LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

18.1 Discuss the complexities of sex as described by anthropologists.
18.2 Discuss the complexities of gender as described by anthropologists.
18.3 Discuss the variations of transgender and LGBTQ persons found by anthropologists in different societies.
18.4 Describe the gender relations in foraging societies.
18.5 Discuss the importance of Margaret Mead’s study of gender relations in Papua New Guinea.
18.6 Describe gender relations and patriarchy in tribal societies.
18.7 Discuss gender in chiefdom societies.
18.8 Discuss gender and patriarchy in agricultural states.
18.9 Discuss the changes in gender in industrial and postindustrial societies.
18.10 Discuss gender relations in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.
18.11 Explain what anthropologists have learned about sexuality in different societies.

This chapter will discuss the anthropological research on gender and sexuality by using a broad cross-cultural and global perspective. In Chapter 17, we discussed the social structure, including family, marriage, and age. There is some overlap in the discussion of social structure with the topic of gender relations as presented in this chapter. For example, in Chapter 17, we discussed the research on patrilineal, matrilineal, ambilineal, and bilateral forms of descent that anthropologists have found in many societies. As we will see in this chapter, these patterns of descent have an influence on gender relations, especially the cultural norms and values that have an impact on male and female relationships. We discuss both classical and contemporary anthropological research on this topic. However, this chapter goes beyond the research regarding males and females to describe the wide variation in gender roles found in different societies throughout the world. In addition to the variation in gender roles discussed, we go on to examine the cross-cultural differences in human sexuality that anthropologists have found in various societies.

We begin the chapter with an overview of the complexities that anthropologists find when examining sex and gender. In previous chapters, we addressed the role of biology and culture in the formation of human behavior. This chapter will continue to draw on this biocultural orientation in presenting the complexities of sex and gender. Additionally, readers should keep in mind the distinction between etic and emic approaches used by anthropologists (see Chapter 14, pp. 299–300). An emic understanding of gender and sexuality is based on the beliefs of the people of the groups being studied, while an etic understanding is based on the scientific analysis offered by the anthropologist.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF SEX

18.1 Discuss the complexities of sex as described by anthropologists.

When anthropologists discuss relationships between males and females in a society, they distinguish between sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological and anatomical differences between males and females. These differences include the primary sexual characteristics—the sex organs—and the secondary sexual characteristics, such as breasts and wider hips for females and more muscular development of the upper torso, larger body size, and extensive body hair for males. Note that these are general tendencies, to which many exceptions exist. That is, many males are smaller and lighter and have less body hair than many females. Nevertheless, in general, males and females are universally distinguished by physiological and anatomical differences (Stone 2013). And, as discussed in Chapter 1 (pp. 15–16), young children easily acquire “essentialist” beliefs about males and females.

Although the vast majority of human bodies can be recognized as belonging to one of two biological sexes, there are some complexities of sex differences. Normally, humans have forty-six chromosomes, of which two—X and Y—are sex chromosomes. A woman’s large gametes (eggs) each carry one X, and a man’s small gametes (sperm) have about an equal division.
between those with an X and those with a Y. When the sperm and egg fuse, the sexual destiny of the fertilized fetus is determined. Usually, males have an X and a Y chromosome (XY), and females have two Xs (XX). After about six weeks of fetal development, a biochemical structure called the indifferent gonad will eventually produce the sex differences for female ovaries or male testes. The Y chromosome plays the key sex-determining role. Typically, one gene carried on the Y chromosome stimulates biochemical changes that produce testes and the hormone (androgen) testosterone, which influences the development of male primary and secondary sex characteristics. If the Y chromosome is absent, the indifferent gonad produces the ovaries and the hormone estrogen or progesterone, which produces female primary and secondary sex characteristics.

However, in some individual cases, the genes can produce what is called androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS), when even in the presence of a Y chromosome, female external genitalia can appear. AIS is an intersex genetic condition that results in the inability of the cell to respond to male hormones or androgens. Thus, a person with AIS and XY can have either male or female genitalia and sometimes something in between. In other cases, there may be mismatches between external appearance (the phenotype) and the genes on sex chromosomes (the genotype). Individuals can sometimes have the XX sex chromosomes; however, they appear externally as males. Thus, a fertilized human egg that is XY can end up producing an individual who looks like a female, and one that is XX can produce someone who looks like a male.

Other possible combinations of two sex chromosomes can produce intermediate sexes with external genitalia, individuals who have a penis and ovaries or a vagina with testes. In some rare occurrences, individuals who have Turner syndrome have just one X chromosome (XO). These individuals have the bodies of women. (All humans must have an X chromosome to produce sufficient biochemical processes to sustain life.) Although Turner syndrome can result in short stature or other medical problems, a world-class Belgian-born American gymnast, Missy Marlowe, who participated in the Olympics in Seoul, Korea, in 1988, has this condition. Turner syndrome occurs in between 1 in 2,000 and 1 in 5,000 live-born females (Donaldson et al. 2006). In other cases, there are individuals with extra X chromosomes. They can be XXX or XXXX. If individuals with these extra Xs have a Y chromosome, they will appear male; if not, they will appear female.

In general, the number of people with a mismatch between chromosomes and hormones, or with ambiguous genitalia, is small, under 1 percent. But in a world population of 7 billion people, a fraction of 1 percent is still a lot of individuals. In comparing “common sense” and “normality” across various societies, the late anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983) gave an example regarding the complexities of sex differences. He compares commonsense knowledge as it differs from scientific knowledge. Common sense is based on experience and folk beliefs held by members of different societies such as wearing warm clothing in cold weather or carrying an umbrella if it is raining, Geertz describes how in the United States every so often an individual is born with both male and female genitalia. These intersexed individuals were viewed with horror and disgust by many Americans, and most American parents of these intersexed infants agreed immediately to have elective surgery to correct this abnormality. However, Geertz noted that such intersexed individuals are viewed differently by the Native American Navajo, who express wonder and awe toward them as gifted spiritual leaders. Thus, common sense and normality differ in respect to sex differences across the world.

As these complexities of sex differences indicate, there are questions that arise regarding whether sex is completely binary based on biological differences. A recent essay by biological anthropologist Alexandra Kralick (2018) in the Atlantic Magazine questions the absolute binary of sex differences based on anatomical sex differences. During the early years of athletic competition in the Olympics, female athletes had to have their genitals inspected to determine if they were truly female. Later, in the 1960s, the Olympic officials began to test for sex chromosomes through blood tests. Kralick begins her essay by describing the case of María José Martínez-Patiño, an Olympic track and field athlete for the Spanish national team who

medaled during the mid-1980s. She was externally entirely female and did not have unusually high testosterone levels for a woman. However, when tested for sex chromosomes, the results came back as XY instead of XX. Based on these test results, Martínez-Patiño was ejected from the Olympics, and her records and medals were taken from her because of this genetic mutation. Because of the absolutist binary definition of sex, she was deprived of her accomplishments.

In the essay, Kralick notes that for many years biological anthropologists and archaeologists had accepted the binary definition of sex in analyzing and classifying male and female human fossil remains. However, more recently, contemporary biological anthropologists investigating the fossil record, including Kralick, have indicated that many female fossil skeletal remains may have been misidentified as males. Today, many of these fossil skeletal remains have been reclassified as “indeterminate” or “unsexed.” This is based on the recognition by biological anthropologists that there is no clear or easy technique to distinguish the sex differences of these fossil remains. These new classifications have improved the scientific accuracy of these findings. Kralick argues that in the past there were false perceptions of distinct biological sexes, and essentialist binary definitions have muddied the fossil records and had humiliating results for many female athletes.

**Male and Female Brain Differences?**

For many years, anthropologists have known that generally in human populations, male brains are larger than female brains. As mentioned earlier, biological males typically have a larger body size than females. Thus, statistically, male brains are larger than female brains because of body size. However, this size gap does not mean that males are more intelligent than females. If absolute brain size mattered in determining intelligence, whales would be much more intelligent than humans (Konner 2015). When comparing the proportional and relative size of the body and brains of whales and humans, we find that humans have much larger brains than whales. Neuroscientists have discovered that when controlling for brain size, women have more gray matter and a thicker cerebral cortex than men (Konner 2015; Ruigrok et al. 2014; Sacher et al. 2013). In addition, these studies have shown that women have stronger connectivity in the left hemisphere of the brain, while men’s stronger connections are with the right hemisphere. This debunks the old myth about how men are more rational or logical and women are more emotional (Konner 2015). (The left hemisphere of the brain is associated with language, logic, mathematics, and science, whereas the right hemisphere performs tasks dealing with creativity and art.) Thus, generally, there are morphological or biological differences between human male and female brains. Yet, it must be emphasized that the similarities between men and women’s brains are much greater than any differences. And, these morphological differences are unrelated to any type of general intelligence (Konner 2015; van der Linden, Dunkel, and Madison 2017).

So, can humans be classified as either male or female based on the standard range of sexual morphology or body type? Obviously, it cannot be summed up as a simple yes or no. As we have seen, there are many permutations in sex differences that contradict a simple XX and XY duality. More accurately, we might classify these sex differences as having a bimodal statistical distribution rather than binary. On a statistical bell curve (see Figure 18.1), the vast majority of humans are within the standard range of morphology or body type between males and females with XY and XX chromosomes and hormones.

**FIGURE 18.1** Bell Curve for Sex Differences in Height

![Bell Curve for Sex Differences in Height](image)

**Source:** Jelenkovic et al. (2016). Genetic and environmental influences on height from infancy to early adulthood: An individual-based pooled analysis of 45 twin cohorts via Our World in Data.
Yet, as we have seen, this is not a complete 100 percent distribution; there are exceptions at the tail ends of the bell curve. This has complicated the picture of a simple binary distinction between males and females. Despite the fact that most humans have essentialist views of males and females, these essentialist beliefs are not accurate when viewed in a scientific context.

Sex and the Division of Labor

A basic component of the division of labor in most societies is the assigning of different tasks to males and females. In studying this phenomenon, anthropologists focus on the issue of whether physical differences (sex differences) between males and females are responsible for these different roles. To address this issue, they ask a number of questions: Is there a universal division of labor based on sex? Does physical strength have anything to do with the work patterns associated with gender? Do childcare and pregnancy determine or influence economic specialization for females? To what degree do cultural values, norms, and beliefs ascribed to masculine or feminine behavior affect work assignments? These questions will be addressed in different sections of this chapter.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF GENDER

18.2 Discuss the complexities of gender as described by anthropologists.

In contrast to sex, most anthropologists view gender as cultural rather than biological. Gender refers to the specific human traits attached to each sex by a society. As members of a particular society, males and females occupy certain statuses, such as son, daughter, husband, wife, father, and mother. In assuming the gender roles that correspond to these different status positions, males are enculturated to be “masculine,” and females are socialized to be “feminine.” And, again, most humans have essentialist beliefs regarding gender and what it means to be masculine or feminine. Masculine behavior is supposed to be aggressive while feminine traits are identified as gentle and “passive.” However, as we will see, aspects of masculine and feminine traits vary widely among different societies, which debunks any essentialist beliefs regarding gender differences (Brettell and Sargent 2017; Stone 2013; Yangisako and Collier 1990).

Gender and Enculturation

One major issue regarding gender is the degree to which enculturation influences male and female behavior. To study this issue, anthropologists focus on the cultural values, beliefs, norms, models, and schemas that may influence gender roles. They also observe the types of activities associated with young boys and girls. In many societies, boys and girls play different games as an aspect of enculturation. For example, in U.S. society, boys in comparison with girls are traditionally encouraged to participate in aggressive, competitive team sports. Variations of cultural values, beliefs, norms, models, and schemas that affect gender roles are found in other societies as well.

