2

Gender Begins—and Continues—at Home

At a restaurant in Manhattan near the end of the lunch hour I sit watching the manager's child, not quite two, toddling among the mostly empty tables. The child is wearing a brightly colored and stylishly patterned jacket and pants. A baseball cap worn back to front partially covers the child's ear-length curly blond hair. Is the child a girl or a boy? The baseball cap and pants suggest a boy, but the hair length and clothing suggest a girl. The toddler's adventurousness might signal a boy, but its looks are androgynous and I can't make up my mind. As the child wanders too far out of his reach, the father calls, "Come back, honey." O.K., I say to myself, it's a girl; he wouldn't have said "honey" if it were a boy. By now, the child has reached an occupied table at the front of the restaurant, and the father goes to retrieve it. The customers there, having arrived at a different conclusion, ask the father how old "he" is.

Turning Babies into Girls and Boys

The first fact adults want to establish about a child is its sex, even if the child is a neonate, a being whose behavior is largely independent of its sex. Unless a baby is naked, though, it's usually impossible to tell what sex it is, so people snatch at cues like type of clothing and hair length. Even so, they frequently guess wrong. To avoid this mistake, I've developed a stratagem: "How old is your baby?" I ask. The parent's response uses the appropriate pronoun, and I'm home free. But why do adults need to know a baby's sex? What does it tell them about the child?

Not Just a Baby

Adults need to know a child's sex because the label tells them how to interpret the child's behavior, even its physical features. The label allows the adult to categorize an attractive baby as "pretty," if it is a girl, or handsome, if it is a boy. The label brings into play the adult's pre-existing beliefs about differences between the sexes. Those beliefs—some conscious and some unconscious—constitute an intuitive conception, or schema, of gender.

We can see adults' conventional perceptions of infants in the greeting cards sent to congratulate parents on their new baby (Bridges 1993). Such cards reflect a social consensus about what boys and girls are like. A researcher who looked at them found, as expected, no pink greeting cards for boys and no blue ones for girls. Pictures of birds and rabbits appear much more often on girls' cards, while bears and dogs are more frequent on boys' cards. When toys are shown, rattles and mobiles are pictured more often on girls' cards than on boys', and balls, sports equipment, and vehicles show up more often on boys' cards. Girl babies are pictured as sleeping or immobile more often than boys are, whereas boys are shown in active play more often.

Decorative elements show gender differences, too. Frills, lace, ribbons, flowers, and hearts are all used more for girls than for boys. Verbal descriptions of infants also differ; the term *sweet,* for example, is applied far more often to girls than to boys. The most striking difference is that expressions of happiness or joy are found more often on cards for boys—64 percent of cards—than for girls—49 percent of cards. People expect parents to be happier about the birth of a boy than the birth of a girl.

Greeting cards thus project babies as already embodying gender schemas. One class of human infants is pink, decorative, sweet, and passive—like birds or rabbits—and the other is sports oriented and physically active—like bears or puppies—and brings happiness and joy.

Similar indications of the influence of gender schemas on adult perceptions of babies come from studies of adults' descriptions of infants. In one study, researchers asked college students to rate the behavior of a baby who was videotaped crying. Some students were told the baby was a boy and others that it was a girl. They described the baby labeled as male as angrier than the same infant labeled as female (Condry & Condry

1976). In another study, parents were asked to rate their newborns on a number of different dimensions when the babies were no more than twenty-four hours old. According to objective measures, there were no differences in weight, height, color, muscle tone, reflex irritability, heart rate, and respiratory rate between the girls and boys. Yet the parents of baby boys perceived their sons as bigger than the parents of daughters perceived their baby girls—even though the babies were all the same weight and height (Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria 1974). Knowing a child's sex influences perceptions, even in a domain like size, which we think of as unambiguous and impervious to bias.[1] The inaccuracies of height judgments of adults described in chapter 1 have their corollary in perceptions of infants.

The fathers' perceptions of their infants were more extreme—hence less accurate—than the mothers' were. For example, although both parents saw daughters as having finer features than sons, fathers saw them as much finer featured than mothers did; similarly, fathers saw sons as much larger featured than mothers did. On the dimension of firmness–softness, mothers correctly rated sons and daughters as equal, but fathers erred in rating sons as much firmer and daughters as much softer than mothers did. Fathers of sons also judged their babies as better-coordinated, more alert, stronger, and hardier than did fathers of daughters. Fathers, then, are especially susceptible to the influence of gender schemas; they tend to see their infants as the adults they will become, rather than as the infants they are. Fathers' perceptions of their offspring's physical characteristics are inaccurate and objectively unwarranted.

Even when infants are simply infants—that is, before they show any signs of behaving like a "boy" or a "girl"—adults view them as distinctively male or female. One woman told me that her cousin gaily refers to her one-year-old as "Joshua, the macho baby." If infants really do not show any differences other than genitalia, how can adults project nonexistent masculine and feminine qualities onto them? How can they see a baby as "macho"? One reason is that they are largely unaware of what they are doing. Although parents are not immune to the reality of their children's characteristics, their perceptions of and reactions to their babies are affected by their own beliefs, attitudes, and expectations. Yet parents believe that their perceptions are accurate.

