

# Girl Power

What has changed for women—and what hasn't

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**W**HEN DAN KINDLON watches the Tigers play softball, he sees the legacy of feminism for girls. “My daughter’s concentrating on catching the ball, and this other girl just slams into her, slides under,” he recalls. “Julia got hurt a little bit, she got scraped up, but it was an experience that used to be exclusively the province of men and boys—to get knocked down, and then you’ve got to pick yourself back up and get back in the game, brush your tears off, and ignore the blood. She was kind of proud of herself afterwards. It was a character-building experience that very few girls growing up in an earlier generation had a chance to have. Now almost all of them have that chance.”

Kindlon is a clinical psychologist and adjunct lecturer at the Harvard School of Public Health. The more he coached his youngest daughter’s team, the more he understood he was observing a new generation of girls and young women. “People who say that girls aren’t competitive and don’t enjoy winning have never gone to a game and watched!” he says with a laugh. “My own daughters are so different from the girls I grew up with, in terms of the things they think they can do.” Linking those observations with accumulating data that show girls outperforming boys in grades, honors, and high-school graduation rates—and with the historic reversal in U.S. college enrollments (58 percent today are women, the 1970 percentage for men)—convinced Kindlon that today’s American girls are profoundly different from their mothers. “They were born into a different world,” he says of girls and young women born

since the early 1980s. He began to think of them as “alpha girls.”

These girls—Kindlon uses the term because his research focuses on female development up to age 21, the period covered by pediatric medicine—were not the self-loathing, melancholic teens at risk portrayed in such former bestsellers as *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap* (Peggy Orenstein), *Failing at Fairness: How America’s Schools Cheat Girls* (Myra and David Sadker), and *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* (Mary Pipher). Girls today “take it for granted that it is their due to get equal rights,” Kindlon says. “They never had to fight those battles over fertility control, equal educational and athletic access, or illegal job discrimination.” As a result, “girls are starting to make the psychological shift, the inner transformation, that Simone de Beauvoir predicted” in 1949 when she wrote, in *The Second Sex*, “sooner or later [women] will arrive at complete economic and social equality, which will bring about an inner metamorphosis.”

Recognizing that a new psychology was necessary to describe his daughters’ generation, Kindlon studied more than 900 girls and boys across the United States and Canada and wrote about his findings in *Alpha Girls: Understanding the New American Girl and How She Is Changing the World* (2006). This new “girl power” is characterized by what Kindlon calls an “emancipated confidence” that is raising self-esteem, reducing depression, and altering gender roles among girls and young women.

“Alpha girls” did not appear overnight, however. A century of social and economic change first tipped and then leveled the playing field, creating the circumstances for unprecedented gains for women in education and the labor force. These gains appear across socioeconomic strata, but they are less widespread among low-income and minority girls. To rectify the disparities,



some “alphas” are creating innovative programs as part of a “girls’ movement” to make such progress available to all young women. Of course, once alpha girls enter the workforce and begin families, they will no doubt encounter the same tradeoffs their mothers did; how they will cope with these challenges is uncertain, but they are already changing wage and marriage patterns in unexpected ways.

## Alpha Psych 101

“THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEMONS that used to affect girls and women in this country just don’t affect today’s girls in the same way,” Kindlon asserts. In the 1980s and early ’90s, Carol Gilligan (formerly Graham professor of gender studies at Harvard Graduate School of Education and now a professor at New York University) and other feminist psychologists wrote that girls in their teens compromise their authenticity to fit gender roles, thereby “losing their voice.” In 1992, influential American Association of University Women (AAUW) research on late-1980s data on girls born in the 1970s found that girls’ self-esteem plunged in middle school, compared to boys’, and that classroom sexism (such as teachers’ calling on boys more than girls, or more competitive than cooperative learning) was a cause. The AAUW report recognized positive trends, such as young women’s ascent in college enrollment, while recommending correctives for the continuing shortfalls.

Alpha girls are created in large numbers when the society that they are born into has sufficient equal opportunity, Kindlon says: “It wasn’t until the early to mid ’80s—when schools really started to get serious about Title IX, when women first began to outnumber men in college, when women began moving into leadership roles, such as Congress, in significant numbers—that societal conditions had changed enough to permit the alpha girl explosion.” He set out to discover how Beauvoir’s “inner metamorphosis” has changed girls’ psychology in the years since the AAUW report.

career and family aspirations) and in 2005 surveyed 700 girls and 228 boys in the sixth through twelfth grades in a range of urban, suburban, and rural U.S. and Canadian schools. He then interviewed the top 113 high-school girls, born for the most part between 1984 and 1988. These were alpha girls who had attained a 3.8 or better grade-point average and at least one leadership position, pursued 10 or more hours of extracurriculars weekly, and scored high on measures of “achievement motivation.”