Gender and Status

Another important issue investigated by anthropologists is the social and political status of males and females in society. As discussed later in this chapter, some early anthropologists such as Lewis Morgan believed that females at one time had a higher social and political status than males but that through time this pattern was reversed. Anthropologists currently focus on how the status of males and females is related to biological factors, the division of labor, kinship relations, political systems, and values and beliefs.

Although primary and secondary sex characteristics are biologically determined, gender and gender roles vary in accordance with the technological, economic, and sociocultural conditions, including values, beliefs, norms, schemas, and models of particular types of societies. And, importantly, gender is an aspect of self-identification. Individuals identify themselves subjectively with a particular gender. In this chapter, we will explore some recent studies by anthropologists who have broadened our understanding of the variation of gender roles among a wide range of societies.

TRANSGENDER AND LGBTQ INDIVIDUALS

18.3 Discuss the variations of transgender and LGBTQ persons found by anthropologists in different societies.

Recently, in U.S. society, a great deal of attention has been paid to transgender individuals. One striking example is the celebrity Caitlyn Jenner, a transgender woman and Olympic athlete who was assigned male at birth and given the name Bruce Jenner. She transitioned in 2015. Transgender is a term used to refer to individuals whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond to their biological (natal) sex assigned at birth. Sometimes transgender individuals are referred to as transsexuals if they desire medical surgery to transition to one sex or another. The opposite of transgender is cisgender, a term for people whose gender identity matches the birth-assigned biological sex. Some individuals may experience gender dysphoria if they feel that their gender does not correspond to their biological sex assigned at birth. Jenner experienced gender dysphoria for a long period of her life, and later transitioned.

There has been some ongoing research by neuroscientists regarding transgender persons. Some of this research has indicated that there are differences in the brains of individual transgender and cisgender people (Rametti et al. 2010; S. Williams 2018). The evidence suggests that transgender persons have brains that are anatomically more similar to the brains of the gender to which they identify. As we saw in our discussion of male and female brains, a size difference and some...
morphological differences have been found by neuroscientists. The neuroimaging research on transgender or transsexual people indicates an intermediate position between that typical of male and female brains (Rametti et al. 2010). Future research in this area may also shed some light on gender dysphoria (S. Williams 2018). Although this neuroscientific research on transgender is not conclusive, it does suggest that transgender identity has a biological component. The research could help satisfy the desire of transgender people to understand the roots of their personal identity.

The acronym LGBTQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans (transgender or transsexual), and queer or questioning. The acronym stands for the sexual orientation of individuals of different genders who are not heterosexual or cisgender. The acronym LGBTQ replaced the earlier term gay community to more accurately represent all of these variations of sexual orientation. The sexual orientation of individuals refers to those to whom one is sexually attracted. Lesbian and gay refer to individuals who are attracted to the same sex. An earlier term, homosexual, is still used by some of these individuals to describe their sexual orientation. Bisexuals are attracted to either sex. Although queer used to be a pejorative term used by homophobic people, it has now been accepted as an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or cisgender. Another variant of LGBTQ is LGBTQIA, in which the I refers to intersex individuals and the A stands for asexual people or allies of LGBTQ individuals.

Though there is an enormous range of scientific evidence to suggest that sexual orientation is an inherited disposition influenced by genes, neurological developments, and heredity, anthropologists continue to investigate both the biology and the cultural aspects of these different forms of sexual orientation. In exploring sexual orientation in other societies, anthropologists use a comparative, cross-cultural approach. Homosexuals, the distinction between gay homosexuals and heterosexuals is not made in the same way as in Western European and U.S. culture. The sexuality of the members of this third gender was not central to their identities or roles within society. Instead, the central characteristic of this third gender was the occupational role. The Mohave Indians of the U.S. Southwest recognize four genders—women who assume the role of men and female attributes as invested with spiritual power. In Thailand, a third gender is represented by what are known as kathoey or (in derogatory English) ladyboys (Barné 2002; P. Jackson 1995; Nanda 2000; Peletz 2011). Kathoey is primarily transsexual males who dress in women's clothes and take on a feminine role in Thai society. Many Buddhists in Thailand believe that one becomes a kathoe as a result of a karmic destiny influenced by one's reincarnation. This karmic destiny is inherited and is unalterable.

In an examination of transgender individuals in Samoa, researchers identified a respected status known as fa'afafine, which translates to “in the manner of a woman,” representing a third gender (Vasey and VanderLann 2009). These fa'afafine share more resources and assistance with younger relatives (siblings, nephews, and nieces) than cisgender individuals who have no children. They are expected to excel in female tasks such as specified domestic chores and care and nurturing of children.

In some Native American Indian societies, certain males wore female clothing, and some devoted themselves to offering sexual services to male warriors. These individuals were referred to as berdaches by Europeans and were regarded as different from both males and females. There were about 155 societies in precontact North America that had third- or fourth-gender individuals (W. Roscoe 1998). These individuals, many of whom were homosexuals, also provided resources and took care of other subsistence activities for their neighbors and relatives in the society (Callender and Kochems 1983; W. Roscoe 1994, 1998). Within these Native American societies, the distinction between gay homosexuals and heterosexuals was not made in the same way as in Western European and U.S. culture. The sexuality of the members of this third gender was not central to their identities or roles within society. Instead, the central characteristic of this third gender was the occupational role. The Mohave Indians of the U.S. Southwest recognize four genders—women who assume the role of men in this way, men who assume feminine roles, and two other genders that are combinations of masculine and feminine attributes.
and men who assume the role of women, as well as males and females (Brettell and Sargent 2017).

Currently, many Native American activists use the neologism “Two Spirit” to refer to those who do not fit easily into the categories of man and woman. These people who were neither males nor females had a particular spirit and played special religious roles (Appiah 2018; W. Roscoe 1998). These individuals do not face homophobic prejudice and discrimination and are accepted as a natural third or fourth gender within their society. Thus, gender variance and fluidity are recognized by many Native Americans.

Anthropologist Serena Nanda (1990, 2000) has done an extensive ethnographic study of the hijras of India, who are viewed as neither men nor women. They are born as males, but some undergo an operation in which their genitals are surgically removed. This operation transforms them, not into females (because they cannot give birth) but into hijras, a third gender. The hijras are followers of a particular Hindu goddess, Bahuchara Mata or Shiva, and earn their living by performing at various types of religious ceremonies. They dress like females and to some extent exaggerate feminine behavior, but they also indulge in certain male-only behaviors, such as smoking a hookah (water pipe) and cigarettes. Within the cultural context of Indian society, the hijras are considered neither deviant nor unnatural, but rather simply an additional form of gender (Murtagh 2013).

Anthropologists have described a variety of male homosexual practices among the highland societies of Papua New Guinea. Among peoples such as the Etoro and the Sambia, male homosexuality is incorporated into initiation rituals. In these societies, there appear to be no distinctions among heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual individuals. Gilbert Herdt (1987) describes how prepubescent Sambian males are initiated into male secret societies and engage in strictly homosexual activities with the older males of these societies. They are obligated to perform regular oral intercourse on the older males and believe that obtaining the gift of semen from their seniors will enable them to become strong, vigorous warriors. These boys are forbidden to engage in any heterosexual relationships for about ten years. Following this lengthy period, they marry and, from that time onward, take up heterosexual relationships with their wives, but then they have homosexual relationships with the young men undergoing their initiation puberty rites of passage.

Homophobia, or prejudice and discrimination against LGBTQ individuals, persists in many countries and societies of the world. In seventy-three countries, being LGBTQ is officially illegal and criminalized, and in eight Islamic countries, it results in the death penalty (Hutt 2018). The criminalization of homosexuality and transgender persons is prevalent in some countries of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Many organizations have been involved in combating this homophobia. In 2016, the United Nations earmarked funding for LGBTQ organizations to assist the rights of these minority groups in countries throughout the world. Globally, same-sex marriage is now legal in twenty-six countries (Hutt 2018). Beginning with the Netherlands in 2000, a number of countries have legalized same-sex marriage, with Australia being the latest in 2017. However, other countries such as Russia have fueled homophobia through the media and the political process. Anthropological research on LGBTQ communities has been useful in this struggle against homophobia by illuminating the fluidity and variance of gender for many different types of societies.

GENDER IN FORAGING SOCIETIES

18.4 Describe the gender relations in foraging societies.

Gender as an aspect of social structure in foraging societies is an extremely important area of ethnographic research. Cultural anthropologists have been examining the interrelationships among patterns of gender, subsistence, economy, and political organization.

Gender and the Division of Labor

Prior to recent ethnographic research on foraging societies, anthropologists believed that male subsistence activities, especially hunting and fishing, provided most of the food resources. In the traditional sex-based evolutionary perspective, males did the hunting, women gathered the vegetation, and they cooperated within a pair-bonded nuclear family (Lovejoy 1981; Washburn and Lancaster 1968). In some of the foraging societies such as the Ju/hoansi San, Semang, and Mbuti, women provided most of the food by gathering plants (Dahlberg 1981; Lee 2013; Martin and Voorhies 1975; Wiessner 2002). In addition, women sometimes hunt or indirectly procure meat. Among the Batak foragers of the rain forests of Malaysia and the Agta in the Philippines, both men and women perform virtually every subsistence task (K. Endicott 1988; Estioko-Griffin and Griffin 1978). Women among the Agta go out into the forest to kill wild boars, just as the men do. The Tiwi of Australia, the Hadza foragers of East Africa, and the Aka of Central Africa demonstrate this same pattern (J. Goodale 1971; Hewlett 1991; Marlowe 2010; Woodburn 1982).

Carol Ember’s (1978) cross-cultural study of foragers indicated that males have typically obtained meat by hunting and fishing. However, as Nicole Waguespack’s (2005) global study of both ethnographic and archaeological evidence indicates, even in societies dominated by meat procurement, women play important economic roles and are involved in...
many different types of activities such as leatherworking and building shelters. The division of labor cannot be simply described as a sex-based division of labor with men hunting and women gathering vegetation.

**Sex-Based Explanations of the Division of Labor**

One early question posed by cultural anthropologists was this: Why is the division of labor in foraging societies so strongly related to a sex (i.e., men hunt, women gather)? There are several possible answers to this question. The first answer is that males tended to hunt and women tended to be engaged in gathering or other nonsubsistence activities because males are stronger and have more endurance in the pursuit of large game. Another answer is that because women bear and nurse children, they lack the freedom of mobility necessary to hunt (Friedell 1975). A third answer is that gathering, especially near a base camp, is a relatively safe activity that entails no potential dangers for women who are either pregnant or caring for children (J. Brown 1970b). Keeping their offspring alive and providing for them is a fundamental aspect of women’s activities in foraging societies (Gurven and Hill 2009).

There is evidence for and against each of these theories. In some foraging societies, men and women are involved in both hunting and gathering. Further, women often perform tasks that require strength and stamina, such as carrying food, children, water, and firewood. Thus, gathering resources is not a sedentary or leisurely activity. Based on this evidence, anthropologist Linda Marie Fedigan (1986) proposed that heavy work and childcare activities are not mutually exclusive, as previously argued.