Moreover, adults can project gender onto infants precisely because much infant behavior is ambiguous. Parents can interpret an infant's cry in a variety of ways. Even if they correctly identify it as a plea for nourishment, they may hear it as an angry demand—"Feed me now!"—or as a piteous wail—"Please feed me." Gender schemas provide the interpretation. To his mother, Joshua, the macho baby, cries "Feed me now!" Because behavior is ambiguous, parents have little chance to correct their errors.

Thus guided—or misguided—by their gender schemas, parents unintentionally and unwittingly misperceive reality. One aim of this book is to replace people's false subjective impressions with objective information, to replace incorrect intuitive conceptions about gender with a picture that is scientifically more accurate. To consider the possible consequences of adults' inaccurate perceptions, we can ask which baby seems better suited to an active and successful professional life: the baby who is better coordinated, more alert, hardier, and stronger, or the one who is less coordinated, less alert, less hardy, and weaker? Which baby is better suited for doing more housework and child care? Just as it is unfair to picture one child as less capable than she is, it is also unfair to see the other as more capable than he is. From the first child too little will be expected, and from the second too much.

The baby is only a few hours old. It lies in its crib, blissfully unaware that its parents are planning its future, based, in part, on qualities it does not possess. In the following sections of this chapter, we look at differences in parents' treatment of the baby as it grows into childhood and examine the consequences of that treatment for division of labor at home.

Not Just a Child

Any adult who spends time with young children is at first stunned by the prevalence of sex differences. My own research group on language acquisition in two-year-olds typically finds no sex differences in the development of syntax. When we play and talk with the children, however, we see many other differences. We usually begin a session with a child by looking at a particular picture book. One student commented that when she gets to the page picturing different kinds of vehicles, the boys focus on the vehicles but the girls talk about the people and animals *in* the

vehicles. We also notice that the boys do more running around during the session and that the girls seem to have a longer attention span. The children are only two years old, but they are already clearly different.

A tape-recording of one little boy talking to himself just before his second birthday revealed that he knew cars were guided by steering wheels, but airplanes by sticks. Since I didn't know what kind of steering mechanism airplanes have, I had some difficulty transcribing his tape. What he seemed to be saying—that planes had sticks instead of wheels—made no sense to me. At age two he also knew the difference by name between a front-end loader, a back-end loader, a dump truck, a cement mixer, and other kinds of trucks. I was astonished, not just by this child's expertise but by the depth of his passion for vehicles. His parents said that when he was eight months old they couldn't figure out why he periodically got very excited. They finally connected his excitement with the sound of a neighbor's Volkswagen driving down the street. This child was unusual in the extent of his fascination with vehicles, but even very young children show gender differences in their toy preferences, with boys preferring vehicles to dolls and girls preferring dolls to vehicles.

Early sex differences convince most casual observers that girls and boys differ intrinsically on a broad range of characteristics, from physical appearance, to toy preferences, to play style. What most people are not able to see, however, is how differently they treat boys and girls, from the first moment of babies' lives.

Many parents believe that they treat all their children the same, whether they are girls or boys. Nor are they completely wrong. A review of 172 studies of parental behavior suggests that in many areas parents *do* treat daughters and sons similarly. They have the same amount of general and verbal interaction with girls and boys, encourage achievement to the same extent, use material rewards to the same degree, and discourage aggression equally (Lytton & Romney 1991).[2] Thus, parents' views of their behavior are partly correct.

Yet parents also treat boys and girls differently. Often without realizing it, they react to children in terms of who the children will become as well as who they are at present. Because children will become gendered beings, parents project gender onto them at an early age, thereby encouraging sex differences. They tend to stimulate boys' motor behavior more than girls'.

They encourage dependency in girls more often than in boys and administer physical punishment to boys more frequently than to girls. Since parents see men as physically tougher than women, they extend that view to their children, perceiving boys as better able than girls to absorb rough physical treatment. Joshua the macho baby can be handled roughly, but his sister cannot. Such differential treatment encourages boys to be tougher than girls. Boys and girls cry equally often during infancy (Maccoby & Jacklin 1974), but as development proceeds, boys cry less and less.

Parents are especially likely to encourage activities they consider appropriate to a child's gender (Lytton & Romney, 1991) and to guide the child toward activities, preferences, and dress that are stereotypically masculine or feminine. Parents are more rigid in their treatment of boys, encouraging masculine activities for boys more strongly than they encourage feminine activities for girls. Finally, in line with the fact that they are more likely than mothers to misperceive infants, fathers emphasize gender appropriateness more than mothers do and tend to be particularly extreme in this respect with boys (Lytton & Romney 1991).

The toddler in the restaurant at the beginning of this chapter was, as I thought, a girl. I had based my surmise on a study that looked at differences in the ways fathers and mothers talk to their young children (Gleason & Greif 1983). Fathers with traditional attitudes about gender use imperatives and threats more often than mothers do and in talking to sons are more prone to use jocular names and names with a slight pejorative undertone (such as *buster*). Fathers also interrupt their children more often than mothers do, use rare words more often in speaking to their children, and demand more challenging responses from them. Fathers are tougher on children than mothers are and are especially tough on boys. From my knowledge of that evidence, I predicted that even a father who dressed his child androgynously would be unlikely to call a boy "honey" in public.

