Chapter 4  •  EXAMINING GENDER INEQUALITIES

In the summer of 2017, the #MeToo movement swept across the United States. Women’s allegations of sexual harassment sparked national conversation, and we saw the unprecedented firing of powerful men like Harvey Weinstein, Bill O’Reilly, and Matt Lauer. Then, in early 2018, the nation watched in horror as close to 200 women from U.S. Olympic gymnastics teams delivered passionate testimonies at the criminal sentencing of team doctor Larry Nassar, who was sentenced to 175 years in prison for decades of sexually abusing some of the nation’s best athletes. During this same time, the celebrity-packed Time’s Up™ legal defense fund formed to ensure “safe, fair, and dignified work for women of all kinds.” At the 2018 Academy Awards, the Time’s Up™ initiative became the main theme of the award ceremony. In the winter of 2019, the documentary series Surviving R. Kelly exposed the famous R&B singer’s long history of abuse against women and girls. Yet, despite all this media attention and rapidly growing numbers of women sharing their #MeToo stories, men are often shocked that so many women in their lives—their mothers, their sisters, their daughters, and their friends and coworkers—have their own #MeToo stories to tell (Pazzanese and Walsh 2017).

What does this divergent reality about the scope and prevalence of sexual assault committed against women reflect? First, it reveals that gender matters. Gender shapes our daily experiences in complex ways that often go unnoticed. Second, it reveals how women are redefining their experiences of sexual harassment as a widespread social problem that requires collective action and institutional response. The #MeToo movement is connected to the broader problem of gender inequality in society.
How Does a Social Constructionist Approach Examine Gender Inequality?

As noted in earlier chapters, the social constructionist approach focuses on how social problems develop out of the ideologies, norms, and social systems we create in our society and thus change over time. For example, before 1920 women in most U.S. states did not have the right to vote. In that historical context, women in the suffrage movement constructed their lack of a right to vote as a social problem. Today, lack of suffrage for women is no longer a social problem. Instead, we might say that women’s underrepresentation in government and politics is a social problem. A social constructionist approach helps us see how certain gendered problems relate to social and historical contexts.

The Social Construction of Gender

Although most people tend to use the terms sex and gender interchangeably, sociologists are very careful about differentiating between the two. Sex refers to our physical, sexual characteristics—things like reproductive organs and chromosomes. To describe your sex, you might say that you have a female body, or you might say...
that you have a male body, or you might say that you have an intersex body. People with intersex bodies (roughly 1% of the population) are born with reproductive organs and chromosomes that are neither entirely female nor entirely male, as conventionally defined. Sex, then, is a biological concept. When we define the concept of sex in the classroom, students often write this in their notes: “Sex = biological. Sex = bodies.”

Gender, on the other hand, is a social rather than biological concept. This means that gender is a socially constructed concept that we learn through socialization within a specific culture. Gender is not something we innately are (like our sex) but something that we do (West and Zimmerman 1987). As we examine different forms of gender inequality, we will note how they are tied to the social construction of gender, which is the process of creating social understandings about what it means to be a woman or man (and girl or boy) in society.

Through different agents of gender socialization, including families, peers, education, media, religion, and sports, we teach and learn gender norms and expectations. Since our ideas about masculinity and femininity change over time, so does the way we “do gender.” For example, although pink is associated with girls and femininity today, up until the 1950s pink was considered a “strong” color and associated with boys (Paoletti 2012). And did you know that when cheerleading first began in the 1800s it was a sport only for men (Wade 2012)? Our ideas about gender and the social meanings we assign it are not fixed. When we look back throughout history, we see that ideals of masculinity differed from today, with scholars noting that millennials are redefining masculinity in new ways (Anderson 2018; Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Griffin 2018). For example, the close association of masculinity with heterosexuality meant that one way men could enact their “manliness” was to say or do homophobic or anti-gay things. Today, however, cultural norms have shifted and there is a social stigma attached to being homophobic. How we express ourselves within our specific gender culture is shaped and changed by different social and historical contexts.

Each culture has its own way of “doing gender” based on its gender ideology, which is the dominant belief system about how gender should be organized and practiced. In the United States and many other cultures, the gender ideology that organizes social life is the gender binary, which is the idea that there are only two categories of people: female-bodied feminine people and male-bodied masculine people. Since gender is a social construct, however, there can be many different expressions of gender. You may identify as a man, or you may identify as a woman, or you may identify as nonbinary.

For people who are gender conforming, their gender identity corresponds with their biological sex; they are also called cisgendered. Gender nonconforming people do not perform the gender associated in their culture with their biological sex and identify as nonbinary, gender queer, non-cisgender, or agender. Transgender or trans is an encompassing term used to describe the many different gender identities for people who don’t identify or exclusively identify with their biological sex. So again, while sex is biological, gender is a socially constructed and fluid concept that can change over time in society and in the lives of individuals.

**CONSIDER THIS 4.1**

Think about your own gender socialization experiences as a child and consider how you learned to “do gender.”

What are some ways your family taught you about gender?

What messages did you learn from the media? Sports? Religion? Peers?

**Different Ways of Doing Gender:** You might be surprised to learn that not all cultures “do gender” the same way. Not all cultures have a gender binary, for instance. Some Native American tribes, such as the Zuni, have always had three to five genders: female, male, two-spirit female, two-spirit male, and transgender. Rather than expecting people to be one or the other (masculine males or feminine females), the concept of “two spirits” allows for people to be simultaneously masculine and feminine (Herdt 1997). The Dayak people of Gerai, West Borneo, dissociate gender from genitals altogether. Whether someone is deemed a man or woman is determined by their level of knowledge about certain community practices, such as identifying and storing different kinds of rice (Helliwell 2000). In Afghanistan, the rights and freedoms of girls and women are so restricted that some families have their female children live as boys, known as bacha posh (“dressed up as a boy”). To become a bacha posh, a girl simply “does boy” by shortening her hair, dressing in boy’s clothes, and changing her name. Living as a bacha posh provides short-term freedoms not given to
In this activity, you will examine how the media constructs gender norms.