In an essay titled “Why Do Men Hunt? A Reevaluation of ‘Man the Hunter’ and the Sexual Division of Labor,” Michael Gurven and Kim Hill (2009) assess some of the current explanations of male–female activities in foraging societies. The traditional explanation for male hunting is to provision their families. However, hunting meat is less reliable and more costly than other means of foraging. One hypothesis suggested that males take on the high-cost and low-yield hunting to “show off” their status and physical abilities to attract females for mating opportunities (Hawkes and Bliege Bird 2002; Hawkes, O’Connell, and Cowgill 2010). This is referred to as the “costly signaling model.” Gurven and Hill (2009) provide a comprehensive, multidimensional model for why men hunt. In their model, costly signaling is one factor that motivates male hunting activity, but it needs to be combined with other factors such as investing in children (parental investment), the social insurance provided with sharing and cooperation through coalition and alliance building, and assisting ill or incapacitated members of the foraging group. This model provides a fruitful avenue for further investigation of why men hunt in foraging societies.

Many research questions pertaining to gender roles and subsistence among foragers remain for future anthropologists. Much of the recent evidence suggests that gender roles and subsistence activities are not as rigid as formerly thought. In these cases, it appears that the subsistence strategies for both males and females are open and that behavior is flexible.

**Female Status**

Closely related to gender roles and subsistence is the question of the social status of women. Empirical data suggest that gender relations tend to be more egalitarian—men and women have more or less equal status—in foraging societies than in other societies (K. Endicott 1988; Friedell 1975; Konner 2015; Lepowsky 1993; Shostak 1981; Ward 2003). This may reflect the substantial contributions women make to gathering food.

Richard Lee (1981, 2013) noted, for example, that as a result of their important role in economic activities, Ju/’hoansi San women participate equally with men in political decision making. Ju/’hoansi San women are treated respectfully, and there is little evidence of male domination or the maltreatment of females. A similar generalization could be applied to the Mbuti, Semang, and Agra, as well as to most of the other foragers. This hypothesis suggests, however, that in societies in which female contributions to the food supply are less critical or less valued, female status is lower. For example, among some of the traditional Inuit (formerly known as Eskimo) and other northern foraging groups for which hunting is the only subsistence activity, females do not gather much in the way of resources for the family. Consequently, those societies tend to be more patriarchal, or male dominated, in political and economic matters (Friedell 1975; Lepowsky 1993; Martin and Voorhies 1975; Ward 2003).

Clearly, equality between males and females in foraging societies is not universal. In some groups, such as the Ju/’hoansi San and Agra, women have more equality, whereas in others, such as the traditional Inuit, females have a lower status. Even in the most egalitarian groups, males tend to have some inherent cultural advantages. In some cases, meat is viewed as a more luxurious and prestigious food and thus enhances the male status. In addition, males are more likely to become the political or religious leaders in foraging societies.

When considering gender relations from a broad, cross-cultural perspective, however, foragers tend to have much more equality than do most other societies. In a large cross-cultural study of small-scale hunter-gatherer societies, anthropologists discovered the general mechanisms that children are taught to reinforce egalitarian norms and values (Lew-Ley et al. 2018). Through narrative stories, songs, cooperating and sharing in peer playgroups, imitating gender roles, and engaging in other foraging tasks, boys and girls are encouraged to respect equality for one another. These activities form
the basis of egalitarian gender relations in most foraging societies. Anthropologists agree that gender relations in foraging societies are more egalitarian than in any other type of society (Konner 2015; Ortner 1996).

GENDER IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

Gender and Enculturation: Margaret Mead’s Study

Although nineteenth-century anthropologists addressed the question of gender roles, their conclusions were largely speculative and were not based on firsthand ethnographic research. In the twentieth century, anthropologists went into the field to collect information concerning the roles of males and females. The first landmark ethnographic study of gender roles was carried out by Margaret Mead and involved three New Guinea societies: the Arapesh, the Mundugumor, and the Tchambuli. Mead’s study was published in 1935 and was titled Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies.

Mead described these three tribes as having totally different types of gender roles. Among the Arapesh, males and females had similar attitudes and behavior. Mead described both sexes as unaggressive, cooperative, passive, and sensitive to the needs of others. Based on U.S. standards of the time, Mead described the Arapesh as feminine. In contrast, Mead described Mundugumor males and females as aggressive, selfish, insensitive, and uncooperative, much like the U.S. stereotype of masculinity. The Tchambuli, according to Mead, represented a complete reversal of U.S. conceptions of gender roles. Tchambuli females were dominant politically and economically, whereas males were submissive, emotionally dependent, and less responsible. Females were the breadwinners and the political leaders; they also engaged in warfare. Males stayed near the domestic camp and cared for the children. One of their primary activities was artistic work such as dancing, painting, and jewelry making. Hence, by U.S. standards, Tchambuli women were masculine, and Tchambuli men were feminine.

Mead concluded that societies can both minimize and exaggerate social and cultural differences between males and females. She argued that gender differences are extremely variable from society to society. Mead’s study challenged the status quo in U.S. society regarding gender-role stereotypes. It also appealed strongly to the emerging feminist movement because it asserted that culture, rather than biology, determines (and limits) gender roles. Tchambuli women became an important symbol for the feminist movement in the United States during the 1960s.

Mead’s Study Reappraised

After restudying the Tchambuli (who actually call themselves the Chambri) during the 1970s, anthropologist Deborah Gewertz (1981) concluded that Mead’s description of the reversal of gender roles was not a completely accurate hypothesis. Gewertz concluded that Mead, though essentially valid in her descriptions and observations, did not stay long enough to see what was happening to the Chambri. According to Gewertz, Mead had viewed the Chambri at a time when they were going through a unique transition. For example, in the 1930s, the Chambri had been driven from their islands by an enemy tribe. All their physical structures and artwork had been burned. Consequently, the Chambri men were engaged full-time near the domestic camps in creating artwork and rebuilding at the time Mead conducted her study. Mead assumed that these were typical activities for males, when, in fact, they were atypical. After assessing her ethnographic data carefully, Gewertz concluded that the Chambri do not exhibit the complete reversal of traditional male and female gender roles that Mead had described. Gewertz found that the Chambri males allocate and control the distribution of goods and valuables and, hence, are dominant politically and economically, despite the fact that females produce most of the goods.

Gewertz’s reevaluation of Chambri gender-role patterns challenges the hypothesis presented by Mead regarding the tremendous flexibility of gender roles in human societies. Although Gewertz notes that cultural values do influence gender roles, a complete reversal of the male and female roles was not evident in the Chambri case. Like many anthropologists of the era of the 1930s, Mead did not take into account the complex regional histories that influenced gender roles in these New Guinea tribal societies.

PATRIARCHY IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES

Gender is an extremely important element of social structure in tribal societies. Cross-cultural ethnographic research on tribal societies has contributed to a better understanding of male-female relations. Anthropologists are interested in the interrelationships among gender roles, subsistence practices, female status, patriarchy, and sexism in tribal societies.

Despite Margaret Mead’s conclusions concerning gender roles among the Tchambuli, most modern anthropologists agree that a pattern of matriarchy, in which females regularly dominate males economically and politically, is not part of the archaeological, historical, and ethnographic record (Bamberger 1974; Friedl 1975; Ortner 1974, 1996; Stone 2013). (See “Critical Perspectives: Were There Matriarchal States?”
A young man jumping the bulls. This is the rite of passage for boys coming to an age of becoming men among the Hamer tribe of the Omo Valley in Ethiopia. Most of these tribal pastoralist societies are patriarchal.

pages 407–409.) With some exceptions, most tribal societies tend to be patriarchal. Anthropologists have offered many hypotheses to explain the prevalence of patriarchy.

Evolutionary psychologists view patriarchy in tribal societies as a consequence of innate reproductive strategies, leading to enhanced reproductive fitness. In this view, males are unconsciously motivated to reproduce with as many females as possible to increase their chances of reproductive success. As we saw in Chapter 17 (p. 375), some tribal males have many more children than others. These reproductive strategies involve competition among males for females. According to this model, this male competition, in turn, leads to political conflict and increases in warfare. These factors produce the patterns of patrilocality, patrilineality, polygyny, and patriarchy in tribal societies (Chagnon 2000; Chagnon and Hames 1979; Van den Berghe and Barash 1977). Another biologically based view suggested by Steven Goldberg (1993) is that males are always dominant in society because male hormones cause them to compete more strongly than women for high status and dominance.

Instead of referring to innate biological drives, cultural materialists such as William Divale and Marvin Harris (1976) maintained that patriarchy and gender hierarchy are caused by the scarcity of resources and recurring warfare in tribal societies. In general, when material resources are scarce, especially in horticultural societies, warfare between competitive tribes is prevalent. Because most warriors are male, both the status and the power of males in these societies become intensified. For these reasons, a male-supremacy complex develops. The Divale and Harris study was subject to extensive criticism based on methodological flaws and inadequate data (Hirschfeld, Howe, and Levin 1978). However, a cross-cultural study using the Human Relations Area Files indicates that the intensification of warfare is strongly associated with the decline of female status (Khalturina and Khorotayev 2006). This study found that societies that emphasize socialization for male aggression and an ideology of male toughness and superiority result in a higher frequency of wife beating and a higher level of separation between genders. In addition, confirming the research discussed earlier, this cross-cultural analysis found that polygyny results from extensive warfare and increased male mortality, which decreases female power and enhances patriarchy. The relationship among tribal warfare, polygyny, and the development of patriarchal societies is a potential research project for future anthropologists.

Patriarchy and Sexism in Tribal Societies

Other anthropologists emphasize that although biological or material considerations may contribute to male domination, the cultural values used to define female are extremely important in the maintenance of tribal patriarchies. In other words, in many tribal societies, female roles have much less prestige than male roles. Many tribal societies adhere to mythologies, beliefs, and ideologies that justify male domination and female subordination. These mythologies, beliefs, and ideologies reinforce sexism—prejudice and discrimination against people based on their sex. Many patrilineal horticultural societies of Papua New Guinea, for example, separate females from males during menstruation because they believe that menstruating females are unclean and will harm the community. Menstrual blood was often associated with witchcraft or the production of harmful potions; therefore, regular contacts with women were prohibited. Women were often thought to be radically different physically and psychologically from males, and their bodily fluids and essences were dangerous and evil (Lindenbaum 1972). These male anxieties, mythical beliefs, and prejudices frequently led to discriminatory practices against females. For example, most tribes in Papua New Guinea have rules of residence that separate husbands and wives into different houses, and young boys are taken from their mothers and segregated into men’s houses.

In many of these tribal societies, women are excluded from political and sacred ritual activities, as well as from military combat. This limitation results in the cultural definition of males as the primary gender that ensures the survival of the society. Because of these views, women in many of these tribal societies are often subjected to social subordination, sexual segregation, excessive domination, and systematic physical abuse (Chagnon 2012; Lindenbaum 1972). At times, they are deprived of material resources during pregnancy, denied the same access to food as males, and physically mutilated. Sexist ideologies are often used to justify these practices.

Yet, there is variation among tribal societies. Based on ethnographic research among the Vanatinal tribal people of Papua New Guinea, Maria Lepowsky (1993) reports that there is very little ideology of male dominance and there are no prohibitions
regarding contact with women who are menstruating. Lepowsky argues that the women among the Vanatinal are respected and treated as equals with the men. Vanatinal women can gain prestige through trading and exchanging valuables. Nevertheless, these women are not allowed to hunt, fish, or make war. Vanatinal men control and retain power over the mobilization of warfare and threats of violence. Thus, Vanatinal society is not a perfectly gender-equalitarian society. Another factor that has played a role in understanding gender roles and taboos in Papua New Guinea is that, to some extent, the anthropologists overemphasized the male interpretations of these taboos against women without taking into consideration the voices of women. In some cases, the women viewed the men’s semen as just as polluting as the men considered their menstrual blood.