Before looking in detail at differences in treatment of boys and girls, we can reconsider why parents are unaware of the extent to which they encourage gender-appropriate behavior. In part it is because they are not conscious of the extent to which they themselves are affected by gender schemas. It is unlikely, for example, that most parents notice that they

speak differently to their sons and daughters. Most parents also neither realize how extensive their beliefs about gender differences are, nor know that many of their beliefs have no basis in fact.

Another factor that blinds some parents to the gender-stereotyped ways they treat their sons and daughters is their conviction that, in behaving differently toward their children, they are guided by the children's individual personalities. Thus the child who is gentler and more vulnerable gets gentler treatment than one who is perceived as self-assertive. Parents see themselves as responding sensitively to already-existing differences in their children. Their beliefs are, of course, not delusional. Children are not blank slates. Each child does have its own temperament and traits. The reality of the child's particular personality only makes it harder for parents to see which aspects of their own behavior are *not* guided by who the children are, but by who the parents think the children will become.

Even parents who deliberately try to rear their children nonstereotypically are subject to the influence of gender schemas. A study of six-year-olds, for example, compared children whose mothers explicitly tried to bring them up in gender-neutral ways with children whose mothers had conventional attitudes about gender roles. When independent observers who were unaware of the parents' beliefs rated the children's clothes as masculine or feminine, the ratings showed that the boys and girls in both types of families were dressed according to gender norms (Weiner & Wilson-Mitchell 1990). The mothers who were committed to gender equality, however, saw their children's clothes as less gender-stereotypical, even though they were not.

The effects of differences in dress and manner may be very subtle and may affect how others perceive a child more than how the child sees herself or himself. Girls are encouraged to dress in stereotypically feminine ways (wearing ornaments for the hair and body, skirts, and somewhat constrictive clothing); to walk and sit in stereotypically feminine ways (using a short stride, swaying the hips, and sitting with knees together and arms close to the body); and to talk in stereotypically feminine ways (higher voice pitch, greater use of "please"). There is evidence that both males and females see feminine women in general as less likely to be competent (see chapter 7). There is, however, no evidence that girls interpret their own stereotypically feminine dress or manner as incompatible with

traditionally masculine achievements. For a variety of reasons, a woman may exempt herself from an assessment of lesser competence. Thus, how we dress children may not affect their own aspirations, but it does—at least in U.S. culture—affect how others perceive them.[1]

Everyone, it appears, is likely to be affected—deeply and nonconsciously—by their culture's view of what it means to be male and female. Even people who consciously espouse egalitarian beliefs do not realize how profoundly they have internalized the culture's norms and applied them to their children. There is wide implicit consensus—across income level, education, and sex—about the core features of gender schemas. For those features, parents are much more alike than they are different. Regardless of demographic variables, most subscribe to basic gender norms, dress gender-stereotypically themselves, and unwittingly treat their children gender-stereotypically.

Parents who actively endorse gender schemas, or are unaware of the impact of gender schemas on their perceptions and interpretations, perceive children as gendered from birth and treat them accordingly. For parents who recognize and actively oppose the limitations of gender schemas, matters are more complex (Weiner and Wilson-Mitchell 1990). Such egalitarian parents have, on the one hand, explicit beliefs that affect some of their child-rearing practices. They encourage their children, especially girls, to consider a wide range of possible occupations, and that encouragement influences the children's aspirations. Without realizing it, on the other hand, they are affected by gender schemas, dressing children in ways appropriate to their gender. Their egalitarian beliefs prevent such parents from perceiving that they do encourage gender-specific patterns and from seeing how closely their children conform to the norm. Gender schemas are powerful cultural forces. Adults cannot simply abandon them, especially when they are unaware that they hold them and that they conform to them in such matters as dress.

Children's dress is one example of the way egalitarian parents are unwittingly affected by gender schemas, but there are others. For example, even parents who each retain their own name after marriage typically give their children the father's name as a last name, perhaps with the mother's last name as a middle name. Though the child is the mother's to take care of, it is the father's in name. Egalitarian parents also make gender

distinctions about playthings. Many strongly discourage gun play for both sexes but discourage it more strongly for girls (Weiner & Wilson-Mitchell 1990). That is because it is culturally deviant for girls to play with guns and culturally normal for boys to do so. A parent who disapproves of gun play will project that disapproval to boys, but will project both that disapproval and an attitude of deviance to girls.

Similarly, parents are likely to encourage doll play for girls but, at most, permit it for boys (Weiner & Wilson-Mitchell 1990). A boy who plays with dolls is culturally deviant. Thus an egalitarian parent's belief that boys should learn to be nurturant conflicts with the gender schema that labels nurturance as a violation of masculine norms. The result is that even egalitarian parents at best allow their sons to play with dolls, as the conversation quoted in chapter 1 exemplifies. Since nurturance is at the core of the female gender schema, parents will experience no conflict when their daughters play with dolls and may actively encourage doll play.

Adults know that infants will become gendered adults and they see that endpoint as inevitable. As parents, they are cognitively primed to look for the seeds of sex differences and, therefore, to interpret ambiguous data in that light. Boys will grow up to become men who wash the family car and do not cry. Girls will grow up to become women who wash the dishes and cry at sad movies. In short, adults perceive children as apprentice adults.