1. Pick from one of the following forms of media, and examine the gendered images and messages created about what it means to be a man and woman in society: magazines (American Girl and Boys Life are great choices, and you can find copies in the library), television advertisements, a film, or social media.

2. As you examine your form of media, write your answers to these questions:
   - What messages are being conveyed about what it means to be a boy/man or girl/woman in society?
   - Do the images and messages you see maintain the gender binary, challenge it, or redefine it?
   - How are people “doing gender” in this form of media?

3. Pair up with another student and discuss your observations. Do you notice any patterns across your and your partner’s observations? What did you learn about the social construction of gender from this activity? Discuss this with your partner.

Broadening Our Gender Lens: Intersectionality

Our gender identity shapes how people treat us and how we experience the social world. We are not, however, just men or just women or just nonbinary. In 1991, Kimberlé...
Crenshaw, a law professor and civil rights advocate, coined the term intersectionality to explain how our social identities—particularly marginalized identities—intersect in important and consequential ways. For example, in a culture where “White” and “male” are the dominant racial and gender groups, women of color are doubly marginalized as both women and as people of color. This is what Crenshaw calls the “double bind of race and gender.” Similarly, sociologist Patricia Hills Collins (2000) theorizes about the “matrix of domination,” urging us to see how gender, race, and class work as interlocking systems of oppression, rather than separate social forces. As we proceed through the chapter, we will apply an intersectional lens to more deeply examine the causes and consequences of gendered problems for different women and men.

**CONSIDER THIS 4.2**

How do you think your social identities—like your racial and ethnic identity, social class status, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and physical abilities or disabilities—impact your experiences as a man, a woman, or a nonbinary person? How has the intersection of your identities shaped your life? How would your life be different if you woke up and had a different racial or sexual identity?

**Where Does Gender Inequality Happen?**

Before we examine the roots of gender inequality, let’s first think about where gender inequality exists. Gender inequality affects many aspects of our lives, ranging from personal experiences to interactions and relationships with others to large societal-level institutions like the economy and government. Sociologists analyze inequality at different levels and examine how inequality at each level reinforces inequality at the other levels.

When we look at gender inequality at the individual level, we focus on how gender influences how we behave as individuals. Everything from how we sit to how we talk depends, in part, on our gender. For example, in public spaces, men tend to take up more physical space than women. Women are more likely than men to make disclaimers and apologies when talking. Both women and men tend to use words like bossy and bitchy when judging women leaders and terms such as decisive and commanding when evaluating men leaders.

Gender inequality also occurs through social interactions and interpersonal relationships, as highlighted in the opening paragraph about women’s experiences with sexual harassment in the workplace; this is called the interactional level. It is during our interactions that we often conform to or resist gender norms. For example, if a young boy wears a dress to school and kids bully him for it, they are policing his gendered behavior at the interactional level. It is through social interaction that we create and reproduce gendered meanings. Remember, we do gender.

When gender inequality occurs at the institutional level, it means that gender becomes part of how social institutions are organized. For example, because of the traditional gender division of labor inside the family in most cultures, women tend to do twice the amount of housework men do. In this way, gender is built into the structure of family life. Also, since only men have been elected to serve as president of the United States and are the majority of elected officials at the national, state, and local levels, we can see how our political system is also gendered.

It’s important to note that social life is interconnected not just across these different levels but also within them. How we organize the workforce directly impacts family life, and vice versa. Paying attention to how our actions in one area of social life relate to what happens in other areas is essential to good sociological thinking (Risman 2004; Schwalbe 2017).

**Check Your Understanding**

- How do sociologists differentiate between sex and gender?
- What does it mean to say that gender is socially constructed?
- What are some examples of “doing gender”?
- What is intersectionality?
- What are the different levels of analysis for examining gender inequality? Why is it important to pay attention to all these levels?

**The Roots of Contemporary Gender Inequality: Identifying Patriarchal Culture**

4.2 What are the underlying roots of contemporary gender inequality?

As you may have noticed, there is a persistent pattern of social organization in many cultures where men hold more status, power, and resources. Although societies
vary in terms of how unequal the status of women and men is, “the status ‘woman’ is usually held in lesser esteem than the status ‘man’” (Lorber 1994:115). Sociologists call this form of organization, in which men have higher status than women, patriarchal culture. Patriarchal culture provides the foundation from which societies create and maintain gender inequality.

How can you tell if your society has a patriarchal culture? Look for these signs: male domination, male-centeredness, and male identification (Johnson 2005). Male domination means men hold almost all positions of authority across all our social institutions, including government, family, religion, education, military, media, sports, and entertainment. For example, in Figure 4.1 we see that despite notable gains made in the 2018 elections, the percentage of women in U.S. Congress remains significantly lower than that of men. As we examine different forms of gender inequality throughout the chapter, we will stay mindful of how male-dominated culture shapes our social systems and daily life.

A culture is male-centered when it prioritizes and emphasizes the activities of males. For example, male sports teams receive much greater promotion and attract many more viewers than female sports teams. In U.S. films, female characters make up only 31% of speaking roles, and just 13% of films have gender-balanced casts (Smith et al. 2018). When we look closely at many cultural products marketed to a mass audience, we notice they often cater to the interests and perspectives of men. The popularity of the restaurant Hooters, for instance—which now markets itself as a “family restaurant”—shows how the food-service business caters to (heterosexual) male customers. No such mainstream equivalent restaurant exists where scantily clad men serve food and drinks to customers.

This brings us to male-identified culture, which is the third feature of patriarchal societies. In male-identified societies, core cultural ideas about what is good, desirable, and valuable are associated with men and masculinity (Johnson 2005). We often celebrate qualities typically associated with men and masculinity, such as strength, bravery, and aggression, while undervaluing traits associated with women and femininity, such as cooperation, sensitivity, and compassion. If we valued masculinity and femininity equally—better yet, if we valued boys and girls equally—calling a boy “girly” wouldn’t be one of the worst insults to hurl at him. Likewise, if we value girls and femininity equally, why does associating a boy with “girliness” diminish his status while a “tomboy” girl has no social stigma?