Kindlon found signs of a new “alpha psychology” among *all* the girls. There were no sex differences in depressive symptoms, no drop in self-esteem across the six grades, and no lack of confidence. By tenth grade, in fact, the girls he surveyed had *higher* self-esteem than boys, and alphas had significantly higher self-esteem than non-alphas. Lower socioeconomic status tended to lower self-esteem scores for both sexes, irrespective of race or ethnicity, but Kindlon interviewed many “inner-city alphas”—the phenomenon is not confined to “elites.” (Consistent with previous research, he did find higher rates of anxiety among girls than boys—perhaps because girls “want to get things done,” he speculates, although he notes that biological factors could be involved. In either case, he cautions against overemphasizing the anxiety scores, because boys may underreport their own anxiety.)

“Loss of voice” may be a thing of the past, as Kindlon suggests, but gender pressures persist, says Wendy Luttrell, Aronson associate professor in human development and education: “We can’t talk about how girls are doing today without talking about boys and girls in relation to each other.” As a feminist ethnographer who analyzes gender, race, and class in educational settings, she believes kids today, in fact, are still “incredibly constrained” by gender. She recently observed such forces in action at the close of her youngest daughter’s summer college-prep program. The karaoke competition between sex-segregated groups was “a *Saturday Night Live* mimicry of what gender roles in contemporary society look like,” she reports. The girls performed “sexy-but-cute Britney Spears acts,” while the boys presented aggressive, sexualized, hip-hop dance

Alpha girls don’t identify with a passive-feminine sex role, yet maintain “female” skills like social networking. They also know how to do things that only men and boys traditionally did, such as “channel their aggression in a competitive situation—not to get too mad, but to get mad enough so you can play harder—and to compete and to enjoy winning.”

He knew that past and recent research in a variety of fields had already revealed gender differences in mental illness: girls and women have twice men’s risk for depression and anxiety disorders, while boys and men are twice as likely to suffer substance-use disorders and schizophrenia. Some theories attribute this depression/anxiety gender gap, which appears in adolescence, to differences in the biology of sex hormones; other explanations focus on “gender socialization.” Investigators have located numerous gender-related risk factors for depression, including passive-feminine sex-role identification, helpless coping styles, and low self-esteem. Body dissatisfaction is also key: in adolescence, boys gain muscle while girls gain fat—just as body-image pressures intensify.

To assess the psychological and social health of a new generation of girls, Kindlon designed the Adolescent Life Survey to measure 19 dimensions of teen experience (from mental health to

numbers. “Each group played off the extreme of the other,” she notes, wishing the hypermasculine and hyperfeminine performances had been far less stereotypical, with “both boys and girls crossing what we consider to be ‘male’ and ‘female’ roles.”

The alpha generation may yet fulfill that wish. “Girls are now able to play more roles,” says Kindlon. Alpha girls don’t identify with a passive-feminine sex role, yet maintain “female” skills like social networking. They also know how to do things that only men and boys traditionally did, such as “channel their aggression in a competitive situation—not to get too mad, but to get mad enough so you can play harder—and to compete and to enjoy winning.” Fathers play a big part in this psychology, Kindlon adds. He has found that alphas’ dads are more involved in their daughters’ lives than non-alphas’ dads. They can pass along “male ways of being,” such as rougher play and greater risk-taking, and “male ways of thinking.”



This “hybrid” self, an “androgynous” personality incorporating aspects of both parents, is a cornerstone of alpha psychology, he believes. The more androgynous girls in his study had higher self-esteem, were less anxious or self-conscious, and engaged in less promiscuous sex and substance abuse. Because they can choose from what feminist psychologists call “separate” (traditionally masculine) or “connected” (traditionally feminine) styles of being in the world, they have a psychological advantage. “Girls are better adapted,” he says. “They’re more flexible and have more skill. Boys haven’t changed as much—or haven’t been induced as much to play a variety of roles.”

What girls are saying, adds Kindlon, is, “I have flexibility that no other woman has ever had in history, or certainly not in any numbers, and I can play any role—‘Bring it on.’” As one “hybrid” alpha (now at Harvard) told him, “I can wear high heels to my linear algebra class. I can be sexy or I can be feminine, or I can also blow the boys away in this really tough class. I can do anything. I don’t see it as inconsistent to be wearing high heels. I don’t feel like I’ve got to dress down or dress like a man to do this class. I can still be a woman and do all these other things.”