Turning Play into Work

In the Hamburg Art Museum hangs a painting entitled *Der Kinderstube—The Nursery*—by Fritz von Uhde. The scene—a pleasant room with blue wallpaper, a parquet floor, and pink curtains at a window opening onto a small balcony beyond—seduces the viewer. A large iron crib stands along the left wall, and a round wooden table is in the right foreground. In the room are three girls and a woman.

At the center a small child—she looks about four years old—holds a doll by the hands, as if dancing with it. On the floor in front of her are another doll and some toy trees. She is the only person in the picture whose entire face is visible. She gazes directly ahead, as if looking at the viewer, who has just entered the room. To her left is a somewhat older

child, perhaps six years old. She sprawls somewhat awkwardly on a child's chair with her legs slightly apart. Looking toward her left, she smiles at the doll perched on her left leg. Nearby is a doll's carriage with another doll inside.

In the background, an older girl, perhaps nine years old, sits composedly and neatly at a window, her head bent over her sewing. Her right leg is crossed over her left, which does not quite reach the floor, because she is sitting on a chair intended for adults. As our eyes follow the scene around to the right, we see a woman in bare quarter-profile with her back toward the table and her face toward the window. Her head is also bent, and she is knitting something with several needles, perhaps a sock. She sits on the same kind of chair as the nine-year-old. On the table are knitting and sewing baskets and an assortment of dolls.

The painting takes us through female development, from play with dolls and doll carriages to sewing and knitting, from facing the viewer head on to being almost invisible. Though painted in 1899, *Der Kinderstube* remains an accurate portrayal of little girls' progress from toys to chores, as the data reviewed in the next section show.

Children's Chores

Parents not only look for the seeds of sex difference early on, they cultivate them. The data on children's chores show that girls over five years old not only spend more time at household tasks than boys do, they also begin their tasks at an earlier age (see Goodnow 1988 for a review). Children's work is divided along the same gender lines as parents' work. That is, girls "specialize" in cooking and cleaning—jobs that need to be performed frequently—while boys are assigned chores that need to be performed less often—such as garbage removal and outdoor work (White & Brinkerhoff 1981).

Because parents see infrequent tasks as ones that call for payment, they are not likely to pay a daughter, for example, for washing the dishes, but they will pay a son for washing the family car. Except for babysitting and restaurant work, girls are less likely to market their skills outside the family than boys are. Girls do not earn money by cleaning bathrooms, vacuuming, dusting, cooking, or washing dishes at other people's homes—perhaps because those jobs are already performed by the woman

of the house. Paying jobs like mowing neighbors' lawns, shoveling snow, and washing windows are, in contrast, often performed by boys, perhaps because, even though the jobs are defined as masculine, the man of the house isn't getting them done.

Children do not passively float through their environment. They try to make sense of it. They form generalizations. The sexual division of their own household labor provides children with data about the implications of sex differences (see Eagly 1987, and Hoffman & Hurst 1990, on the sexual division of labor). Children can rightly conclude that females do the jobs that have to be done daily or more frequently, while males' jobs are occasional. That situation implies that females are more closely connected to and defined by household work than males are. In fact, it even sounds odd to call masculine tasks like emptying the garbage housework.

From the data they gather on chore allocation, children have reason to conclude that the tasks males perform have monetary value but the tasks females perform do not. Children have reason to think that boys labor for payment, while girls labor "for love" (Goodnow 1988).[4]

A story a woman's in-laws told her about her husband Joe's childhood illustrates how early boys learn to expect payment. When only three years old, Joe proposed to his grandmother, who lived with the family, that he would empty her bedroom wastebasket for a quarter. He had learned—precociously—that some tasks are worth money and that if you are a boy it is acceptable to try to bargain for compensation, even from your grandmother.

The early division of household chores along gender lines accustoms boys and girls to seeing their contributions to the household differently. Yet, it should be noted, there is little direct evidence of cause-and-effect relationships. There are no data, for example, to demonstrate that boys who take out the garbage are more likely to take it out as adults than boys who do not—even though it sounds reasonable. Here, as in many areas, while we know there are sex differences among adults and apparently corresponding differences in the way adults treat children, we do not know which, if any, of the early experiences are causally related to adult behavior (Eccles & Blumenfeld 1985).

Some data, however, do suggest that performing household chores is related to showing concern for others in the family. One study queried

mothers, and children between twelve and fourteen, about the children's performance of household chores (Grusec, Goodnow, & Cohen 1996). The investigators looked particularly at chores that benefited the household (such as cleaning up after dinner) and compared children who performed the chores on a regular basis with those who were requested to perform them. The children, especially girls, who regularly did chores without being asked were more likely to show spontaneous concern for others in the household than those who carried out such tasks only when specifically requested to do so. One reason the effects were limited to girls may be that girls perform many more chores on a regular basis than boys do. Girls are led to take more moment-to-moment responsibility for what goes on in the home than boys are.

Gender and Play

Children's play becomes gender-differentiated even earlier than their household chores. Little girls and boys have many playthings in common, such as clay, puzzles, small blocks, records, and books (Fagot 1985). In addition to such gender-neutral play, many boys and girls engage in both masculine and feminine play. Many little girls like trucks, as well as dolls, and at least some little boys play with both dolls and fire engines. Even children who play with both, however, are likely to spend more of their time playing with the toys that "match" their sex—a pattern that emerges as early as one year of age (see below). Girls play with dolls more than they do with vehicles, and the converse is true for boys.