We also see male-identified culture reflected in our language. For example, we use words like mankind, freshmen, and “you guys” to refer to both women and men, as if they are gender-neutral terms (Kleinman 2002). People often assume babies dressed in gender-neutral clothing are boys, or they avoid mentioning any gender to avoid offending the parents by indicating they could be girls. In a patriarchal culture, male is the default, female is “the other”

\[ FIGURE 4.1 \]

Women Elected to U.S. Congress by Political Party in 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WOMEN IN U.S. ELECTED OFFICES, BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>State legislators</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>U.S. Congress</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mayors of 100 largest cities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Governors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>President</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>All women</th>
<th>Women of color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7,383</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

XX Total number of political officials
XX% Percentage of women in role

Male-identified culture helps explain why the now-famous author of the Harry Potter books, J. K. Rowling, didn’t use her first name, Joanne. The book publishers wanted the book to appeal to both boys and girls and thought if they identified the author as a woman, boys wouldn’t read it. So they went with J. K. (Savill 2000).

It is critical to mention here that referring to a culture as patriarchal is not about blaming individual men (or women) for the status of gender relations. Patriarchy is a complex system that is larger than any one of us as individuals. At the same time, it is our collective participation in the system that keeps patriarchal culture—which is the foundation of gender inequality—going (Johnson 2005). If we want to curb gender inequality, we must identify and understand this foundation.

**Check Your Understanding**

1. What are the three features of patriarchal culture?
2. What are examples of each feature from your society?
3. Why is it important to understand the patriarchal roots of gender inequality?

### Contemporary Gender Inequality in the Workplace

**4.3 What are some forms of gender inequality in the workplace?**

Over the past four decades, women have made tremendous progress in education. In fact, in the United States, more college degrees are earned by women than by men (U.S. Department of Education 2018). The proportion of women ages 25 to 64 in the labor force who have a college degree more than tripled from 1970 to 2017, increasing from 11% to 57% (U.S. Department of Education 2018). Advancements in education have prepared women well for the workforce. In fact, women now compose almost half of all U.S. workers and are the sole or co-breadwinner in half of American families with children (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016). Despite these advancements, however, research consistently shows that women simply do not receive the same return on their investments in education as their male counterparts.

#### Defining the Gender Wage Gap

The *gender wage gap* is the difference between the incomes of women and men who work year-round, full-time. In 2017, women earned 81.8 cents for every $1.00 men earned (Hegewisch and Williams-Baron 2018). Overall, the highest-paid occupations have the largest gender wage gap and the lowest-paid occupations have the smallest gap (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016). The wage gap between Black and Hispanic women and men is smaller than the gap between White and Asian women, not because these women are paid equal wages but because Black and Hispanic men earn some of the lowest wages. This shows why we must pay attention to the intersections of race, gender, and class. Table 4.1 shows the gender wage gap by race and ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Background</th>
<th>2017 Women</th>
<th>2017 Men</th>
<th>Female Earnings as % of Male Earnings of Same Group</th>
<th>Female Earnings as % of White Male Earnings</th>
<th>2016 Women</th>
<th>2016 Men</th>
<th>Female Earnings as % of Male Earnings of Same Group</th>
<th>Female Earnings as % of White Male Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Races/Ethnicities</td>
<td>$770</td>
<td>$941</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$765</td>
<td>$934</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>$795</td>
<td>$971</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>$782</td>
<td>$962</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$657</td>
<td>$710</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>$655</td>
<td>$733</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>$603</td>
<td>$690</td>
<td>87.4%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
<td>$598</td>
<td>$677</td>
<td>88.4%</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>$903</td>
<td>$1,207</td>
<td>74.8%</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
<td>$921</td>
<td>$1,176</td>
<td>78.4%</td>
<td>95.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The effects of the gender wage gap are cumulative and detrimental over the life course. For example, in addition to wages lost, the gender wage gap helps explain why women’s average Social Security retirement benefit (which is based on earned income) is only 75% of men’s. This brings us to our next question. How does the wage gap happen? If women have acquired the education necessary to compete with men in the labor market, why do they not receive the same return on their investment?

Explaining the Wage Gap: Occupational Segregation

One key piece of the gender wage gap puzzle is occupational segregation, when occupations are composed of either mostly male or mostly female workers. Because of high rates of gender occupational segregation, the labor market is structured by gender (Weeden, Newhart, and Gelbgiser 2018).

What jobs come to mind when you think of “women’s jobs”? Make a mental list of jobs in your head. When asked this question, most students tend to list jobs such as preschool and K–12 teacher, nurse, librarian, dental hygienist, and social worker. Let’s try it again. What jobs come to mind when you think of “men’s jobs”? Are you thinking about jobs like construction worker, electrician, and a variety of jobs in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)? All these jobs are segregated by gender. But keep in mind that we, as a society, have socially constructed this occupational segregation by gender. For example, up until around 1840, teaching primary school was a “man’s job” (Houston 2009). The way we construct the labor market by gender is not fixed in stone, and we can—and do—change it.

When comparing jobs at similar skill levels, it becomes clear that the gender wage gap doesn’t arise only because women and men tend to occupy different jobs. Rather, what we see is that male-dominated jobs pay more than female-dominated jobs at similar skill levels. What’s more striking, however, is that women’s median earnings are lower than men’s in nearly all occupations, regardless if they work in female-dominated, male-dominated, or mixed-gender jobs (Hegewisch and Williams-Baron 2018). Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show that women still earn less than men in all the most common occupations for men. Therefore, there is a gender wage gap not only across occupations but also within occupations.