**Gender, Subsistence, and Female Status**

A number of anthropologists propose that the status of women in tribal societies depends on their contributions to subsistence activities. As we have seen, both males and females are involved in horticultural production. Males usually clear the ground for the gardens, whereas women weed and harvest the crops. In cross-cultural surveys of tribal horticultural societies, women actually contribute more to cultivation activities in horticultural societies than do men (Goody 1976; Martin and Voorhies 1975). Nevertheless, patriarchy reigns in conjunction with a sexist ideology in most of these tribal groups. In some matrilineal horticultural societies, however, the status of females tends to be higher.

**Female Status in Matrilineal Societies**

In matrilineally organized societies such as the Haudenosaunee (formerly called Iroquois), Hopi, and Zuni of North America, women have considerable influence in economic and political decision making. Also, the mothers and sisters of the wives in matrilineages can often offer support in domestic disputes with males. In addition, rights to property—including land, technology, and livestock—are embodied in the matrilineages. In general, however, males in matrilineal societies hold the influential positions of political power and maintain control over economic resources. In most matrilineal societies, the mother’s brother has political authority and economic control within the family. Thus, matrilineality does not translate into matriarchy.

**The Haudenosaunee (Formerly Called Iroquois)**

The Haudenosaunee offer a good example of the status of females in matrilineal societies. The families that occupied the Haudenosaunee longhouses were related through matrilineages. The senior women, their daughters, the daughters’ children, the brothers, and the unmarried sons built the longhouses. Although husbands lived in the longhouses, they were considered outsiders. The matrilineages of the longhouses maintained the garden plots and owned the tools in common. These matrilineages planted, weeded, and harvested the corn, beans, and squash. The Haudenosaunee women processed, stored, and distributed all of the food and provisioned the men’s war parties. The men were highly dependent on the food supplies of the women.

The elder matrons in these matrilineages had the power to appoint the sachem, a council leader of the Haudenosaunee political system. A council of fifty sachems governed the five different tribes of the Haudenosaunee confederacy. Often they appointed their younger sons to this position and would rule until their sons were of age. Women could also influence decisions about peace and warfare and determine whether prisoners of war should live or die (J. Brown 1970a).

Clearly, as the Haudenosaunee case indicates, women influenced the political and economic dynamics in some matrilineal societies. In their cross-cultural survey, Martin and Voorhies (1975) found that the status of women is higher in horticultural societies that practice matrilineal descent. In many of these matrilineal societies, males developed political power only if they had strong support from the relatives of their wives. Nevertheless, these findings also indicate that in the matrilineal societies, males still exercise political authority and assume control over key economic resources. In these societies, women may be held in high regard, but they are still economically and politically subordinate to men.

**GENDER IN CHIEFDOM SOCIETIES**

18.7 Discuss gender in chiefdom societies.

Typically, gender relations were highly unequal in chiefdom societies, with males exercising economic and political dominance over females. Bridewealth payments, along with arranged marriages, enabled men to claim rights to the labor of children and women. This practice was particularly significant among the highest-status descent groups. A woman’s chances of success depended entirely on the rank of her siblings and parents. Higher-ranking males who wanted to control and manage their marital relations, labor, and potential offspring frequently married women with low-ranking brothers.

If a woman was fortunate enough to be born or marry into a high-ranking descent group, her ascribed or achieved status was secured. Anthropologist Laura Klein (1980) described how some high-ranking women among the Tsimshian Indians were able to maintain very high status in their society. According to Sahlins (1985), some wives of high-ranking chiefs in traditional Hawaiian society married as many as forty males (a type of royal polyandry) to maintain their high status. Thus, the women of the ruling stratum had a higher status than men or women from other strata. In an interesting discussion of the different chiefdoms that existed in the area of Appalachia in North America, archaeologists Lynne Sullivan and Christopher Rodning (2001)
GENDER IN AGRICULTURAL STATES

Discuss gender and patriarchy in agricultural states.

As we saw in Chapter 17 (pp. 382–383), marriage offered the only respectable career or means of subsistence for women in agricultural societies. This pattern reflected the unequal status of males and females and excessive patriarchy found in most agricultural societies.

Gender, Subsistence, and Status

The transition to intensive agriculture affected the subsistence roles of both males and females. Martin and Voorhies (1975) noted that in agricultural systems, the amount of labor that women contributed to food production declined. For example, the adoption of plow agriculture greatly diminished the need for weeding, a task that was primarily taken care of by women. They hypothesized that as women's role in agriculture decreased, their social status decreased accordingly. Thus, agricultural civilizations were even more patriarchal than were tribes or chiefdoms. Women were viewed as useless in the agricultural economy, and for the most part, they were confined to cooking, raising children, and caring for the domestic animals. They had little contact outside their immediate families. Martin and Voorhies emphasized that a definite distinction arose in agricultural states between men's and women's roles. Women were restricted to inside (domestic) activities, whereas males were allowed to participate in outside (public) activities. In general, women were not allowed to own property, engage in politics, pursue education, or participate in any activity that would take them outside the domestic sphere. Since Martin and Voorhies did their research, a number of feminist anthropologists have questioned the simplistic dichotomy between the domestic and public realms for gender roles. In some cases, the domestic domain encompassed some of the activities of the public sphere and vice versa. However, they have agreed that this distinction has helped analyze gender in most agricultural societies (Lamphere 1997; Ortner 1996). Generally, most studies concur that the female role was restricted in many of these societies.

Female Seclusion

The highly restricted female role in many agricultural societies was reflected in a number of cultural practices. For example, China adopted the tradition of foot binding, which involved binding a young female child's feet so they would not grow. Although this practice was supposed to produce beautiful feet (in the view of Chinese males), it had the effect of immobilizing women. Although less of a handicap for upper-class females, who did not have to participate in the daily labor requirements of most women and were carried around by servants, foot binding was also practiced by the peasantry during various periods, which meant that peasant women had to work with considerable disabilities.

Similarly, many areas of the Near East, North Africa, and South Asia practiced purdah, a system that restricted women to the household. *Purdah* is a Persian word that is translated as “curtain” or “barrier.” In this system, women had to obtain permission from their husbands to leave the house to visit families and friends. In some of these regions, a woman had to cover her face with a veil when in public (Beck and Keddie 1978; Fernea and Fernea 1979). Female seclusion was one of the ways in which males tried to control the paternity of the children that they were raising. Segregating females from males was a means of ensuring that wives would not become sexually involved with other men.

Patriarchy and Sexism

Sexist ideology developed in agricultural states as a means of reinforcing the seclusion of women. In many agricultural societies, females were viewed as inherently inferior and dependent on males. The so-called natural superiority of males was reinforced in most of the legal, moral, and religious traditions in agricultural states, including Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity. In the Old Testament, there are many references to women as the property of the husbands, equivalent
to animals and other household property. In Leviticus 27:3–7, women are valued in currency (shekels) much less than males.

The New Testament also supported patriarchal attitudes toward women. In Ephesians 5:22–24, it states, “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.”

Many passages from Islam’s Qur’an endorsed patriarchal attitudes and cultural values (as we will see later), as did Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions developing in the agricultural societies throughout the world. In many of these agricultural societies, males were viewed as more intelligent, stronger, and more emotionally stable. In addition, many of these societies viewed women as sexually dangerous; women caught having premarital or extramarital sex were punished severely. In some cases, they were executed by stoning, as mentioned in Leviticus in the Old Testament and in the Qur’an. In contrast, males were permitted to engage in extramarital affairs or have many wives, mistresses, or concubines.

Variations in the Status of Women

The role and status of women in agricultural civilizations varied by region. For example, in some areas where soil conditions were poor, both male and female peasants had to work together in the fields to produce for the household, which tended to create more gender equality. In most Southeast Asian agricultural societies, such as Thailand and Cambodia, both males and females worked together in rice cultivation. In some cases, land was divided equally among all children, regardless of gender, indicating that in these societies females had relative equality with males. Although in these countries women were mostly confined to the domestic sphere and to household tasks, they played an important role in decision making and financial matters within the rural communities (Keyes 1995; Scupin 2006a; Van Esterik 1996; Winzeler 1996). Anthropologists have discovered other exceptions regarding the role and status of peasant women in public in some agricultural civilizations. In China, Mesoamerica, and West Africa, many women participated as sellers in the marketplaces, taking some of the surplus produce or crafts made in the villages. However, this activity was generally restricted to older women whose children were grown. In some cases, the role of a market woman did lead to higher status. Many of these women participated in the public sphere, but were still segregated from male political activities. Moreover, these women had to perform their domestic chores as well as their marketplace activities.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

WERE THERE MATRIARCHAL STATES?

Anthropologists have not found any substantive archaeological or ethnographic evidence for the existence of matriarchal societies. There are, of course, societies that have a matrilineal social organization, in which one traces descent through the mother’s side of the family. But as we have discussed, matriliney does not translate into a matriarchal society in which women would have economic and political dominance over males. Within societies organized by matrilineal descent, such as the Haudenosaunee (formerly Iroquois) Indian societies discussed earlier, males tend to dominate in political and economic affairs. Women may have a more active role in these areas, but patriarchy exists as the prevalent gender pattern in these matrilineal societies. However, the belief that there were once matriarchal societies that were overcome by male-dominated, warlike societies has a long history in the West. For example, after examining Greek and Roman mythology, law, religion, and history, the German lawyer Johann Jacob Bachofen wrote an influential book called Das Mutterrecht (The Mother-Right), published in 1861. Bachofen suggested that matrilineal kinship combined with matriarchy was the first form of human evolutionary development. He reasoned that since no child could determine its paternity, kinship, descent, and inheritance could be recognized only through women. Bachofen argued that women...
Enthusiastic about Morgan’s ideas in *Ancient Society*, American anthropologist [see Chapter 13], reinforced this Victorian view of ancient matriarchal societies. Based on his ethnographic study of **Haudenosaunee** Indian society and other sources, Morgan argued in his famous book *Ancient Society* (1877) that there must have been an early stage of matriarchal society. He studied kinship terms from different areas of the world to substantiate this view. Morgan suggested that a patriarchal stage of evolution replaced an earlier form of matriarchy as more advanced forms of agriculture developed. In his understanding, matriarchal societies were based on the communal ownership of property and polyandry (females married to two or more males). He argued that patriarchy evolved along with the concept of private property and ownership. Morgan suggested that males invented the institution of monogamy to ensure the paternity of their children. This enabled them to pass their private property on to their male heirs.

Europeans Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels became enthusiastic about Morgan’s ideas in *Ancient Society*. Engels wrote about the connection between the evolution of private property and the emergence of patriarchal societies in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* in 1884. This book, along with other writings by Marx and Engels, provided the intellectual foundation of the socialist and communist movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Following Morgan, Marx and Engels believed that revolutionary change in the economy caused by the evolution of advanced forms of agriculture resulted in men taking control of the politics from women. As men gained control over herd animals and farmland, they also instituted the marriage pattern of monogamy, in which females pledged lifetime fidelity to one man. This institution assured males of the paternity of their own children. Engels referred to this commitment as "the world historical defeat of the female sex." He and Marx argued that the institution of the patriarchal family and monogamy became the basis for treating females as property and commodities, demonstrated in existing rituals such as the "giving away of the bride by the father to the groom" in Western wedding ceremonies. Women became servants of men and provided subsistence to support male authority and wealth accumulation in capitalist societies. Marx and Engels believed that Victorian sexist attitudes and male chauvinism had been developed to ensure male authority and paternity. They believed that the global transformation from matriarchal and matriarchal societies into patrilineal and patriarchal societies established one of the integral components resulting in exploitative capitalist societies.