We do not know exactly how children's toy preferences develop. One study of how fathers react to their one-year-olds does suggest how parents may affect children's preferences, and also illustrates the consistent finding that fathers are more concerned that their sons behave like boys than that their daughters act like girls (Snow, Jacklin, & Maccoby 1983). Fathers were observed playing in a room with their twelve-month-old sons or daughters. On a shelf within the babies' sight but out of reach were two dolls, two trucks, a toy vacuum cleaner, and a shovel. The question of interest was which toys the fathers would give to their children.

Fathers of sons gave the boys a truck about twice as often as they gave them a doll. Fathers of daughters gave the girls a doll about as often as

they gave them a truck. Compared to fathers of daughters, fathers of sons gave the boys a doll only half as often. The fathers in both groups gave trucks equally often. Thus, fathers were much more concerned about the gender identification of the toys their sons played with than they were about the gender of the toys their daughters played with. Girls were given greater flexibility in their choices.

I repeat the conversation quoted in chapter 1 here because it summarizes the data just reviewed perfectly:

She: If we have a girl, I'll get her a truck.
He: Of course.
She: If we have a boy, I'll get him a doll.
He: Well . . . If he *asks* for one.

Although the baby has yet to be conceived, this father-to-be, like the fathers in the study, wants his son to be masculine more than he wants his daughter to be feminine. (An alternative interpretation is that he sees dolls as feminine and trucks as neutral.) Also like the fathers in the study, this future father seems determined not to offer his son a doll unless the child specifically requests it.

In the same study (Snow et al. 1983), boys who were given dolls played with them for a shorter time than did girls who were given dolls. Girls and boys given trucks, however, played with them for the same amount of time, although there was a slight tendency for boys to play with them longer. The children's toy preferences along traditional gender lines had thus begun by the age of twelve months, to be completed as infant girls' interest in masculine toys wanes—or is suppressed—in the course of development.

There are two possible explanations of children's early toy preferences. The first is that children develop their preferences independently of parents' attitudes. The second is that parents influence their children's choices at an early age. A study of parents of three- to five-year-olds suggests that the second explanation is more likely. It examined how parents respond to children's selection of toys (Langlois & Downs 1980).[5] Mothers reacted favorably when either boys or girls chose feminine toys but were especially likely to praise or show affection to girls when they made feminine

choices. Mothers tended to reward their children's choices (by praising, helping, or showing affection) instead of punishing them (by, for example, interfering with children's play or ridiculing the children) for nontraditional choices. Thus, mothers were relatively permissive, but looked especially favorably on the "girllike" actions of their daughters.

Fathers reacted somewhat differently. They rewarded boys for masculine choices and punished them for feminine choices. Similarly, they rewarded girls for feminine choices and punished them for masculine ones. Thus, fathers made clear, in a way that mothers did not, what toys their children should prefer. They were particularly likely to reward boys for masculine choices (Langlois & Downs 1980).

It appears, then, that both mothers and fathers want their children of the same sex to conform to gender norms. It may instead be, however, that each parent is simply most knowledgeable about how their own gender is expected to behave: mothers know more about feminine norms, and fathers know more about masculine norms.

It is worth emphasizing the important differences in the way mothers and fathers in this study used rewards and punishments. Regardless of the child's sex, mothers tended to use reward more often than punishment. With girls, fathers too used reward more often than punishment, but with boys they were more likely to use punishment. Fathers thus enforce gender norms more vigorously than mothers do—not only by approving of "appropriate" choices but by disapproving of "inappropriate" choices, particularly boys' feminine choices.

How, then, do the research findings about children's early play and chores fit together? Little girls play with dolls, feeding them, changing their diapers, dressing them in different outfits, and putting them to bed. Doll play is direct practice for the child care they will perform if they become mothers. Middle-class girls also decorate dollhouses, move the furniture around, and play with miniature tea sets. They play "house" and "dress-up." On television, they see cunning miniature refrigerators with tiny plastic ice-cube dispensers and a light that goes on when you open the door. Here, too, girls' play is practice for the kitchen work and home decoration they are likely to be in charge of as adults. A great deal of girls' play imitates what they will do in earnest as women: take responsibility for the well-being of others, decorate their houses, decorate them-

selves. Were boys to spend time playing with dolls, they would learn the same skills; but boys spend little time with dolls.

Although play is intrinsically enjoyable, adults help children learn what to enjoy. Adults portray little girls' play—mock housework and child care—as fun for girls, and most girls seem to agree. With that background of enjoyment, it would be surprising if the pleasure did not linger when play was transformed into work. Instead of a doll to care for, a real baby; instead of playing house, real tea sets to buy, real tabletops to dust, real dishes to wash, real refrigerators to open, real food to prepare. Little girls' play with dolls and dollhouses evolves into older girls' and women's work.

Adults thus prepare girls for their grown-up role in two ways. First, they give little girls dolls to play with; as play is fun—by definition—and is performed purely for pleasure, pleasure becomes associated with housework and child care. Moreover, in playing "mother" the child experiences, momentarily, the mother's role and the power associated with it. Second, adults assign girls chores that duplicate those they will perform as adults. In this way, girls' childhood play and household chores provide a solid foundation for women's household responsibilities, fostering the familiar picture of women as nurturers and caretakers. The painter von Uhde intuitively understood this evolution: he shows play becoming housework within the frame of a single painting portraying female development from age four to adulthood.