Explaining the Wage Gap: Employer Preference and Discrimination

Since we live in a patriarchal culture, we don’t usually recognize the gender biases against women in the workplace—or elsewhere. For example, in the 2016 presidential election, Hillary Clinton suffered from a “likability” problem and was often labeled “cold.” Although Donald Trump was also considered unlikeable by many, that wasn’t the focus of his critics. In fact, many people were drawn to Trump precisely because of his brash and aggressive tone. It seemed suitable for him but not for her. This is gender bias.

Gender bias is often followed by gender discrimination, differential treatment based on gender identity. Anyone can experience gender discrimination, which includes actions committed against someone—like sexual harassment—but can also involve ignoring or overlooking people of one gender. For example, women might be excluded from networking opportunities, lunch meetings, mentoring experiences, and other professional activities. You might be thinking, Wait a minute, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made gender discrimination illegal. Why does this stuff still happen? Thankfully, sociologists who study gender and work have given us some analytic tools to explain and address gender discrimination in the workplace. Let’s take a look at some of those explanations.

CONSIDER THIS 4.3

For men, how does their gender serve as a resource in ways that benefit them in their work experiences? For women, how does their gender serve as a disadvantage in their work experiences?

Explaining the Wage Gap: The Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling refers to the institutional barriers within a workplace hierarchy that prevent women from reaching upper-level positions. Women have made gains in terms of making it to middle management, yet it is still rare to see women CEOs, top corporate officers, presidents, and directors or board members of major companies and institutions. Research suggests that policies, practices, and attitudes give preference to men over women in the workplace. These implicit (and sometimes explicit) biases against women relate to our collective norms about appropriate and desirable behavior for women and men.
Men’s Violence Against Women

4.4 How does violence against women relate to patriarchal societies?

In India in 2012, six men beat, gang-raped, and tortured a 23-year-old woman on a bus outside of South Delhi. Her name was Jyoti Singh Pandey, and she was a medical student. One of the perpetrators in the brutal attack was the bus driver. The student suffered devastating injuries and died in the hospital 2 weeks later. The violent attack led to mass social protest in India and mobilized major social reform in the legal system, including new laws to enforce stricter punishment for rape offenders and the addition of new courts to prosecute rape cases more quickly. Sometimes a personal tragedy can incite major social transformation. In this case, one person’s victimization spotlighted cultural norms about gender, violence, and power.

In both private and public spaces spanning the globe, violence against women and girls takes many different forms, including “honor killings,” acid burning, stoning women to death, sex-selective abortion to eliminate female fetuses, the international sex trafficking trade, intimate partner violence, rape and sexual violence, street harassment, and cyber harassment, among others. Global estimates indicate that 1 in 3 women worldwide experience sexual and/or physical violence in their lifetime (World Health Organization 2018a). Here, we will examine three key forms of violence against women: rape and other sexual violence, street harassment, and cyber harassment. Another key form of violence against women is intimate partner violence, which you will learn more about in Chapter 12.

CONSIDER THIS 4.4

How do different forms of violence against women reflect the three features of patriarchal culture?

Women in India protesting widespread violence against women
AP Photo/Ajit Solanki

Women make up less than 35% of police personnel in all 86 countries with data

In most countries, less than 40% of women who experienced violence sought help of any sort. Of those, less than 10% sought help from the police.

Women against violence

Rape and Sexual Violence

In June 2018, a survey by the Thomson Reuters Foundation ranked the United States number 10 on a list of the 10 most dangerous nations in the world for women in terms of risk of sexual violence. India ranked number 1. Sexual violence is “a sexual act committed against someone without that person’s freely given consent” (Smith et al. 2015). In the United States, 1 out of 5 women report experiencing some form of sexual violence (Morgan and Truman 2018; Smith et al. 2015). Although popular culture has cautioned against “stranger danger,” the overwhelming majority of rape victims know the person who raped them (Morgan and Truman 2018).

In recent years, the term rape culture has emerged to describe the normalization of rape and other forms of sexual violence against women. To say that we live in a rape culture means that social norms, cultural practices, and social institutions condone men’s objectification of and access to women’s bodies. In recent years, we have seen greater public awareness and efforts to prevent sexual violence, as in the national It’s On Us campaign, the #MeToo movement, and the Times Up™ campaign.

Sexual Assault on College Campuses: There is also increasing attention on the prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses, with research estimating that 1 in 5 women will be sexually assaulted during college (Krebs et al. 2016). This contrasts with 4% of undergraduate men reporting sexual violence victimization during college (Krebs et al. 2016). Victimization rates are highest for undergraduate women and students who identify as transgender, genderqueer, nonconforming, and questioning, with 23% and 24%, respectively, reporting sexual assault (Griner et al. 2017).

Several risk factors for men’s sexual aggression on college campuses include an overarching “hookup culture” that positions men as sexual aggressors, heavy drinking, the sexual objectification of women through pornography, masculinity norms that reward men for sexual conquests, rape myth acceptance, and negative attitudes about women (Campbell et al. 2017; Flack et al. 2007; McDaniel and Rodriguez 2017). Efforts to address campus-based sexual violence include rape prevention programming, healthy relationship education, and bystander intervention trainings. The focus of these programs is on transforming a rape culture into a culture of consent.

What is your campus doing to address rape and sexual assault? What are some ways you can get involved? The “Sociologist in Action” featured in this chapter, Haley Marie Raimondi, describes how she has focused her career on supporting survivors of gender-based violence.

Street Harassment

Street harassment involves “unwanted comments, gestures, and actions forced on a stranger in a public place without their consent and is directed at them because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation” (Stop Street Harassment 2018). A national survey found that 84% of women in the United States experienced street harassment before the age of 17, and 66% before the age of 14 (Livingston et al. 2015). Street harassment involves a variety of behaviors, such as verbal taunts (often referred to as catcalling, a very gendered term), unwanted touching and groping, flashing (revealing nude body parts), and upskirting (taking photographs or video up someone’s skirt or dress). Gallup data from surveys in 143 countries, including Italy, France, Australia, and the United States, found that men are considerably more likely than women to say they feel safe walking alone in their communities. Table 4.4 shows the prevalence and different forms of street harassment in different countries.

