

## YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, BABY...OR HAVE YOU?

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It is widely acknowledged that the modern feminist movement began in the late 1950s and early to mid-1960s and that significant gains have been made by women in subsequent decades. One must be cautious, however, in assuming that the struggle for equality is over or that "women have arrived." A common response, when thinking about or discussing the status of women in American culture, is impatience or disdain because we want to believe that the struggle for equality is over, that equality between the sexes has been achieved. Some view gender equality as a "dead issue," or as something that society set out to achieve some decades ago, and the successes of those past efforts should suffice.

Myths and misinformation abound about the roles, status, and opportunities for women in today's American society. From time to time it is useful to perform a "reality check" to expose the hype, rumors, and assumptions that we all make about gender equality. It is particularly helpful for researchers and instructors across various disciplines who focus classroom attention on gender issues to be able to gauge student attitudes and beliefs about the sexes. What beliefs or opinions about men's and women's "place" in our culture do students bring with them when they arrive at our classroom doors? Exercises that can alert students to misinformation and expose the assumptions that lead to faulty or outdated thinking can be extremely useful to educators and valuable for students.

The purpose of this article is to provide one such exercise, a classroom or workshop activity that can spark discussion and offer glimpses into the current status of women in this country. The following twenty questions reflect various topics and concerns related to women in particular, and gender issues in general. This activity can be done in the classroom as a warm-up exercise to determine the level of students' awareness of these issues and to generate discussion. Questions can also be subdivided into specialized topics, such as women in the workforce, women and violence, and personal relationships, for an instructor's use in conjunction with other course material on that specific area. Answers and references pertaining to the questions are also provided.

### HOW FAR HAS THE "BABY" ACTUALLY COME? QUESTIONS TO TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN

1. Does the statistic that women earn 76 cents in comparison to a man's dollar in the United States apply to or reflect all women, across racial and ethnic groups?

*Answer:* No. U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics show that Hispanic women working full-time ear approximately 55 cents, African American women 65 cents, and European American women 80 cents to men's dollars (all men, combined) (Herman, 2001; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1994). This wage gap indicates that the average woman earns \$420,000 less in salary over her lifetime. ("Wage Gap," 1996). In addition, 2001 U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that the average woman's wage dropped from 76 cents in 1990 to 73 cents in 2000 (Lipson, 2001). The pay gap widens with age: the 73 cents decreases to 70 cents for women ages 45 to 54, and to 64 to 68 cents for women ages 55 to 64 (Lipson, 2001).

2. Are men and women equally represented as elected officials in our federal government?

*Answer:* No. The U.S. Census Bureau (1999) estimates that women comprise 51% of the total population in the United States, but currently only two of the nine Supreme Court Justices are women, 58 of the 435 members of Congress are women, and 9 of the 100 members of the United States Senate are women.

3. What segment of society has benefited most from affirmative action programs?

*Answer:* Although many people believe that African Americans have benefited the most from affirmative action programs, actually European American women have been the biggest beneficiaries over the 30 years of the program's existence. European American women are the largest single group to benefit, with much less benefit extended to Hispanic and African American men and women (American Civil Liberties Union, 1995; "Analyzing Affirmative Action," 1995; St. George, 1995).

4. What kind of unethical questions are women often asked in job interviews?

*Answer:* Women interviewing for jobs are frequently asked questions about their personal and family lives, often in an attempt to discover if they have children or, more to the point, if they intend to have children while employed at the company or institution with which they are interviewing. Men are rarely asked such questions because of the assumption that their careers or work responsibilities will not be deterred or interrupted by raising a family (Ivy & Backlund, 2000).

5. Is it still legal to include a space for sex (as in male\_\_ female\_\_) on job applications?

*Answer:* Yes. It is still legal to request that a job applicant indicate her or his sex on an application, but it is illegal to let the response affect a person's chances of being interviewed or hired (Ivey & Backlund, 2000).

6. Given that in 1968 15% of managers were women, then 15% should have risen through the ranks to become senior managers in the decade of the 1990s. What percentage actually represents women in senior management in the 1990s?