Other important thinkers of the twentieth century such as Sigmund Freud (see Chapter 11) transmitted these ideas regarding early matriarchal societies. One European archaeologist, the late Maria Gimbutas (1982, 1991), proposed that early “matrisc” societies were once the predominant form of society in ancient Europe. She argued that in the period she calls “Old Europe” (between 6500 and 3500 B.C.), peaceful, sedentary villages existed where men and women formed equal partnerships with one another. Gimbutas drew on a number of types of artifacts to make her case. Based on art, architecture, figurines, ceramic pottery, marble, gold, grave goods, and other artifacts, she suggested that the culture of “Old Europe” was centered on the belief in a Great Mother Goddess and other goddesses. According to Gimbutas, a “queen-priestess” ruled and maintained control over this matrificocused religious tradition. She found no evidence of weapons or warfare from that time period, challenging the assumption that warfare is endemic and universal in human societies. In addition, Gimbutas argued that these societies were completely egalitarian, with no classes, castes, or slaves and, of course, no male rulers. According to Gimbutas, “Old Europe” was invaded by tribal horse-riding pastoralists known as the Kurgan by 4400 B.C. These Kurgan pastoralists from the Eurasian steppes, who were male dominated, were associated with the earliest forms of Indo-European languages, and developed religious traditions and mythologies that reflected a warrior cult. They maintained a pantheon of male gods representing the Sun, stars, thunder, and lightning, and they were associated with warriorlike artifacts such as daggers and axes. Eventually, the Kurgan introduced iron plows that were used to cultivate the land. This technological innovation altered forever the relationship between males and females in European society. Males with plows and draft animals supplanted the female-oriented forms of cultivation. As the Kurgan society replaced the “Old Europe,” women were relegated to the domestic aspect of subsistence activities. According to Gimbutas, the mythical and ideological culture perpetuated by the Kurgans continued until the beginnings of Christianity in Europe and beyond.

More recently, archaeologist Lynn Meskell (1995) has criticized the picture of Old Europe and the Kurgan culture presented by Maria Gimbutas. Meskell notes that since the nineteenth century there has been a recurrent interest in the notion of original, matriarchal Mother Goddess societies. This view has been perpetuated in some of the ecofeminist and “New Age” religious literature. Meskell argues that these New Age feminists utilize Gimbutas to ground their movement in a utopian vision of the past. She suggests that these Mother Goddess “gynocentric” theories of prehistory serve as vehicles for attempting to overturn patriarchal institutions in today’s societies. However, Meskell suggests that these gynocentric views are based on inadequate scholarship and actually damage the positive aspects of gender research in anthropology. She and many other archaeologists note that Gimbutas neglected a tremendous amount of data and artifacts that would demonstrate the fallibility of her thesis. Numerous artifacts such as artwork indicating the prevalence of male deity figurines were dismissed in Gimbutas’s data collection. Artifacts indicating warfare, human sacrifice, and fortifications are abundant throughout the archaeological record dated within Gimbutas’s Old Europe period. And the view of Kurgan patriarchal domination of this once-peaceful matrisc society is too simplistic to explain the complexities of European archaeology. Meskell concludes that the belief that there were distinctive stages of matriarchal and patriarchal societies is a remnant of the Victorian past. She argues that these simplistic views do not do justice to interpretations.
in archaeology or feminist anthropological and gender studies in the twenty-first century. Of course, there were agricultural societies that worshipped female goddesses and maintained mythologies about matriarchal societies. In fact, there were agricultural societies that had females who held important leadership and political roles, such as the famed Cleopatra. Yet, the evidence from archaeology and ethnography suggests that female political supremacy and domination over the economy did not exist. Despite Cleopatra’s political authority, a male elite clearly controlled the economy and politics in ancient Egypt.

As we have seen in this chapter, the status of women in most of the agricultural societies in the past, including the goddess-worshipping ones, was very low. Both males and females have used mythologies and beliefs about early matriarchies throughout history. Nineteenth-century males used these beliefs to justify the status and authority of what they believed to be more evolved and advanced “patriarchal” institutions. Today, some women in the ecofeminist and New Age movements use these myths to perpetuate their vision of a utopian society. Many contemporary anthropologists, both male and female, argue that the terms patriarchy and matriarchy are too limited as dichotomies to assess the position of women in many societies of the world. For example, in an ethnography, Women at the Center: Life in a Modern Matriarchy (2002), based on eighteen years of study in Minangkabau, Indonesia, anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sandroid challenges the framework and stereotype of many Western peoples who believe that the religion of Islam consistently subordinates women with its patriarchal traditions. She finds that in Indonesia the cultural beliefs about women have always been relatively egalitarian and that these beliefs have resisted any attempt at subordinating women in this society. Anthropologists are working all over the world to refine their approach to gender issues and are investigating various global changes influencing gender change. In addition, one of the major goals of anthropology is to enhance and improve the rights of women and men throughout the world (see Chapter 24). But to do so, we must have an accurate assessment of what the archaeological and ethnographic records tell us. Without this accurate assessment, we cannot either further our knowledge of humanity or aid in the improvement of the human condition.

Questions to Ponder
1. What kind of data would be needed to infer a true matriarchal society in the past?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the belief in an early matriarchal society?
3. Could there ever be a truly matriarchal society? If so, how could one develop?
4. What has this Critical Perspectives box taught you about analyzing anthropological data?

Women may play an important role in markets in agricultural societies.

GENDER IN INDUSTRIAL AND POSTINDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES

Discuss the changes in gender relations in industrial and postindustrial societies.

Industrialization had a profound impact on gender relationships, particularly in England, Europe, and North America. The transition from an agricultural economy to an industrial wage economy drew many women from the domestic realm into the workplace. In general, women have become more economically self-sufficient and less dependent on men for support.

Gender and the Division of Labor

Although women in Western industrial societies have entered the workforce in considerable numbers in the last several decades, most women work in a small number of occupations within the service economy, especially in underpaid clerical positions. In addition, women in industrial and postindustrial societies perform the majority of domestic tasks, such as household chores and childcare, which are still considered by many the primary responsibility of women. Male occupations and the husband’s income are usually considered the primary source of family income. Consequently, women in these societies have a dual burden of combining their domestic role with employment outside the home (Bannister 1991). A similar pattern is seen in Japanese society (McCreery and McCreery 2006; G. Roberts 2016).

The gender wage gap highlighting the difference between women and men in U.S. society has been studied thoroughly by sociologists at the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR). The reports indicate that the labor force in the United States remains segregated by gender. In a report issued by the IWPR in 2018, these sociologists found that women earn less than men in nearly every occupation (Rose and Hartmann...
2018. The long-term gender earnings gap has narrowed since 1968, but the gap still exists. In middle skill occupations women earn only 66 percent of workers' earnings in jobs primarily done by men. Though women have made progress during the last few decades by moving into occupations previously held exclusively by males, the level of income inequality between genders persists. Most women are involved in occupations that are viewed as “women's work,” such as teaching young children, cleaning, serving, and caring for seniors, that offer workers low wages and few benefits. The IWPR predicts that it will take forty-one years—or until 2059—for U.S. women to finally reach pay parity.

There was more wage disparity for both African American and Hispanic women compared with white males. The IWPR report states that African American women will have to wait until 2119 and Hispanic women will have to wait until 2224 for equal pay with men.

**Female Status in Industrial Societies**

Aside from foraging groups, in most preindustrial societies, males held considerable authority and control over females. This authority diminished in industrial societies as women gained more independence and gender relations became more egalitarian. As we have seen, however, women are still restricted in the workplace and have a dual burden of outside work and domestic chores. This indicates that the cultural legacy of patriarchy still persists in most industrial societies.

As their economic role has changed, women have attempted to gain equal economic and political rights. The call for gender equality began with women from upper- and middle-class families. Unlike working-class women, these early women's rights advocates were financially secure and had much leisure time to devote to political activism. They eventually secured the right to vote in the United States and in other industrialized nations. In addition, with increasing educational levels and economic opportunities, more women entered the workforce (see Figure 18.2).

**Feminism**

During the 1960s, a combination of economic and social forces fueled the feminist movement in many industrialized societies. During the 1950s, many U.S. women began to question their roles as solitary homemakers, especially after they participated heavily within the workforce during the World War II years. They were not satisfied with their domestic roles as housewives serving their husbands, on whom they were dependent economically, and they wanted more direct participation in the outside world. Feminism is the belief that women are equal to men and should have equal rights and opportunities. The contemporary feminist movement has helped many women discover that they have been denied equal rights and dignity. This movement has a much broader base of support than the early women's rights movement. Among its supporters are career women, high school and college students, homemakers, senior citizens, and many men.

Feminists have secured some concrete gains and helped change certain attitudes in the United States. For example, in a landmark legal decision in 1972, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T), the world’s largest employer of women at the time, was forced to pay $23 million in immediate pay increases and $15 million in back pay to employees who had suffered sex discrimination. In addition, women have been admitted to many formerly all-male institutions such as the U.S. Military Academy at West Point (Macionis 2016).

Despite these gains, many female workers continue to be segregated into low-paying service occupations. To resolve this and other problems, the feminist movement supported the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution to prohibit discrimination because of gender. Although the ERA was supported by almost three-fourths of American adults and passed by Congress in 1972, it failed to win ratification by the states. Apparently, the idea of full equality and equivalent pay for equivalent work has not received the full endorsement of U.S. society. Although there has been progress in gender equality in U.S. society, the cultural legacy of patriarchy remains a persistent force.

In Japan, the cultural legacy of patriarchy has retained its grip on the role of women. In newly industrializing Japan, the Meiji Civil Code, promulgated in 1898, granted very few rights to women (McCleery and McCleery 2006). Article 5 in the Police Security Regulations of 1900 explicitly forbade women from joining political organizations or even attending meetings at which political speeches were given. These laws would remain in force in Japan until after World War II. After the U.S. occupation of Japan following
World War II, women’s suffrage was approved. Article 14 of the Japanese Constitution, proclaimed in 1946, bans discrimination on the basis of race, creed, sex, social status, or family origin. Article 24 explicitly requires the consent of both parties to marriage. The revised Civil Code issued in 1947 abolishes the traditional *ie* corporate family system. The next major change in Japanese women’s legal status came in 1985, with the passage of the Equal Opportunities Employment Law. But legal status and social acceptance are two different things, especially when laws like this one contain no penalties for violation. However, during the 1970s, wives and mothers who moved to the suburbs were the daughters of women accustomed to being stay-at-home wives. Just as in the United States and Europe, more and more Japanese women were entering the workforce. As elsewhere in the industrial world, the cost of educating the children was rising. Some women always had to work simply to make ends meet. Now more looked for work to keep up with the neighbors or to be sure that their families could afford the new consumer goods that everyone wanted. Many young women typically took jobs that lasted only until they married. Then, returning to the labor force after their children started school, they could find only low-paying, part-time work. They could supplement their household’s income, but rarely earned enough to be financially independent.

Japanese women were, however, becoming more highly educated. In 1955, only 5 percent of women in Japan received postsecondary education, and more than half of those went only to junior college. However, as of 2016, there were 1,247,726 women in Japanese universities, which is about 50 percent of the entire student population (Statistical Handbook of Japan 2017). Higher education combined with still limited opportunities was a recipe for dissatisfaction—and provided at best temporary relief (McCreery and McCreery 2006; G. Roberts 2016).