## The Rise of the Alpha Girl

LONG-EMERGING CHANGES in girls’ access to higher education and career options have prepared the ground for girls’ “emancipated confidence.” In fact, aspects of alpha girlhood aren’t new. “Girls have been ahead of boys in pre-college education for well over 100 years,” says Allison professor of economics Lawrence Katz: in high-school graduation rates and in constituting two-thirds of honors students. “What was striking in the past [was] that even though girls dominated boys through high school, boys were given greater opportunities to go on to college.”

But as the women’s movement dismantled labor-market barriers and an accelerating service economy expanded job opportunities in the 1970s, girls and young women expected and found greater economic benefits from going to college. Add the Pill and later marriage and first birth; subtract male incentives like the GI Bill and disproportionate family support; multiply by behavioral differences between girls and boys—and you have the formula for exponential change, argue Lee professor of economics Claudia Goldin and Katz in a recent journal article, “The Homecoming of American College Women: The Reversal of the College Gender Gap” (with Ilyana Kuziemko, Ph.D. ’07).

“It’s never clear why the American press wakes up suddenly and says, ‘Oh! Where are the men on campus?’ The crossover point was way back in 1980—25 years ago!” says Goldin. Headlines imply that male college attendance has dropped, yet there’s been “enormous growth in B.A. completion rates” for both sexes, she notes. The female rate of increase has been much higher, however, so the ratios of the 1960s and ’70s have flipped—to 58 percent female nationwide today. What drove this dramatic catch-up and reversal? “The playing field and the labor market are much more even,” says Katz. “That’s really what’s changed.”

Surprisingly, however, the rise of women in higher education began with college parity, early in the twentieth century. From 1900 to the Crash of 1929, women went to college in numbers equal to men. A fraction went to the “Seven Sisters,” but the majority enrolled in public institutions, such as teachers’ colleges and the large state institutions that accepted women. Then the Great Depression drove a wedge into parity. Unemployed men

needed the college advantage, and school districts’ new “marriage bars” against married female teachers made teaching degrees less valuable to women.

Male-to-female ratios peaked in 1947, after World War II. “You get this huge spike of guys coming back from Europe and Asia,” Goldin says, when there were “two and a half men” on college campuses for every woman. The GI Bill enabled men from many age groups to attend college at the same time, bolstering male enrollment until after the Korean War. More women went as well, because college benefits often included “your M.R.S.,” notes Goldin. Then came Vietnam—and draft deferment. Because more draftable men went to and stayed in college, male college graduation rates peaked for men born in the late 1940s. Women also have “a Vietnam effect,” Goldin says: “If boys go, girls go.” Women were catching up, but the gender gap in B.A. completion in 1970 still favored men, 57 percent to 43 percent.

By 1972, girls in the top socioeconomic quartile achieved college parity despite the war. In two decades, by 1992, girls at every socioeconomic level had a substantial lead. “Families are not discriminating in resources for college in favor of boys as they may have done 75 years ago,” says Katz. And in the lower half of economic distribution, the female-to-male ratio today is considerably higher than in the upper half, a reversal of traditional patterns. (The female advantage is larger among African Americans and Hispanics than among whites, but the decline in the male-to-female ratio of undergraduates during the past 35 years is not due primarily to changes in the ethnic mix of the college-aged population, write Goldin and Katz: “The bottom line is that the new gender gap favoring females is found throughout the socioeconomic distribution,” and it is similar for whites, all ethnic and racial subgroups, and the entire U.S. population.)

Girls and young women today also invest in “their own human capital” through what they choose to study in high school and college, due to dramatic changes in the labor market. Reflecting on college majors, Goldin says, “The huge shift is out of education into business.” Until the 1970s, most female undergraduates concentrated in literature, languages, and education, because most of the job opportunities were in teaching. In 1970, for example, 56 percent of working 30- to 34-year-old college-educated women were teachers, compared to only 18 percent in 2000. By 2005, 50 percent of business majors were women. And “psychology is the English of yesterday,” adds Goldin: 78 percent of psychology concentrators today are women. As their opportunities changed, girls took more high-school science and math, achieving virtual parity by 1992 in numbers of courses (and narrowing the math-score gap), while remaining ahead in foreign languages.

Meanwhile, boys’ progress relative to girls’ was less dramatic, and even stagnating at lower socioeconomic levels. In Goldin and Katz’s “cost-benefit analysis” of college returns, girls and young women have lower “nonpecuniary costs” for college-prep and attendance than boys and young men, and they earn higher economic benefits from going to college (women without college earn less than men without college). Moreover, note Goldin and Katz, boys have more learning disabilities, suffer from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder at triple the rate of girls, engage in more criminal activity, and spend less time on schoolwork than girls.