Cyber Harassment and Digital Abuse

Research over the past decade has shown that women are also disproportionately targets of online harassment and digital abuse, which is using technology to bully, stalk, harass, and intimidate. Digital abuse takes place in the context of intimate partner violence (e.g., revenge porn, threatening posts) but also frequently happens to women in non-intimate relationships. Women often face extreme hostility in the form of digital sexism in discussion rooms, in comment sections, in gaming communities, and on social media platforms (Sobieraj 2017). Reflecting patriarchal societies, trolling, cyberstalking, harassment, and online bullying
are attempts to diminish and exclude women’s voices and presence in online spaces (Henry and Powell 2018; Megarry 2014; Sobieraj 2017).

Digital abuse extends to professional work for women, and female journalists ages 25 to 35 are twice as likely as their male colleagues to be bullied and receive physical and sexual threats (Hagen 2016). Women are much more likely to be attacked for their appearance and called names like “whore” and “slut,” while men are attacked for what they say online. Women are also much more likely to receive rape threats than are men. Feminist women, including Anita Sarkeesian, have been visible targets of cyber harassment, misogyny, and abuse. In 2014, Sarkeesian became well-known when her web-based show Feminist Frequency produced a series called “Tropes vs. Women in Video Games,” where she analyzed how video games portray female characters. The image above shows one of the tweets directed at Sarkeesian during this time.

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**HALEY MARIE RAIMONDI**

As a sociology major in college, I learned the importance of viewing the world through a sociological lens. I studied how social inequalities intersect with one another and create additional barriers that minority group members must overcome when striving for equality. I learned how the cultural construction of hypermasculinity, which places value on physical strength and male aggression, prevails throughout our society. I also learned how gender-based violence disproportionately affects women. Once I developed a sociological perspective, I felt empowered to help those who unjustly suffer from a form of gender inequality that not only inhibits women’s ability to thrive in our society but also, at times, makes this an unsafe world for women.

In 2012, I became a victim advocate and crisis counselor with the YWCA. I was responsible for providing crisis intervention and advocacy on a 24-hour crisis hotline and forensic and hospital accompaniment to survivors of sexual violence. Then, in 2015, I joined the Samaritan House, a Virginia Beach-based nonprofit that serves victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and homelessness. Currently, I serve as the program director and oversee all victim services, including our emergency shelter, housing, children’s advocacy, therapeutic services, victim advocacy, and intake programs. I also played an integral part in planning the Regional Coordinated Crisis Response of South Hampton Roads, which helped streamline victim access to a 24/7 crisis hotline, an emergency shelter, victim advocacy, and therapeutic services. I was appointed by the mayor of Virginia Beach to serve on the city’s first Fatality Review Committee, a group that provides technical assistance when reviewing fatalities and works to prevent them in the future.

I have witnessed firsthand that interpersonal relationship violence impacts women in all social strata. But my sociological training allows me to recognize that certain demographic groups experience higher rates of violence. This awareness has led me to create two additional advisory committees—one for people of color and one for the elderly and disabled populations—because abuse within these populations is disproportionately high. I believe that the education, outreach, and culturally appropriate services we provide are critical for these underserved victims to feel supported as they leave their abusive situations and heal from the trauma they have endured.

Ultimately, my sociological knowledge and skills prepared me to advocate effectively for the needs of those impacted by gender-based violence in my community and to better serve the women and girls who are disproportionately affected by violence.

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**Discussion Questions:** What are some ways that sociology informs the work to end violence against women? What kinds of analytic tools does sociology provide that help us understand the causes and consequences of domestic and sexual violence?
### TABLE 4.4

**Percentage of Women Reporting Street Harassment Around the World**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>95% of Argentinian women report being harassed the first time before age 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76.11% of Argentinian women report avoiding an area of their town/city because of harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>66% of German women report being groped or fondled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80% of German women report that they take different routes to their home or destination because of harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>80% of South African women report changing their clothing because of harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72% of South African women report being followed by a man or group of men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>79% of Canadian women report being followed by a man or group of men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63% of Canadian women report feeling distracted at school or work because of harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>47% of Indian women report that someone has exposed themselves to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80% of Indian women report being unwilling to go out at night because of harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>72% of U.S. women report taking different transportation due to harassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85% of U.S. women report experiencing street harassment for the first time before age 17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

71% of respondents globally report being followed.

Source: Adapted from Hollaback and ILR School at Cornell University
Check Your Understanding
1. What are some forms of violence against women?
2. In what spheres of life does violence against women occur?
3. How does violence against women online relate to patriarchal societies?

How Does Gender Inequality Affect Boys and Men?

Up to this point, we have examined how patriarchal culture affects women and the social construction of gendered norms and institutions. But what about boys and men? What are some of the costs associated with gender inequality for men?

Have you ever heard someone say “Man up”? Through gender socialization, boys and men are taught that “real men” are strong, independent, emotionally stoic, and tough (Jensen 2007; Katz 2013; Kimmel 2009).

Men and boys often project a tough-guy persona to avoid being ridiculed and shamed by other men for not being “man enough” (Earp and Katz 1999; Katz 2013). Language is one effective way to engage in gender policing, which is the enforcement of culturally accepted gender norms. The boundaries of masculinity are policed by calling boys and men names like “gay” and “fag,” which
reflects how masculinity and heterosexuality are often interwoven (Bucher 2014; Pascoe 2011). Societal pressures for boys and men to “man up” and prove their masculinity have been linked to different adverse outcomes, ranging from the personal to the institutional.

**Work-Related Injuries and Death**

Men are five times more likely to die in job-related incidents than women are (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017a). Figure 4.4 shows the top 10 jobs with the highest work-related fatalities, and in all 10 jobs men significantly outnumber women, with Hispanic and Latino men experiencing the highest rate of job-related fatalities (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017a). The intersection of gender, race, and social class often means that poor men of color, especially migrant laborers, work riskier and more dangerous jobs than do native-born and White men.