Yet, even when women are in the workforce in Japanese society, up until recently, they tended to have a second-class status when compared to men. Many college-educated women in offices are expected to wear uniforms and to serve tea and coffee to the men, and they are treated as if they are

---

**Figure 18.2** U.S. Civilian Labor Force Participation Rate: Women, 2018

office servants (Hendry 2013; Kerbo and McKinstry 1998; G. Roberts 2016). They are expected to defer to men in the office and present themselves as infantile, which is interpreted as cute and polite. Most men in Japan perform almost no domestic chores and expect to be waited on by their wives. Despite this tradition of patriarchy in Japan, the Japanese woman has a powerful position within the domestic household. She manages the household budget, takes charge of the children’s education, and makes long-term financial investments for the family. Thus, the outside-of-the-home and the inside-of-the-home roles for women in Japan are still strongly influenced by patriarchal traditions.

Some women are active in a growing feminist movement in Japan that wants to transform gender roles, but traditional cultural expectations based on patriarchy are still resistant to change (McCreery and McCreery 2006; G. Roberts 2016). In both the Western societies and Japan, women are marrying at a much older age than in the past. New reproductive technologies introduced into industrial and postindustrial societies, such as artificial insemination (AI) and in vitro fertilization (IVF), along with perhaps even cloning in some societies in the future, will undoubtedly influence the moral, legal, and social status of gender and males and females in these advanced postindustrial societies.

GENDER IN LATIN AMERICA, AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND ASIA

18.10 Discuss gender relations in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

Machismo in Latin America

Gender relationships in Latin America have been strongly influenced by the Spanish and Portuguese colonial experience (see Chapter 22). The basic traditional values affecting gender relations are known as machismo, the explicit code for the behavior of Latin American males. As a part of this code, the “true man” (macho) is supposed to be courageous, sexually virile, aggressive, and superior to women. A woman, in contrast, is supposed to be passive, sexually conservative and faithful, obedient, and completely devoted to her mate. These ideals and values have affected gender relations throughout Latin America.

Yet, many cultural anthropologists who have done research in Latin American communities have observed that the actual behaviors of males and females do not conform completely to the ideals of machismo. In an early study, Oscar Lewis (1951) observed that in the town of Tepoztlán, husbands were not the dominant authoritarian figures in the family that they wanted to be, and wives were not completely submissive. Instead, in many families, he found conflict between the spouses over authority. Most families tended to follow a middle course. The wife did little to challenge the authority of her husband, and the husband was not too overbearing toward his wife. In a more recent study, anthropologists Adriana Manago and Patricia Greenfield (2011) found that rural Mayan women in Chiapas, Mexico, were promoting gender equality and developing an indigenous form of feminism while taking a critical stance towards traditional patriarchy. It appears that challenges to patriarchy are trends that are beginning to influence gender relations throughout Latin America.

In a recent essay, anthropologist Tamar Diana Wilson (2014) writes about the prevalence of violence against women in Latin America. She begins the essay citing a UNICEF report estimating that globally one in three women experience some form of victimization in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, and that 20 to 50 percent experience violence of some kind. However, the incidence of violence is underreported because women may feel shame, fear reprisal, or lack confidence in the legal system. Wilson describes how machismo beliefs and values underlie forms of gendered violence, torture, rape, and sometimes death under military dictatorships, as well as domestic abuse, incest, and sex trafficking, in Latin America. She discusses the World Health Organization report of 2006 that interviewed thousands of women in ten Latin American countries. This report showed rural Peru with the highest rates of domestic abuse, where 81 percent of women had been subjected to violence by their partners. Wilson also discusses the prevalence of structural violence against women in the workplace where they are abused, sexually harassed, and discriminated against by macho male superiors. Although laws addressing domestic violence were passed in Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru in the 1990s, the patriarchal values represented by machismo have endured in Latin America.

Gender in Africa

Most African societies tend to be patriarchal, placing women in a subordinate status. In 1988, for example, women provided approximately 60 to 80 percent of the household food needs in many parts of Africa (Smith-Ivan 1988). They often worked ten to twelve hours a day, and in many instances, their workload increased after colonization and independence. As colonial regimes forced males to migrate to mines for employment, women were forced to assume the major subsistence roles for the family. Because their husbands’ wages were meager, women had to grow and collect food for their families. In most cases, the lack of formal education prevented females from entering the wage-labor economy, so they were unable to buy property and send their children to school.
Despite providing much of the agricultural labor and household food needs, women in rural Africa tend to be the poorest people on the world's poorest continent. The various European powers that colonized Africa affected gender relations. The Europeans often allocated land to males, but African women were given rights to land only through their relationship to males (J. Henn 1984; Tandon 1988). This tended to decrease the status of females in African society. Males were considered the head of the household and earned income, whereas females were viewed as the providers of the family's social needs (such as childcare) and the producers of the future labor force. Following independence, males were given access to credit, training, and new skills to improve agricultural production. Because females did not have collateral through landownership, they were denied the credit and training needed for commercialized agriculture.

The globalization of the economy and rural villages has also influenced the emergence of the major AIDS crisis in Africa. For example, this deadly disease spread as African males migrated long distances from their rural communities in search of job opportunities in trucking. These men have contact with women prostitutes, who are also drawn into these jobs to support new lifestyles and care for their families. The males return to their communities infected with HIV and infect their wives, resulting in more health problems for women throughout Africa. The cost of drugs to contain this heterosexual spread of HIV appears to be prohibitive in these developing rural communities (Robbins 2013).

**Urban African Women**

African women in the urban regions of Africa often receive a formal education and tend to have more independence than do rural women. In West Africa, females have traditionally been employed in urban markets and had more control over their lives than other women. Some of these women became educated and have become prominent self-employed entrepreneurs. In general, however, even highly educated women are confined to the service sector of the urban economy, working in clerical or secretarial occupations (Robertson 1984; Smith-Ivan 1988). Urban women who are without formal education and who lack the support of extended families and village communities are especially vulnerable to exploitation and alienation. Without extended family members to assist with childcare, women often are restricted to unskilled, low-wage occupations, such as making clothing, that require them to remain at home.

Because South Africa was largely controlled by European settlers and up until recently possessed a strong economy, the role of women there is somewhat different from that in other parts of Africa. Some South African women are employed as domestics in white homes or as clerical and textile workers in the industrial sector. Despite their valuable contribution to these sectors of the economy, however, they earn 20 percent less than the minimum wage (Smith-Ivan 1988; Ramsey 2010).

One positive development in some African countries is the increasing attention given to women. Beginning in the 1980s, the international women's movement with support from the United Nations Decade for Women provided some support for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that assisted African women. They lobbied for women's rights and for reform of cultural practices and laws, access to land rights, and reproductive rights to help alleviate harsh living conditions and gender oppression (Bouilly, Rillon, and Cross 2016). This movement has influenced and mobilized many women in both rural and urban Africa to struggle for their rights and against patriarchy.

The pivotal role of women in agriculture and the urban areas is increasingly being recognized and supported by various governments. Prenatal and health care for mothers and babies has improved. New cooperatives for women in rural agriculture and improvements for women working in factories have been established by government policies. Women are also beginning to play a more important role in politics. Yet, these advances could be subject to economic declines and political instability (Ramsey 2010). Thus, the role of women in both rural and urban Africa depends on the adjustment to the new demands and opportunities of globalization in the future. However, as noted by many ethnographers and other specialists who do research in Africa, the resilience of patriarchy is still very powerful.

**Gender in the Middle East**

The Western image of the Arab or Muslim woman is frequently that of a female hidden behind a veil and completely dominated by the demands of a patriarchal society. Early Western scholars painted a grim and unwholesome portrait of the female in the Muslim household. Cultural anthropologists find that this image obscures the complexity of gender relations in the Middle East.
The patriarchal ideal and the status of the female in the Muslim world cannot be understood without reference to two views in the Islamic perspective. First, according to the Islamic tradition, before the origins of Islam in the seventh century A.D., females were treated negatively. For example, in the pre-Islamic period, the Bedouins regularly practiced female infanticide by burying the unwanted child in sand. The Qur’an explicitly forbids this practice. Thus, Islam was viewed as having had a progressive influence on the role of women. Second, Islam condemns all sexual immorality, prescribing severe penalties for adultery. The Qur’an enjoins both males and females to be chaste and modest.

Islamic religious texts prescribe a specific set of statuses and corresponding roles for females to play in the Muslim family as daughter, sister, wife, and mother. Each of these statuses carries certain obligations, rights, privileges, and duties. These statuses are influenced by the patriarchal ideals of the Islamic texts. One passage of the Qur’an (iv:34) is often cited when referring to the role of women:

*Men are in charge of women, because God (Allah) hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient.*

This passage provides the context for the development of various laws that have influenced the status of Muslim women. For example, traditionally a woman could inherit only a one-half share of her parents’ estate, whereas her brothers could inherit full shares. This law assumed that a woman is fully cared for by her family and that when she marries, her husband’s family will provide for her material needs. Thus, a Muslim woman does not need the full share of inheritance.

Another traditional code in Islamic law illustrates the patriarchal attitudes toward women with respect to political and legal issues. In legal cases, a woman is granted half the legal status of a man. For example, if a crime is committed, two women as opposed to one man are needed as legal witnesses for testimony. This legal equation of “two females equal one male” reflects the traditional Islamic image of women as less experienced and less capable than men in political and legal affairs.

Ethnographic research since the 1970s has demonstrated that male–female relations in these societies are far more complex than the religious texts might imply. By focusing exclusively on Islamic texts and laws, early researchers distorted and misunderstood actual practices and relations between males and females. Moreover, before the 1970s, much of the ethnographic research in Muslim societies was done by males, resulting in a skewed understanding of the position of women because male cultural anthropologists did not have the same access to female informants as did female cultural anthropologists. Eventually, female cultural anthropologists such as Lois Beck, Lila Abu-Lughod, Soraya Altorki, and Elizabeth Fernea began to study the Muslim female world.

Female cultural anthropologists discovered that the position of Muslim women cannot be categorized uniformly. One major reason for variation is the extent to which Islamic countries have been exposed to the West. Some, like Tunisia, Egypt, and Turkey, have adopted legal reforms that have improved the status of women.

For example, Egyptian women have had access to secondary education since the early 1900s and have had career opportunities in medicine, law, engineering, management, and government. The Egyptian constitution accords women full equality with men and—ideally—prohibits gender discrimination in career opportunities. Muslim feminist movements dedicated to improving the status of women have emerged in those countries most affected by the West.

In contrast to Egypt, religiously conservative Saudi Arabia has had highly restrictive cultural norms regarding women. Saudi Arabia was not colonized by Europeans and thus was more isolated, and the religious and political authorities actively opposed Western values and culture within their society. The Saudi Arabian government, which has a constitution based on Sharia law, has interpreted Islamic law to declare that any mingling of the genders is morally wrong. Saudi women are segregated from men: they attend separate schools and, on finishing their education, can seek employment only in exclusively female institutions such as women’s hospitals, schools, and banks. Up until recently, Saudi women were forbidden by law to drive cars. When riding on public buses, they have to sit in special closed sections. All Saudi public buildings must have separate entrances and elevators for men and women (Altorki 1986; Badran 1998).