School has also become harder and more competitive since 1983, when the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk*, notes Dan Kindlon. The girls born at

that time and since “were starting to make the psychological shift predicted by Beauvoir, so they rose to the challenge,” he says. “Girls are doing the work and boys aren’t—boys are playing Grand Theft Auto.” Kindlon once asked his youngest daughter, “Is it just that girls are smarter than boys? And at age 11 she said, ‘No, they’re not smarter, but they have more stamina,’ which I think really does characterize it.”

Yet college-bound girls, despite their hard work, face stiffer admissions competition than boys. A *U.S. News* analysis of a decade of data from 1,400 colleges discovered that schools maintained gender balance by admitting girls at “drastically different rates”—on average 13 percentage points *lower*—than boys. “When a number of state universities started becoming incredibly female [70 percent or more],” explains Katz, “private universities started doing things that look like affirmative action for boys. Admissions officers basically said, ‘We were getting worried about the gender mix, so we shaded things.’ They’re bringing in on-the-margin guys who are less qualified than women in order to maintain some gender balance.”

Fertility control, meanwhile, has helped women achieve their ambitions well beyond college. As Goldin and Katz argue in another journal article, “The Power of the Pill: Oral Contraceptives and Women’s Career and Marriage Decisions,” the birth-control pill, approved in 1960 but made available to college-age single women only in the late 1960s and early ’70s, allowed young women to delay both marriage and childbearing while they pursued graduate and professional school. Women now earn the majority of M.D., D.D.S., and J.D. professional degrees, and the majority of all postgraduate degrees.

“For the first time in history, females have complete fertility control, which means they aren’t getting pregnant, dropping out, having babies,” notes neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine, a former Harvard Medical School resident and faculty member who is the author of *The Female Brain* and founder and director of the Women’s Mood and Hormone Clinic at the University of California, San Francisco. She believes that the “alpha” phenomenon also involves “a paradigm shift in the way parents think about their girls’ options in the world,” in part because unwanted pregnancy is out of the picture. “There’s a whole generation of girls whose creativity and intellect are being supported by their families. Their mothers and fathers are cheering them on, coaching them, and setting the bar high, so that their ambition can soar and take them high.” With a level playing field, then, in family resources, higher education, economic opportunity, and fertility control, a critical mass of girls and young women have achieved—and are achieving—the historic potential of their sex.

## Strong Women, Strong Girls?

“A LOT OF THE HOPES of the feminist movement and the girls’ programming movement are being realized, but there’s a tremendous amount of work still to be done, particularly for girls without educational or economic advantages,” says Lindsay Hyde ’04, founder and executive director of Strong Women, Strong Girls (SWSG), a nonprofit organization that fosters high aspirations and success skills among low-income minority girls by involving them with strong female role models. Hyde’s inspiration was her own mother, a Miami single mom who cut the grass, tiled the bathroom floor, redid the electrical system, and “demonstrated for me that women could really do anything!”

Keen to share her own experience with young girls, Hyde designed and taught a curriculum based on historic and contemporary women at the local elementary school during her last semester of high school. When she couldn’t find a girl-centered service opportunity at Harvard that fall, she used her curriculum to start a new afterschool program through Phillips Brooks House, beginning with six undergraduate women and 30 girls from the third, fourth, and fifth grades at Roxbury and Mission Hill elementary schools. Seven years later, SWSG serves 400 mostly African-American and Latina girls at 32 schools and community centers in Boston and Pittsburgh, with 120 mentors from seven colleges and universities. (For her work, Hyde recently received the Samuel S. Beard Award for Greatest Public Service by an Individual 35 or Under, one of the five Jefferson Awards conferred annually by the American Institute for Public Service.)

To offset the effects of poverty, gender stereotyping, and low expectations that can undermine girls’ academic confidence and direct them to narrow education and career options, SWSG combines the study of diverse female role models with team-mentoring, field trips, and community service. Two or three undergraduate mentors lead 10 to 12 girls in weekly lessons built around a particular skill, such as critical thinking. Sessions begin by reading the biography of a woman exemplifying that skill, such as Sally Ride, the first American female astronaut, in order to “paint a picture of the steps she needed to take to go from being 10 years old



to being an astronaut, because that's one of the hardest things for our girls to figure out," Hyde explains. Girls then apply the skill-of-the-week in a hands-on project—using everyday objects such as paper plates and paper towel rolls to build space shuttles, for example. Lessons conclude with journal writing, with prompts like, "What are two ways that you'll use your critical thinking skills this week?" SWSG also teaches coping skills (from healthy eating and exercise to stress management), and partners with sports-focused nonprofits to provide girls with a holistic experience. During the last six weeks of the school year, the girls and their mentors create a service project for their community.