**Suicide and Other Health Issues: The Stigma of Vulnerability and Victimization**

Men are 3.5 times more likely than women to die by suicide, with middle-aged White men having the highest rate of suicide (Stone et al. 2017). In terms of overall health outcomes, men in the United States suffer more chronic health conditions, have higher death rates for all 15 leading causes of death, and die roughly seven years younger than women (World Health Organization 2018a).

Considering the widespread notion that “boys don’t cry,” it is perhaps unsurprising that men tend to avoid going to the doctor, and when boys and men suffer from depression and other mental health conditions, they are less likely than women to seek help (O’Brien, Hunt, and Hart 2005; Seidler et al. 2016). Admitting vulnerability or “weakness” runs counter to the dominant narrative of manhood that says men should be tough and “cool, calm, and collected.” Also, since the image of a “victim” is more commonly associated with women, men experience an added stigma of victimization associated with reporting injuries related to domestic and sexual violence (Arnocky and Vaillancourt 2014; Stiles, Ortiz, and Keene 2017). Men in the military—a particularly male-dominated institution—are especially unlikely to report sexual violence victimization (U.S. Department of Defense 2017).

**Family Engagement**

Today, many men struggle to balance changing and conflicting gender norms associated with work and expectations to be both a breadwinner and an engaged and nurturing father (Petts and Knoester 2018).
Although more men today would like to take paternity leave to spend time with their children, many fear negative reactions if they take time away from work (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017b). Most men in the United States take less than 2 weeks off when they have or adopt a baby because (1) the United States does not mandate paid leave for new parents; (2) it is less socially acceptable for men to take advantage of family leave benefits, even if their employers offer them; and (3) many men make more money than the women in their households, so they feel compelled to focus on their jobs (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017b). This is not fair to fathers (or their families).

Changing gender roles to reduce gender inequality will benefit individuals, families, organizations, and society as a whole. Higher rates of gender equality are associated with marital satisfaction, more profitable businesses, stronger economies, higher levels of education, and higher levels of employment and productivity (Bergin 2017; European Institute for Gender Equity 2017; Hunt et al. 2018). When rates of gender equality are high, so is the overall health of a society.

Check Your Understanding

1. What is gender policing, and how does this impact boys and men?
2. How are boys and men negatively impacted by the social construction of gender?
3. How does gender equality benefit men, as well as women?
Other Gendered Social Problems

4.6 What are some current social problems that have gendered features?

In addition to the different forms of gender inequality described earlier, there are also gendered social problems, which are social problems that have strong gendered patterns. These aren’t inequalities but rather pressing social problems with distinct gendered dimensions. We now look at three of them: mass shootings, the sexual objectification of women, and the regulation of women’s bodies.

Mass Shootings as a Gendered Social Problem

During the aftermath of mass shootings in the United States, we typically hear the same public discussions blaming guns, video games, or mental health, or all three. If we look at the gendered nature of this problem, however, we notice several important patterns:

- Almost all mass shooters are boys or men.
- Many mass shootings are “revenge” shootings that specifically target women and girls whom the shooter perceived as rejecting his sexual advances.
- Most mass shooters have a history of domestic violence (Follman, Aronsen, and Pan 2019; O’Toole 2014).

Figure 4.5 shows the breakdown of mass shootings by gender. From 1982 to 2018, all but two mass shootings in the United States were perpetrated by men.

If we ignore the gendered nature of the violence, we miss the most important factor, which is that these acts of mass violence are tied to our cultural construction of manhood and masculinity (American Psychological Association 2018; Johnson 2012; Katz 2006, 2012; Madfis 2014).

While women and girls, like men and boys, suffer from mental illness and have the same access to guns and video games, what they don’t have is the collective socialization into a masculinity that equates “manliness” with violence and revenge and sees emotional vulnerability as a weakness. Girls and women are given permission to ask for help and to share their feelings and show their emotions. Meanwhile, a little boy on the playground is told to “man up” when he is pushed around.

In February 2018, a week after a horrific school shooting in Parkland, Florida, during which a 19-year-old male student killed 14 students and three staff members, actor Michael Ian Black wrote an op-ed in the New York Times titled “The Boys Are Not All Right.” He echoed sociological research as he declared that the gender revolution that provided girls and women new and empowering opportunities to “redefine what it means to be female” failed to come full circle for boys and men, who are still “trapped in the same suffocating model of outdated masculinity.” Black urged readers to abandon the traditional expectations of manhood and masculinity as...
he proclaimed, “America’s boys are broken. And it’s killing us.” If we want to save ourselves, we must reconstruct gender norms—for boys and men, as well as for girls, women, and nonbinary people.

**Sexual Objectification of Women in the Media and Pornification of Culture**

Gender scholars have coined the term “the male gaze,” to describe the sexual objectification of women in the media, when they are portrayed merely as objects of sexual desire for the heterosexual male viewer, without their own personalities or agency (Johnson 2005). More gender egalitarian societies, like Sweden, have banned the sexual objectification of women’s bodies in advertising. The sexual objectification of women, then, is not inevitable, and doing away with it would offer many benefits for individuals and society. The constant self-monitoring that girls and women do to “keep up with” the barrage of images of thin, sexually desirable women in the media prompts feelings of shame, anxiety, and depression (Hesse-Biber 2007; Miles-McLean et al. 2015). Research also links widespread sexual objectification to the disproportionately high rates of eating disorders experienced by girls and women (Roberts 2016; Tuning 2016).

A problem related to the sexual objectification of women in the media is the pornification of culture, the dominance of pornographic imagery and values in popular culture (Dines 2010). Women are almost always the targets of pornified images, as seen in the increasing depiction of women as exotic dancers, the popularity of female porn stars in popular culture, and the success of films like *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Images of violence against women in pornography, including choking and raping women, to name just a couple, have become mainstream (Jones 2018; Stanley et al. 2016).