Despite legal reforms and women’s access to education in some Muslim societies, the notion that women are subordinate to men to some extent remains firmly entrenched. For example, in Egypt, a woman trained in law cannot become a judge or hold any position with legislative authority. Also, in Egypt, polygyny remains legal, and men can obtain divorces with minimal justification. In many respects, the patriarchal family remains the center of Islamic social organization. Hence, in some cases, attempts to reform women’s status have been perceived as heretical assaults on the Islamic family and morality. Some of the recent Islamic revival movements have reactivated conservative, patriarchal cultural norms.

The Veil and Seclusion

To many Westerners, the patriarchal order of the Islamic societies is most conspicuously symbolized by the veil and the other shapeless garments worn by Muslim women. In general, as a
female approaches puberty, she is supposed to be restricted and kept from contact with males. The veil is an outward manifestation of a long, extensive historical and cultural pattern (Beck and Keddie 1978; Fernea and Fernea 1979; Pomianek 2018). The wearing of the veil and the enforced seclusion of the Muslim woman, as noted earlier, are known as purdah. These practices reinforce a separation between the domestic, private sphere of women and the male-dominated public sphere.

Veiling and purdah tend to be associated with urban Muslim women. Most scholars believe that the tradition of veiling originated in urban areas among upper-class women prior to the emergence of Islamic religious developments (Beck and Keddie 1978). Traditionally, many peasant and Bedouin women in the Middle East and North Africa do not wear the veil and generally have more freedom to associate with men than do Muslim women who live in towns and cities. Many urban Muslim women report that the veil and accompanying garments offer practical protection from strangers and that when in public they would feel naked and self-conscious without these garments (Fernea and Fernea 1979).

In countries such as Egypt, Turkey, and Iran that had formerly abandoned traditional dress codes, some educated middle-class women have opted to wear the veil and the all-enveloping garments. Many of these women wear the hijab or headscarf (Pomianek 2018). In Iran, the government and religious authorities enforce women’s dress to resist what they call “Westoxification,” or the adoption of Western norms of dress and fashion. To some extent, this return to traditional dress reflects the revival movements now occurring throughout the Islamic world. For many Muslim women, returning to the veil is one way in which they can affirm their Islamic religious and cultural identity and make a political and symbolic statement of resistance to Western power and influence (Hansen 2004; Pomianek 2018).

Despite the gender segregation that exists within some Muslim communities, some anthropological studies indicate that many young Muslim women are beginning to challenge these patterns. In one illuminating study in the Middle Eastern country of Jordan, anthropologist Laura Kaya (2009) discovered that young Muslim women find ways around gender segregation through internet chat. Kaya did ethnographic research in the internet cafés that were used by young Muslim women and men to build romantic relationships. Despite the cultural norms against female and male direct interaction in the gender-segregated world of Jordan, these young people often contacted one another in modest forms of romantic discourse through internet chat. The internet cafés are modern developments, and young men and women who were strangers often sit next to one another, something that would violate the cultural norms in other segregated settings. At times, the men would send the women in the same internet café scans of photos of themselves or romantic e-cards. This might result in a meeting between a male and female who were not introduced by someone in their family, something that is prohibited by cultural norms. Kaya discovered that this form of internet communication was a new mode of online dating that challenged the cultural norms of the Middle Eastern lifestyle. Although this new development of internet café chatting opened up new opportunities for overcoming gender segregation, Kaya mentions that the women who were seen as active in these cafés were often stigmatized as having violated the honor of the family. Thus, the cultural norms that influence gender segregation are still very powerful in the context of Middle Eastern societies.

Gender and Status in South Asia

The status of women in South Asia varies from one cultural area to another, especially in respect to urban versus rural communities. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, which are influenced by the Islamic tradition, many women are secluded according to the prescriptions of purdah. Until recently, Hindu women of northern India were subject to similar norms. Today, however, many Hindu women do not wear the veil and accompanying clothing, thereby distinguishing themselves from Muslims. Traditionally, in both Islamic and Hindu regions, a woman was expected to obey her father, her husband, and, eventually, her sons. Women ate after the men were finished and walked several paces behind them.

In a recent study in urban Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) and in surrounding towns and villages of West Bengal, India, ethnographer Sarah Lamb (2018) found that women who opted to remain single were found to be in violation of the compulsory norms for marriage. Lamb uses a “narrative” biographical approach in ethnography to tell the stories of these single Indian women, some of whom were highly educated urban professionals while others were working class or rural villagers. She used open-ended interviews and “hanging out” with these women over tea or dinner, and with the more educated English-speaking elite engaging in dialogue through email and Facebook Messenger. Lamb notes how there are
powerful norms regarding the unacceptability of the unmarried adult woman and the lack of childbearing. Marriage and childbearing are essential for the Indian woman’s self-worth. In these stories collected by Lamb, these women described gender inequality and patriarchal tendencies that reinforced the norms that single unmarried women who did not have children were valued as worthless. On the other hand, some of the narratives by the educated women emphasize their fulfillment and pride in their achievements in their vocations and careers. One single woman from a rural village earned a PhD and worked as a university professor and was able to transform her family’s life by building a new house and providing modern amenities, such as education, status, and jobs. Another single woman was a lesbian but was forced to go through with an arranged marriage by her family. Lamb concludes that all of these single women expressed their ambivalence regarding their circumstances and the constraints that they encountered remaining single. She indicates how class status, family expectations, and the cultural norms that reinforced patriarchy and gender inequality impacted the self-worth of these single women in India.

In the rural communities, older women, particularly mothers-in-law, gain more respect and status in the family. In certain cases, older women become dominant figures in the extended family, controlling the household budget. As some urban South Asian women have become educated, they have begun to resist the patriarchal tendencies of their societies. Some have even participated in emerging feminist political activities. As industrialization and urbanization continue, an increase in feminist activity is expected. However, because about 75 to 80 percent of the population still resides in rural communities, patriarchal tendencies remain pervasive (Hardgrove 2006; Weiss 2006).

**Gender in China**

Following the Chinese Maoist Revolution in 1950 (see Chapter 22), the government dominated by the Communist Party initiated a campaign to eradicate the patriarchal nature of Chinese gender relations. The Communist leadership viewed the traditional family, clan, and male dominance as remnants of procommunist “feudal” China, as well as major sources of inequality. The Chinese Communist Party passed legislation such as the marriage laws of 1950 to destroy the traditional clan and extended-family ties and create more equal relationships between males and females. The marriage laws required free choice in marriage by both partners, guaranteed monogamy, and established a woman’s right to work and obtain a divorce without losing her children (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002; De Voe 2006).

Norman Chance (1984), an American anthropologist, was able to do ethnographic research on one of the communes in the 1980s when China opened its doors to the West. His research was located in what was called Half Moon Village. Based on his study of Half Moon Village, Chance concluded that the status of women had improved under the Communist regime and that, in general, the new marriage laws had disrupted the Confucian pattern of rigid patriarchy. Young girls were no longer married off or sold. Women were no longer confined to the home; rather, they were encouraged to work along with the men in agriculture and industry.

Chance noted some other changes in the status of women. He regularly observed young men taking care of their children and doing tasks such as cooking, chores that were previously performed only by women. In addition, women had assumed decision-making roles in certain areas, especially in respect to family planning—a high priority for the Chinese government after 1976. After China adopted the well-known one-child policy, the Communist Party paid bonuses to families that had only one child. Families had to return the bonus to the government if they had a second child. Women were responsible for administering and monitoring this policy.

Despite these changes, however, Chance found that some remnants of the older patriarchal norms were still evident. For example, peasant women engaged in agricultural labor were unable to develop skills that would lead to better job opportunities in the factories and other sideline occupations of the commune. In contrast to men, women were restricted to unskilled jobs. In addition, women did not hold administrative positions on commune committees.

Chance also found that women’s role in the family did not change dramatically. Typically, patrilocal residence rules prevailed at Half Moon Village. Chance noted that this often led to conflicts between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in the modern Chinese family, just as it had for centuries in the traditional Chinese family. In addition, despite the passage of the marriage laws, matchmaking and arranged marriages remained the norm, and villagers strongly disapproved of divorce. Couples still preferred male over female children to perpetuate family interests. Party officials frequently postponed efforts to alter these patriarchal patterns because such changes might cause stress and conflicts in the family unit.

Following globalization trends and the decline and collapse of rigid Maoist policies in the People’s Republic of China since the 1980s, ethnographic research has found that an enormous change has influenced family and gender issues in this society (Brownell and Wasserstrom 2002; De Voe 2006; Santos and Harrell 2016). Marriage rules are tending to become more flexible, based on individual choice rather than family arrangements, and women are becoming more independent and educated as they encounter the global economy, new technologies introduced by outsourcing (see Chapter 21), and the new global media, including the internet, which are influencing cultural and social change. However, outside of the urban areas, patriarchal values and ideologies reinforcing patrilineal...
ties continue to persist in rural regions of China (Santos and Harrell 2016).

SEXUALITY IN DIFFERENT SOCIETIES

18.11 What have anthropologists learned about sexuality in different societies?

Human sexuality is a subject that connects the biological and cultural aspects of the individual and culture. The sex drive, sexual maturation, and sexual activity have different meanings for individuals, depending on the societal and cultural contexts. What are considered “normal,” “abnormal,” or “deviant” patterns of sexuality differ from one society to another.

Anthropologists have studied enculturation and its consequences for sexual practices in varying societies. Like hunger, sex is a natural biological drive or urge for humans universally. However, this drive is channeled in certain directions through the process of enculturation.

Codes of Sexual Behavior

Societies differ with respect to how permissive or restrictive their codes or norms regarding sexuality are. Some societies approve of premarital and extramarital sexual relations, whereas others strictly segregate males from females to prohibit such relations. In some societies, sexual activity begins very early for both males and females to prepare for marriage. For example, with the Lepcha of Sikkim (a small kingdom north of India in the Himalayas), girls have their first sexual experience before puberty. In Lepcha society, sexual activity is considered as much a necessity as food or drink, and like food or drink, for the most part it does not matter from whom one receives it, though one is naturally grateful to those who provide it (Lindholm and Lindholm 1980). The Lepcha have a great deal of sexual freedom and appear to have very little sexual jealousy.

Another example of a permissive sexuality is the phenomenon of polyamory. Polyamory (from the Greek meaning “many loves”) is the practice of, or desire to have consensual and nonexclusive intimate sexual relations with multiple partners (nonmonogamy). Anthropologist Charles Erasmus (1977) described the Oneida community, an exclusive Christian religious commune founded by John Humphrey Noyes in 1848 in Oneida, New York, that practiced polyamous relationships promoting free love known as complex marriage. In this religious commune, individuals had sexual relationships with multiple partners. Noyes promoted polyamory as a means of achieving the spiritual pleasures of sexual connections. The males were to use sexual continence (coitus reservatus, or interruption of ejaculation) to practice a rigid form of birth control. Other more recent developments have promoted polyamous relationships among individuals in the United States and other Western countries. Some psychologists have been exploring the difficult emotional and cognitive issues for individuals involved in these polyamous relationships (Conley, Gusakova, and Piemonte 2019).