*Answer:* Only 3% of senior management in the 1990s were women, suggesting that the "glass ceiling" in corporations is alive and well. This trend led one team of researchers to conclude: "If women's rate of progress proceeds at the present pace, women will not achieve equitable representation and pay at all management levels for another 75 to 100 years" (Reskin & Padavic, 1994, pp. 95-96).

7. What percentage of women in the workforce choose nontraditional (or traditionally male-dominated) careers?

*Answer:* Only 6% of women in the American workforce choose nontraditional or male-dominated career paths (American Association of University Women, 1998a, 1998b). Women cluster in only 20 of the 400 job categories provided on questionnaires about career paths. However, more women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are entering male-dominated and, typically, higher-paying professions than in recent decades (Lipson, 2001).

8. What percentage of minimum wage earners are women?

*Answer:* Two thirds of all minimum wage earners in the United States are women (American Association of University Women, 1998a, 1998b).

9. Given that girls account for 40% of all high school athletes and women are 37% of all college varsity athletes, what percentage of athletic scholarship dollars do female athletes receive?

- A. 10%
- B. 23%
- C. 41%
- D. 50%

*Answer:* According to the Executive Summary on Title IX, 25 years after the enactment of Title IX, only 23% of college athletic scholarship dollars go to female athletes. Only 27% of recruiting dollars are spent on female athletes. (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 1997).

10. Women comprise 73% of elementary and secondary school teachers. What percentage are principals?

- A. 35%
- B. 45%
- C. 55%
- D. 65%

*Answer:* The correct answer is 35%, according to the Report Card on Gender Equity (National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, 1997).

11. True or False? Studies show that 60% of 8<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> graders have experienced sexual harassment.

*Answer:* False. Studies show that 81% (85% of girls; 76% of boys) have experienced sexual harassment (American Association of University Women, 1993). Research indicates that sexual harassment is related to female students' reduced academic performance and decreased interest in school.

12. Are Americans ready for a woman president?

*Answer:* George Gallup first asked citizens in 1936 whether they would "vote for a woman for president if she qualified in every other respect." Sixty-five percent of respondents said they would not. A recent poll shows that 90% of Americans say that they could support a woman for president (Cliff & Brazaitis, 2000). Still, when it comes to the qualities that people seek in candidates for public office, men still have the advantage. Leadership and the ability to be decisive are perceived to be male traits, while women are viewed as being more honest and caring (Cliff & Brazaitis, 2000).

13. Is there a relationship between pornography and violence against women?

*Answer:* Common sense suggests that pornographic materials that portray women in humiliating and degrading poses are unhealthy for women. In fact, the 1986 Meese Commission concluded that extensive viewing of pornographic materials leads viewers to believe that rape and other forms of sexual violence are less harmful than they might otherwise believe. Most researchers agree that pornography has not been proven to be a direct cause of violence. Rather, studies show that viewing violence can lead to violent behavior (Starer, 1995). When reviewing the research findings, one must be diligent in uncovering political agendas. For example, the issue of censorship is often intertwined in discussions about pornography. Interested parties in the equation include pro-family lobbies, the religious right, the press, feminists, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). All parties would receive an incentive if conclusive evidence emerged that pornography directly causes violence (Starer, 1995).

14. What is the economic impact of divorce for men versus women?

*Answer:* Many women face a decrease in their standard of living following a divorce. For the average woman, it takes five years to recover financially (Gelernter, 1996). On average, divorced men enjoy a 10% increase in their standard of living, but women suffer a 30% drop in their standard of living. Census reports indicate that only half of divorced women who were awarded child support receive it in full each month, about 25% of fathers pay a portion, and about 25% pay nothing. As their children grow older, fathers become less likely to pay in full and more likely to pay smaller amounts (Gelernter, 1996).

15. After a marriage breaks up, is it more beneficial for children to be raised by their father or their mother?

*Answer:* In a study of more than 22,000 American male respondents, researchers found that children raised by single mothers were nearly as likely to succeed in adulthood as children raised in traditional two-parent homes. When income and job status were taken into account, children who were raised by single mothers were more likely to reach higher professional and educational levels than children raised in households headed by a stepfather or single father (Biblarz, Raftery, & Bucur, 1997). Researcher Timothy Biblarz explains: "On Average, mothers tend to sustain a higher level of emotional involvement in children amid spousal conflict and marital disruptions. Compared to a father, a mother has a greater reproductive investment in a particular child. A father's relations with his children tend to diminish as his relations diminish with the children's mother" (Biblarz, in Sullivan, 1997).

16. What percentage of married women will experience marital rape?

*Answer:* The FBI indicated that 102,555 women were survivors of rape in 1990 (U.S. Department of Justice, 1996), but the Rape in America study estimates that 683,000 women are raped every year (National Victims Center and Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, 1992). The National Violence Against Women survey reported that nearly 18% of respondents had been raped or had been the target of an attempted rape (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998). In this study, 8,000 women and 8,000 men shared their experiences with rape, physical assault, and stalking. The findings indicated that violence against women is primarily partner violence: 76% of the women who were raped and/or physically assaulted since age 18 were assaulted by a current or former husband, cohabiting partner, or date, compared with 18% of the men. The women's movement raised public awareness of rape and also facilitated new responses for survivors; however, a great deal remains to be done in this area. At the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, violence against women was identified as one of the most pressing concerns of women worldwide (Winters, 1998).

17. True or False? The majority of American workers are covered by the national Family and Medical Leave Act, which requires businesses to permit up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave annually.

*Answer:* True, Signed by President Clinton in 1993, the national Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) covers approximately two thirds of the U.S. labor force, including private and public sector employees. Employers with 50 or more employees are required to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave a year to eligible employees to care for a newborn, newly adopted, or foster child; to care for a child, spouse, or parent with a serious health condition; or for the serious health condition of the employee, including maternity-related disability. Although this is a significant step forward, many U.S. workers are still not covered by the Act. This group includes teachers, employees who work for companies with fewer than 50 employees, and people deemed "key" employees (Family and Medical Leave Act, 1993).

Other industrial countries do much better, with Canadian workers receiving 15 weeks of family leave at 60% pay and women in France receiving 12 weeks of maternity leave at full pay (Kenen, 1998).

18. True or False? Women are frequently required to pay higher insurance premiums than men for the same benefits, or to pay the same as men for less protection or benefits.

*Answer:* True. If women won equality in insurance prices, coverage, and benefits, they would gain more than \$2.5 billions annually. This would include \$150 million per year in increased annuities paid to retired women and would equal what men receive with the same policies. Life insurance savings paid out to older women would be \$140 million per year, equaling what men get with the same policies. Women would gain \$2 billion per year in reduced charges for automobile insurance. Current pricing methods are strongly biased against women because they ignore 2:1 ratio of men's to women's average mileage and, consequently, the 2:1 ration of accident involvement (Butler, 1993).

19. Is Social Security a woman's issue?

*Answer:* Yes. Since women live longer than men, they depend on Social Security benefits for more years than men do. Additionally, women are half as likely as men to receive a pension and when they do, the average pension income for older women is \$2,682 annually, compared to \$5,731 for men (American Association of University Women, 2000). The Social Security system, founded in 1940, reflects the predominant role (homemaker) that women played at that time. The percentage of women in the workforce in 1940 was 14%; the percentage had risen to 59% by 1993 (Social Security Administration, 1993). Sixty-three percent of women on Social Security receive benefits based on their husbands' earnings (wives' or widows' benefits), while only 1% of men receive benefits based on their wives' earnings. Thirty-seven percent of these women had no earnings history, and 26% had a higher benefit as a wife or widow than as an earner. Monthly benefits for women currently average \$621, while men receive an average of \$810 (National Organization for Women, 1999).

20. How are federal judicial nominations handled differently between sexes?

*Answer:* In 1999, the Citizens for Independent Courts Task Force on Federal Judicial Selection submitted a nonpartisan blue-ribbon study during the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress. It reported that the confirmation procedure for women and minority nominees took significantly longer than for white male nominees. On average, the process took 65 days longer for women and 60 days longer for nonwhite nominees. In 1999, six of the ten judicial candidates who waited two years or longer to be confirmed were women or members of minorities. On the federal bench, women and minority members are underrepresented, with less than 21% of the seats belonging to women and less than 17% of the federal judgeships held by members of ethnic minorities (American Association of University Women, 2000).

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