Considering that Internet pornography has emerged as a primary source of sexual education for our youth—with most boys exposed to porn by the age of 11—the consequences of porn consumption are
In this ad, the positioning of the woman’s lipstick-coated open mouth, accompanied by the text “It’ll blow your mind away,” is reminiscent of pornographic images of women performing oral sex on men. Is also associated with rape-supportive beliefs and the perpetration of sexual violence (Wright and Randall 2012; Wright et al. 2016). Pornography doesn’t cause rape—but what it does do is lead to the development of negative attitudes toward women. This, in turn, contributes to the rape culture previously described, where sexual violence against women is minimized and normalized (Ezzell 2017).

Regulating and Policing Women’s Bodies

Although the #MeToo and Time’s Up™ anti–sexual harassment movements took center stage at the 2018 Grammy Awards, so did this dance routine, which illustrates the objectification and pornification of women’s bodies that underlie sexual harassment in the entertainment industry.

Kevin Winter/Getty Images for NARAS

What are some consequences of the sexual objectification and pornification of women’s bodies in the media? How do you think these trends might impact how women are viewed and treated in broader society? In the workplace? In government and politics? In their intimate relationships?

significant. The more pornography a man watches, the more likely he is to request pornographic sex acts of his partner (Sun et al. 2016). Pornography consumption is also associated with rape-supportive beliefs and the perpetration of sexual violence (Wright and Randall 2012; Wright et al. 2016). Pornography doesn’t cause rape—but what it does do is lead to the development of negative attitudes toward women. This, in turn, contributes to the rape culture previously described, where sexual violence against women is minimized and normalized (Ezzell 2017).

Regulating and Policing Women’s Bodies

The sexual objectification of women in the media is pervasive, yet it’s important to point out how women’s bodies—when not presented for the male gaze—are regulated and policed in other social contexts. Perhaps the most obvious example is women’s reproductive freedom, which remains an ongoing and contested political issue, despite the landmark Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision in 1973 that legalized women’s right to abortion. Also, despite recent efforts by many women to normalize breastfeeding in public, it is still considered
a social taboo, and nursing mothers often retreat to public bathrooms to nurse their babies on toilets and other out-of-sight places. In the United States, it wasn’t until 2018 that it became legal for women to breastfeed in public in all 50 states. Why do you think we shame women for exposing a part of their breast to feed their child, considering the widespread sexualization of women’s breasts throughout our culture?

School dress codes provide another form of regulating and policing female bodies. Many prohibit girls from wearing certain clothing, like tank tops or short skirts, that will “distract” their male peers, but do not have similar restrictions for boys. The implication is that girls’ bodies cause problems. The #iamnotadistraction movement is pushing back against what many female students and their supporters call body-shaming.

Check Your Understanding
1. How are mass shootings a gendered social problem?
2. What is the sexual objectification of women?
3. Is the sexual objectification of women inevitable?
4. What are some consequences of sexual objectification?
5. How are girls’ and women’s bodies regulated and policed in daily life?

Gender-Based Movements and Social Change

In addition to the broader women’s movement, there are hundreds of social movement organizations and initiatives all over the country engaged in social problems work. Some of these organizations include the following:

- The National Organization for Women (https://now.org/)
- Women of Color Network, Inc. (http://www.wocninc.org/)
- Feminist Majority Foundation (http://www.feminist.org/)
- Sister Song (https://www.sistersong.net/)
- National LGBTQ Task Force (http://www.thetaskforce.org/)
- The more than 50 national and state-level coalitions addressing domestic and sexual violence (see https://vawnet.org/ for a list of organizations)
- Institute for Women’s Policy Research (https://iwpr.org/)
- Planned Parenthood (https://www.plannedparenthood.org/)
- National Domestic Workers Alliance (https://www.domesticworkers.org/)
- Culture Reframed (https://www.culturereframed.org/)

Gender-based activism today takes many forms, from Tatyana Fazlalizadeh’s public art that addresses gender-based street harassment to the Ban Bossy campaign to Australian senator Larissa Waters breastfeeding at work. These daily acts of resistance nudge us forward toward new and more equitable ways of living.

Joanne Rathe/The Boston Globe via Getty Images

You might say that on January 20, 2017, the earth shook a little when about 4.2 million people spanning 600 cities across the world joined the Women’s March to protest a variety of gender-based problems, from sexual harassment, pay inequality, and reproductive freedom to the intersection of sexism and racism. The Women’s March showed us that the woman’s movement of today is diverse and intersectional and that men play an important role as allies in the pursuit of gender equality. The Women’s March and the #MeToo movement helped inspire the recent growth in women running for elected positions, with 2018 seeing record-breaking numbers of women running for office. The slogan “The Future Is Female” is growing in popularity.
These organizations work to address gender discrimination in society through policy initiatives, research, education and awareness, and/or advocacy and service provision. The fact that many of your college campuses now have women’s centers, LGBTQ centers, and courses that focus on gender issues reflects the widespread integration of gender-based social change work in daily life and social institutions.

Social problems work often involves policy work to create new guidelines, new resources and funding, and/or new legal protections for marginalized groups. In the United States, laws and policies that address gender discrimination in different areas of life include these:

- **Title IX**, originally passed in 1972 to ensure gender equity in our education system, continues to help fight gender discrimination in education and sports today.
- **The Violence Against Women Act**, initially passed in 1994 and then reauthorized in 2000 and 2005, provides vital resources and services to victims of domestic and sexual violence and stalking.
- **The Equal Pay Act** was passed many years ago, in 1963, yet women's protections against pay discrimination were not effectively enforced until the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009.

Current policy-making efforts continue to address gender-related discrimination in the workplace and in other areas of life.

Gender-based activism has become increasingly intersectional, as seen in the #SayHerName movement, which raises awareness about the lack of media coverage for African American women killed by police officers. #SayHerName grew out of the #BlackLivesMatter movement to bring visibility to this social problem that grows out of the intersection between sexism and racism.