The volunteers, who serve as role models themselves, are a key element of the Strong Women, Strong Girls program. These smart, successful young women from various backgrounds introduce their inner-city students to diverse cultures, ideas, and career paths. "The girls may see a woman who's an English major,

right yet!" says Hyde, who was recently scouting wedding locations with her fiancé, Blair Baldwin '02, B '09. In the course of graduating from college, working for a couple years, going back to graduate school, perhaps starting a company or nonprofit (as she has done), and having a family, the question her cohort asks is, "How am I going to fit in all of these great things that I want to do?"

Alpha girls want to do everything—have successful careers *and* marriage and children, in sequence or combination. How will they handle the realities of the workplace and the tough choices their own mothers faced? "It won't be quite as easy as it was for them in high school and college," says Dan Kindlon. "They'll get slapped around a little when they get out into the world," he thinks, "but they're ready for the challenge." And as Hyde points out, "Some of the structural challenges around balancing work and family—maternity- and paternity-leave policies, women's

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who's really passionate about writing and poetry and literature, working with a woman who's a physics major, who's really passionate about science and electronics," says Hyde. "They look up to both women, who are doing very different things with very different interests and passions."

Many of these girls know few people who've gone to college besides their mentors, notes Hyde, but "they start to feel, 'Gosh, maybe college is something that I could do.'" To encourage this sense of familiarity, SWSG includes campus field trips. "We have some girls who now have been to Harvard three years in a row, and they really feel that it's a place that holds possibility for them to be there. That's a tremendous change, to go from saying, 'I don't know anybody who's ever gone to college' to walking onto the Harvard campus and saying, 'I feel like I belong here. I know where I'm going, and this is a place that feels comfortable for me.'"

The program works. Most parents feel their daughters have learned new skills (94 percent), increased their self-esteem (88 percent), and strengthened their belief in themselves as a leader (80 percent). The mentors also benefit: nearly 95 percent report greater self-confidence and empowerment. At many SWSG partner colleges, there are waiting lists of volunteers.

Strong Women, Strong Girls is helping distribute the benefits of feminism, yet the young women who volunteer often "come to the work with less of a politically oriented agenda and much more of a service-oriented agenda," reports Hyde. Volunteers frequently tell her, "I had positive experiences as a young woman, and I believe that it is incumbent on me to help other young women also have positive experiences." As a result, more inner-city girls are breaking out of gender stereotypes and gaining the "emancipated confidence" of alpha psychology to expand their educational and career opportunities.

### Having It All?

"THE MYTH OF HAVING IT ALL, and having it all at once, is what my generation is working to figure out—and we haven't gotten it

wages, and on-ramp/off-ramp opportunities in the workforce—have not caught up quite as fast as women's own belief in themselves and in their capacities."

In Kindlon's research, he found that financial success was a top priority for nearly all the alpha girls surveyed, and that almost a third were determined to get rich. But they will encounter a persistent wage gap: in the United States, for each dollar earned by white men, women overall still earn only 77 cents, and African-American and Hispanic women earn even less, 64 cents and 52 cents, respectively. A recent AAUW study found that even though women earn higher grades than men, this superior academic performance doesn't translate into higher—or even equal—compensation. A year after college, women make 80 percent of the salaries of their male peers; 10 years later, the gap widens.

But alphas are starting to reverse the wage gap for the first time in large cities like New York, Boston, and Chicago. According to Queens College sociologist Andrew Beveridge, women between the ages of 21 to 30 working full time had median incomes as much as 17 percent higher than their male peers—because 53 percent of the women had college degrees compared to 38 percent of the men. "There are going to be more living college-educated women in this country in about five to 10 years than college-educated men. Historically, that's unprecedented," notes Kindlon. "We're going to see some really interesting changes in the next 20 or 30 years."

Women's educational advantage will influence work, marriage, and family in unexpected ways. African-American women now earn B.A.s at almost twice the rate of black males, for example, which is contributing to huge declines in their marriage rates, note Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz. Although marriage among educated whites is occurring later and more permanently, many educated black women don't just delay marriage, they don't marry at all. With potential black male partners facing jobless rates of up to 50 percent for high-school graduates and up to 72



percent for dropouts, and interracial marriage still a rarity, educated and employed black women often decide to raise their children out of wedlock. Recent reports suggest that some professional black women are starting to enter interracial relationships, however, so the alpha generation may change these marriage patterns. Meanwhile, Katz and Goldin believe the “marriage gap” reinforces an increasingly polarized and unequal socioeconomic environment for children.

