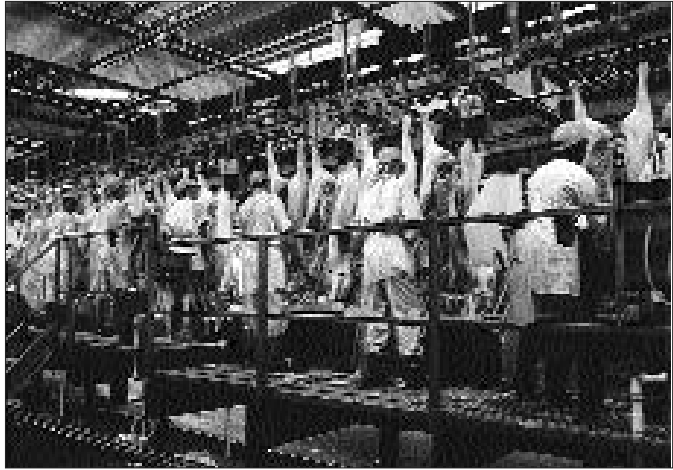


vanished: E. coli and other microbial dangers have replaced tuberculosis.

“In some ways, working conditions are better today than they were in *The Jungle*,” notes Deborah Fink, the author of *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line* (1998), who spent four months in 1992 working undercover in a Perry, Iowa plant owned by IBP, the industry’s largest employer. Workers today wear gloves and arm guards, and are at less risk of getting infections from cuts. “But [packers] have reduced entire jobs to a small set of motions,” she says. “Twenty years ago it was considered a skill to be able to bone a ham. Now all workers do is make one cut all day.” So, instead of infections, workers are prone to getting repetitive-motion injuries.

Worker turnover is high, “between 80 percent and 120 percent” for the major packers, says Nunes. While packers insist they want to reduce turnover in order to cut the expense of training new workers, critics strongly doubt it. “Employees stay for a limited time, earn no seniority, don’t retire, and have no access to paid vacations or, in many cases, health benefits,” observes Donald Stull, an anthropologist at the University of Kansas.



“Line work is demanding on people’s bodies,” but the meatpacking industry, says a specialist, assumes it can keep replacing workers.

In Sinclair’s day, the Chicago-based “Beef Trust” actively recruited workers from Ireland and Eastern Europe. Today, the “Big Three” packers (IBP, Cargill’s Excel Corporation, and Con-Agra’s Monfort), have turned to Central America and Asia. Last year, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service “shook the foundation of the industry,” Nunes says, when it methodically reviewed the papers of 24,310 Nebraska workers and found irregularities in a fifth of them.

For all the dramatic changes in the industry, Stull says, *The Jungle’s* Jurgis Rudkis would be disappointed to learn how much in a 21st-century meatpacking plant remains sadly the same.

SOCIETY

Jack versus Jill

“The War against Boys” by Christina Hoff Sommers, in *The Atlantic Monthly* (May 2000), 77 N. Washington St., Boston, Mass. 02114.

A decade ago, Harvard University’s Carol Gilligan, author of the influential *In a Different Voice* (1982), announced that America’s adolescent girls were in crisis. Soon, with the help of two studies by the American Association of University Women, it became the conventional wisdom among educators that schools shortchange girls. Yet there is almost no solid empirical support for that conclusion,

asserts Sommers, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and author of *Who Stole Feminism?* (1994). She contends that it is adolescent boys who are the troubled sex.

“The typical boy is a year and a half behind the typical girl in reading and writing; he is less committed to school and less likely to go to college,” she writes. In 1997, 55 percent of full-time college students were

female, and the gender gap in enrollment is projected to grow.

“Far from being shy and demoralized, today’s girls outshine boys,” Sommers says. “They get better grades. They have higher educational aspirations. They follow more rigorous academic programs and participate in advanced-placement classes at higher rates. . . . Girls, allegedly timorous and lacking in confidence, now outnumber boys in student government, in honor societies, on school newspapers, and in debating clubs. Only in sports are boys ahead. . . . Girls read more books. They outperform boys on tests for artistic and musical ability. More girls than boys study abroad. More join the Peace Corps.” Meanwhile, boys have the dubious edge in school suspensions, being held back, and dropping out. They are more likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. “More boys than girls are involved in crime, alcohol, and drugs.”

Boys score better on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and other standardized tests, Sommers acknowledges—but that’s

because of another male disadvantage. Boys from families with lower incomes or limited formal education—characteristics associated with below-average scores—are less likely than comparable girls to take the SAT. They don’t drag down male SAT averages—and they don’t go to college.

“Growing evidence that the scales are tipped not against girls but against boys is beginning to inspire a quiet revisionism,” observes Sommers. Even Gilligan—though “oblivious of all the factual evidence that paternal separation causes aberrant behavior in boys”—lately has given some attention to their problems, calling for basic changes in child rearing to get boys in touch with their inner nurturer. A far better solution, says Sommers, would be “the traditional approach” to civilizing young males: “through character education: Develop the young man’s sense of honor. Help him become a considerate, conscientious human being. Turn him into a gentleman. This approach respects boys’ masculine nature; it is time-tested, and it works.”

What’s in a Face?

“The Mythology of the Face-Lift” by Wendy Doniger, in *Social Research* (Spring 2000), New School Univ., 65 Fifth Ave., Rm. 354, New York, N.Y. 10003.

Though face-lifts and other kinds of cosmetic surgery are a distinctly modern phenomenon, myths both ancient and modern have something to say about it. They tell of the folly of the desire for a new face—and they are quite right, contends Doniger, a professor of history of religions at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

The folly is shown, for instance, in various versions of an Inuit tale: A jealous mother who desires her son-in-law kills her daughter and takes her face, putting it on over her own. The husband is fooled—but not for long. He soon notices the discrepancy between the beautiful young visage and the old woman’s skinny legs or shrunken body. Or, in a version told by Annie Dillard in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1975), the young man, wet from hunting, lies with the woman, and “the skin mask shrinks and slides, uncovering the shriveled face of the old mother, and the boy flees in horror, forever.”

The face-lift myths, like contemporary accounts of cosmetic surgery, “frequently express the desire to have not just any face but one’s own face as it once was in the past—to masquerade as one’s younger self, as it were,” Doniger says. But gaining the countenance of this younger self changes one into someone else, a person “different from who you really are now: a person with a soul and a face that are formed and scarred by experience.”

Myths warn of other dangers, Doniger notes. “Incest dogs the face-lift because of the confusion of generations, mothers looking just like their daughters, as they so proudly boast on returning from their surgeries and spas. Even when this doubling back does not result in actual incest, it arrests our abilities to move forward in time [to] become our parents and eventually accept our own deaths.”

In the film *Dave* (1993), a wife realizes that the man impersonating her husband has