Since the early 2000s, men’s involvement in gender-based activism has increased, with organizations like Men Can Stop Rape, A Call to Men, Men Stopping Violence, Mentors in Violence Prevention, Futures Without Violence, and the National Organization for Men Against Sexism working with boys and men on antisexist and antiviolence education. This “engaging men” work focuses on dismantling traditional notions of masculinity linked to men’s violence (Macomber 2015; Messner et al. 2015). The documentary film *The Feminist on Cell Block Y* shows how 25-year-old Richard Vargas, who has been incarcerated since his teens, is teaching feminism at Soledad State Prison in California. His program focuses on “toxic masculinity,” and how societal expectations to be tough and unemotional underlie men’s life choices and involvement in crime. In doing so he helps show, in yet another way, that gender equality benefits people of all genders.

**Check Your Understanding**

1. What are some characteristics of gender-based movements and activism today?
2. What is an example of how gender-based activism is intersectional?
3. What are some of the key policy changes that have been made to address gender discrimination in U.S. society?
4. What role do men play in gender-based movements and activism?
CONCLUSION

Recognizing how gender is socially constructed gives us a powerful lens to examine gender inequality as a social problem. By paying attention to how we create and reproduce gender inequality in everyday life, we can create new language, norms, and ways of “doing gender” that meet our individual and societal needs. As you think about the work that still needs to be done to achieve gender equality, stay inspired by how much change and progress have already taken place. What will you do to keep the momentum going?

As you work for gender equality, remember we are not just gendered people. We each have multiple identities that intersect and affect our lives in important ways. In the following chapter, you will learn more about how our sexual identities shape our experiences.

REVIEW

1. How does the social constructionist approach examine gender inequality?

The social constructionist approach to studying gender emphasizes how we “do gender” in ways that create and reinforce gender inequality. By paying attention to how gender is socially constructed and varies over time and place, we can see how our ideas about gender are fluid rather than static. The social constructionist approach examines how gender organizes daily life and social systems in ways that create and maintain gender inequality. This approach also shows how the social construction of gender relates to harmful social outcomes for boys and men.

2. What are the underlying roots of contemporary gender inequality?

In many societies across the world, men hold more status, power, and resources. The status “woman” is usually held in lower regard than the status “man.” Sociologists call this form of organization, in which men have higher status than women, patriarchal culture, and it serves as the foundation from which societies create and maintain gender inequality. The three primary features of patriarchal culture are male domination, male-centeredness, and male identification. Male domination means men hold almost all positions of power within social institutions. Male-centeredness means a culture prioritizes and emphasizes the activities of males. Male identification means that the core cultural ideas about what is good, desirable, and valuable are associated with men and masculinity, while cultural ideas about women and femininity are devalued. Patriarchy is a complex system that is larger than any one of us as individuals, yet we all participate in it to some extent. It is the foundation of gender inequality.

3. What are some forms of gender inequality in the workplace?

Gender inequality in the workplace remains a significant form of gender inequality. Despite women’s advancements in education, and the fact that women now compose almost half of all U.S. workers, research consistently shows that women simply do not receive the same return on their investments in education as their male counterparts. There remains a gender wage gap, which operates at the individual, interactional, and institutional levels. Sociologists explain the gender wage gap by pointing to several institutional processes, including occupational segregation, gender discrimination, and the glass ceiling. Gender socialization also contributes to the wage gap by steering boys and girls and women and men to different careers. Our ideas about what is appropriate behavior based on gender often mean that women in the workplace are branded things like “bossy” and “bitchy,” while men who behave similarly are deemed “strong leaders” and “confident.” Efforts to address workplace inequity focus on policy and institutional change.

4. How does violence against women relate to patriarchal societies?

A major form of gender inequality is men’s violence against women, which takes a variety of forms, including intimate partner violence, rape and sexual assault, street harassment, and digital abuse. Efforts to end violence against women address cultural norms around gender, power, and violence.

5. How does gender inequality impact boys and men?

The social construction of masculinity and pressures for boys and men to “man up” have been linked to different negative outcomes, ranging from the personal to the institutional. Men are much more likely to die in job-related incidents than women and women to work in more dangerous, physically demanding jobs. In addition, men are more likely than women to die by suicide, and in terms of overall health outcomes, men suffer more chronic health conditions, have higher death rates, and have lower life expectancy than women. When boys and men suffer from depression and other mental health conditions or sexual abuse, they are less likely than women to seek help. Last, many men struggle to balance changing and conflicting gender norms associated with work and expectations to be both a breadwinner and an engaged and nurturing father. Men and boys, as well as our families and institutions, also have a lot to gain from gender egalitarianism.

6. What are some current social problems that have gendered features?

Mass shootings are a gendered social problem because almost all mass shootings are committed by men, despite the fact that women also experience mental health challenges and have access to firearms. Other social problems that have gendered dimensions include the sexual objectification of women, the pornification of culture, and the policing of
women’s and girls’ bodies in public spaces, all of which reflect how women’s bodies remain the subject of public spectacle, critique, and control.

7. **What are some current efforts to address gender inequality?**

In addition to the broader women’s movement, there are hundreds of social movement organizations and initiatives all over the country engaged in social problems work. These organizations work to address gender discrimination in society through policy initiatives, research, education and awareness, and/or advocacy and service provision. Over the years, there have been many critical laws and policies that address gender discrimination in different areas of life, including the Equal Pay Act, Title IX, and the Violence Against Women Act. Contemporary gender-based activism takes on many different forms, from street art that challenges street harassment to public displays of breastfeeding to social media campaigns.

**KEY TERMS**

- gender 57
- gender-based activism 77
- gender binary 57
- gender ideology 57
- gender policing 71
- gender socialization 57
- gender wage gap 61
- gendered social problems 74
- glass ceiling 62
- glass escalator 66
- intersectionality 59
- patriarchal culture 60
- pornification of culture 75
- rape culture 68
- sex 56
- sexual harassment 65
- sexual objectification of women 75
- sexual violence 68
- social construction of gender 57
- street harassment 68

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