“The mothering piece is really the fault line when it comes to class and race,” says ethnographer Wendy Luttrell, author of *Schoolsmart and Motherwise: Working-Class Women's Identity and Schooling* (1997). For middle- and upper-class girls and women struggling to balance rewarding work and family, “the tradeoff is about being the perfect mom and doing the perfect job—about being able to do *everything*,” she says. But for poor and working-class, increasingly single, mothers, “It’s not about tradeoffs, it’s about, ‘How am I going to support my kids and keep them safe?’” For these women, the challenge is meeting the double-duty demands of mothering and low-wage work, predominantly in service-

sector jobs and often for professional women, who employ and rely upon low-income women (disproportionately women of color and recent immigrants) to do all kinds of family-care work, says Luttrell. The current rhetoric about work-family conflicts emphasizes personal choices regarding working and/or mothering, “but this overlooks the larger mother-care-work crisis caused by unequal opportunity, declining social services, and unjust policies that pit employment demands on wage-poor mothers against the care needs of their children.”

Not all young women will choose to be mothers (26 percent of white women born in 1960 with a college degree are childless, for example), but the majority will. With 72 percent of American mothers working outside the home, the work/family challenge is widespread. “From a women’s rights point of view, that’s still the biggest hurdle to overcome,” notes Kindlon.

Work/family issues play a significant role in the wage gap. Some companies avoid investing in training women who may take time off for maternity and childrearing, according to Burbank professor of political economy Torben Iversen. Once career

## From Title IX to Riot Grrrls

**T**ODAY’S AMERICAN GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN may be the daughters of feminism, but their world isn’t always the one envisioned by their foremothers. “Little girls dress in pink and they’re princesses, but at the same time they’re going to grow up to wear five-inch heels and kick ass!” says Lee professor of economics Claudia Goldin, an old-school feminist who wants more equality, not difference, between the sexes. The rise of “girl power” and the celebration of “difference”—propelled by forces ranging from Title IX to feminist punk-rock bands—have changed American culture, although not all girls have benefited equally.

The struggle for women’s rights in the United States is often described in terms of “waves.” First-wave feminism culminated with women’s suffrage in 1920, while the resurgent second-wave feminism of the 1960s and ’70s focused on reproductive freedom, sexual harassment, equal pay, and access to education and jobs. The second-wave mother of the girls’ movement was Carol Gilligan, formerly Graham professor of gender studies at Harvard Graduate School of Education, whose book on women’s psychological development, *In a Different Voice* (1982), inspired countless studies on girls and sweeping educational changes. Another second-wave development was Title IX.

“My students have been *deeply* touched by Title IX” and its expectation that girls would participate in sports equally to boys, says assistant professor of studies of women, gender, and sexuality and of history and literature Robin Bernstein, when asked about girls’ self-esteem. Her work in performance studies examines “what people do with bodies.” Athletics, she says, significantly changes a girl’s relationship with her body. To help her students understand the law’s impact, she tells them that in the 1970s, “a sports bra was a specialized piece of sports equipment, not something you could buy at any department store—which speaks to a huge change in expectations for women and athletics.” People don’t recognize Title IX’s impact, she adds, “not just

on female athletes who made varsity or went on to the Olympics, but on the masses of girls who grew up with the expectation, ‘Sure, I’ll play soccer. Why not?’”

Female sports participation has skyrocketed since Richard Nixon signed Title IX of the 1972 Educational Amendments to the 1964 Civil Rights Act into law—by 450 percent in college and an astounding 900 percent in high school (to 2.9 million girls) in 2005-2006. (Not everyone has benefited as intended. For inner-city girls, for example, sports fields are often nonexistent and schools can’t afford the expense of equipment, lessons, and travel.)

Furthermore, Title IX is not just about sports. It not only bans bias (in recruitment, financial aid, benefits, and scholarships) against either sex in any educational setting receiving federal aid, it also outlaws sexual harassment and protects equal access to math and science, higher education, career training, technology, and employment. Wendy Luttrell, Aronson associate professor in human development and education and the author of *Pregnant Bodies, Fertile Minds: Gender, Race, and the Schooling of Pregnant Teens* (2003), notes that “Title IX was also initiated so that pregnant girls could stay in school.” (Public schools used to expel pregnant students and bar visibly pregnant teachers from classrooms. “Title IX got rid of the *de jure* discrimination that pregnant girls cannot be in school,” Luttrell says, “but *de facto* discrimination”—either isolating the girls from resources and regular classes, or mainstreaming them without support—“is still quite prevalent.”)