Adults prepare boys differently. Fathers in particular encourage play that rarely involves being responsible for another's welfare and is seldom direct practice for adult work. Boys do not, in their play, pretend to be taking out the garbage or washing the car. If their play does involve responsibility, as in playing a firefighter, the role is one for which adults are paid. Most of boys' play, however, has no adult counterpart as work; it remains play.

Boys are, for example, encouraged to engage in rough-and-tumble games with other boys, to play cops-and-robbers and cowboys, to build and ride vehicles of all sorts, and to participate in sports. Most boys do not, however, become professional boxers, cops, robbers, cowboys, truck drivers, or athletes. Boys' play turns not into work, but into men's play. Older boys and men play or watch sports, hunt, practice target shooting,

and pursue hobbies. They watch films whose main protagonists are cowboys, male athletes, or male criminals and law enforcers (whose vehicles careen and crash as toys do).

Girls' play shades imperceptibly into housework; boys' play remains play.

Boys and girls thus receive long apprenticeships in their respective activities. That is not to say that children are unformed lumps of clay being sculpted by their environment. Children come equipped with certain mental structures and predispositions—the most important of which, perhaps, is the capacity to form explanatory theories and hypotheses. (I discuss how that capacity mediates children's developing understanding of gender in chapter 3.) Nor do I argue that the gender-differentiated activities children engage in have no inherent appeal; the play of both girls and boys is intrinsically satisfying.

Yet each kind of play also seems to be something of an acquired taste. Some girls never acquire a taste for dolls, and some boys never learn to like sports. At the same time, some children glory in their gender roles from an early age. By the age of two some boys are daredevils and some girls are coquettes. Most children, however, take longer to learn what they like. Both nurturant play and physical play may require years of nourishing by adults.

At present our culture divides the nourishing along gender lines. It is as if we took half the children and encouraged an interest in writing, and took the other half and supported only an interest in drawing. Some children might well be naturally drawn to one or the other activity without adult intervention, because they are both inherently gratifying. Without instruction, though, most children would not discover the pleasures of either. Since drawing is not taught in contemporary U.S. culture, most children and adults do not draw. Yet in the nineteenth century, skill in drawing was common among the English middle classes.

What would happen if children were not given years of practice in either nurturant or physical play? We don't know. As things stand, children learn to enjoy only half of what is potentially open to them, the half adults give them access to. Girls learn to take pleasure in being nurturant, and boys learn to take pleasure in physical skills. Girls' increasing interest in sports shows how quickly some of them acquire a taste for physical

activity. We have yet to provide boys with a parallel opportunity for nurturance.

Injustice at Home

The gender differences evident in children's work and play come to fruition when adults form partnerships and establish homes. Almost all employed women in heterosexual relationships live in households where the division of labor is grossly and visibly inequitable. Studies of housework show that women perform far more than their fair share (e.g., Robinson 1988; Biernat & Wortman 1991). The imbalance exists among all groups of women who live with men, including professional women. Married women who work for pay average about thirty-three hours of housework per week—about two-thirds of the total household work. Married men who are employed do fourteen to eighteen hours of housework a week (e.g., Lennon & Rosenfield 1994, from 1987–88 data; Blair & Lichter 1991, from 1988 data).[6] These figures do not distinguish between housework and child care because of the difficulty of apportioning tasks. When a man makes dinner for his children, for example, is that housework or child care? To solve that problem, many studies query people about specific tasks, such as making dinner.

One study queried both women who primarily work in corporations and academia and their husbands (Biernat & Wortman 1991). Overall, the partners had roughly equal professional commitments and responsibilities. The women, who were slightly better educated than their husbands and a few years younger, earned somewhat less money and were more intensely involved in their jobs. Despite their rough equality in the workplace, the men and women were not equal at home.

Questioned independently, the wives and husbands agreed that the wives carried out more of all child care tasks but one—playing with the children. In that one area, the partners were equally involved. Yet when they rated themselves as parents, the women expressed more guilt than men about not being a better parent. Moreover, the women gave their husbands higher marks as parents than the men gave themselves. Many professional women apparently believe they should bear the major responsibility for children and rate their husbands as good parents even though they do less than their share of child care.

Survey data show that most married men and women who work see nothing wrong with an unequal division of labor at home (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994; Sanchez 1994; for qualitative analyses, see Hochschild 1989). In one study of couples employed outside the home, about 67 percent of men and 60 percent of women said that the unequal division of labor in their households was fair (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994). In another study, 72 percent of husbands and 66 percent of wives saw the unequal division as fair (Sanchez 1994).

Men and women also agree about the cut-off points in perceptions of fairness. Men perceive doing an almost equal amount of household labor—48 percent—as unfair to themselves; they see the division as fair to both parties when they are doing just 36 percent of the work. Only when their wives average just over 70 percent of the work do husbands see the inequality as unfair (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994).

