

but which women may be able to resist more effectively.

A major source in the sex discrepancy in mortality rates appears to be related to the use of tobacco, especially as it pertains to respiratory cancer and to other associated pathologies such as cardiovascular disease. One study estimates that approximately 75 per cent of the increase in the male-female differential in life expectancy (between the ages of thirty-seven and eighty-seven) over the period from 1910 to 1962 in the United States can be accounted for by the effects of smoking.

Traditionally, our society has accepted cigarette smoking for men and discouraged it for women. While smoking has never been culturally prescribed as part of the male gender role, the differential use of cigarettes by men and women is, nevertheless, related to our system of gender roles and its resulting double standard. Older women in 1980 enjoyed a mortality rate favourable to older men in part because most of them had not smoked or had not smoked heavily. However, the proportion of young women who smoke cigarettes has increased in recent years, and as this occurs it seems likely that the rate of tobacco-related pathologies of women will increase as women who smoke reach midlife.

What can be said regarding the future? A narrowing of the sex gap in mortality can be expected, although it is doubtful that unity will ever be achieved. A narrowing can be expected on the following grounds.

One, in the last decade, the increase in the sex mortality differential has slowed down in pace. Two, reductions in maternal mortality have played an important role in the past, but further reductions will be minimal given current low rates.

Three, women are engaging in more activities that were previously reserved for men and that have life-threatening qualities.

Four activities can be singled out in this regard. One is driving cars. As we have already seen, among young persons, deaths due to motor-vehicle accidents is one area where the sex mortality differential is narrowing. And still, women drive 50 per cent fewer miles annually than men.

There is plenty of room for women

to "catch up." Another is cigarette smoking. Even if women smoke differently (i.e., inhale less deeply, smoke lighter tar/nicotine cigarettes) and even if there is some protective mechanism within women, if enough women smoke long enough, there is bound to be a mortality effect.

Another activity is alcohol consumption. There is evidence which suggests that women are drinking more. There is also some speculation that women's bodies (particularly their livers) are less able to handle alcohol than are men's. If this is so, the implications for the sex mortality differential are clear. A fourth activity surrounds women climbing the career ladder. As more and more women enter the executive and professional ranks, the coronary-prone Type-A personality type may become more common among women.

At the present time, gender roles are changing. It seems that women are taking on men's behaviours, rather than the reverse. To the degree that this happens, women's mortality will more closely approximate that of men's. However, women's biological superiority will probably ensure that women's longevity will continue to be greater than that of men's.

#### Further Reading:

Robert D. Retherford, *The Changing Sex Differential in Mortality*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1975.

Jean Veevers and Ellen Gee, "Women Drivers/Men Drivers: A Synthesis of Empirical Research on Sex Differences in Driving," *Population Research and Policy Review* (forthcoming).

Lois M. Verbrugge, "Recent Trends in Sex Mortality Differentials in the United States," *Women and Health*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1980), pp. 17-37.

\*For the full text of this article, see Jean Veevers and Ellen Gee, "Accelerating Sex Mortality Differentials in Canada: An Analysis of Contributing Factors," *Social Biology* (forthcoming).

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## Recollections

feather boa  
teasing smiling sensual  
memories of romantic illusions  
lying with you  
pretending love was the reason

straw  
stretching into the purse  
my grandmother gave me  
hoping  
I would be a young lady

dancing laughing  
greek with tight pants  
inviting women  
to slip dollars in  
beside his sex

summer wind brushing  
past the ceramic pieces  
strung on a rope  
my mother smiling at me  
love and fear in her eyes

light knobby frail  
age old

once I bought a shawl  
hand knit by some old women  
for six dollars  
knitting their hope for protection  
into clothes  
worn and discarded  
by those they love  
and those they will never see

*Hilary Mackey*

Vancouver, British Columbia