While the effects of Title IX were taking hold, a “third wave” of American feminism—advocating “difference” and “girlness”—was rising. Feminist performance artists like the Guerilla Girls and the V-Girls reclaimed the word “girl” in the 1980s, and in the early 1990s, the punk band Bikini Kill famously put the *grrr* into “grrrl” and helped catalyze a movement of Riot Grrrls. Young third-wavers resisted sexism through their music,

choices are taken into account, Iversen has found that “statistical discrimination” against women (basing judgments about individuals from a group on average assumptions about that group) is a major cause of the wage gap. Katz believes that among college graduates, career “choice” is likely the largest factor causing the wage gender gap, while traditional sex discrimination remains substantial but is diminishing. He suggests that behavioral differences play a secondary role: men tend to negotiate better salaries or bonuses, while women tend to accept what’s offered, and men seem to thrive on “pure competition” more than women. (Because studies have found that some employers “penalize” women who negotiate, female reluctance to negotiate may be self-protective against bias.)

According to the *Harvard Crimson* survey of the class of 2007, such factors are still in play for recent alphas. Women and men were heading to graduate school (22 percent) and finding jobs (50

percent) in equal numbers, but there was a significant gender gap in median starting salaries: men were contracted to earn \$10,000 more. “That’s entirely explained by which sectors they go into,” says Katz: 58 percent of men chose finance, compared to 43 percent of women (still a large percentage of women choosing a male-dominated field). Eleven women planned to work at non-governmental organizations, but no men, adds Goldin: “Men chose to work 80 hours a week at Goldman Sachs and make \$60,000, not including bonuses.” However, *within* banking or consulting, they report, the wage gap disappears.

Goldin is concerned about the “extremely large” economic penalty for choosing to balance family and career down the line. Female and male lawyers straight out of law school have similar salaries, she notes, but 10

the Internet, and grass-roots activism, on the one hand, and on the other, through a “girlie” feminism that championed “girl stuff,” from Barbie dolls and high heels to knitting.

“Girl Power,” the third wave’s best-known catch phrase, went mainstream as the slogan for the British pop group the Spice Girls. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services even named its first girl-centered public-health initiative Girl Power! ([www.girlpower.gov](http://www.girlpower.gov)). Today girls’ programming includes cultural staples like the Ms. Foundation’s original Take Our Daughters to Work Day (now Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day) and organizations like Strong Women, Strong Girls (SWSG).

Even the preferred sex of infants has acquired a girl-power spin. “Now people say, ‘Oh, I’m having a boy. This is going to be so difficult,’” says Goldin. “We’ve seen a huge shift in what is considered to be the perfect child—little girls are just ‘easier,’ they’re ‘smarter,’ they ‘mature faster.’” Popular treatments of sex-difference research may be responsible: “Men, Get Ready to Develop Brain Envy,” declares the back cover of *The Female Brain*, by neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine, a former Harvard Medical School resident and professor.

Brizendine has found a generational divide in the response to her work on this biology-psychology connection. Girls and women under 30 send grateful e-mails, she says: “Younger women have come up in the world not thinking they have limitations on their intellect at all. They’ve embraced their own intelligence, and they’re moving forward.” But women of her own over-50 generation “don’t like it. They’re afraid the message will hurt women instead of help them. If you say anything about difference, it means *unequal*, and unequal means women lose.” Brizendine was a second-waver, but now, she says, “I call myself a third-wave feminist, which means embracing and celebrating the differences.”

Whatever the wave, few daughters of feminism identify themselves by the “f-word,” as Dan Kindlon, clinical psychologist and

adjunct lecturer at the Harvard School of Public Health, found among the alpha girls he studies. SWSG’s Lindsay Hyde ’04 reports that her volunteer mentors “have really differing levels of comfort with what feminism means.” Demonizing rants against “male-bashing *feminazis*” are partly to blame, so SWSG organizationally defines feminism, which “has become such a flash point in the political realm, as ‘ensuring that *everyone*, men and women, have access to the resources they need to make positive choices in their lives,’” says Hyde. “Using that definition, I absolutely consider myself a feminist.”





years later their earnings are very different. Many professions were structured for “the *Father Knows Best* world, when every person in the labor market had a mirror image in the home,” which freed time for the paid worker. Hence “rising to the top” (tenure, partnership, profit shares) required enormous amounts of time—on average 80 hours a week. For women, the traditional promotional clock often conflicts with their biological clock, and many who want children don’t “opt into” the partner track, says Goldin, choosing instead less demanding—and less remunerative—corporate counsel, government, or nonprofit work, or having a small firm. (Being slow to adapt to women’s realities has cost law firms dearly, however, prompting restructuring that will benefit alpha girls. To attract and retain female attorneys, some firms now offer flextime partner tracks; “lattice” rather than “ladder” careers—climbing interspersed with slower childbearing periods; on-site daycare; flat-rate or project-based compensation rather than billable hours; and part-time partnerships.)