Anthropologist William Jankowiak has done cross-cultural research on romantic love (see Chapter 17, p. 386), love and marriage in China, and polygyny among fundamentalist Mormons in the U.S. Southwest. Lately, he and Helen Gerth (2012) did extensive interviews of individuals in Las Vegas who were involved in polyamous relationships. Referring to his cross-cultural studies of folk tales about romantic love from seventy-eight different societies, Jankowiak counted how many of these stories contained stories of relationships that took a nasty turn. Many of the stories portrayed the risks and warnings about being manipulated, seduced, or harmed by an attractive but ill-meaning lover (Jankowiak 2018). Jankowiak notes that one strategy taken by polyamory advocates to avoid these problems of romantic love is to engage in loving multiple partners at one time. These poliamorists suggest that a rich support network provides a sense of personal fulfillment. Yet the interviews of these individuals in polyamous relationships indicated that although there was no tension in the beginnings of their multiple relationships, they struggled to balance their lovers in enduring arrangements. Those who insisted that they had achieved a state of emotional unity with multiple partners still ranked their partners into primary and secondary lovers (Jankowiak and Gerth 2012). Based on his research on both polygamous and polyamous relationships, Jankowiak (2018) has concluded that humans may not be sexually monogamous, but they seem to be emotionally monogamous. It appears very difficult for individuals to passionately love two people at the same time.

In a new book Romantic Love in America: Cultural Models of Gay, Straight, and Polyamorous Relationships (Romantic Love in America: Cultural Models of Gay, Straight, and Polyamorous Relationships, cognitive anthropologist Victor de Munck (2019) discusses the cultural models that underlie romantic love and polyamory. He interviewed individuals in the U.S. regarding their straight, gay, and lesbian relationships, and begins with a definition of romantic love as “a universal human disposition to focus attention, passion, and empathy on another person in order to develop and maintain a mutual enduring attachment to another who is deemed unique, irreplaceable, and of equal worth in terms of life value as oneself and for whom one ‘instinctively’ lowers one’s own calculus of self-interest so as to willingly engage in altruistic acts for the welfare of the beloved” (de Munck 2019, xii). He says that this definition of romantic love does not deny the possibility of polyamory—one can have more than one incommensurable partner. Yet, he suggests that polyamory is really a product of the internet age because it is extremely difficult in most places (Portland, Oregon, is a notable exception) to find
like-minded people who profess polyamory, since those individuals who support it are dispersed within larger communities. These individuals—gay, straight, or lesbian—fragment or subdivide the model of romantic love to include other people for mostly sexual purposes, but also for companionate or passionate love (see Chapter 17, p. 386). They view sex as a positive thing in and of itself, it can just be about recreation or fun, and it does not have to lead to anything else aside from friendship among people in polyamorous relationships. These polyamorous individuals recognize jealousy as the biggest problem, but deal with it through honesty and transparency to control it in their relationships. De Munck suggests that polyamory is adaptive in contemporary America because it corresponds to the fragmentation that many individuals feel in their lives and their thirst for personal autonomy. In addition, if individuals in a polyamorous relationship have a family, it can provide a productive division of labor for childcare and other responsibilities.

In general, these polyamorous practices are usually viewed as culturally deviant and morally unacceptable by the majority of people throughout the world.

The antithesis of this permissive pattern of sexuality is found in some Arab societies of the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia, girls and women are strictly segregated from boys and men. Young girls begin wearing a cloak and veil at the age of puberty. Saudi Arabian society prohibits the mixing of males and females and to this end provides separate institutions for education, work, and other public facilities. In Saudi society, a family’s honor is judged by its control over the sexuality of its daughters. Brides are expected to be virgins, and, to guarantee this, families prevent daughters from interacting with boys. As discussed earlier, gender segregation and the dress code are strongly enforced by religious police in Saudi society.

Other highly restrictive attitudes and patterns of sexuality were found in societies such as the Inis Beag Islanders of Ireland, studied by anthropologist John Messenger (1971). Sex was never discussed openly at home or near children. Parents gave no sexual instruction to children. Messenger reported that the Inis Beag people lacked basic knowledge regarding sexual matters: For example, there seemed to be a general ignorance of the ability of females to have orgasms, any expression of male or female sexuality was considered deviant, and it was believed that sexual activity weakens men. Females and males were separated at an early age. Dancing was permitted, but there was no touching or contact between males and females. Dirty jokes and nudity were strongly frowned on. Messenger reported that there was little evidence of any premarital sex or any sexual foreplay between married people. Generally, people married very late in life, and there was a high percentage of celibate males in the population. Through these ethnographic examples, anthropologists have found that sexual behavior and practice varies widely throughout the world.

The United States has gone through different cycles of restrictiveness and permissiveness regarding the cultural norms that influence sexual practices (D’Emilio 1988). In the early history of the United States, Puritan norms equated sexuality with sinful behavior. Later, in the nineteenth century, American society reinforced restrictive Puritan attitudes. But the 1920s were a more liberal, permissive era with regard to sexual attitudes. The 1950s proved to be once again a more restrictive period, but this was followed by the sexual revolution of the 1960s. American society is extremely complex, and many different norms and attitudes are represented with respect to sexuality. The restrictive legacy of Puritanism still exists within some groups, as evidenced by some conservative views regarding LGBTQ issues. For example, in 1996, the U.S. Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that prohibited married same-sex couples from collecting federal benefits. However, on June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court overruled DOMA in the Obergefell v. Hodges decision and has approved same-sex marriage. This decision reflects some of the new changes in American attitudes regarding LGBTQ issues. But, recently, the United States has banned transgender people from serving in the military and removed protections for transgender prison inmates. As is obvious, homophobia is still apparent in U.S. society, and LGBTQ acceptance is not universal across the country.

**SUMMARY AND REVIEW OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

18.1 Discuss the complexities of sex as described by anthropologists.

Sex refers to the biological and anatomical differences between males and females based on sex chromosomes and hormones. Some individuals may have the sex chromosomes for male (XY) or female (XX), yet there are a number of variations in these sex chromosomes and in physical body types. Sex is not strictly binary, but rather sex differences have a bimodal statistical distribution on a bell curve with some variations at the tail ends of the curve.

18.2 Discuss the complexities of gender as described by anthropologists.

Gender involves the culturally based human traits that are assigned to individuals based on their sex (biological traits). Although sex characteristics are biologically
determined, gender roles vary in accordance with the technological, economic, and sociocultural conditions of particular types of societies.

18.3 Describe the variations of transgender and LGBTQ persons found by anthropologists in different societies.

Transgender is a term used to refer to individuals whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond to their biological (natal) sex assigned at birth. Sometimes transgender individuals are referred to as transsexuals if they desire medical surgery to transition to one sex or another. The opposite of transgender is cisgender, a term for people whose gender identity matches the birth-assigned biological sex. Some individuals may experience gender dysphoria if they feel that their gender does not correspond to their biological sex assigned at birth. Neuroscientific research on transgender individuals tends to suggest that transgender identity has a biological component. The acronym LGBTQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

Though there is an enormous range of scientific evidence to suggest that sexual orientation is an inherited disposition influenced by genes, neurological developments, and heredity, anthropologists continue to investigate both the biology and the cultural aspects of these different forms of sexual orientation. Many societies have had institutionalized cultural roles for people who are not classified as either male or female.

18.4 Describe the gender relations in foraging societies.

Contrary to most stereotypes about the gender-based division of labor in foraging societies with male hunting providing most of the meat and protein for the group, in many cases females provide most of the foodstuffs involving the collection of vegetation. The status of women within band societies is usually fairly equal to men, primarily because males and females both contribute toward provisioning for the families.

18.5 Discuss the importance of Margaret Mead’s study of gender relations in Papua New Guinea.

Margaret Mead’s pioneering research on the variation of gender roles in Papua New Guinea led to new understandings of male and female patterns. Her data demonstrating that gender was much more varied than male and female biological differences depending on particular cultural norms and values were important for the development of feminist ideals. Although Mead misunderstood gender in one of the tribes in Papua New Guinea based on later ethnographic research, she helped humanity’s overall understanding of gender plasticity and fluidity in different societies.

18.6 Describe gender relations and patriarchy in tribal societies.

With some exceptions, gender inequality and patriarchy and sexist views toward women are prevalent in tribal societies. However, in matrilineal societies, women have a higher status than men, despite the fact that men still control the political sphere.

18.7 Discuss gender in chiefdom societies.

Gender relationships were usually unequal in chiefdoms, with women ranked below men, except for women who were in the chiefly stratum, whose status was very high.

18.8 Discuss gender and patriarchy in agricultural states.

With some exceptions in Southeast Asia where bilateral descent was important, patriarchy and excessive sexism were prevalent in agricultural societies resulting in female seclusion and veiling in some cases. Patriarchy was the common practice of all of the religious traditions that developed in agricultural states, including Confucianism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

18.9 Discuss the changes in gender in industrial and postindustrial societies.

Gender relations have become more equal in industrial and postindustrial societies; however, feminist movements have emerged that critique the remaining aspects of patriarchy that still prevail.

18.10 Discuss gender relations in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

Gender relationships in Latin America have been strongly influenced by the Spanish and Portuguese colonial experience. The basic traditional values affecting gender relations are known as machismo, the explicit code for the behavior of Latin American males, which tends to emphasize excessive patriarchal norms and values. Yet, many cultural anthropologists who have done research in Latin American communities have observed that the actual behaviors of males and females do not conform completely to the ideals of machismo. However, these machismo values are still retained throughout Latin America as evidenced by the violence and abuse directed against women.

Most African societies tend to be patriarchal, placing women in a subordinate status. Despite providing much of the agricultural labor and household food needs, women in rural Africa tend to be the poorest people on the world’s poorest continent. The various European powers that colonized Africa affected gender relations by emphasizing patriarchy. African women in the urban regions often receive a formal education and tend to have more independence than do rural women.
However, as noted by many ethnographers and other specialists who do research in Africa, the resilience of patriarchy is still very powerful. The Western image of the Arab or Muslim woman is frequently that of a female hidden behind a veil and completely dominated by the demands of a patriarchal society. Cultural anthropologists find that this image obscures the complexity of gender relations in the Middle East.

The patriarchal ideal and the status of the female in the Muslim world cannot be understood without reference to views in the Islamic perspective. But ethnographic research since the 1970s has demonstrated that male–female relations in these societies are far more complex than the religious texts might imply. Middle Eastern countries differ in respect to women’s rights and gender inequality. Despite the gender segregation that exists within some Muslim communities, some anthropological studies indicate that many young Muslim women are beginning to challenge these patterns. But presently, the cultural norms that influence gender segregation are still very powerful in the context of Middle Eastern societies.

The status of women in South Asia varies from one cultural area to another, especially in respect to urban versus rural communities. In the rural communities, older women, particularly mothers-in-law, gain more respect and status in the family. As some urban South Asian women have become educated, they have begun to resist the patriarchal tendencies of their societies. However, because about 75 to 80 percent of the population still resides in rural communities, patriarchal tendencies remain pervasive.

Following the Chinese Maoist Revolution in 1950, the government dominated by the Communist Party initiated a campaign to eradicate the patriarchal nature of Chinese gender relations. Despite these changes, however, anthropologist Norman Chance found that some remnants of the older patriarchal norms were still evident. Following globalization trends and the decline and collapse of rigid Maoist policies in the People’s Republic of China since the 1980s, ethnographic research has found that an enormous change has influenced family and gender issues in this society. Marriage rules are tending to become more flexible, based on individual choice rather than family arrangements, and women are becoming more independent and educated as they encounter the global economy.

### 18.11 What have anthropologists learned about sexuality in different societies?

Enculturation’s relationship to sexual practices and norms has been a topic of research in anthropology. A wide variation of sexual practices and norms in different parts of the world has been described. The United States has gone through different cycles of restrictiveness and permissiveness regarding the cultural norms that influence sexual practices. Most recently, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage, which reflects new changes in American attitudes regarding LGBTQ issues.