

sends us a mixed message.” On the one hand, she says, he portrays homosexuals “as sharing the same emotions, longings, and dreams as heterosexuals,” but on the other, he says that in gay relationships, there is (in Sullivan’s words), “more likely to be a greater understanding of the need for extramarital outlets between two men than between a man and a woman; and again, the lack of children gives gay couples greater freedom.”

Gay marriage would likely seem a parody

to most people, one that could further weaken an already beleaguered institution, James Q. Wilson suspects. Writing in *Commentary* (March 1996), he observes: “To me, the chief limitation of Sullivan’s view is that it presupposes that marriage would have the same domesticating effect on homosexual members as it has on heterosexuals, while leaving the latter largely unaffected. Those are very large assumptions that no modern society has ever tested.”

## *Farewell to a Factoid*

“A Re-evaluation of the Economic Consequences of Divorce” by Richard R. Peterson, “The Economic Consequences of Divorce Are Still Unequal” by Lenore J. Weitzman, and “Statistical Errors, Faulty Conclusions, Misguided Policy: Reply to Weitzman” by Peterson, in *American Sociological Review* (June 1996), Dept. of Sociology, Univ. of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz. 85721.

In the ongoing debate about the consequences of relaxed divorce laws, one statistic has stood out: after divorce, women suffer a 73 percent decline in their standard of living, while men experience a 42 percent increase. This staggering finding first appeared in sociologist Lenore Weitzman’s award-winning 1985 book, *The Divorce Revolution*, and it has been repeated hundreds of times since, not only in scholarly journals but in newspapers, magazines, and court cases. Yet the dramatic statistic, Peterson contends—and Weitzman now concedes—is simply wrong.

Weitzman’s finding was based on interviews with people who were divorced in Los Angeles in 1977, seven years after the state introduced a “no-fault” divorce law; such laws allow a spouse to win a divorce without proving a “fault” such as adultery. This and other reforms (including equal division of marital property) were supposed to put women on an equal footing with men, but Weitzman’s work suggested that women (and children) now fared much worse. (All 50 states since have adopted some form of no-fault law.)

Peterson, a sociologist at the Social Science Research Council in New York,

replicated Weitzman’s analysis, using corrected data he derived from Weitzman’s raw data. His re-analysis found a 27 percent average decline in women’s standard of living and a 10 percent increase in men’s. These results are roughly in line with the studies done before Weitzman’s.

Although he performed various operations on the data, Peterson says he is at a loss to explain how Weitzman got her inaccurate results. So is Weitzman, who says that her own original corrected data file no longer exists. She claims that she herself was originally skeptical about the 73 percent figure but that “my computer expert” verified it, “and I accepted that.”

The “major finding” of her book, she says, still stands: “Women and children are unfairly and disproportionately burdened by divorce.” True, responds Peterson, but her argument about no-fault divorce and related reforms does not. Although she herself did not favor a return to fault-based divorce, others who did used her inaccurate data to bolster their case. But rolling back no-fault, it now appears, may not be much help to divorced women and their children.

## *Baseball Goes Uptown*

“The Future of Baseball” by Shannon Dortch, in *American Demographics* (Apr. 1996), 127 W. State St., Ithaca, N.Y. 14850.

A baseball crowd “is a beer-drinking crowd, not a mixed-drink crowd,” Bill Veeck, the late owner of the Chicago White Sox, once observed. He never saw the cappuccino

and cheesecake stands at Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore, notes Dortch, senior editor of *American Demographics*. Baseball today, she argues, is a sport for the

## Regarding Myself

Writing in *Commentary* (Feb. 1996), Joseph Adelson, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, considers the state of scientific knowledge concerning one of the decade's most highly prized commodities.

*So what, in the end, do we know about self-esteem? As huge as is the outpouring of books designed to laud and to enhance this elusive quality, the amount of serious research or theoretical writing on the subject is surprisingly small. Until just a few years ago, most textbooks in developmental psychology did not even list self-esteem in the index.*

*As for actual findings, few of them come as a surprise. The most important is that, like almost all other traits of personality, self-esteem starts early and stays late. Those who think either well or poorly of themselves as young children will continue to do so into adulthood, and, within limits, under almost any circumstances. Although some of our greatest dramas and works of fiction are built around acts of personal transformation, they are dramas precisely because they are improbable—out of the ordinary. In the typical course of events we find continuity: Johnny, a troublesome child at four, is troublesome at nine, and by the time he reaches adolescence he is a handful, perhaps even beyond reach.*

*Self-esteem, then, is very deeply rooted, and once in place it is hard—not impossible, but hard—to dislodge or overcome. I put this so strongly precisely because the self-esteem literature, particularly in the field of education, does not. Rather, rejecting the notion that character is destiny, it prefers in its utopian way to believe in the infinite openness of personality. In this literature, self-esteem is not inherent but circumstantial, and can be raised or lowered by a teacher's behavior. It is also extraordinarily delicate, and easily bruised.*

*I have already indicated my skepticism with regard to this last assertion, which has become bedrock to the entire education industry. As Charles Sykes spells out in gruesome detail in his recent book, *Dumbing Down Our Kids*, the need to preserve a student's good opinion of himself is now assumed by educators to take clear priority over achieving academic excellence; the latter, indeed, is seen as a weapon aimed at the former, and the teacher's primary task is to blunt that weapon. For—the reasoning goes—if the work is too hard, the child will be discouraged and will be unable to learn. As Sykes takes pains to point out, there is no evidence at all to support this idea; it is a fiction, born of ideology.*

affluent and in danger of becoming the ex-national pastime.

The 1994–95 strike by (wealthy) players against (wealthy) owners seems to have permanently turned off a lot of fans, not least working-class ones. Only 14 percent of adults in blue-collar and lower-paid white-collar jobs went to the ballparks last year, a decline of about four percentage points since 1993. Among physicians, lawyers, and other professionals, in contrast, attendance remained the same: 21 percent.

It's not just the strike that's responsible. The average cost of a day at a major league ballpark for a family of four last year totaled \$97.25. (That bought four average-priced tickets, two small draft beers, two small soft

drinks, four hot dogs, two game programs, two souvenir caps, and one parking space).

In smaller markets, such as Cincinnati, the tab can be much smaller. Teams such as the Reds depend heavily on ticket and concession sales and so remain "keenly aware of the need to keep baseball affordable," Dortch observes. But in the biggest markets, such as New York and Los Angeles, revenue from TV broadcasts matters most. Many owners, she says, see television executives as the most important "fans," not the bleacher bums. This view may prove very shortsighted. The percentage of adults who watch baseball on TV dropped to 22 percent last year, down sharply from 31 percent in 1993.