CHAPTER 8

Communicating
Gender at Work

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Gender is not just a women's issue, but much of the early research equated women and gender.

Surgeon, nurse. Corporate executive, secretary. Airline pilot, flight attendant. All of these terms denote occupations, but if we are all honest with ourselves, for the first occupation in each pairing we typically think "man," and for the second occupation, we think "woman." How many of us are not at least still a little surprised when we hear a woman's voice coming from the flight deck on a commercial flight? These examples highlight the relationship between gender and work, illustrating how work and occupations are gendered. As organizational communication scholar Karen Ashcraft (2013) has shown, the gendering of work and occupations has little or nothing to do with natural distinctions between men and women, and everything to do with how certain professions and forms of work have historically been constructed as suited to either men or women, mainly as a way to preserve structures of advantage and disadvantage in society.

In this chapter, then, we are going to examine the relationship between gender and work, exploring how gender has historically played (and still plays) a central and defining role in structuring the nature of work and indeed, in providing occupational opportunities

(or lack thereof) for men and women. In this sense, we will address the connections among gender, work, and power. In other words, the configuration of the gender-work dynamic that operates today did not occur spontaneously, but is the result of structures of power that date back to the beginning of industrial capitalism. As we saw in Chapter 2, the so-called Cult of True Womanhood (Welter, 1966) developed as an ideology to preserve the public sphere (including work) for men and confine women to the private sphere of home and hearth. As sociologist Steven Vallas (2012) indicates, we are still living with the legacy of that ideology more than 150 years later, as women still struggle to achieve parity with men in the workplace.

It's important, however, that when we think about gender and work, we don't immediately think women and work. This chapter is not simply about women's progress (or lack thereof) in the work sphere. Instead, it examines work, organization, and gender from a communication perspective. What does a communication perspective bring to the study of gender dynamics at work in the organizing process? First, it understands that both women and men have (or more accurately, do) gender; that is, both men and women engage in gendered communication behavior as they go about their everyday lives. Second, a critical communication perspective understands that power is a routine feature of the gender-work relationship, shaping workplace interaction. Third, a communication perspective recognizes that gender is fluid and dynamic; it is not located in people but emerges from the communication dynamics of particular social contexts. In other words, we *perform* gender. Finally, a communication perspective recognizes that gender identities are not fixed but historically variable; what counts as masculinity or femininity today has not always been the case, as social norms about appropriate gendered behavior shift over time.

Given the critical orientation of this text, we will also be adopting a feminist approach to the analysis of the gender-work relationship. This choice may seem a little odd for two middle-aged white males (Dennis being a bit more "middle-aged" than Tim), but as we hope to show, and as the title of one of feminist scholar bell hooks's texts says, *Feminism Is for Everybody*, especially if you believe in gender equality (hooks, 2000). In that book, hooks defines **feminism** as "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (2000, p. 1). While this definition is a pretty broad, it does point to a key question common to all feminist approaches; that is, how do we understand, explain, and critique the relationship between gender and power? In other words, to what extent can the distribution of power in society be understood through the analysis of gender? While studying gender cannot account for all the ways power and oppression work in society, it provides a number of different insights into how social structures rest on gendered assumptions.

However, this picture is somewhat complicated by the fact that, historically speaking, multiple feminist perspectives have emerged that conceptualize the relationship between gender and power in different ways. In her overview of feminist thought, Rosemarie Tong (2009) identifies the following feminist perspectives: liberal, radical, socialist, psycho-analytic, care-focused, postcolonial, ecofeminist, postmodern, and third wave feminism. We're not going to review all of these here; our point is that thinking of feminism as a unified, homogeneous body of knowledge ignores its complexity. As an approach to the study of human behavior, it is much like any other area of study in its multiple and sometimes divergent efforts to understand how society works.

In this chapter, we are going to limit our discussion to three different feminist approaches to the study of gender and work: liberal feminism, radical feminism, and what we will call critical feminism. Each of these perspectives is particularly useful for exploring changing understandings of gender in the context of work and organizational life. However, while feminism has been around for 200 years, organizational communication and management scholars have been slow to systematically address gender issues at work. Indeed, it is really only in the last 25 years or so that organizational communication scholars have taken seriously the relationships among gender, power, and work (Ashcraft, 1998a, 1998b; Buzzanell, 1995; Mumby, 1996; Putnam, 1990; Putnam & Fairhurst, 1985). Let's turn, then, to a discussion of how different feminist perspectives have examined work and organization.

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The feminist movement is often referred to in terms of waves. The first wave of feminism from the mid-19th through the early 20th century defined oppression principally in terms of women's exclusion from voting and property rights. One might mark the beginning of an organized feminist movement by an 1848 conference held in Seneca Falls, NY, attended by over 300 men and women (including Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Frederick Douglass). The conference approved a "Declaration of Sentiments" (mirroring the Declaration of Independence) that included 12 resolutions regarding women's rights pertaining to property, child custody, marriage, and the franchise of voting. All 12 resolutions received unanimous approval except, ironically, Resolution 9 ("Resolved, that it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the franchise"). Many women delegates were concerned that the "extreme" nature of this resolution would result in all 12 being rejected (Tong, 2009, p. 22). It took a persuasive argument by Frederick Douglass to get the resolution passed: "In this denial of the right to participate in government, not merely the degradation of woman and the perpetuation of a great injustice happens, but the maiming and repudiation of one-half of the moral and intellectual power of the government of the world" (as cited in McMillen, 2008, pp. 93–94). It took more than 70 years after the Seneca Falls conference for women to receive voting rights in the United States.

The second wave of feminism that began in the early 1960s was a much broader movement. It was concerned with such issues as reproductive freedom, domestic violence, rape, and the participation of women in domains—such as upper management and politics— that were previously reserved for men (women have always been a significant portion of the workforce but until the last 30 years or so have been denied a significant presence in the upper echelons of organizations). Thus, as we will see below, the second wave viewed oppression in much more complex terms, identifying forms of exploitation (e.g., sexual harassment and domestic violence) that had not previously been brought into public consciousness (MacKinnon, 1979). A number of feminist perspectives emerged during this period, and debates swirled among feminists regarding the sources of women's

oppression. Central issues included the following: Are women the same as men (i.e., have the same abilities), or do they offer different skills (e.g., empathy, nurturance, care, etc.) that have been marginalized under the ideology of male dominance in society known as patriarchy? Is capitalism or patriarchy (or both!) most responsible for women's oppression (Eisenstein, 1979)? Are the family and traditional sex-gender relations sources of women's oppression (Firestone, 1970)?

Finally, the past 30 years or so have witnessed a growing recognition that women are far from a homogeneous group and that oppression and exploitation are experienced in myriad ways. In fact, the second wave of feminism has rightly been criticized for privileging the voices of white, middle-class women and excluding working-class women and women of color from its agenda. In the early 1980s, for example, bell hooks (1981) wrote a book titled *Ain't I a Woman* (a phrase taken from a speech by 19th-century African American activist Sojourner Truth) that drew attention to the white middle-class worldview that dominated the second wave of feminism. Today, the project of feminism includes not only women of color but also men. As a result of efforts to capture the diverse experience of women, in recent years a feminist third wave has thus come to prominence. If the second wave could be summed up by the idea that women share similarities, particularly in their experience of oppression, the third wave of feminism emphasizes multiplicity and difference. Moreover, such multiplicity and difference can be fluid, as third wave feminists recognize that identities are not fixed but, instead, are ambiguous and characterized by "lived messiness" (Haywood & Drake, 1997, as cited in Tong, 2009, p. 288). The forms of empowerment that third wave feminists invoke are often individual rather than collective forms of empowerment including, for example, celebration of multiple forms of gender and sexual expression.

Given this historical context, let's turn now to a discussion of the three forms of feminism that we see as most effectively informing discussions of gender, work, and organizational communication. These perspectives are (1) liberal feminism, (2) radical feminism, and (3) critical feminism. While these perspectives overlap in some fashion, each presents us with different ways of examining issues such as patriarchy, domination, gender, equality, emancipation, and so forth. In addition, each perspective provides different ways of understanding and examining organizational life; indeed, the nature of societal institutions and organizations is very much a focal point of feminist analysis and critique. A summary of the three perspectives can be found in Table 8.1 later in this chapter.

Liberal Feminism: Creating a Level Playing Field

Liberal feminism is a product of late 18th- and 19th-century liberal political theory and is perhaps most associated in its early days with the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft (1792/1975), Harriet Taylor Mill (1851/1994), and her second husband, John Stuart Mill (1869/1970). Liberal feminism is both a critique and an extension of the Enlightenment tradition that focused on individual autonomy and rights. While this perspective firmly believes in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's "declaration of the rights of man," it critiques the fact that women were excluded from that declaration. Thus, while (male-oriented) Enlightenment liberal political theory developed the principles of liberty, fraternity, and

equality, liberal feminism critiqued its failure to include women in this new conception of individual rights.

As we saw above, the early days of liberal feminism focused on voting and property rights, but the feminist second wave was a much broader movement. It emerged partly out of disenchantment with the emerging civil rights and student movements (which tended to marginalize the role of women activists) and partly in response to Betty Friedan's (1963) landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*. In identifying what she called "the problem that has no name" (p. 15), Friedan gave voice to many middle-class, educated women who experienced a deep sense of malaise as a result of their limited opportunity for fulfillment through anything other than their roles as wives and mothers. The rallying cry "The personal is political" stressed the idea that what patriarchal society had traditionally defined as individual, personal issues (domestic violence, child care, relational abuse, etc.) actually had much more profound and far-reaching implications for the ways in which society defined women and their roles. In this sense, the second wave of feminism was a time of consciousness raising, in which feminists attempted to draw attention to the various institutional mechanisms that limited women's full participation in society.

In what ways can these concerns be related to organizational communication issues? From a liberal feminist perspective, the principal concern has been with expanding access to work and career opportunities for women. The past several decades have seen efforts on a number of different fronts to level the playing field in order for women to compete for jobs on an equal basis with men. For example, in 1964 Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was passed, prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sex, race, or religion. In addition, affirmative action programs and Equal Employment Opportunity laws have mandated equal access to job opportunities for women.

Despite these legislative efforts, women still lag behind men on a number of different organizational fronts. For example, many women continue to experience the **glass ceiling** phenomenon (Buzzanell, 1995), where they reach a certain level of the organizational hierarchy and then have great difficulty progressing any further. Indeed, the Center for American Progress, a public policy research institute, provides the following information regarding the movement of women into senior-level organizational positions (Warner & Corley, 2017):

Women are 50.8% of the U.S. population:

- They earn almost 60% of undergraduate degrees and 60% of all master's degrees.

- They earn 47% of all law degrees and 48% of all medical degrees.

- They earn 38% of MBAs and 48% of specialized master's degrees.

- They account for 47% of the U.S. labor force and 49% of the college-educated workforce.

However, despite holding almost 52% of all professional-level jobs, American women lag behind men when it comes to their representation in leadership positions:

- While they are 44% of the overall Standard & Poors 500 labor force and 36% of first- or mid-level officials and managers in those companies, they are only 25%

of executive- and senior-level officials and managers, hold only 20% of board seats, and are only 6% of CEOs.

- At S&P 500 companies in the financial services industry, they make up 54% of the labor force but are only 29% of executive- and senior-level managers and 2% of CEOs.

- In the legal field, they are 45% of associates but only 22% of partners and 18% of equity partners.

- In medicine, they comprise 37% of all physicians and surgeons but only 16% of permanent medical school deans.

- In academia, they are only 31% of full professors and 27% of college presidents.

- They were only 6% of partners in venture capital firms in 2013—down from 10% in 1999.

- In 2014, women were just 20% of executives, senior officers, and management in U.S. high-tech industries. As recently as 2016, 43% of the 150 highest-earning public companies in Silicon Valley had no female executive officers at all.

A 2017 *Fortune* magazine article celebrates the fact that the number of women CEOs increased by more than 50% over its 2016 figure (from 21 out of 500 to 32 out of 500)—a whopping 6.4% of Fortune 500 CEOs (Zarya, 2017). Moreover, only two women of color are Fortune 500 CEOs—Geisha Williams at PG&E, and Indra Nooyi at PepsiCo (Zarya, 2017). But as we point out in Chapter 11 on leadership, there are still as many male CEOs in large U.S. companies named John as there are women CEOs (Miller, Quealy, & Sanger-Katz, 2018).

One of the earliest and most important liberal feminist efforts to address the lack of women's progress up the corporate hierarchy was Rosabeth Moss Kanter's (1977) book *Men and Women of the Corporation*. In her 5-year-long investigation of a large corporation, Kanter identified a number of different factors that prevented women from advancing in this organization. Two phenomena in particular are significant for us in understanding how gender and organizational communication are closely linked: (1) tokenism and (2) homosocial reproduction.

Tokenism refers to a condition whereby a person finds himself or herself identified as a minority in a dominant culture. In Kanter's (1977) study, women were the tokens because of their minority status in the corporation, but anyone who is a member of a minority group can be given token status (e.g., African Americans, Latinos/as, individuals with disabilities, etc.). The important thing about tokens is that they are visible (because they look or behave differently from other organization members), and they come to be viewed as representatives of their minority groups rather than as individuals with particular traits and skills. This visibility means that any mistake they make tends to be amplified while, ironically, competent performance is overlooked. In other words, ability is often eclipsed by physical appearance, according to Kanter. As such, token organization members frequently have to work much harder than do dominant group members in order to get recognition and rewards. Thus, tokens are under tremendous pressure and are, in effect, set

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The glass ceiling limits women's ability to reach the highest levels of corporate life.

up for failure. Furthermore, any failure is taken as indicative of the performance of members of the token group, rather than as a failure of the individual person.

From a communication perspective, tokenism is a perceptual phenomenon created by the members of the dominant culture; people are not tokens unless others communicatively construct them as such. Kanter indicates that tokenism is a perceptual tendency characterized by high visibility, contrast, and assimilation. That is, a token (a) has a high organizational profile; (b) is perceived as contrasting significantly with the dominant culture, such that members of the dominant culture exaggerate both their differences from the token and commonalities amongst themselves; and (c) is assimilated into the stereotype of his or her token group and not allowed by members of the dominant group to function as an individual. In this sense, tokenism is a creation of the perceptual and communication practices of those who shape the dominant culture of the organization.

In such contexts, people who experience tokenism feel that all their actions and decisions are scrutinized in a manner that members of the dominant culture do not experience. As such, they can never afford to function merely adequately and often end up working much harder than the average organization member in order to be perceived as competent. As journalist Anna Quindlen (2003) has stated, "Women [and minorities] have won the right to do as much as men do. They just haven't won the right to do as little as men do" (p. 74).

Homosocial reproduction is a condition that functions in tandem with tokenism and describes an organizational context in which, to put it simply, "the men who manage reproduce themselves in kind" (Kanter, 1977, p. 48). In her interviews with male managers, Kanter discovered that they preferred to work with people who were like themselves,

mainly because it facilitated a relatively predictable environment in which communication with colleagues was easy and comfortable. In this sense, women employees inserted a level of unpredictability that upset the smooth flow of communication and decision making. Put in the terms discussed in Chapter 5, we might say that male managers were comfortable being part of a single, coherent organizational culture that reflected their view of the corporate world. Women undermined that coherence.

Thus, phenomena such as "the old boys' network" and the "old school tie" are part of the process of homosocial reproduction, whereby men hire other men who look a lot like them and come from similar backgrounds—white, middle class, educated at particular schools, and so forth. In such a context, it becomes extremely difficult for women to assimilate into a culture where they do not immediately understand the taken for granted meanings at work, and where the in-group perceives them as alien before they have even had a chance to prove themselves. Silicon Valley, for example, is notorious for its gender inequity, with only 2 % of women-led companies receiving venture capital funding (Corbyn, 2018). Indeed, the term *Brotopia* is often used to describe Silicon Valley, where women frequently experience the phenomenon of being the only woman in the room because of the dominance of a "Bro" culture (Chang, 2018).

Of course, much has changed in the 40 years since Kanter's study. But while it is no longer unusual for women to be in management positions, they still frequently experience barriers to advancement that limit their success when compared with similarly qualified men. Where women are able to move into particular occupations, they frequently tend to fill "occupational ghettoes"—professions that are defined as women's occupations. These include clerical work, nursing, pediatrics, social work, elementary school teaching,
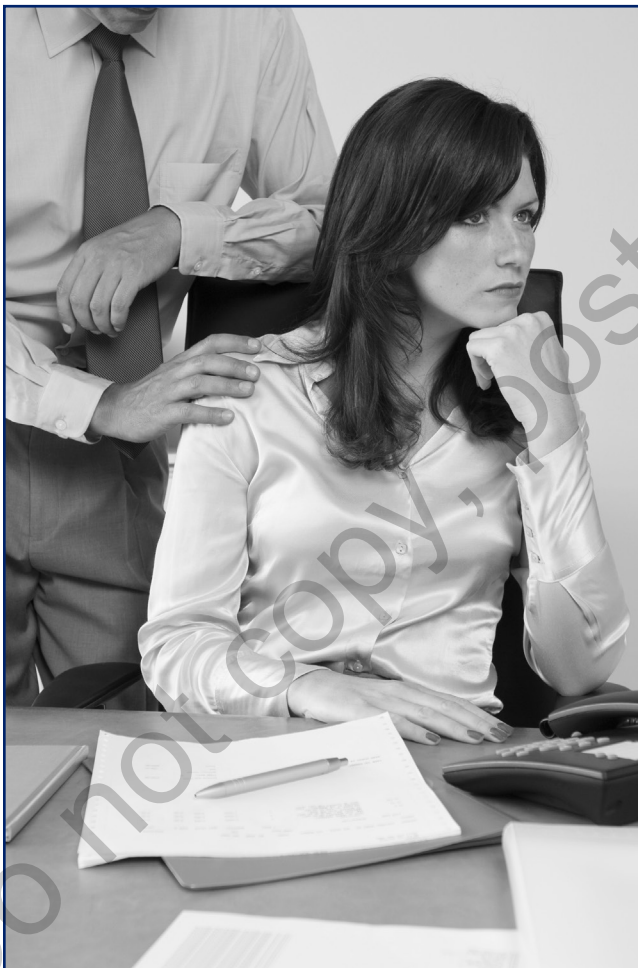
As the #MeToo movement has shown, sexual harassment is still a widespread feature of organizational life.

temporary employment, and so forth. When women are able to move into a profession that has previously been dominated by men, the salaries in such professions tend to fall.

In the 1990s, researchers identified a phenomenon that complements women's glass ceiling experience—the **glass escalator** (Harvey Wingfield, 2009; Williams, 1992, 2013). This phenomenon is a different form of tokenism, in which men in female-dominated professions (e.g., nursing, grade school teaching, social work) experience a pressure toward upward mobility that sees them promoted more quickly than women. In other words, tokenism works negatively for women but positively for men. Thus, even in professions where women have a distinct numerical superiority, they still experience difficulty in their efforts to progress professionally. Interestingly, men entering female-dominated professions are generally welcomed by those women (because it raises the prestige of the profession), while women entering a male-dominated profession do not receive the same welcome, frequently having access blocked to professional social networks and possibilities for career advancement (Harvey Wingfield, 2009).

Recently, Christine Williams (who did the original research on the glass escalator) has revisited the phenomenon, arguing that her original conception failed to consider issues of race, sexuality, and class (Williams, 2013). In other words, her research failed to adopt what feminists refer to as an **intersectional approach**, where the combined effects of race, class, gender, and sexuality on people's positions in society are explored. Adopting an intersectional approach to the glass ceiling has interesting results, showing that the glass escalator effect works only for white men in traditional work organizations; it does not apply to minority men. For example, Adia Harvey Wingfield's (2009) study of African American men in the—heavily feminized—nursing profession shows that they do not experience a glass escalator effect. Indeed, it is often quite the opposite; while white male nurses are often mistaken by patients for doctors, minority male nurses are often mistaken for orderlies or janitors. Moreover, Williams points out that her original research took place in traditional occupations with high stability and career ladders, while today (and as we saw in Chapter 6) neoliberalism has drastically reshaped work, with more low-paying retail jobs than well-paid manufacturing jobs in the United States. As a result, glass escalators and glass ceilings have been replaced for many workers by revolving doors. Retail work has an incredibly high turnover rate and is notorious for gender pay disparities, with women earning only 75% of what men earn in retail work (often because men in retail get fast-tracked into managerial positions while women remain in frontline, customer service positions). The glass escalator, then, is a useful concept to explain some forms of gender discrimination, but it is also a good example of how treating gender in isolation (and limiting its application to traditional occupations) can be problematic.

A further glass metaphor has also been used to describe women's organizational experience, one that is often applied to women who do make it through the glass ceiling, or who are not overlooked by the glass escalator—the **glass cliff**. Developed by management scholars Michelle Ryan and Alex Haslam, the glass cliff refers to the precarious position women managers often find themselves in once they have succeeded in shattering the glass ceiling (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010, 2011; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Based on their analysis of the appointment and subsequent tenure of numerous women CEOs, Ryan and Haslam argue that companies are more likely to appoint men as

CEOs when the company is stable and thriving and more likely to appoint women as CEOs in times of crisis. Ryan and Haslam claim that companies tend to operate with the formula "Think manager—think male; think crisis—think female" (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). This trend means that women are often appointed to senior positions associated with a greater risk of failure. Thus, "women were more likely than men to be placed in positions *already associated* with poor company performance" (Ryan & Haslam, 2007, p. 556).

The glass cliff, then, refers to an additional form of discrimination that women may face once they have broken through the glass ceiling—successful women are more frequently placed in precarious positions and thus, potentially set up for a fall. They tend to be overlooked when safe or "cushy" positions are available. Susanne Bruckmüller and Nyla Branscombe (2011) argue that CEOs such as Carly Fiorina of Hewlett-Packard, Kate Swann of W. H. Smith, and Carol Bartz of Yahoo had all been subject to the glass cliff phenomenon, being fired once they had not delivered the expected company revitalization.

In general, then, we can describe liberal feminism as an entryist approach to organizational communication, in which efforts are aimed at providing ways for women to receive the same professional opportunities and support as men do. For example, at General Electric, the corporation's Women's Network—established to improve women's access to high-ranked GE positions—coaches women managers in public-speaking skills, in making effective presentations, and in "exuding leadership qualities" (Walsh, 2000, p. 13).

Many companies now have parental leave programs in place that permit women (and often men) to take paid leave around the birth of a child without compromising their professional status and career chances in the firm. However, the United States is years behind many other (particularly European) industrialized nations in providing adequate parental leave programs. For example, in a study examining the parental leave laws in 21 countries, the United States ranked 20th in the amount of protected job leave available to parents (Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2008). Switzerland ranked last with 14 weeks of protected leave, while Spain and France ranked first with more than 300 weeks. The United States offers a combined 24 weeks of protected leave for a two-parent family. Moreover, while almost all countries provide direct financial (government-paid) support for parents (varying between 3 months and 1 year of full-time equivalent paid leave), the United States is one of only three countries that offers no paid parental leave (the other two are Lesotho and Papua New Guinea). Finally, "only about one-fourth of U.S. employers offer fully paid 'maternity-related leave' of any duration, and one-fifth of U.S. employers offer no maternity-related leave of any kind, paid or unpaid" (Ray et al. 2008, p. 1). Figure 8.1 provides information on all 21 countries in the study and certainly displays some interesting comparative data on the efforts of most of the top industrialized nations to provide parental leave for their citizens. The United States does not fare well in this comparison.

Often, when women do take advantage of such programs, they find themselves less competitive in terms of raises, promotions, job opportunities, and so on. As such, women (and men) are often loath to participate in company parental leave programs even when they are available, for fear it will indicate they are not serious about their careers. For example, in their study of one workplace with a parental leave policy, organizational communication scholars Erika Kirby and Kathy Krone (2002) discovered that employees often adopted an attitude of "the policy exists but you can't really use it," indicating

a considerable gap between the official company leave policy and the ways employees made sense of it within the culture of the organization.

One final and influential effort to address the professional barriers that women face is Sheryl Sandberg's (2013) book, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. Sandberg argues that women's lack of access to upper-level management positions is largely self-imposed; she suggests that the route to workplace equality lies through individual women's ability to overcome their own psychological hang-ups that prevent them from recognizing their worth and "leaning in" (rather than sitting back) at the (literal and metaphorical) board-room table where the important decisions are made. She provides three pieces of advice for women: (1) Sit at the table, (2) don't leave before you leave, and (3) make your partner a real partner.

First, Sandberg (2013) argues that women face internal, self-imposed barriers to advancement, choosing to watch from the sidelines rather than get involved in decision making. Many women fall prey to the impostor syndrome in which they feel like a fraud, with it being only a matter of time before they are exposed as incompetent (both men and women experience the impostor syndrome, but women tend to experience it more intensely and frequently). Part of this, Sandberg argues, is because women consistently underestimate themselves, while men do not; women often judge their work performance as worse than it is, while men judge their performance as better than it is. Moreover, a man will attribute his success to his own abilities, while women attribute it to external factors like luck or help from others. Sandberg thus encourages women to feel more confident and less insecure and to seize opportunities when they come along; in other words, fake it 'til you feel it.

Second, Sandberg (2013) advocates that women "don't leave before they leave." This advice addresses the dilemma young women often face between a career and family. Sandberg argues that far too often women make decisions too prematurely, scaling back investment in their careers in anticipation of children (she tells the story of a young woman at Facebook who asked her questions about how to balance career and family, even though at the time of the conversation she didn't even have a boyfriend). Sandberg's point is that women often pass up career opportunities because they fear that they will get in the way of having a family. But Sandberg argues, "Anyone lucky enough to have options should keep them open. Don't enter the workforce already looking for the exit. Don't put on the brakes. Accelerate. Keep the foot on the gas pedal until a decision must be made. That's the only way to ensure that when that day comes, there will be a real decision to make" (p. 103).

Third, and related, Sandberg (2013) encourages women to "make your partner a real partner." Here her argument pushes back against traditional gender roles that reinforce the expectation that women will take on more parental responsibilities than men. As she points out, very few women who have made it to the top of their companies have done so without a supportive partner: "Of the twenty-eight women who have served as CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, twenty-six were married, one was divorced, and only one had never married" (p. 109). In contrast, the absence of a real partner, Sandberg argues, has a negative effect on women's careers, with fully 60% of women who leave the workforce citing their husbands as significant factors in their decisions (p. 110). As she states, "As

Figure 8.1   Total and Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Paid Parental Leave for Two-Parent Families
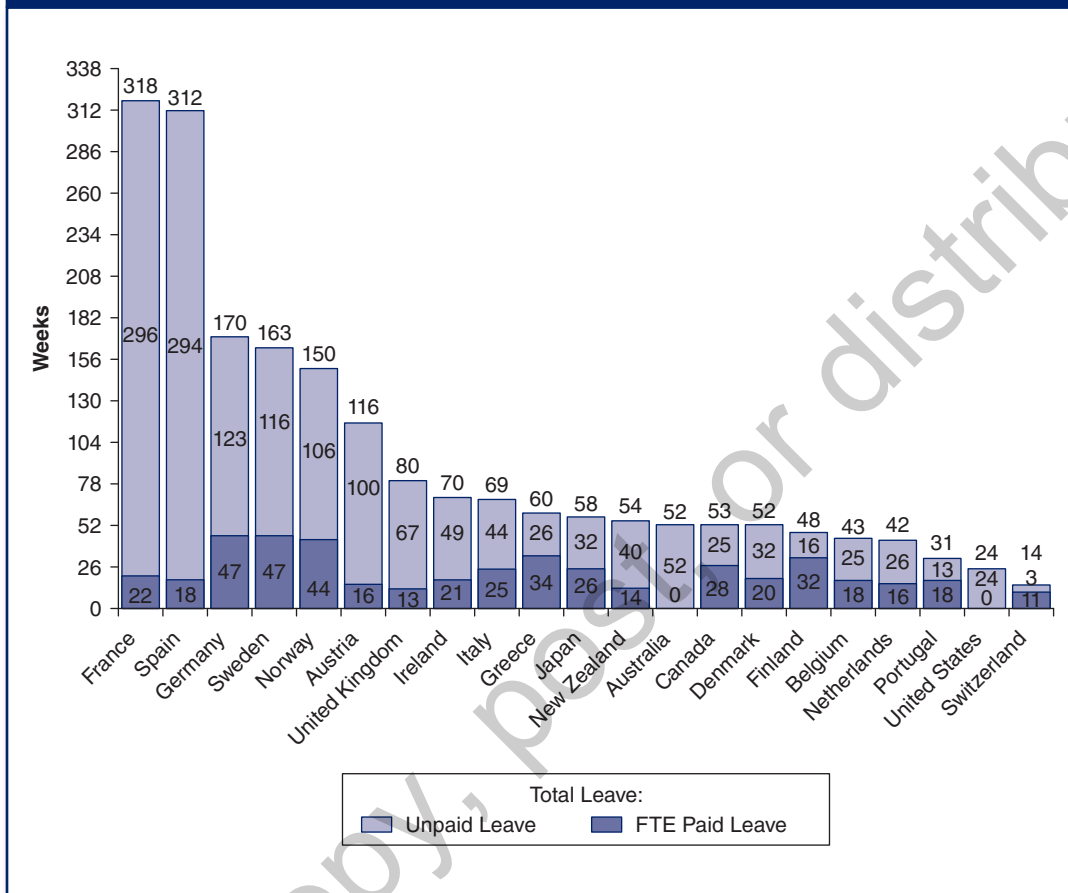
women must be more empowered at work, men must be more empowered at home. . . . We need more men to sit at the table . . . the kitchen table" (pp.108, 120).

Sandberg's argument is compelling and engaging, and it resonates with a lot of career-oriented women. Indeed, she provides a lot of useful and practical advice for women (and men too, particularly regarding how to help their partners be successful in their careers). However, it is also worth mentioning a couple of limitations in her argument. First, and consistent with lots of liberal feminist writings, she tends to treat women as a single, undifferentiated category, with little attention to how the structural conditions of race and class affect women's opportunities. Thus, it is difficult to explain women's relative lack of success in terms of internal, psychological barriers when one is comparing, for example, a single, working-class mother with two kids and an upper-middle class mother in a dual career situation (as was the case with Sandberg herself). The former can "lean in"

as much as she wants, but she does not have the same starting point as the latter. Second, Sandberg's focus is very much on what individual women can do to empower themselves, rather than on the collective forms of empowerment that much of the feminist movement has focused on. In this sense, one can argue that Sandberg's perspective is neoliberal feminist (Fraser, 2013). That is, her focus is on enabling women to be more entrepreneurial within the existing corporate system; she has little interest in changing the structures of inequality that exist in the system itself.

In summary, the liberal feminist approach to work has done much to draw attention to the difficulties professional women often face in organizational settings, including pay inequities, lack of advancement opportunities, tokenism, and so forth. However, this approach also has certain limitations. First, in leaving unquestioned the basic structure and assumptions of contemporary organizational life, this perspective places the onus on women adapting to a male-dominated organizational environment. For example, Sandberg's (2013) focus on leaning in does not ask for change from men, just from the women who want to get ahead in their careers.

Second, the liberal feminist perspective can be described largely as a women-in-management approach to organizational issues (Calás & Smircich, 1996). As such, its focus has been on white, middle-class women, to the neglect of minority and working-class women. For example, while liberal feminism has drawn attention to the difficulties career women face in juggling work and home life, struggling against the glass ceiling, and developing support networks, it has often ignored the fact that many women (a) have little choice about whether to work or stay home, (b) are often in low-wage jobs with little or no hope of advancement, and (c) are more subject to sexual harassment than are women in higher-level positions. Thus, the research on women who make the choice both to have a career and a domestic life with children often overlooks the fact that many poor and working-class mothers have no option but to work, given the decline in real income over the past 30 years. Many of the blue-collar occupations that could support a family on a single income have largely disappeared from the American economic landscape, forcing many women into low-income jobs that are the only means of family survival.

Third, the liberal feminist perspective has tended to treat gender as a variable, regarding masculinity and femininity as unproblematic categories. As we will see in our later discussion of the critical feminist perspective, gender is more usefully understood not as an organizational variable but rather as a constitutive feature of organizational life that shapes everyday meaning and sense-making practices. From this perspective, gender is viewed not as a role one takes on or casts off depending on the social setting but, instead, as a quality intimately tied up with the ways we construct our identities.

Radical Feminism: Constructing Alternative Organizational Forms

Like the second wave of liberal feminism, **radical feminism** has its roots in the political movements of the 1960s and arose out of disenchantment with the sexism of those movements. However, it developed in a very different direction and is rooted in a different set of premises than liberal feminism.

Radical feminism is radical in the sense that it is woman centered (Calás & Smircich, 1996). That is, while liberal feminism seeks women's access to male-dominated institutions,

radical feminism proposes alternative institutional forms rooted in women's values. In this sense, radical feminism takes feminine qualities that have traditionally been devalued in a patriarchal society and revalues them, placing them at the center of an alternative vision of society (Firestone, 1970). Thus, traditional feminine qualities such as emotion, nurturance, sensitivity, and connectedness—qualities that have occupied a secondary status to rationality, competitiveness, and independence in patriarchal society—are reframed as the basis on which an alternative vision of the world can be built. Radical feminism therefore emphasizes women's ways of knowing as an alternative to the perceived failure of men's stewardship of the world (which, radical feminists would argue, has led to wars, poverty, persecution, famine, etc.). Their argument is that patriarchal ideology has taken certain facts about male and female biology, exaggerated the differences, and built cultural constructions around them that (conveniently) empower men and disempower women. Some radical feminists, like Shulamith Firestone (1970), argued for the end of the traditional nuclear family because it created a false dichotomy between men and women, positioning women in their reproductive role as subservient to men.

Radical feminists are thus interested in the transformation of various features of society through the development of alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. As radical feminist Audre Lorde (1984) stated in her critique of patriarchy:

[Feminism] involves learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (p. 112; emphasis in original)

Thus, while liberal feminism generally tends to downplay the differences between men and women, arguing that women are just as competent as men and able to perform traditionally male-dominated roles, radical feminism—following Lorde—argues that the very assumptions on which patriarchal society is built are problematic and inherently oppressive to women. Thus, society needs to be built on a set of principles that reject patriarchy and embrace matriarchy.

Radical feminists argued that this could be done through the establishment of women-based groups and organizations structured according to a different set of values and operating principles. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, these organizations were aimed at providing contexts that were free from the oppressive conditions that frequently characterized male-dominated bureaucracies and thus provided women with a forum for consciousness raising—that is, a context in which women could come to a better understanding of themselves and others that was untainted by dominant patriarchal ideologies.

In many ways, this was very much a utopian project; it was a collective effort to develop alternative organizations and groups that provided women with spaces in which to create an alternative vision of what the world might be like based on a very different set of principles. For example, many of these women's organizations had no hierarchy, preferring to engage in decision making through developing consensus, and leadership roles tended to rotate regularly among members of the organization. Furthermore, many of

these organizations described themselves as collectives, to distinguish themselves from the traditional bureaucratic forms of patriarchy.

Sociologist Joyce Rothschild-Whitt (1979) characterizes such collectivist organizations as having the following features:

- Authority resides in the collective as whole, not individuals who occupy an office.

- There is minimal stipulation of rules rather than the universal, formal rules of a bureaucracy.

- Social control is based on mutually shared values rather than supervision or use of impersonal rules and sanctions.

- Social relations are personal and of value in themselves, as opposed to the role- and rule-based relations of bureaucracies.

- Recruitment and advancement are based on friends and shared values rather than specialized training and formal certification.

- Individual incentives focus on furthering the organization's values and political goals, rather than securing economic rewards.

- Power is distributed in an egalitarian manner, rather than determined by the office one holds. Any individual's power is strictly limited by the collective as a whole.

- Division of labor is minimized, with members sharing many jobs and functions; the separation of mental and manual work is minimized. In the bureaucratic organization job specialization and division of labor are maximized.

As we can see, then, such collective organizations attempted to reject completely the bureaucratic model and the hierarchy and impersonal organizational environment it implied; such a model was seen as inherently patriarchal. Instead, radical feminist organizations valued an organizational structure and form that emphasized the opportunity for individual women to contribute to a larger vision of what life could be like in a non-oppressive, more egalitarian society where women could more fully realize their identities. While such an approach to organizing certainly has its merits, the utopian project of radical feminism remains unrealized for a number of reasons.

First, it adopts what might be described as an essentialist approach to gender issues. That is, women are valued because of what are seen as their natural characteristics—nurturance, emotionality, caring, connection, and so on—which are viewed as superior to masculine tendencies of rationality, independence, hierarchy, and individualism. Such an approach suggests that women have natural characteristics, and that men do also. This approach leads to a very bifurcated, bipolar view of the world, in which women and men live in different universes. In addition, the characterization of women and men as having natural characteristics suggests little possibility for change.

Second, radical feminism adopts a separatist philosophy, in which women can fully realize their possibilities only through the creation of social structures and institutions free from patriarchal values and ideologies. In other words, such feminist organizations

often have a women-only rule. Under some circumstances, such a separatist philosophy makes good sense (e.g., women's support groups for victims of rape, domestic abuse crisis centers, etc.); in such contexts, the presence of men can provoke extreme anxiety in the women seeking support and counseling. On the other hand, we could argue that in many circumstances such a separatist philosophy simply reifies (or naturalizes) the differences between men and women.

Third, the very separatist philosophy of some feminist organizations frequently led to their demise, largely because, in reality, there is no such thing as an organization not interconnected with many different organizations and its environment. As we saw in Chapter 4 on systems theory, organizations that cannot adapt to environmental changes tend toward entropy and disorder, and certainly this was the case with many of the feminist organizations of the 1970s: Their separatist philosophy proved to be their downfall, and many went out of existence. Those that did survive and thrive learned the importance of adaptation and interdependence with other organizations. Mariangela Maguire and Laila Mohtar (1994), for example, show how a feminist women's crisis center was able to remain true to its feminist values of advocacy for women while at the same time developing close ties with state funding agencies and the local police department. Furthermore, Ashcraft (2000, 2001) focuses on a contemporary feminist organization's efforts to adopt a hybrid structure that combines feminist values with the bureaucratic formalization of organizational goals and principles—a form of control Ashcraft describes as feminist-bureaucratic. Finally, management scholars Joanne Martin, Kathleen Knopoff, and Christine Beckman's (1998) study of The Body Shop international corporation demonstrates how even a large, multinational, for-profit organization can combine bureaucratic, post-bureaucratic, and feminist principles to create a progressive corporate structure that allows organization members to be expressive and emotional in their work.

In general, then, radical feminist principles in their pure form were typically unable to survive the realities of their social, political, and economic environments. Instead, radical feminist goals tended to adapt to the practicalities of everyday organizational life. While on the one hand this adaptation may seem like a compromise of basic principles, on the other hand, it recognizes the need for organizations and their members to address the changing character of the real world.

Critical Feminism: Viewing Organizations as Gendered

The last perspective we will consider is what we call **critical feminism**. We see this perspective as the one that is the most interesting and useful for understanding the relationship between gender and organizational communication. The critical feminist approach has a number of advantages.

First, it views gender as a socially constructed phenomenon that is subject to change. For example, in the past 100 years what counts as feminine and masculine has altered considerably as the norms for gender-appropriate behavior have shifted. For instance, the phrase "woman leader" is not the oxymoron it was 50 years ago (though it's interesting that we'd never think of saying "man leader"—an indication that the term *leader* is still heavily gendered).

Second, the critical feminist perspective views gender not as an organizational variable that can be isolated and studied separately from other organizational phenomena; rather, gender is seen as a defining, constitutive feature of daily organizational life. In this sense, we can think of organizations as gendered. Sociologist Joan Acker (1990) defines this term in the following manner:

> To say that an organization . . . is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and coercion, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender. (p. 146)

This definition gets at the idea that gender is not only a routine feature of daily organizational life but also impossible to escape because it lies at the very foundation of how we define ourselves, the world, and others. All of our identities, sense-making efforts, and organizational meanings are therefore gendered. Thus, many jobs and professions are gendered and hence coded as either masculine or feminine (Ashcraft, 2013). Secretarial work, nursing, and grade school teaching are gendered as feminine, while airline pilot, bank manager, and surgeon are coded as masculine. This gendering does not mean, of course, that men can't be nurses or that women can't be surgeons—many are. The point is that the organizational roles themselves are gendered such that the people occupying them have particular expectations placed on them by the organization and those around them. In other words, gender is a structural feature of organizations rather than simply a characteristic of individuals.

For example, a female airline pilot might have to work very hard in her organizational performance to be seen as equally competent as her male colleagues. As Ashcraft (2005; Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004) has shown, the airline industry historically has deliberately constructed an image of the airline pilot as coolly rational, professional, in control, and paternalistic—a gendered professional identity intended to make us feel safe while we are flying in a metal tube at 30,000 feet. Similarly, the role of flight attendant has been deliberately constructed in a gendered manner to convey warmth, nurturance, and attentiveness; this feminized role perfectly complements the masculine role of the pilot. Thus, the creation of an organizational reality that allows us to fly with at least some level of comfort and calm is heavily dependent on gendered organizational identities and scripts in which the man takes care of the rational, technical, mechanical aspects of flying and the woman tends to the emotional, bodily dimensions of the experience. To take the analysis one step further, we can say that the experience of flying as a safe activity depends on a mind–body split, in which the masculine is associated with the mind and rationality and the feminine is associated with the body and emotions. Thus, pilots are held accountable for performances that exhibit rational decision making, coolness under pressure, paternalism ("This is your captain [father] speaking"), and technical proficiency. Flight attendants, on the other hand, are held accountable (by passengers) for their gendered performance of emotional labor that keeps passengers feeling safe and cared for.

Third, and following from the idea of organizations as gendered, the critical feminist perspective focuses on the ways organization members do gender; that is, it is an ongoing, performative accomplishment of both women and men (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This notion enables us to understand how, as social actors, we are constantly engaged in performances of gendered identity that are highly context driven and for which we are held accountable by others on a moment-to-moment basis. This doing of gender encompasses everything from the way we dress to how we talk to the kinds of activities we engage in, as well as the meanings we construct. In other words, our very identities are involved in the process of doing gender.

The notion of **gender accountability** is extremely important in this process. As sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) argue, each of us is constantly being held accountable for our adequate performance of masculinities and femininities, with each performance judged in terms of the social context in which it occurs. Feminist scholar Jane Flax (1990), for example, argues that both men and women are "prisoners of gender" (p. 179) and that we need to examine how both masculine and feminine identities are constructed in modern society. The usefulness of this approach is that it does not simply isolate women and femininity as problems to be addressed. Instead, masculinity is examined as something that is every bit as socially constructed as femininity is. It also recognizes that, as Flax suggests, men are in many ways just as constrained by societal gender scripts as women are. For example, men are often held to standards of hypermasculinity and required to behave in macho and aggressive ways; such standards frequently limit how men are legitimately able to express emotion and tenderness.

For example, Karen Ho's (2009) study of the culture of Wall Street investment bankers shows a gendered performance in which employees are held accountable for their masculinity through working insane hours, earning lots of money, and pushing their (often drug-fuelled) bodies to the limit. Interestingly, the workers in Collinson's (1992) study of working class truck factory workers (see Chapter 2) would probably consider such work effeminate, given that it does not involve actual, physical labor in which one gets one's hands dirty—a good example of how the social construction of gender (masculinity or femininity) is contextual.

An interesting extension of the gender accountability notion is the challenges transgender people encounter in and around work. Although organizations have made strides in accepting workers who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer, transgender identities still meet significant discrimination (Dixon & Dougherty, 2014), including an unemployment rate three times the national average. Curious about how identifying as transgender affects the search for employment, organizational communication scholar Elizabeth Eger's (2018) study of transgender jobseekers found that they often tried to keep their transgender identities closeted to avoid stigma and make themselves marketable but that potential employers enforced gender accountability without their consent. In many cases, interviewers "read" the jobseekers' bodies and/or their speech in interviews and directly questioned their identities; some even conducted background checks revealing interviewees' former names. Many trans people are thus reluctant to disclose their gender identities, fearful that managers and co-workers will enforce a restrictive two-category gender accountability on persons who problematize performances of masculinities and femininities.