Married women who work have similar cut-off points. They do not find the division of labor unfair to themselves until they are doing about 75 percent of the household work. When they are doing 66 percent of the work they judge the division as fair to both parties. Women even see the division as unfair to their husbands when they, the wives, are doing close to 60 percent of the work. These perceptions held even when the investigators corrected for factors that should be important in determining fairness—such as differences in education, age, ethnic group, or hours spent working outside the home (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994). Men and women are in basic agreement: women should do most of the household work.

Economic factors account for some of the differences in time spent working at home, but less than one might expect. One hypothesis based on economics is that men do less work than women at home because they do more work than women outside the home. An arrangement whereby men spend more time working outside the home than women do might itself have an economic basis—men can earn more money than women—or it might be due to gender schemas that portray men as naturally belonging outside the house and women as naturally belonging inside it. Whatever the source, once an unequal arrangement is in place, couples may act to equalize the division of their total labor.

A different economic hypothesis suggests that the partner who makes more money has more power and, therefore, does less work at home. The

more powerful partner can buy his or her way out of housework. Here, too, the situation in which male and female partners are unequally compensated may originate in gender schemas that measure a male's worth according to his professional status but apply a different standard to a woman. Once an external inequality is in place, it can generate further internal inequalities.

There are two different ways to test such economic hypotheses. The first method looks at households in terms of differences between partners' earnings, time spent working outside the home, and amount of housework performed. Economic hypotheses would predict that as the husbands and wives approach equality outside the home they will also approach equality in household labor. (The increase in equality could result from hiring outside help, the man's undertaking more household tasks, the woman's performing fewer tasks, or a combination of all three.)

The second method of testing would select households in which both partners have full-time jobs to which they are equally committed and from which they earn approximately equal salaries. Economic hypotheses would predict that housework would be equally divided among such couples.

Studies that examine the relation between outside income and housework do not, however, support the predictions. They find only a limited correlation between salary and the number of hours men spend at housework. In dual-earner couples, men do not do more housework as women make more money (Blair & Lichter 1991, from 1988 survey data). Nor does the size of the disparity in salary affect how much housework men do. In fact, the absolute number of hours males contribute to household work is affected by relatively few variables. Men do little housework, period.

Among the variables that do influence the amount of housework males carry out is the number of hours they or their partners work outside the home. As men work longer hours away from home, they perform somewhat less housework; and as their partners work longer hours, the men perform somewhat more housework (Blair & Lichter 1991; Ferree 1991). Time availability is, therefore, a modest factor in determining how much work men do. Another factor with a modest effect on the division of labor is beliefs about sharing household tasks. In households where

people express the belief that housework should be shared equally, men perform somewhat more work (Blair & Lichter 1991; Ferree 1991; Starrels 1994, from 1981 survey data).

The *proportion* of housework males perform is larger among those with female partners who earn higher salaries and have more education. Coupled with the finding that such female characteristics do not affect the *absolute* amount of work men do, the men's higher proportion appears to be due primarily to women's spending less time on housework. A woman's earning power and high education results in her doing less housework but does not necessarily result in her male partner's doing more. Instead, since she does less, his constant contribution becomes a larger percentage of the whole.

Men and women who want an equitable relationship could take the following message from the data reviewed thus far. Equality in housework is approached—but not reached—when the partners work equal hours outside the home and have equal incomes and education. Yet even the combination of those economic factors is not sufficient to guarantee equality. Household labor is disproportionately done by women, even when they have professional full-time jobs to which they are deeply committed (Biernat & Wortman, 1991). Earnings and hours spent outside the home have some effect on housework time but fail to account for all the sex differences (South & Spitze 1994).

One of the most puzzling aspects of the research findings is women's own view that the markedly unequal division of labor is fair. Could economic factors explain their perception? Here, too, economics seems to play only a modest role. The percentage of a couple's income earned by the woman does not affect perceptions of fairness (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994). Nor do the number of hours either partner works outside the home account for women's perceptions of fairness (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994).

The partner's sex always influences the household division of labor more than economic differences. Economic equality helps, but it does not guarantee an equitable division. Explicit beliefs about equality at home also help, but—even when combined with equal work commitment, equal salary, and equal education—do not guarantee a fifty-fifty split of household work.

Explaining Inequity at Home

On the face of it, the inequity between men and women in their work at home is mysterious. Why doesn't the man *want* to do his share? In the workplace slackers exist, but they are looked down on by others. On the job, most people are willing to do their share and feel some shame if they do not. Why doesn't the man want to take care of his children? And, even if he doesn't want to do his share, why doesn't the woman insist on it? In a two-person relationship in which both partners work outside the home, a woman should be in a good position to demand and receive equity. The facts are simple: housework and child care have to be done; there are two people to do it.

There are, then, two things to be explained: why men behave at home in a way they would find unacceptable at work; and why women accept an inequitable division of labor. One part of the explanation is that both men and women see equity as a relevant concept in the workplace, but neither sees the home as a workplace (see Prentice & Crosby 1987 for a related point). The sexual division of children's play and labor induces both boys and girls to see housework and child care as women's responsibility, a responsibility that, ideally, is performed with love and pleasure. If housework, especially child care, is a woman's labor of love, equity does not come into the picture.