The alpha girls Kindlon studied were aware that “having it all” isn’t easy. Most knew their career path: medicine was at the top (25 percent), followed by STEM (science, technology, engineer-

professional women comfortably “wrap together career and family,” notes Goldin. Many can even afford to “opt out” for a couple of years to be with their kids. “I have no crocodile tears for women at this level,” she says. It’s the women in their early thirties who dropped out of high school (10 percent), or graduated but didn’t do any college (25 percent), about whom Goldin is concerned. “They aren’t going to do as well.”

Strong Women, Strong Girls seeks to change those statistics for a future generation. SWSG’s Lindsey Hyde also supports flextime solutions in the present. Her female staff find creative ways to balance work and family, and their partners and spouses are assuming more domestic responsibilities, too. “Women in my generation are asking their partners to be more involved, and considering that before entering a more serious relationship,” she says. “Is this somebody who’s going to support me in the choices that I make, whatever those choices may be?”

Alpha girls won’t make the same mistake their mothers made, says Kindlon—“have a job *and* do 90 percent of the domestic stuff.” They’ll tell their husbands or partners, “We’re going to split this. If you’re home, you’re going to change diapers the same

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ing, math) fields and art/music (13 percent each), business (12 percent), and politics/law (9 percent). Medicine was the first choice, Kindlon believes, because most female physicians can and do practice part-time, allowing a lucrative, satisfying career with time for kids. By specialty, the percentage of female residents in 2003 was highest for obstetrics/gynecology (71 percent), followed by pediatrics (65 percent), dermatology (57 percent), pathology and psychiatry (50 percent each), family medicine (49 percent), and surgery (24 percent). How might subsequent choices influence alpha women’s salaries? “Women are using their market power *not* to maximize their earnings, but to get the job that allows more balance,” says Katz. They’re forming group ob/gyn practices and earning \$140,000 a year for 50-hour weeks and not coming in at night, while men are making \$180,000 for 60 hours and taking the emergency calls.

The work/family challenge involves more than wages, of course. When young women face the reality of child-rearing, there may be a psychological penalty, says Louann Brizendine. Her psychiatry-neurology residents are “two years out from hanging up their shingle,” she reports, “and I don’t see them giving a second thought to anything holding them back from what they want to do—up to age 27 or 28.” The question of children looms ahead, but “they go full steam with their ambition—the alpha female is out there doing her thing.” Then comes the critical, pivotal point of turning 30, when “you’ve got about 10 years left to have kids”—and alpha confidence falters. “All of a sudden my students start to think, ‘How am I going to reserve part of my energy, my self, my creativity, and my time, to have kids?’ They get anxious.”

Of course, with money for good daycare and good schools,

way I do. If the house is dirty, either I’ll get used to it, or you’re going to help me out with it.” This generation won’t feel “it’s *their* work to do, as a lot of women today do”; as a result, men will pick up a bigger share and women’s lives won’t feel as unbalanced.

“It’s very possible that my daughters will be the primary breadwinners in their homes,” Kindlon speculates. “They’re certainly not looking for a husband to provide for them!” Single mothers already carry that responsibility, but more married mothers will, too. In fact, “if the college-educated person is making more money and has health benefits and the other person doesn’t, who’s going to cut back on the career? There’s no question, I’ve seen it. I have nephews whose wives are working, and they’re staying home with the kids, because money’s behind it, and nothing’s stopping that trend.” (Some estimates number U.S. stay-at-home dads at 2 million.) “The real fuel for the engine is going to be that women will have more money, so they’ll have more of a say over what happens,” he adds. With parenting no longer “women’s work” alone, perhaps a true work/life balance is possible for men *and* women.

For Hyde, a different responsibility is foremost. “One of the things that is really important for women of my generation to be cognizant of is that we *have* had tremendous opportunities and that it is incumbent on us to make sure that the young women—and young men—who are coming up behind us have access to those same opportunities. As people who have been so privileged to live in this time period, we really do have a responsibility to continue to make change moving forward.”

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