Finally, the critical feminist perspective enables us to look closely at the relationships among gender, work, and power. While gender is socially constructed and changing, such constructions do not occur in a haphazard manner. Rather, they are the result of relations of power in organizations and society. Generally speaking, those groups who have the most power and resources have the most influence on the ways gender identities are constructed. Moreover, those groups in power construct these gendered identities in ways that benefit them the most (Ashcraft, 2013).

The simplest example of this process at work is the way that, historically, men have largely shaped the gendered identities available to both women and men, with feminine identities being constructed as inferior to masculine identities. Such constructions (e.g., women as emotional/irrational, subject to hysteria, maternal, etc.) were traditionally used as a means to justify women's exclusion from many spheres of society (government, industry—except in limited roles—law, etc.). In the airline industry, for example, the argument for excluding women from the cockpit included the claim that a woman who was menstruating might act emotionally and place passengers in danger! And of course, legally speaking, women historically were considered to have no rights and were viewed literally as the property of their husbands. Such a view of women in society is hard to sustain without discourses and sense-making practices that construct women as weak, emotional, needing paternalistic care, and so forth. In addition, the perspective of history allows us to see just how socially constructed these views of women were (although, of course, these social constructions had very real political and economic consequences).

In contemporary organizational life, the relationship between gender and power shapes everyday work and professional contexts. Angela Trethewey (2001), for example, shows how middle-aged professional women are subject to a societal master narrative of decline in which they are positioned as less attractive and less powerful by virtue of their aging bodies; professional women often experience aging as a time of loss and isolation. Such a narrative typically does not apply to male professionals, who are generally viewed as more experienced, distinguished, and powerful as they age. Trethewey's point is that women professionals inevitably have to confront and make sense of the narrative of decline, choosing either to reproduce it by buying in to the idea that they need to work out more, get plastic surgery, and so on, or to resist it and reject the idea of youth and beauty as superior to the aging process.

The idea that gender, work, and power are closely connected is effectively illustrated by another glass metaphor—that is, the **glass slipper** (Ashcraft, 2013). Ashcraft defines the glass slipper as "the alignment of occupational identity with embodied social identities as it yields systematic forms of advantage and disadvantage" (p. 16). Put simply, the glass slipper draws attention to the ways that certain forms of identity are deemed to fit more naturally with certain professions (like Cinderella and her glass slipper). Thus, as Cinderella's particular form of femininity eliminated the ugly sisters from contention for the prince's hand in marriage (because the slipper was made for her, and her only), so many occupations carefully construct the social identity that is to be seen as a natural fit for the work they perform. Ashcraft's point is that such constructions do not happen arbitrarily; they are the result of strategic efforts to construct occupational glass slippers that fit only certain kinds of social identities (white, male, heterosexual, etc.) and exclude others

(black/brown, female, gay, etc.), even though there is no connection between the form of work performed and the social identity of the worker. Technical professions, for example, are often heavily male dominated, even though there is no natural or biological connection between the kind of work done and male bodies. Thus, the glass slipper "calls attention to systematic patterns of disadvantage and advantage" (Ashcrat, 2013, p. 26) by highlighting how taken for granted divisions among occupational identities are socially constructed.

An excellent example of the glass slipper is portrayed in the 2016 film *Hidden Figures*, which dramatizes the important role of African American women mathematicians in the NASA space program of the 1960s. The film draws attention to how, although essential to the success of the space program (Katherine Johnson, for example, calculated launch and re-entry trajectories for manned spacecraft), these women were excluded from the history of the space program precisely because the occupational glass slipper of mathematician/ NASA employee does not fit them (the title of the film alludes to how their black bodies ("figures") were written out of the official historical record of the NASA space program). Indeed, the film superbly portrays how, at every turn, they are socially constructed as "other," the "ugly step sisters," as it were, of the space program. As Ashcraft (2013), indicates, however, the glass slipper "is both solid and fragile; it can be shattered and refashioned" (p. 22), as occupations go through discursive struggles over their collective identity. The professional identities of occupations change, but often only through the efforts of those who are marginalized and deemed not worthy of wearing the glass slipper.

Table 8.1 Comparing Liberal, Radical, and Critical Feminist Perspectives

Issue	Perspective		
	Liberal Feminism	**Radical Feminism**	**Critical Feminism**
View of organizations	Creates barriers to women's advancement (e.g., glass ceiling)	Inherently patriarchal; needs alternative organizations rooted in women's ways of knowing	Gendered forms that construct systems of power and meaning (e.g., glass slipper)
Conception of gender	Social roles played by men and women; gender as variable	Gender as essential features of women and men	We are always accountable for our gendered performances
View of communication	Communication as expression of gender roles; communication styles reflect gender	Built on patriarchal meanings; needs to create alternative, woman-centered forms of communication	Communication and power inextricably linked; communication creates gendered identities
Goal of emancipation	Creates equal opportunities for women and men	Creates a world based on feminist principles, free from patriarchy	Free both women and men from systems of power that make both prisoners of gender

⬡ MASCULINITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

When people think about gender and feminism, they typically think about women's issues. This tendency is partly because, for much of its history, feminism has been concerned with women's rights and advancement, but it's also because, from a commonsense perspective, women have gender and men do not. However, as we have already learned, masculinity is just as much a product of social constructions and power relations as femininity is. The case is simply that those groups possessing the most power tend to position themselves as the norm and therefore are relatively invisible (the glass slipper is not visible on men, for example). Hence, masculinity typically has not been held up to the same kind of scrutiny as femininity has. So, in this section, we will take a closer look at the relationship between masculinity and organizing.

Historian Gail Bederman (1995) shows that the term *masculinity* came into common usage only in the early 20th century and replaced the term *manliness* in describing appropriate male behavior and identity. From the early to mid-19th century, the term manliness was used to describe "honor, high-mindedness, and strength stemming from . . . self-mastery" (p. 12). Manliness had strong moral connotations, describing a virtuous form of life characterized by gentility and respectability; in complementary fashion, true womanhood involved the pious, maternal guardianship of virtue and the domestic sphere. This conception of manliness was seen as the foundation on which virtuous men could build their fortunes in an entrepreneurial society. Thus, "middle-class men were awarded (or denied) credit based on others' assessment of the manliness of their characters, and credit raters like Dun and Bradstreet reported on businessmen's honesty, probity, and family life" (p. 14).

In the late 19th century, however, this conception of manliness changed as the economic landscape shifted from small-scale businesses to the large-scale corporations of industrial capitalism; between 1870 and 1910, the percentage of middle-class men who were self-employed dropped from 67% to 37%. Moreover, middle-class male identity and authority were being challenged on two fronts: by women demanding universal suffrage and by working-class men and immigrants who were increasingly gaining political power through unions. If we add to this scenario a newly diagnosed medical condition called neurasthenia (a nervous disorder caused by excessive brain work in an increasingly competitive economy) from which doctors claimed middle-class businessmen were increasingly suffering, then manliness as a form of identity was under significant threat.

Bederman (1995) claims that in the face of this threat, middle-class men attempted to remake and revitalize their sense of manhood. For example, social contexts traditionally associated with working-class men, such as saloons and music halls, were increasingly adopted by middle-class men, and values such as physical prowess, aggressiveness, and strong sexuality were seen as desirable traits. Moreover, middle-class men began to take up activities such as sparring and adopted boxing as a spectator sport.

Interestingly, Bederman (1995) indicates that in the late 19th century, as men worked to reshape manhood, they adopted new terms used to denigrate behaviors seen as unmanly. *Sissy*, *pussyfoot*, and *stuffed shirt* were all coined "to denote behavior which had once appeared self-possessed and manly but now seemed overcivilized and effeminate" (p. 17).

In contrast, a new term increasingly emerged to refer to all behaviors that embodied the new, virile sense of manhood—masculinity.

In many ways this new form of masculinity (which Bederman, 1995, says was firmly established by 1930) is still hegemonic, or dominant, today. Aggressiveness, strong hetero-sexuality, assertiveness, independence, individuality, and so forth are probably terms that most men (and women) would use to describe what it currently means to be masculine. The important thing to keep in mind is that this form of **hegemonic masculinity** is not a natural feature of men but is the product of specific historical, economic, political, and social conditions and is open to change and transformation.

In studying workplace masculinity, the focus of many organizational researchers has involved, as management scholar Jeff Hearn (1996) puts it, "deconstructing the dominant—making the one(s) the other(s)" (p. 611). In other words, shining a light on mas-culinity means exploring how it is constructed as a dominant gender and also enables us to think about other ways in which masculinity might be performed (Connell, 1993, 1995; Connell, Hearn, & Kimmel, 2005). As Albert Mills and Peter Chiaramonte (1991) put it, organizations provide a gendered metacommunicative frame; that is, they communicate about the appropriate gendered communicative practices in which we should engage.

Of course, such frames do not dictate how we must enact our gendered identities—masculine or feminine—but as indicated above, we are always held accountable for our gendered performances, rendering us open to sanctions (punishment) if we do not perform adequately. Women are often sanctioned if they fail to act in an appropriately feminine man-ner (whatever that might mean), while men are often sanctioned for exhibiting behavior that is not appropriately masculine (again, the meaning of this varies from context to context).

CRITICAL RESEARCH 8.1

Kristen Barber (2008). The well-coiffed man: Class, race, and heterosexual masculinity in the hair salon. *Gender & Society, 22*, 455–476.

In her ethnographic study, the perfectly named Kristen Barber examines how the traditionally feminine space of a hair salon becomes a site for the management of professional heterosexual masculinity. While the salon (as opposed to the barber shop) is a space where women "create bonds and form friendships with each other" (p. 458), it is increasingly used by men as a resource to maintain their professional identities. Barber situates the study in the context of the historical shift from Fordist industrial work in which men's masculinity was judged in terms of their ability to perform manual labor, to late-Fordist and post-Fordist work in which there is a greater emphasis on appearance. As such, white-collar employees are increasingly required to interact with customers and develop strong interpersonal skills and elegant appearance. Thus, "it is no longer enough for men to work hard, they must also look good" (p. 460).

Barber's study focuses on the men's motivations for going to a hair salon rather than a barbershop and examines how these motivations reflect a particular construction of masculine identity. She

identifies three motivations: (1) to enjoy the salon as a place of leisure, luxury, and pampering; (2) to form personalized relationships with their hair stylists; and (3) to obtain a stylish haircut that they view as reflecting a white, professional aesthetic. To address these motivations, Barber adopts an intersectional approach (considering how race, class, and gender come together) to address these questions.

First, Barber shows how the men construct the salon as a place where they can be pampered. They see it as a place where they can relax and take a pause from what they view as their hectic (read "professional") daily lives. They feel taken care of by the gendered body work of the female stylists. While they could never justify attending a spa, a 45-minute pause in their day is constructed as part of their professionalization process.

Second, and related, the men see the relationship with their stylists as personal, involving the sharing of intimate details about family and home life. Thus, the stylists perform both body and emotional labor in constructing personal relationships with the men. Interestingly, the men make sense of this personal attention as contrasting with the (male) barber–client relationship at a barbershop, where the barber "doesn't care about you" and is simply doing a job. Barber (the author!) argues that this distinction is not only gendered but classed, as the clients describe a distinction between "garage talk" at the barber's and "professional talk" at the salon. Again, we see how gender construction never occurs in isolation, but always in relation to other constructions of gender.

Finally, Barber suggests that while attention to looks can potentially threaten their masculinity, the men justify patronizing a salon by arguing that it is not for them but to maintain a professional appearance for others. In the process, they again distance themselves from the barbershop where, they argue, the haircuts are outmoded and not professional. Moreover, they suggest, the barbershop reflects a more aggressive (read working class) masculinity that does not fit with their professional identity.

In sum, the study is an interesting example of how gender construction often occurs through binary oppositions; in this case, the binary of professional white men and working-class white men. Note that the extent to which this opposition exists in reality (e.g., the Brooklyn-style barbershop has become hipster central in popular culture and thus contradicts this reality) matters less than the fact the opposition is used by a particular group to engage in identity work to resolve particular tensions (in this case, men attending a feminized space).

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of salon or barbershop do you use? Can you identify gendered performances (by both client and stylist) in this context?

2. To what degree do you agree with Barber's analysis? As a brief field study, visit a barbershop and a hair salon and see if you can identify the patterns of gendered behavior that Barber discusses. Do you see additional forms of gender expression at work?

3. Are there other forms of service or retail work that exhibit the same kind of gender binary that the hairdressing industry exhibits? What are they, and what kinds of gender performances do they entail?

It is important to note, though, that when we talk about masculinity, we are not refer-ring to individual men or women and the ways they act. Instead, masculinity refers to a set of routines, scripts, and discourses that shape behavior. In this sense, masculinity is less a personality trait and more a set of meanings and institutional frames through which we are held accountable for our gendered performances. In addition, masculinity as a gendered practice makes sense only in relation to femininity; neither stands alone as a meaningful identity.

For example, author Joseph Finder (1987) provides an interesting account of his experi-ence working as a secretary in a large corporation (the title of the article, "A Male Secretary," gives some insight into how gendered the traditional secretarial role is). He describes how everyone who visited the office where he worked would try to make sense of his role there by asking questions such as "Are you filling in for the regular secretary?" or "Are you working here temporarily?" Even his boss would try to avoid giving him certain tasks, such as photocopying and would frequently stop by his desk to talk sports ("How about those Red Sox?") in an effort to reassert a "normal" masculine relationship. Interestingly, even his female secretarial coworkers refused to accept his presence there or his claims that this position was his "real" job, choosing instead to encourage him to move on to better things (think about how this encouragement ties in to the notion of the glass escalator, discussed above).

This article is a great example of how gendered organizational structures and ideolo-gies constantly reassert themselves and reify established power relations, with those in subordinate positions often working to reproduce such power relations, even when they are not in their own best interests. Thus, rather than see the presence of a male secre-tary as a possibility for challenging traditional gender roles and creating the potential for change, secretaries instead choose to hold Finder accountable for his gender violation, hence reproducing their own subordination to gender ideologies that limit their own pro-fessional mobility.

Masculinity, then, is worthy of our consideration because it is usually taken for granted in the wider culture and has profound implications for how we view men, women, and their relationships with each other. As we have seen, masculinity is every bit as socially constructed as femininity, and what counts as masculine behavior is dependent on a num-ber of contextual factors, including historical precedent, economic conditions, class, race, organizational culture, and so forth. As we indicated earlier in the chapter, quoting Jane Flax (1990), both men and women are "prisoners of gender," and, as such, we need to understand how contemporary conceptions of masculinity (and the kinds of femininity that complement them) both enable and limit possibilities for personal growth and devel-opment in organizational life.

The idea that masculinity, like femininity, is socially constructed means it is potentially open to change and transformation. Thus, although one might argue that the kind of hege-monic masculinity Bederman (1995) describes is still dominant in organizations and soci-ety more broadly, it is certainly the case that competing, or alternative, masculinities exist. Eric Anderson's (2009) notion of inclusive masculinity, for example, challenges the idea that masculinity is always rooted in homophobia and antifemininity. His ethnographic study of members of fraternities and university sports teams such as soccer and rugby

reveals a greater openness to alternative masculinities, such as gay and more feminine men, than has usually been seen as typical for such social contexts, where domination, aggression, competition, sexism, and homophobia are thought to prevail. Inclusive masculinity doesn't necessarily challenge or overthrow hegemonic or orthodox masculinity but instead, broadens the range of possibilities for legitimate expressions of masculinity. If we think back to our earlier discussion of gender and accountability, we might say that Anderson's study suggests that young men in the contexts he studied (university sports teams and fraternities) are less likely to hold one another to a narrow definition of what counts as appropriately masculine behavior. In your experience, do you agree with this assessment?

CRITICAL CASE STUDY 8.1

Performing Working-Class Masculinity

During his college summer breaks, Dennis worked for an agricultural contractor in the United Kingdom called Farmwork Services (FS) that provided crop-spraying services to local farmers (not many young adults have such romantic and rewarding summer employment!). Many of the men he worked with (and they were all men, apart from one female clerical worker in the office) were relatively uneducated (some never finished high school), and all were poorly paid, earning wages barely above the poverty line. It would be fair to say that all of them were very much working class. All, however, had strong mechanical and technical skills; one had trained as a JCB driver (a JCB is a large, earth-moving machine), another could fix any engine around, and another had extensive body shop experience. In one way or another, all had practical skills that Dennis most certainly did not have.

Much of the interaction among the men was rooted in, and expressive of, a particular kind of working-class masculinity, not dissimilar from that of the workers in David Collinson's (1988) "Engineering Humor" study discussed in Chapter 2. Of course, there was the usual banter and joking about sexual performance (questions like, "Did you get any [sex] last night?" abounded), as well as the ritual daily passing around of the "Page Three girl" in *The Sun*—a daily tabloid that always featured a topless model.

But beyond these more obvious expressions of masculine heterosexuality, working-class masculinity was also performed in more subtle ways. For example, there were informal, though strictly enforced, rules about who sat in which chair in the crew room. As a new employee, Dennis made the mistake of sitting in a senior employee's seat and was told in no uncertain terms to move, finally being allocated the least desirable seat by the drafty crew room door. Also, early in his employment he made the mistake of picking up and reading a newspaper sitting on the seat next to him. The owner of the newspaper berated him for this faux pas; what he quickly discovered was that a newspaper became

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common property in the crew room only when its owner had read it to his satisfaction; opening a crisp, clean newspaper for the first time was the owner's prerogative and no one else's.

Finally, one of the most distinctive ways in which masculinity was performed was through employees' careful separation of book knowledge and white-collar work on the one hand, and practical knowledge and blue-collar work on the other hand. Much of the employees' identities as men was tied up in the practical skills they possessed, whether that involved working complex equipment, repainting company vehicles, or spraying crops with chemicals. Moreover, despite the fact that they were more poorly paid than the white-collar office workers and managers, they frequently compared themselves favorably with them, arguing that the managers knew little about the "real work" they did. In fact, one of the employees who had expertise in spray painting vehicles turned a 2-day job into 3 days of work because he knew his supervisor had no idea how such a job was done. Such resistance to managerial control is not unusual as workers attempt to maintain some degree of autonomy in work environments where they have little power.

Work at FS, then, was defined in part by the working-class masculine identities employees enacted in the workplace. These identities were constructed partly through identification with a particular kind of work—hard, physical labor that required engagement with and mastery of something tangible—and partly through opposition to other forms of identity that did not pass muster on the masculinity front. The latter included white-collar masculinity that involved paper pushing or book knowledge and any form of femininity (most of the men Dennis worked with placed women in two categories—sex objects and faithful or nagging wives—but either way they were placed in a subordinate position).

Thus, gender roles are not simply acted out in individualistic ways but rather are produced through interactions with others who hold us accountable for playing out those roles. Such accountability leaves us open to sanction when we fail to meet the standards of the organization or those around us—even if those other people occupy subordinate positions in the organizational hierarchy. For a longer discussion of Dennis's experience at FS, see Mumby (2006).

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe your gender identity? In what ways do you express or perform this identity?

2. Have you ever been in a work context that was highly gendered? In what ways was it gendered? In what ways did you enact and/or resist this gender construction? How were you held accountable for your performance of gender?

3. In what ways do class and gender intersect? Can you identify different gender performances that are specific to particular class locations?

⬡ SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

We did not want to end this chapter without drawing attention to the issue of **sexual harassment**. In many ways, this workplace phenomenon draws acute attention to the relationship between gender and power. As the #MeToo and #TimesUp! movements have powerfully illustrated, what most sexual harassers have in common is their ability to exercise power and control over the people they harass (e.g., Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, Mario Batali, and Matt Lauer). And while there are many cases of men being sexually harassed (Scarduzio & Geist-Martin, 2010), the vast majority of harassment cases involve men harassing women. Indeed, using a broad definition that covers everything from verbal harassment to sexual assault, a recent survey indicates that 81% of women and 43% of men have experienced sexual harassment (Chatterjee, 2018).

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2002),

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment is typically viewed as taking two different forms: (1) **hostile environment** and (2) **quid pro quo**. In the hostile environment form, sexual harassment involves contexts where conduct directed at a person because of her or his sex or sexuality unreasonably interferes with the person's ability to perform her or his job. The quid pro quo (literally, "something for something") form involves situations in which a harasser demands sexual favors with the promise of preferred treatment regarding employment or evaluation (Harvey Weinstein's assurances, and threats, that he would provide or eliminate movie roles for his victims would be a prime example of this sort of harassment).

Almost everyone would agree that sexual harassment is unacceptable and a significant problem in the workplace; however, it is surprisingly difficult for people to agree on when sexual harassment has occurred. Even organization members who have experienced sexual harassment are not always comfortable naming their experience as harassment. Furthermore, one person's perception of behavior as friendly banter can sometimes be framed by another as threatening and intimidating behavior. This difference in interpretation of behavior is especially true when there is a power differential between the parties involved. There is a much greater chance that a person in a subordinate position will view a particular behavior as harassing than a person in a more powerful position will. We are sure many of you—particularly the women in the class—have felt uneasy about behavior exhibited toward you by a superior or someone in authority, and we suspect that if you were to confront that person about his or her behavior, he or she would be shocked at your interpretation of the actions in question. Of course, such a response does not mean that person's behavior is not harassment (regardless of the intent) or that you are wrong to feel uncomfortable.

However, it is important to point out that harassment is not just an interpersonal issue, but an organizational one too. Institutionally speaking, organizations are often terrible at dealing with sexual harassment and often have bureaucratic procedures in place that do more to protect the organization than the individual who is experiencing harassment. Indeed, as organizational communication scholar Kate Harris (2013) argues, official organizational discourse on sexual harassment and violence is often written in ways that excuse those organizations from complicity with harassment and violence. Indeed, it is well worth reading engineer Susan Fowler's (2017) account of her time working at Uber, in which the company not only systematically failed to address her sexual harassment complaints (about a manager who had been reported by numerous women) but also punished her (by giving her poor performance reports and blocking a transfer) for reporting the issue. Fowler notes that when she joined Über, 25% of its workforce were women, but by the time she tried to transfer, that number had fallen to 6%.

Sexual harassment experiences of organization members, then, are often sequestered (i.e., hidden from public view and discussion) by the ways both the people who experience harassment and the institutions that create policies discursively frame (i.e., give meaning to) such behaviors (Clair, 1993a, b). Clair reports that in her interviews with women who had experienced workplace harassment, the women used some common discursive frames to make sense out of their experiences. These frames include, for example, simple misunderstanding, in which women who experience harassment frame it as an interpretive error on their part (thus shifting blame away from the harassers and to themselves), and reification, in which sexual harassment is accepted as part of the culture of the organization, as the way it is.

One might assume that, 25 years after Clair's (1993a, b) research, it has become easier for women to identify and confront forms of organizational discrimination, including sexual harassment—especially as women gain a stronger foothold amongst the managerial élite. However, recent research by psychologist Britney Brinkman and her colleagues suggests that this is not the case; women continue to struggle to confront instances in which they experience various forms of gender prejudice (Brinkman, Garcia, & Rickard, 2011; Brinkman & Rickard, 2009). Analyzing daily online diaries kept by 81 college-age women, Brinkman found discrepancies between what the women said they would do and what they actually do in dealing with gender prejudice. Thus, women seem readily able to identify gender prejudice (unlike some of Clair's respondents) but are often loath to confront it directly, expressing concerns about possibly escalating the situation or harming their careers. This evidence suggests, then, that women still struggle with how to deal with prejudice and harassment, fearing backlash from supervisors and peers. Indeed, as the #MeToo movement has shown, such concerns are very real, as many women have reported experiencing such backlash. In perhaps the most extreme (and scary) example, Harvey Weinstein is reported to have hired ex-Mossad (Israeli secret service) agents to spy on women who accused him of sexual harassment (Farrow, 2017).

♦ CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have examined the relationships among gender, power, work, and organizing. To begin with, we discussed three different feminist perspectives that provided us

with three very different lenses for viewing the gender-power-organization perspective. While all three perspectives are useful in their own right, the critical feminist approach best captures the ways in which gender is a socially constructed, communicative phenomenon. Moreover, the critical feminist approach enables us to think of gender as an ongoing accomplishment of everyday organizational life that always occurs in the context of power relations; everyone is held accountable for the performance of gender, but some people are held more accountable than others. Finally, the critical feminist perspective enables us to see gender not as simply a characteristic of individuals but rather, as an endemic, defining feature of organizational life. In claiming that organizations are gendered, we are saying that the very meanings, structures, routines, and norms of organizing are rooted in particular understanding of male and female, masculine and feminine. By examining the relationship between gender and power in this way, we can develop a better understanding of how gender issues thread themselves in complex ways through everyday organizational life.

We also examined the relationship between masculinity and organizational communication. This examination is important in part because as a rule, men and masculinity are the neutral norm against which gender performances are measured. By unpacking masculinity and its meanings we can better understand how what is "normal" and "natural" comes into being and thus how what complements the normal (femininity, alternative masculinities, etc.) is positioned in society and in organizational life. This discussion opens up the possibilities for thinking about what alternatives to hegemonic masculinity might look like.

Finally, we discussed the phenomenon of sexual harassment, noting that it needs to be understood as an extreme (though all too routine) example of the intersection of gender and power. Sexual harassment at work does not just involve one or more person's bad behavior, but it must be understood and addressed at the institutional, organizational level.

Overall, we have tried in this chapter to think about gender and organizational communication in more complex ways than it is typically discussed. Through this process we can better reflect on the role gender plays in everyday organizational life.

CRITICAL APPLICATIONS

1. Conduct a gender analysis of yourself. How would you describe your own gendered identity? Keep in mind that this is different from your sexuality; it refers to the ways you engage in a gendered performance as you engage with others in social situations. Do you see yourself as highly masculine/feminine? Metrosexual? Why? What is it about your gender identity that enables you to classify yourself in this way?

2. Think about some examples from your everyday organizational life that illustrate how gender is socially constructed. What consequences does this social construction process have for the way organizations operate and make decisions?

3. On a piece of paper, write down as many answers as you can to the following question: "When you have to walk home late at night from, for example, class or the campus library, what precautions do you take to protect yourself?" Once you have completed the list, pair up

with a man (if you are a woman) or a woman (if you are a man) and compare your lists. What do you notice. Discuss with your partner what these lists say about the relationship between gender and power. This exercise can be concluded with a full class discussion about the differences between men's and women's answers to this question.

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