Because child care is a labor of love, a woman who insists on equity seems heartless. She appears—even to herself—to be someone who does not love her children. If she lies in bed while the baby cries, telling her husband that it is his turn to get up, she is perceived as cold and unfeeling. Even though it *is* his turn and he should know that without being told, even though he should be subliminally listening for the baby's cry and leap out of bed the moment he hears it, he is not a monster—either to himself or to the baby's mother—if he does none of those things but mumbles that he is too tired. From the perspective of fairness, none of this makes sense. Yet boys and girls spend years learning that fairness is irrelevant at home.

Women are educated to specialize in love, and for many of them love yields real rewards. It is a pleasure to soothe and kiss a baby, to be the recipient of a baby's smile. The father who does not leap up at the baby's

cry misses those pleasures. What finally enmeshes women in their inequitable situation is the real joy to be gained from exercising their duty, a pleasure most men have not developed a taste for.

The result is that men do not perceive themselves as getting a free ride, anymore than women see themselves as giving one. Women have learned to help others directly, by caring for them, even if that help comes at their own expense. Men, on the other hand, have learned to help others indirectly, by earning money to provide material well-being and educational opportunities.

Another part of the explanation is that, because of their years of training in nonoverlapping roles, both men and women define certain jobs as feminine and others as masculine. A woman is less of a woman if she does not make a house a home, and a man is less of a man if he does. Both sexes feel that way. The cartoon character Dagwood, who came to the door in an apron, was a figure of fun because he donned a feminine role. Since the cultural definition of a man—as the research on parental responses to toy choices indicates—is less flexible than that of a woman, a man finds it particularly difficult to retain his identity as a man if he performs feminine jobs.

A third part of the explanation is that men tend to compare themselves to other men and that women compare themselves to other women (Major 1993). Because most men do little housework or child care, an individual man comparing himself to other men (e.g., his father; see Hochschild 1989) can easily feel that he is behaving appropriately when he follows their example. Similarly, the role of other women (e.g., her mother) as homemaker and child-rearer can easily convince an individual woman that her burden is normal (Thompson 1991).

By the same token, when partners compare their spouses to others, they are likely to do so along gender lines. So, if a husband thinks about how much housework and child care his wife does, he will compare her with what he knows of other women and conclude that she is only doing what is normal; if a wife compares the amount of housework her husband does with what she knows of other men, she will see her husband as normal—or even a bit better than average.

An additional measure of household power is related to women's perceptions of fairness. Women who believe that their standard of living,

social life, and career opportunities would be diminished by separating from their partners are somewhat more likely than others to see an unequal division of housework as fair. Similarly, women who think their standard of living would drop below the poverty line if they left their partners are somewhat more likely than other women to judge an unfair division of labor as fair (Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994). Overall, however, how much a woman has to lose by ending her marriage makes a relatively modest contribution to her perceptions of fairness.

Although both sexes misperceive their living situation, women are more likely than men to perceive the unfairness accurately (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994; Sanchez 1994). Why, then, do women who see the injustice allow it to continue? One reason is that there are costs—not all of them monetary—to perceiving injustice. Women who acknowledge the unfairness of their living situation are more depressed than those who deny it (Lennon & Rosenfield 1994). Another reason is that many women do not know how to rectify the problem. They do not see the home as an arena in which negotiation and bargaining are appropriate, even though calm negotiation might benefit both parties (Mahony 1995; Carter, with Peters 1996).

Newspaper and magazine articles about heterosexual women who work outside the home typically pose the question of how *women* can handle both their household and job responsibilities. It is young *women* who are especially concerned about how they will combine a professional life with having a family. From an Olympian perspective, there is an inexplicable lacuna. Why are there so few articles posing the question of how *men* can handle both their household and job responsibilities? What about the problem of "working fathers," of men who work "outside the home"? What about the problem of educating men so that their lack of training in child care and household work can be remedied? What about children's need for *two* nurturing and involved parents?

Instead, the usual solutions proffered to solve "women's" problem are higher-quality, more affordable, more widely available child care; flexible work hours; and family-leave policies. All those improvements are needed, but they fail to question the way the problem is framed. They do not ask why combining work and family is a female problem rather than a human problem, and thus do not address it as a human problem.

Childhood training in the sexual division of household labor is so powerful that few males or females ask who will bring up the children, let alone question who will *want* to bring them up. So strong is the perception of household inequity as normal that people see no need to explain it, do not perceive it as an injustice, do not see that men are missing a valuable experience, and do not plan realistically how to avoid inequity. People realize there is something wrong with an intimate relationship in which one person physically abuses the other but fail to see that something is wrong when one person bears more than half the burden of work.

As I mentioned above, neither men nor women think of their home as a negotiation site. That reluctance makes it difficult for couples to plan how to avoid work–home conflicts or to negotiate such conflicts when they arise. Yet, unless both parties are willing to resolve conflicts so that sometimes the male's and sometimes the female's work life suffers, there will be no change. Change will occur only when each partner believes that the other should have an equal chance for professional and domestic fulfillment and works to make fairness a daily reality. Change will occur only when both partners agree that their household arrangements should pass on the message of fairness to their children. Finally, long-term gender equality can only originate in homes that give children two functioning parents, not one who functions and another who earns money.

In the following words from 1958, Eleanor Roosevelt was not specifically addressing gender equality in the home, but her eloquent statement is a fitting end to this chapter. "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? . . . In small places, close to home. . . . Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity."