

THE GENDERED SOCIETY



MICHAEL KIMMEL

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The Gendered Society

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Separate and Unequal

The Gendered World of Work

Well, Son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards all torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.

—LANGSTON HUGHES
“Mother to Son”

Freud once wrote that the two great tasks for all human beings are “to work and to love.” And it is certainly true that people have always worked—to satisfy their basic material needs for food, clothing, and shelter; to provide for children and loved ones; to participate in community life; as well as to satisfy more culturally and historically specific desires to leave a mark on the world and to move up the social ladder. So it shouldn't surprise us that virtually every society has developed a division of labor, a way of dividing the tasks that must be done in order for the society as a whole to survive. And because gender, as we have seen, is a system of both classification and identity and a structure of power relations, it shouldn't surprise us that virtually every society has a gendered division of labor. There are very few tasks, in very few societies,

that are not allocated by gender. This doesn't necessarily imply that the tasks assigned to one gender are less or more significant to the life of the community than the tasks assigned to the other. One might use a variety of criteria to assign tasks, and one might determine the relative values of each in a variety of ways. Valuing women's work over men's work, or vice versa, is not inevitable; it is an artifact of cultural relationships.

All this hardly comes as a surprise. But what might surprise contemporary American readers is that the gendered division of labor that many have called "traditional," the separation of the world into two distinct spheres—the public sphere of work, business, politics, and culture and the private sphere of the home, domestic life, and child care—is a relatively new phenomenon in American society. The doctrine of separate spheres was not firmly established until the decades just before the Civil War, and even then it was honored as much in the breach as in its fulfillment. Women have always worked outside the home for both economic and personal reasons—though they have had to fight to do so. The so-called traditional system of dads who head out to work every morning, leaving moms to stay at home with the children as full-time housewives and mothers, was an invention of the 1950s—and part of a larger ideological effort to facilitate the reentry of American men back into the workplace and domestic life after World War II and to legitimate the return of women from the workplace and back into the home.

And what also might surprise us is that this universal gendered division of labor tells us virtually nothing about the relative values given to the work women and men do. And, interestingly, it turns out that in societies in which women's work is less valued—that is, in more traditional societies in which women's legal status is lower—women do *more* work than the men do, up to 35 percent more in terms of time (figure 9.1).

THE CHANGING GENDER COMPOSITION OF THE LABOR FORCE

Perhaps the most significant change in the relationship of gender and work is numerical—the enormous shift in the gender composition of the labor force. In the twentieth century, women entered every area of the labor force, and in unprecedented numbers. The impact has been enormous. In my classes I often illustrate this phenomenon by asking the women who intend to have full-time careers or jobs outside the home to raise their hands. Without exception, all two hundred or so women do. Then I ask them to keep their hands raised if their mothers have or had a full-time job or career outside the home for at least eight years without interruption. About one-third put their hands down. Then I ask them to keep their hands raised if their grandmothers had a full-time job or career outside the home for at least eight uninterrupted years. Perhaps now four or five hands remain raised. In the class, one can clearly see the differences in women's working lives over just three generations.

What would happen if I posed the same question to the men in the class? "How many men expect to have full-time careers, outside the home, when they graduate from college?" The very question sounds ridiculous. *Of course*, they expect to have careers, as did their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers. They'd never put their hands down, unless a distant relative was unemployed, or we reach back to the 1930s Great Depression.

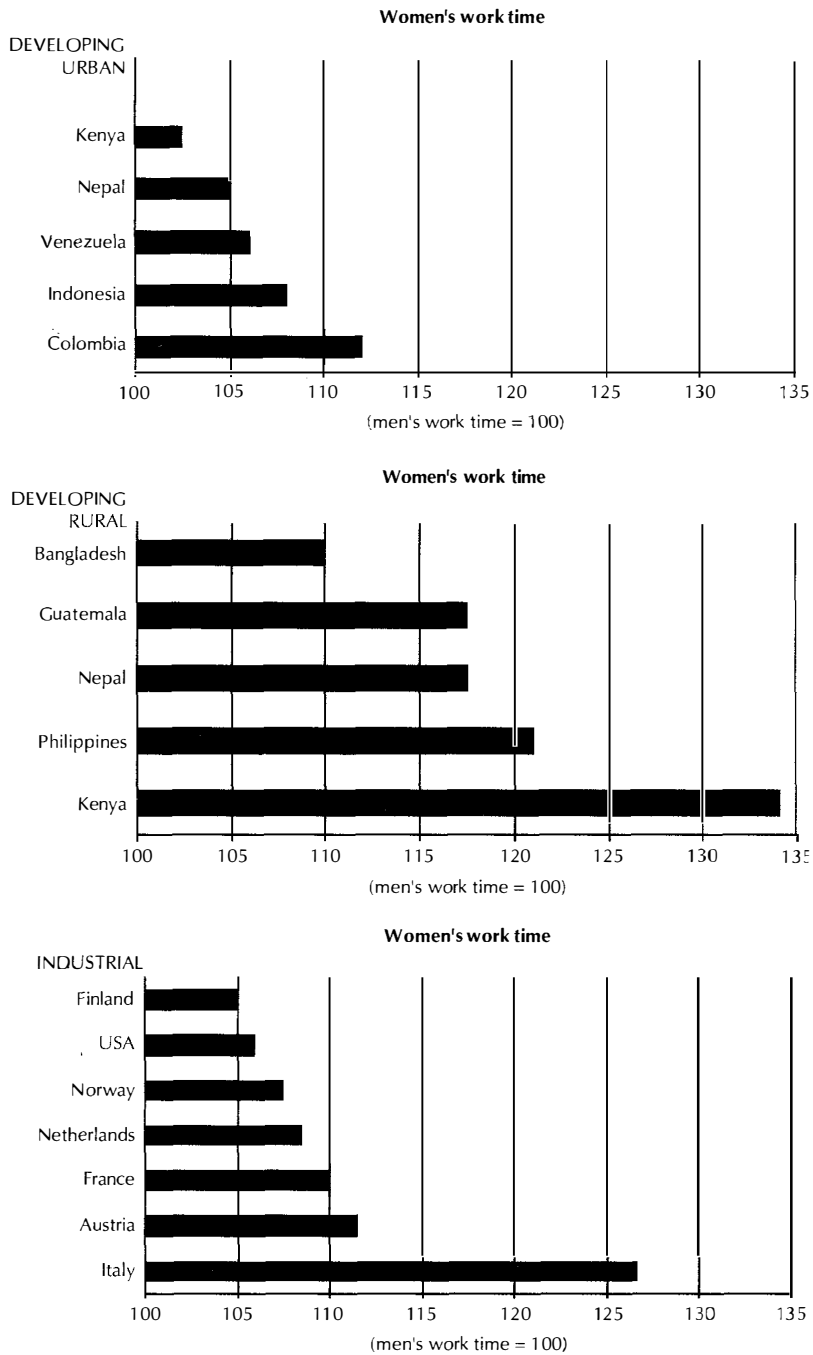


Figure 9.1. Women work more hours than men. From *United Nations, Human Development Report 1995* (Oxford University Press, 1995). Reprinted by permission of publisher.

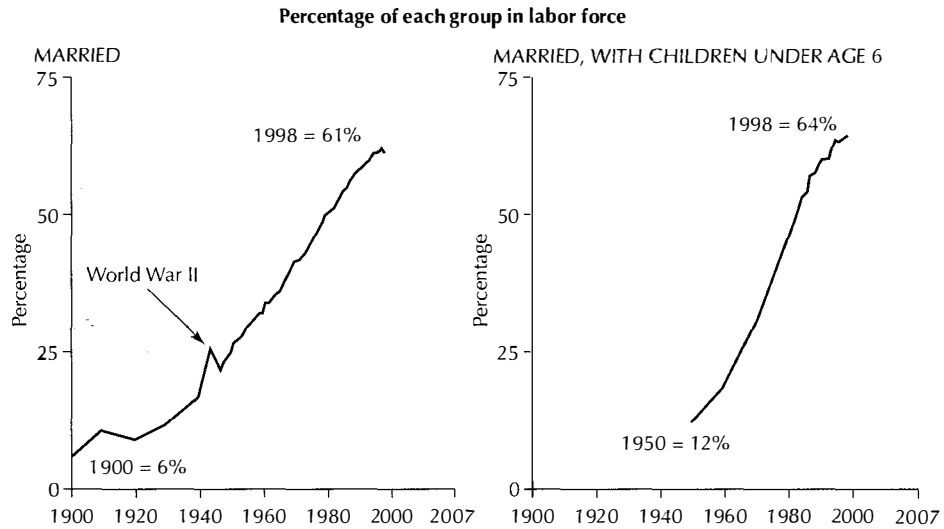


Figure 9.2. Labor force participation of women. From *The First Measured Century* by Theodore Caplow, Louis Hicks, and Ben J. Wattenberg. Update from *Monthly Labor Review* November, 2007.

This experiment illustrates in miniature the dramatic change in the composition of the labor force. The percentage of both women and men entering the labor force increased throughout the last century, but women's rate of increase far outpaced men's. The percentage of women working rose from 20.6 percent in 1900 to more than 60 percent in 2005 (men's rates were 85 percent and 74 percent, respectively). Marriage and children slowed that entry, but the trajectory is still the same. Only 6 percent of married women worked outside the home in 1900; 61 percent do so today. And whereas only 12 percent of married women with children under six years old were working outside the home as recently as 1950, nearly 66 percent were doing so fewer than forty years later (figures 9.2–9.5).

This dramatic increase in labor force participation has been true for all races and ethnicities. (Black women's rates [64 percent] are slightly higher than white women's [60 percent], and Hispanic women's rates are slightly lower [56 percent] than those of both black and white women. Among men, however, Hispanic men have the highest rates [79 percent], compared with white men [74 percent] and black men [66 percent]).¹ Even since 1970, the increase in women's participation has been dramatic. In the next decade, 80 percent of all new entrants into the labor force will be women, minorities, and immigrants. Among married women, the data are actually more startling. In 1900, only 4 percent of married women were working, and by 1960, only 18.6 percent of married women with young children were working. This number has tripled since 1960, so that today, nearly 60 percent of all married women with children under six years old are in the labor force.²

Women's entry into the labor force has taken place at every level, from low-paid clerical and sales work through all the major professions. In 1962, women represented less than 1 percent of all engineers, 6 percent of all doctors, and 19 percent of all university

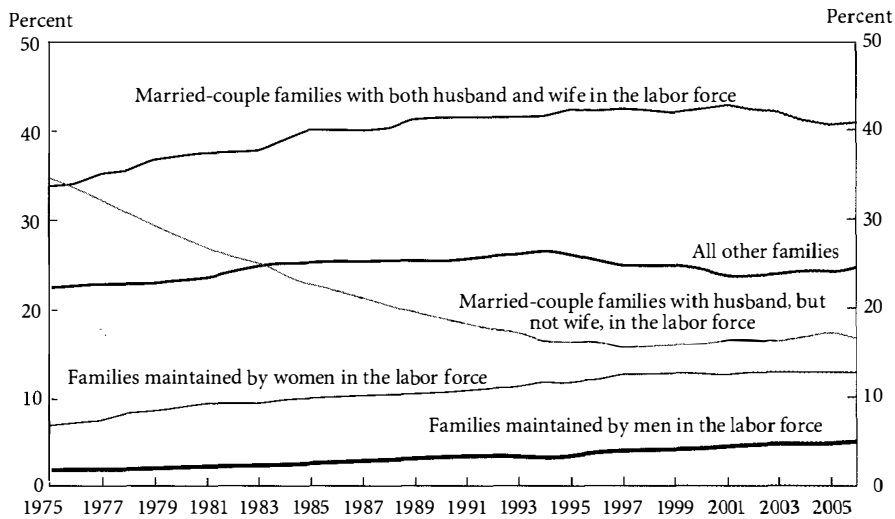


Figure 9.3. Work patterns in families have changed remarkably over time. Percent distribution of families by family type and labor force status of family members, March 1975–2006. *Source: Monthly Labor Review, July/August 2007.*

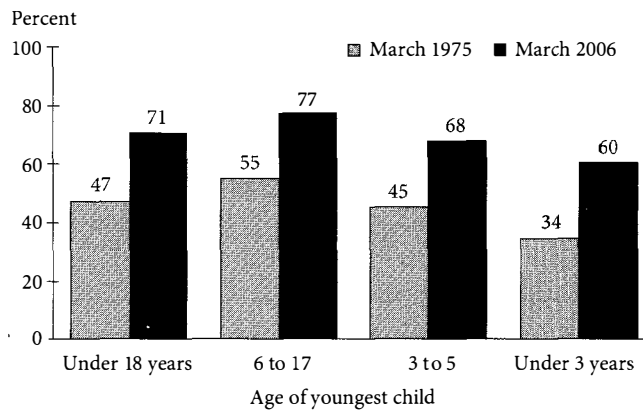


Figure 9.4. Labor force participation rates have increased dramatically among mother over the past 31 years. *Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.*

professors. By 1990, women made up over 7 percent of all engineers, 20 percent of all doctors, and almost 40 percent of all university professors. From 1970 to 1995, women's shares of doctoral degrees jumped from 25 percent to 44 percent among whites and from 39 percent to 55 percent among blacks. "The increasing representation of women among the ranks of managers in organizations," writes sociologist Jerry Jacobs, "is perhaps the most dramatic shift in the sex composition of an occupation since clerical work became a female dominated field in the late 19th century."³

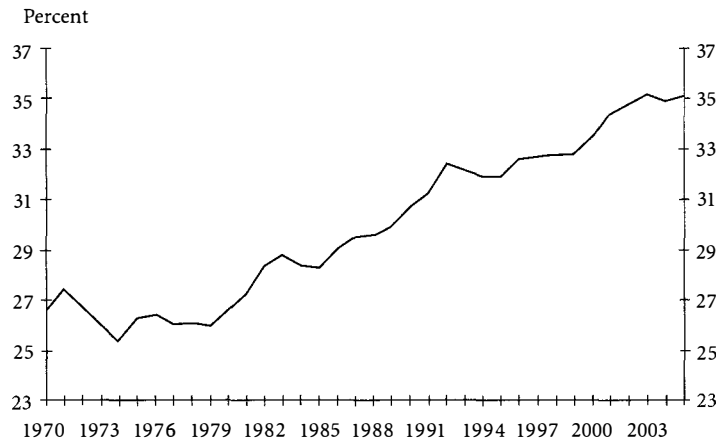


Figure 9.5. In 2005, working wives contributed a little more than a third of their families' income. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

We've come a long way, indeed, from the mid-nineteenth century, when a young Mary Taylor wrote to her friend Charlotte Brontë that "there are no means for a woman to live in England, but by teaching, sewing, or washing. The last is the best, the best paid, the least unhealthy and the most free." These changes have rippled through the rest of society, gradually changing the relationship of the family to the workplace. Gone forever is the male breadwinner who supports a family on his income alone. What was the norm at the turn of the twentieth century now constitutes less than 5 percent of all families. Forget the Cleavers, the Andersons, and the Nelsons. Forget the Cramdens and the Nortons. And forget even Lucy, whose every scheme to enter the work world, from the bakery to Ricky's nightclub act, ended in disaster. Today, the norm is the dual-earner couple. And yet we don't seem to get it. *The Workplace 2000*

Try this at Home: Economic Shift

Interview your parents, grandparents, and other relatives to find out what jobs your ancestors had. Go back as far as you can. If your grandparents were born in this country, odds are that most will have been farmers in 1820 and factory workers in 1920, as the agricultural economy was replaced by the industrial economy. If your grandparents or parents were immigrants, odds are that the people who immigrated were the agricultural workers. If not, it's a good bet they were small shopkeepers or craft workers, and when they came here they began their careers as factory workers or peddlers (sales) of some sort.

And what about the men and the women? Odds are that both women and men worked on those farms or that those first immigrant relatives, both male and female, were working to try and support their families. If there are stay-at-home moms in your family history, in what generation did the women *stop* working? Where was the family living? Odds are that the women stopped working when the family moved to the suburbs or small towns: Among farmers and the urban poor everyone worked.

forecast report issued during the Reagan administration, for example, admitted that “most current policies were designed for a society in which men worked and women stayed home.”⁴

THE PERSISTENCE OF GENDER IDEOLOGIES

Such statements acknowledge that whereas the realities of home and workplace have changed, our ideas about them have lagged far behind. Many Americans still believe in the “traditional” male breadwinner/female housewife model even if our own lives no longer reflect it—much like the way we say we believe in the individual small shopkeeper, the Mom and Pop grocery on Main Street, as the cornerstone of American business—even as we shop almost exclusively at Wal-Mart, the Gap, Sam’s Clubs, and shopping malls. Our adherence to gender ideologies that no longer fit the world we live in has dramatic consequences for women and men, both at work and at home.

Since the early nineteenth century, the workplace has been seen as a masculine arena, where men could test and prove their manhood against other men in the dog-eat-dog marketplace. Working enabled men to confirm their manhood as breadwinners and family providers. The workplace was a site of “homosocial reproduction”—a place where men created themselves as men. As psychiatrist Willard Gaylin writes:

nothing is more important to a man’s pride, self-respect, status, and manhood than work. Nothing. Sexual impotence, like sudden loss of ambulation or physical strength, may shatter his self-confidence. But . . . pride is built on work and achievement, and the success that accrues from that work. Yet today men often seem confused and contradictory in their attitudes about work.⁵

Gaylin captures a contradiction at the heart of men’s relationship to the workplace: On the one hand, it is the most significant place where men prove manhood and confirm identity, but, on the other hand, all that breadwinning and providing do not necessarily make men happy. “I have never met a man—among my patients or friends,” Gaylin writes, “who in his heart of hearts considers himself a success.”⁶

The nineteenth-century ideal of the self-made man and the prospect of unlimited upward mobility for those who worked hard enough placed men on a treadmill of work, sacrifice, and responsibility. If a man could rise as high as his dreams and discipline could take him, he could also fall just as far. A 1974 Yankelovitch survey found that about 80 percent of American men were unhappy in their jobs. Another study found that 74 percent of men said they would choose a slower career track to spend more time with their families. “No man on his deathbed ever said he wished he had spent less time with his family and more time at the office,” as the familiar cliché has it.

Yet why would men be unhappy in an arena whose homosociality they struggle so hard to maintain? Part of the reason has to do with what women and men carry with them into the workplace. Though most married couples are now dual-earner couples, when the wife outearns the husband all sorts of assumptions might bubble up to the surface: His masculinity may no longer be tied to being the only worker, but rather it may be tied to making the most money to support the family. The gender ideologies about who earns more are currently in much flux: A *Newsweek* poll found 25 percent of respondents thought it unacceptable for a wife to earn more than her husband, but 35 percent of men said they’d quit their jobs or reduce their hours if their wives earned

more money. And though traditional gender stereotypes would have us believe that women would be content to marry less attractive but financially stable men (whereas men would be happier marrying very attractive women, without regard to finances), 50 percent of women now say that earning potential is “not at all important” in their mate choice. Men, alas, are still drawn to the gorgeous bombshell with no earning capacity.⁷

Another part of the reason has to do with what happens in the workplace. Given the demands of corporate or factory life, men rarely, if ever, experience any ability to discuss their inner lives, their feelings, their needs. The workplace becomes a treadmill, a place to fit in, not to stand out. It is a place where a man sacrifices himself on the altar of family responsibility. Perhaps one of the most poignant expressions of this dilemma comes in Arthur Miller’s elegiac play *Death of a Salesman*, when Willy Loman’s sons confront their own futures in the workplace. First Biff looks down that road:

Well, I spent six or seven years after high school trying to work myself up. Shipping clerk, salesman, business of one kind or another. And it’s a measly manner of existence. To get on that subway on the hot mornings in summer. To devote your whole life to keep stock, or making phone calls, or selling or buying. To suffer fifty weeks of the year for the sake of a two-week vacation, when all you really desire is to be outdoors, with your shirt off. And always to have to get ahead of the next fella. And still—that’s how you build a future.

Then his brother, Happy, responds with his vision of that future:

All I can do now is wait for the merchandise manager to die. And suppose I get to be merchandise manager? He’s a good friend of mine, and he just built a terrific estate on Long Island. And he lived there about two months and sold it, and now he’s building another one. He can’t enjoy it once it’s finished. And I know that’s just what I would do. I don’t know what the hell I’m workin’ for.⁸

Many men say they lose sight of what they’re working for. Men often feel that they are supposed to be tough, aggressive, competitive—the “king of the hill,” the boss, their “own man,” on “top of the heap.” We measure masculinity by the size of a man’s paycheck. Asked why he worked so hard, one man told an interviewer:

I don’t know . . . I really hate to be a failure. I always wanted to be on top of whatever I was doing. It depends on the particular picture but I like to be on top, either chairman of the committee or president of an association or whatever.⁹

Most men, of course, are neither at the top of the hierarchy nor likely to get there. Raised to believe that there are no limits, they bump constantly into those limits and have no one to blame except themselves. And because men conflate masculinity with workplace success, they remain unaware that the work they are doing is also producing and reproducing gender dynamics; they see it as just “work.”¹⁰ Men, as the saying goes, are “unsexed by failure”: They cease to be seen as real men.

Women, on the other hand, are “unsexed by success.” To be competent, aggressive, and ambitious in the workplace may be both gender confirming and gender conforming for men, but those traits are gender *non*conforming and thus gender disconfirming for women, undermining women’s sense of themselves as feminine. Geri Richmond,

a chemist, describes how she constantly battled between being “feminine” and being a scientist. A high school cheerleader and chemistry whiz, she gradually shed all the trappings of traditional femininity in graduate school in order to fit in—she threw out her dresses, nail polish, makeup, high-heeled shoes. She even tossed out her hand lotion, out of fear that its scent would evoke femininity.¹¹

In the all-male workplace, women’s role was to “lubricate” the male-male interactions. Women performed what sociologist Arlie Hochschild calls “emotion work,” making sure that the all-male arena was well-oiled and functioning smoothly. So, for example, women performed jobs like stewardess, office manager, cocktail waitress, and cheerleader to make sure the male-male interactions went smoothly—and remained unmistakably heterosexual.¹²

If women had no “real” role in the workplace, what did they do there? The traditional idea was that women worked either because they *had* to—because they were single, working class, and/or the sole economic support for their children or themselves—or because they wanted to earn the extra pocket money (“play money”) that they, as middle-class consumers, wanted for their trifles. This often made working women apologetic for working at all. “If the world were perfect,” it pushed them to say, “we would stay home with our children, which is after all, where we belong and where we would rather be.” But such a position belies women’s actual experience. Women work, the political columnist Katha Pollitt writes, “because we enjoy our jobs, our salaries, the prospect of a more interesting and secure future than we would have with rusted skills, less seniority, less experience.”¹³

Of course, these traditional gender ideologies have undergone significant change as well. It’s not the 1950s—even in our heads. (Actually, even the 1950s weren’t the 1950s—that is the reality, as we saw in the chapter on the family, hardly resembled the sanitized image of nostalgic conservatives that has been romanticized by Hollywood). Take, for example, *Mad Men*, among the most popular television shows of the past few years. *Mad Men* depicts a group of ambitious advertising executives at the very beginning of the 1960s. The world is perfectly gender segregated: All the executives are male, all the secretaries are female. (Incidentally every single character is white, and no one—either “then” or now—seems to make much of a fuss about that.) The world of male entitlement is fully intact, and the men’s sexual predation isn’t considered sexual harassment, it’s just how things are. The show elicits a sort of self-congratulatory feeling from a contemporary viewer—back in the day, we say to ourselves, they did all sorts of things we now know to be wrong: Everyone smoked everywhere; the men drank pretty much all day, in their offices, and preyed on female support staff as if in a brothel. (One secretary’s ambition to become an account executive provides a tension-filled plotline for an entire season.) How benighted their views! How archaic! We know better *now*!

But the transparently anachronistic themes only mask how today those archaic attitudes still hold sway, and how they continue to clash with the changing realities of the work world. And that clash makes the workplace a particularly contentious arena for gender issues. On the one hand, women face persistent discrimination based on their gender: They are paid less, promoted less, and assigned to specific jobs despite their qualifications and motivations; and they are made to feel unwelcome, like intruders in an all-male preserve. On the other hand, men say they are bewildered and angered

Subtle Sexism

Gender discrimination is both structural and attitudinal; it's embedded in both social institutions and structural arrangements and in our heads. Of course, the blatant forms of sexism of the 1950s workplace are no longer acceptable. Gone, largely, is Dan Draper's (of *Mad Men*) patronizing pat on his secretary's butt. But in its place have come a myriad assortment of subtle attitudes and behaviors that reproduce workplace inequality. In a marvelously clever analysis, sociologist Nicole Benokraitis outlines several forms of "subtle sexism," behaviors that may even be invisible to those who enact them.

Condescending chivalry: A supervisor withholds useful criticism from a female employee to "protect" her.

Supportive discouragement: Discouraging a woman from competing for a challenging opportunity because she might not succeed.

Friendly harassment: Kidding a woman in public about her appearance.

Subjective objectification: Believing that all women fit some particular stereotype.

Radiant devaluation: Offering exaggerated praise for an accomplishment that might otherwise be seen as routine.

Liberated sexism: Inviting a woman for a drink after work, just like one of the boys, but then refusing to let her pay for a round.

Benevolent exploitation: Giving a woman the opportunity to work on a project to get experience, but then taking all credit for the final product.

Considerate domination: Making decisions for women about what they can and cannot handle (as, for example, a new mother) without letting her decide how best to manage her time.

Collegial exclusion: Scheduling meetings at times when parents have family responsibilities that might conflict, such as 7 a.m. breakfast "networking" or "team building" meetings.

Source: Nicole Benokraitis, *Subtle Sexism: Current Practices and Prospects for Change*. Thousand Oaks, Sage, 1997.

by the changes in workplace policy that make them feel like they are "walking on eggshells," fearful of making any kind of remark to a woman lest they be hauled into court for sexual harassment.

The structural backdrop to this current workplace wariness and corporate confusion is one of the highest levels of workplace gender inequality in the industrial world. That the United States manifests this gender inequality may contradict American assumptions about freedom and equality of opportunity, but it is not so terribly surprising because we also have among the highest levels of income inequality in general in the industrial world. According to a study commissioned by the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the difference between the best-paid 10 percent and the lowest-paid 10 percent of all working Americans is wider than that in any other industrial nation. During the economic boom of the 1980s, the top 1 percent of the income pyramid received about 60 percent of all the economic gains of the decade. The next 19 percent received another 25 percent, so that, in all, 85 percent of all economic gains of the decade went to the top 20 percent of the economic hierarchy. The bottom 20 percent of Americans actually lost 9 percent, and the next 20 percent above them lost 1 percent. So much for "trickle down" economics! For the bottom 80 percent of Americans, the peak earning year in the last three decades was 1973—that is, their annual incomes have since then either remained flat or declined. According to the Congressional Budget Office, mean family income, in fact, has remained absolutely

flat. Measured in 2006 dollars, median family income in 1973 was \$44,603; in 1990 it was \$50,233.

Remember, also, this is average *family* income—and the greatest single change in the labor force is the increasing presence of women. So this means that men's incomes have actually declined over the past quarter-century. A thirty-year-old man in 1949 saw his real earnings rise by 63 percent by the time he turned forty. In 1973, that same thirty-year-old man would have seen his real income *fall* by 1 percent by his fortieth birthday. These economic indicators are particularly important as the general context for gender inequality, because they suggest that the majority of male workers have felt increasingly squeezed in the past two decades, working longer and harder to make ends meet while experiencing a decline in income. This increased economic pressure, coupled with increased economic precariousness caused by downsizing, corporate layoffs, and market volatility, has kept American men anxious about their previously unchallenged position as providers and breadwinners (figures 9.6a, b). Indeed, male workers account for more than four out of every five jobs lost in the current recession (since June, 2008).¹⁴

THE PERSISTENCE OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

For many years, the chief obstacle facing women who sought to enter the labor force was sex discrimination. Discrimination occurs when we treat people who are similar in different ways, or when we treat people who are different in similar ways. For example, women and African Americans are seen, legally, as “similar” in all functionally relevant aspects relating to employment, housing, or education. Therefore, to exclude one race or gender from housing, educational opportunities, or employment would be a form of discrimination. On the other hand, people with certain physical disabilities are seen as legally *different* and thus deserving of antidiscrimination protection. Treating them “the same” as able-bodied people—failing to provide wheelchair-accessible facilities, for example—is therefore also a form of discrimination.

In gender discrimination in the workplace, employers have historically referred to a variety of characteristics about women in order to exclude them, e.g., women don't really want to work; they don't need the money; they have different aptitudes and interests. It was assumed that women either couldn't do a job or that, if they could, they would neither want to nor need to do it. What these arguments share is a belief that the differences between women and men are decisive and that these differences are the source of women's and men's different experiences. Such arguments also provided the pretense for justifying race discrimination in employment and education, at least until 1954, when the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* that there were no compelling differences between blacks and whites that could serve as a qualification for equal access to employment or education. Today, the Court holds race cases to what it calls “strict scrutiny,” meaning that discrimination on the basis of race is always legally suspect and that there are no legal grounds for racial discrimination. It is discrimination to treat those who are alike—blacks and whites—as if they were different.

This is not completely true, however, when it comes to gender. In its cases involving gender discrimination, the Supreme Court has granted only “intermediate scrutiny.”

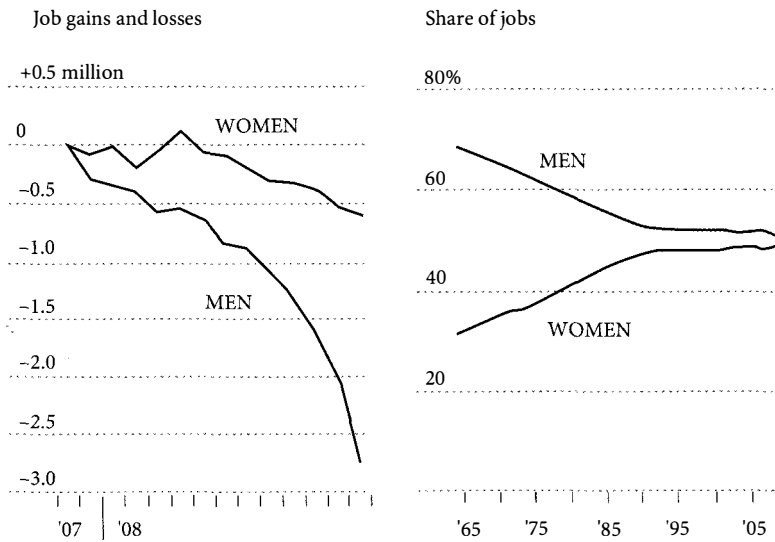


Figure 9.6a. Closing the Gap in Employment. Since the start of the recession, men have lost more than 2.7 million jobs, representing 82 percent of all job losses. Given this loss, women are poised to take a greater share of the nation's jobs. Sources: Current Population Survey and Current Employment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

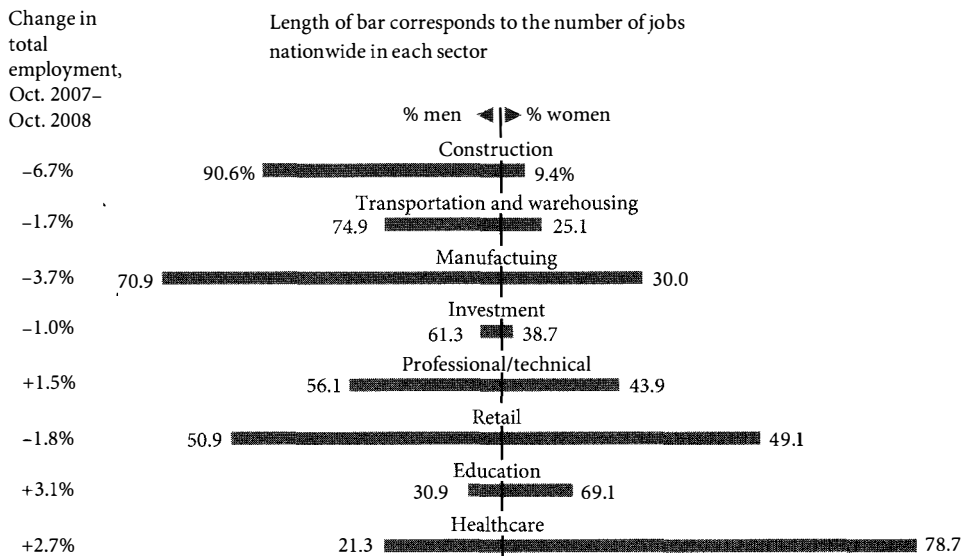


Figure 9.6b. Losses are worse in sectors that employ more males. Source: From Robert Gavin, "Losing Jobs in Unequal Numbers" in Boston Globe, December 5, 2008.

Discrimination on the basis of gender is permissible, but only under the most exceptional of circumstances. The basis for the discrimination may not rely on any stereotypical ideas about the differences between women and men, and there must be a “bona fide occupational qualification”—that is, the discrimination must be based on some occupational requirement that either only men or only women could meet. In federal cases, the discrimination must also be “substantially related to an important governmental interest”—that is, it must serve some larger goal of the government.

Consider, for example, the case of a nine-year-old girl who applies to work as a lifeguard at the beach. Denying her the job would not be a case of either gender or age discrimination because one would equally deny the job to a nine-year-old boy, as age is a functionally relevant category for the performance of the job. But it is extraordinarily difficult to demonstrate in court that the requirements of any particular job are such that only women or only men could possibly perform that job.

One such case involved a woman who applied for a job with Trans World Airlines. During her interview, she was asked about her marital status, her plans regarding pregnancy, her relationship with another TWA employee, the number of children she had, whether they were legitimate, and her child-care arrangements. In fact, that was *all* she was asked at her first interview. She was not hired. The courts found that she had been treated differently based on gender and thus had been discriminated against. Can we even imagine the interviewers asking a male applicant those kinds of questions?

Most legal cases of workplace discrimination have involved women bringing suit to enter formerly all-male workplaces. One interesting recent case, however, explored the other side of the coin. The Hooters restaurant chain was sued by several men who sought employment as waiters in restaurants in Illinois and Maryland. Historically, Hooters hired only “voluptuous” women to work as their “scantly clad” bartenders and food servers. The male plaintiffs, and their lawyers, argued that such a policy violates equal employment statutes. Hooters countered that its restaurants provide “vicarious sexual recreation” and that “female sexuality is a bona fide occupation,” citing other all-female occupations like Playboy Bunnies and the Rockettes. Hooters waitresses “serve Buffalo wings with a side order of sex appeal” was the way one newspaper columnist put it. Company spokesman Mike McNeil claimed that Hooters doesn’t sell food; it sells sex appeal—and “to have female sex appeal, you have to be female.” The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) quietly dropped its own investigation, saying it had better cases to pursue. Eventually, the case was settled out of court, with Hooters paying \$3.75 million to the men and their attorneys and adding a few men to its staffs as bartenders—but not as waiters.¹⁵

SEX SEGREGATION

Outright gender discrimination is extremely difficult to justify. But far more subtle and pervasive mechanisms maintain gender inequality. Perhaps the most ubiquitous of these is sex segregation. Sex segregation, writes sociologist Barbara Reskin, “refers to women’s and men’s concentration in different occupations, industries, jobs, and levels in workplace hierarchies.” Thus sex segregation becomes, itself, a “sexual division of paid labor in which men and women do different tasks, or the same tasks under different names or at different times and places.” Different occupations are seen as more

appropriate for one gender or the other, and thus women and men are guided, pushed, or occasionally shoved into specific positions.¹⁶

In fact, sex segregation in the workplace is so pervasive that it appears to be the natural order of things, the simple expression of women's and men's natural predispositions. In that sense, it's more subtle than some garment factories in Bangladesh, where male and female workers actually work on different floors to ensure no contact between them. In the United States, it *appears* to be the result of our "natural" differences; but, as we have seen before, these differences are themselves the consequence of segregation. Today, fewer than 10 percent of all Americans have a co-worker or a colleague of the other sex who does the same job, for the same employer, in the same location, on the same shift. Though almost equal numbers of women and men go off to work every morning, we do not go together to the same place, nor do we have the same jobs. In fact, of the nearly sixty-six million women in the labor force in the United States, 30 percent worked in just 10 of the 503 "occupations" listed by the U.S. Census. Or, to put it another way, more than 52 percent of all women or of all men would have to change their jobs for the occupational distribution to be completely integrated.¹⁷

Sex segregation starts early and continues throughout our work lives. And it has significant consequences for incomes and experiences. I frequently ask my students how many of them have worked as babysitters. Typically, at least two-thirds of the women say they have, and occasionally one or two men say they have. How much do they earn? They average about \$4 to \$5 an hour, typically earning \$20 for an afternoon or evening. When I ask how many of them have earned extra money by mowing lawns or shoveling snow, though, the gender division is reversed. Most of the men, but only an occasional woman, say they had those jobs and typically earned about \$20–\$25 per house—or about \$100 a day. And although it is true that shoveling snow or mowing lawns requires far more physical exertion than babysitting, babysitting also requires specific social, mental, and nurturing skills, caring and feeding, and the ability to respond quickly in a crisis. And in most societies, ours included, it is hardly the menial physical laborers who are paid the most (think of the difference between corporate executives and professional lawn mowers). In fact, when grown-ups do these jobs—professional baby nursing or lawn maintenance—their incomes are roughly similar. What determines the differences in wages for these two after-school jobs has far less to do with the intrinsic properties of the jobs and far more to do with the gender of who performs them. That we see the disparities as having to do with something other than gender is exactly the way in which occupational sex segregation obscures gender discrimination.

The impact of sex segregation on income remains just as profound as the differences between babysitting and snow-shoveling for the rest of our lives. Job segregation by sex is the single largest cause of the pay gap between the sexes (tables 9.1 and 9.2). Consider that in 2007, while women represented just over 46 percent of all workers in the civilian labor force, they were 28.2 percent of all dentists; 14.4 percent of all architects and engineers; 32.6 percent of all lawyers and 43 percent of all judges; 13.7 percent of all police officers; 5.3 percent of firefighters; 4.2 percent of all natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations, and 30 percent of all physicians. On the other hand, women were also 96.7 percent of all secretaries, 91.7 percent of all nurses,

94.6 percent of all child-care workers, 82 percent of all teachers (excluding college and university), 78.6 percent of all data entry keyboard operators. Almost half of all female employees today work in occupations that are more than 75 percent female.¹⁸ And yet all of these represent significant *improvements* since 1990.

Explanations of sex segregation often rely on the qualities of male and female job seekers. Because of differential socialization, women and men are likely to seek different kinds of jobs for different reasons. However, socialization alone is not sufficient as an explanation. “Socialization cannot explain why a sex-segregated labor market emerged, why each sex is allocated to particular types of occupations, and why the sex typing of occupations changes in particular ways over time.” Instead, we need to think of sex segregation as the outcome of several factors—“on the differential socialization of young men and women, sex-typed tracking in the educational system, and sex-linked social control at the workplace, at the hiring stage and beyond.”¹⁹

Table 9.1. The 10 Most Female Occupations (highest percentage of workers that are female)

Occupation	% Female	Annual Wage
Dental hygienists	98.6%	\$60,980
Preschool and kindergarten teachers	97.7%	\$21,990
Secretaries and administrative assistants	96.9%	\$26,670
Dental assistants	95.4%	\$29,520
Speech-language pathologists	95.3%	\$54,880
Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	94.2%	\$35,230
Child-care workers	94.2%	\$17,050
Hairdressers, hair stylists, and cosmetologists	93.4%	\$20,610
Receptionists and information clerks	92.7%	\$22,150
Payroll and timekeeping clerks	92.4%	\$31,360

Source: *San Jose Mercury*, November 2007.

Table 9.2. The 10 Most Male Occupations (highest percentage of workers that are male)

Occupation	% Male	Annual Wage
Logging workers	99.8%	\$29,430
Automotive body and related repairers	99.4%	\$34,810
Cement masons, concrete finishers, and terrazzo workers	99.3%	\$32,030
Bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists	99.1%	\$36,620
Electrical power-line installers and repairers	99.1%	\$50,150
Tool and die makers	99.1%	\$43,580
Roofers	98.9%	\$31,230
Heavy vehicle/mobile equipment service technicians and mechanics	98.6%	\$39,410
Home appliance repairers	98.5%	\$32,980
Crane and tower operators	98.5%	\$38,870

Source: *San Jose Mercury*, November 2007.

If sex segregation were simply the product of socialized differences between women and men, we should expect that professions would have roughly comparable gender distributions in other cities or countries. But they do not. For example, in New York City, there are only 25 women out of 11,500 firefighters, or .03 percent of the force. In Minneapolis, 17 percent of the firefighters are women. Or take dentists. In the United States, dentistry is a heavily male-dominated profession; in Europe, most dentists are female. In Russia, about half of all doctors are women and have been for some time. Assuming that European and Russian women and men are roughly similar to North American women and men, you would expect the gender composition of dentistry or medicine to be similar.

This leads to another consequence of sex segregation: wage differentials. Professions that are male-dominated tend to have higher wages; professions that are female dominated tend to have lower wages. And though one might be tempted to explain this by the characteristics of the job, it turns out that the gender composition of the position is actually a better predictor. Again, take dentists. In the United States, dentistry sits near the top of the income pyramid. In Europe, the income level of dentists is about average. This difference has nothing to do with the practice of dentistry, which is, one assumes, fairly comparable. The wage difference is entirely the result of the gender of the person who does the job. There is nothing inherent in the job that makes it more “suitable” for women or for men.

One of the easiest ways to see the impact of sex segregation on wages is to watch what happens when a particular occupation begins to change its gender composition. For example, clerical work was once considered a highly skilled occupation, in which a virtually all-male labor force was paid reasonably well. (One is reminded, of course, of the exception to this rule, the innocent and virtuous Bob Cratchit in Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*.) In the early part of the twentieth century, in both Britain and the United States, though, the gender distribution began to change, and by the middle of the century, most clerical workers were female. As a result, clerical work was reevaluated as less demanding of skill and less valuable to an organization; thus workers’ wages fell. As sociologist Samuel Cohn notes, this is a result, not a cause, of the changing gender composition of the workforce.²⁰

Veterinary medicine, also, had long been a male-dominated field. In the late 1960s, only about 5 percent of veterinary students were women. Today that number is closer to 70 percent, and the number of female veterinarians has more than doubled since 1991, whereas the number of male veterinarians has declined by 15 percent. And their incomes have followed the changing gender composition. In the 1970s, when males dominated the field, veterinarians’ incomes were right behind those of physicians; today, veterinarians average about \$70,000 to \$80,000 a year, whereas physicians average closer to double that figure. “Vets are people with medical degrees without the medical income,” commented one veterinary epidemiologist.²¹

The exact opposite process took place with computer programmers. In the 1940s, women were hired as keypunch operators, the precursors to computer programmers, because the job seemed to resemble clerical work. In fact, however, computer programming “demanded complex skills in abstract logic, mathematics, electrical circuitry and machinery, all of which,” sociologist Katharine Donato observed, “women used to perform in their work” without much problem. However, after programming was

recognized as “intellectually demanding,” it became attractive to men, who began to enter the field and thus drove wages up considerably.²²

The relationship between gender composition and prestige (and wages) has long been in evidence. In the 1920s, the feminist writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman found it

amusing to see how rapidly the attitude toward a given occupation changed as it changed hands. For instance, two of the oldest occupations of women, the world over, were that of helping other women to bring babies into the world and that of laying out the dead. Women sat at the gates of life, at both ends, for countless generations. Yet as soon as the obstetrician found one large source of income in his highly specialized services, and the undertaker found another in his, these occupations became “man’s work”; a “woman doctor” was shrunk from even by women, and a “woman undertaker” seemed ridiculous.²³

(It is interesting that women have returned to obstetrics, but undertaking remains virtually all-male.)

The effects of sex segregation may be “geographic” in everyday life—both in the workplace and in leisure. In a 2008 study, Michelle Arthur, Robert del Campo, and Harry Van Buren, three business professors at University of New Mexico, studied golf courses. Well, what they actually studied were the placement of the tees at the beginning of each hole at 455 courses in all 50 states. Typically, women tee off from a tee placed somewhat in front of the men’s tee (part of an understanding that equality doesn’t mean treating people exactly the same, since the only place where women’s and men’s different upper body strength actually makes a difference is on the first shot). What Arthur, Del Campo, and Van Buren found was a correlation between the distance between the men’s and women’s tee and the wage gap in that immediate locale. That’s right: the further apart were the tees, the lower were women’s wages! The closer the tees were, the higher were women’s wages.

How is this to be explained? The obvious answer is that those locales where golf course administrators believed women needed increased assistance were those characterized by a patronizing view of women’s abilities in general. And those attitudes would have seeped into local workplaces, where women’s abilities would have been undervalued. Seems plausible. But the authors also suggested a less attitudinal explanation as well. When the tees are closer together, women and men were more likely to ride in the same golf carts; where the tees are far apart, women are more likely to ride only with other women. And it’s in those golf carts, in the informal conversations and networking that accompany our “leisure time,” that one hears of opportunities, connections, and contacts that can advance a career.²⁴

The sex of the worker is also vitally important in determining wages. Women and men are paid to do not the same work, but rather different work, and they are evaluated on different standards. As William Bielby and James Baron write, “men’s jobs are rewarded according to their standing within the hierarchy of men’s work, and women’s jobs are rewarded according to their standing within the hierarchy of women’s work. The legitimacy of this system is easy to sustain in a segregated workplace.” Stated simply, “women’s occupations pay less at least partly *because* women do them.”²⁵

Here’s a novel way to consider the impact of sex segregation on wages. As we just saw, when a particular occupation shifts its gender composition, wages shift too. The

more “masculine,” the higher the wages; the more “feminine,” the lower the wages. But what happens when the gender of the worker changes? I’m not talking about the gender of a category of workers. Rather, the actual gender of the actual individual worker: then what happens? In their research sociologist Kristen Schilt and economist Matthew Wiswall tracked the wages of transgender people—before and after their transitions. Female-to-male transgender people’s wages go up slightly following their transitions, while average wages for male-to-female transgender workers fell by nearly one-third. What’s more, male-to-female workers saw a loss of authority, greater levels of harassment, and possible termination than female-to-male transgender, people, who often saw an *increase* in respect and authority. Remember—these were the same human beings. Only their gender had changed. And that mattered a lot.²⁶

Legal remedies for sex stereotyping of occupations have yielded mixed results. In a 1971 case, *Diaz v Pan American World Airways*, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled that men could not be denied employment as flight attendants on the grounds that passengers expected and preferred women in this position. In 1996, you will recall from the last chapter, the Supreme Court ruled that women could not be denied the educational opportunity offered to men at the Virginia Military Institute, despite the school’s arguments that women would not want such an “adversative” education, nor would they be able to withstand the physical rigors of the program.

A lawsuit against Wal-Mart, the world’s largest chain of retail stores, illustrates the problem of sex segregation. Although 72 percent of Wal-Mart’s hourly sales employees were women, they represented less than 33 percent of the company’s managers (compared with 56 percent at competitors), according to the lawsuit filed on behalf of nearly three-quarters of a million women. A lawsuit against Home Depot in the 1990s, alleging similar sex segregation, was settled out of court for \$65 million (plus \$22.5 million in lawyers’ fees).²⁷

Perhaps the most widely cited case in sex segregation was the case of *EEOC v Sears*, a case brought by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against the giant chain of retail stores. The EEOC had found that Sears had routinely shuttled women and men into different sales positions, resulting in massive wage disparities between the two. Women were pushed into over-the-counter retail positions, largely in clothing, jewelry, and household goods, where commissions tended to be low and where workers received straight salary for their work. Men, on the other hand, tended to concentrate in sales of high-end consumer goods, such as refrigerators and televisions, which offered high commissions.

Sears argued that this sex-based division of retail sales resulted from individual choice on the part of its male and female labor forces. Differential socialization, Sears suggested, led women and men to pursue different career paths. Women, Sears claimed, were less interested in the more demanding, intensely competitive, and time-consuming higher-end commission sales positions and were more interested in those that offered them more flexibility, whereas the men were more interested in those pressure-filled, high-paying positions. Women, Sears argued, were more relationship-centered and less competitive.

The EEOC, by contrast, argued that although Sears did not intend to discriminate, such outcomes were the result of gender-based discrimination. The case did not pit the interests or motivations of all men against those of all women, but rather included

only those women who were already in the labor force, who, one assumed, had similar motivations to those of men in the labor force. Just because it is true, argues historian Alice Kessler-Harris, who was an expert witness for the EEOC, that there are average differences between women and men in their motivations does not mean that every single member of the group “men” or “women” is identical and that some would not seek the opportunities afforded to the other group. To discriminate against individuals on the basis of average between-group differences ignores the differences *within* each group, differences that often turn out to be greater than the differences between the groups.

Such behavior, of course, relies on stereotypes and should be prohibited under the law. Stereotypes assume that all members of a group share characteristics that, possibly, some members of the group share—and even, occasionally, most members share. Logically, stereotypes fall into a compositional fallacy—assuming that what is true of some is true of all. So it would be illogical to assert that just because all members of category A are also members of category B, all members of category B are members of category A. You know nothing, for example, about the relative size of these categories: All A’s may be B’s, and yet all B’s may not be A’s. Thus in the classic formulation of the compositional fallacy one might say, “All members of the Mafia are Italian, but all Italians are not members of the Mafia” or “All humans are animals, but not all animals are human.”

In the Sears case, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Sears’s acquittal on sex discrimination charges, in part because the Court said that no single individual woman had stepped forward and declared that she had sought to enter high-commission sales or had been refused because of these stereotypes. (Often legal cases seem to need a concrete plaintiff because the courts are less convinced by aggregate statistical disparities if no individual has been harmed.) And the Court found that gender differences did play a role, that “since difference was real and fundamental, it could explain statistical variations in Sears hiring.” Yes. And it probably also explains the differences in salary.²⁸

INCOME DISCRIMINATION—THE WAGE GAP

Another major consequence of the combination of sex segregation and the persistence of archaic gender ideologies is income discrimination. At both the aggregate level and the individual level—whether we average all incomes or look at specific individuals’ wages for the jobs they do—women earn less than men. This wage difference begins early in our lives—even before we begin working. A 1995 *Wall Street Journal* report observed that elementary school girls receive smaller allowances and are asked to do more chores than boys are.²⁹

Income inequality often remains invisible precisely because of sex segregation—what appears to us simply as paying people doing different *jobs* is actually a way of paying different *genders* differently for doing roughly the same jobs with the same skill levels. As long as it appears that pay is the attribute of the job, and not of the gender of the person doing the job, income inequality remains invisible to us (figures 9.7 and 9.8). In 1999, the median annual income for men working full-time was \$37,057. For women it was \$27,194, about 73 percent of men’s annual income. By 2003, that gap had shrunk still further—today women’s wages are about 77 percent of men’s wages (75 percent for whites, 87 percent for blacks and Hispanics). Actually, that is due, in



Figure 9.7. The Gender Wage Gap Explained. October 7th, 2008 Barry Deutsch Posted in *Economic cartoons*, *Feminist cartoons*. Courtesy Barry Deutsch from *cartoons.com*.

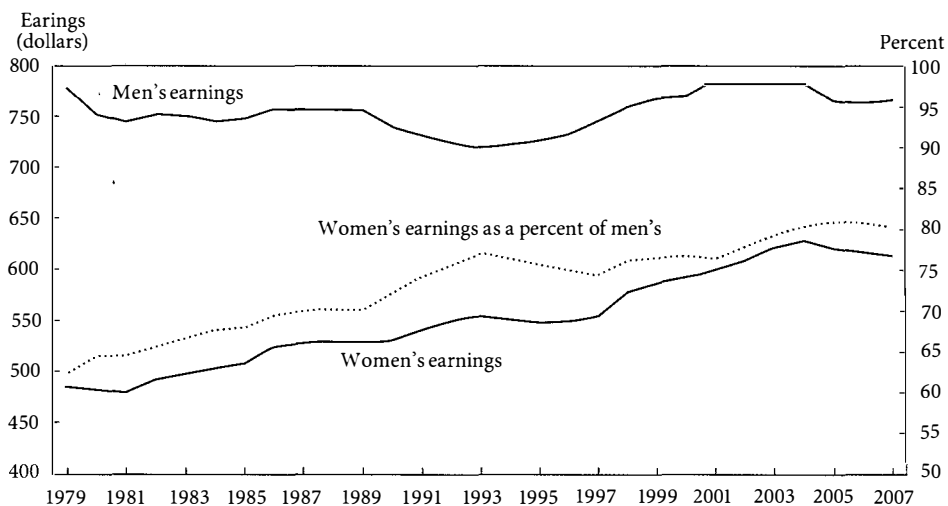


Figure 9.8. Median usual weekly earnings of full-time wage and salary workers in constant (2007) dollars, by sex, 1979–2007 annual averages.

large part, not to the massive increases in women's wages, but rather to the decline in men's wages—the decline, especially, in the high-wage skilled manufacturing sector of the economy, where jobs have been exported overseas to workers who receive decidedly lower wages.

On average, working women still bring home \$192 a week less than men. To illustrate the extent of this wage inequality, every year the president proclaims a date in early April “National Pay Inequity Awareness Day.” Why then? Because the average woman in a full-time job would need to work for a full year and then until early April of the next year to match what the average man earned the year before.²³⁰

The National Committee on Pay Equity estimated that in 1996 alone working women lost almost \$100 million due to wage inequality. Over the course of her lifetime, the average working woman will lose about \$420,000. And the gender gap in income is made more complex by both race and educational level. Black and Hispanic men earn less than white men, and black men earn only slightly more than white women. Black and Hispanic women earn significantly less than white men or white women, and black women earn slightly more than Hispanic men (figure 9.9).

What is, perhaps, most astonishing is how consistent this wage gap has been. In biblical times, female workers were valued at thirty pieces of silver, whereas men were valued at fifty, i.e., women were valued at 60 percent. In the United States, this wage difference has remained relatively constant for the past 150 years! Since the Civil War, women's wages have fluctuated between one-half and two-thirds of men's wages.

The wage gap varies with the level of education. College-educated women earn 29 percent less than college-educated men; in fact, college-educated women earn about the same as noncollege-educated men (figure 9.10). And the gap varies with age, actually increasing throughout women's lives. The reason for this is simple: Women and men enter the labor force at more comparable starting salaries; women aged fifteen to twenty-four earn 93 percent as much as their male counterparts. But as women continue their careers, gender discrimination in promotion and raises adds to the differences in income, so that women aged fifty-five to fifty-nine earn only 62 percent as much as men (figure 9.11). A report from the General Accounting Office found that the

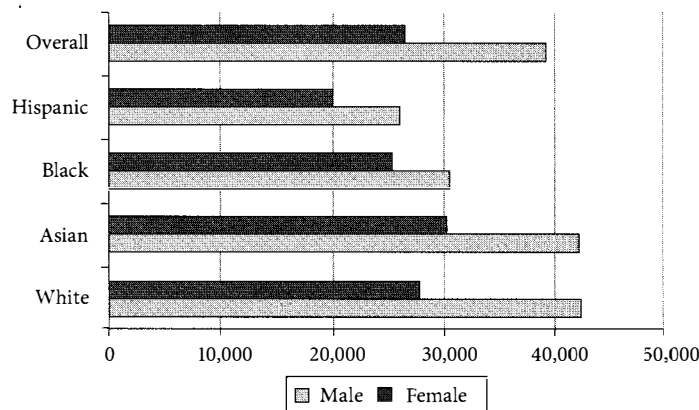


Figure 9.9. 2005 U.S. Census figures on the wage gap, 2005.

Oh Really?

Have you heard the gender wage gap is a myth, a “feminist fiction”? Some have argued that the wage gap is the natural outcome of differences in education, years working, and especially the different motivations that women and men bring to the workplace.

Don’t believe it. Sure, people have different motivations when they enter the workplace. Unfortunately, these different motivations account for only a small amount of the differences in women’s and men’s wages. The wage gap persists because it combines structural inequalities, the attitudes and assumptions that both men and women carry around in our heads, and the choices we *all* have to make about balancing work and family.

Source: Arrah Nielsen, “Gender Wage Gap Is Feminist Fiction,” *Washington, D.C. Independent Women’s Forum*, April 15, 2005

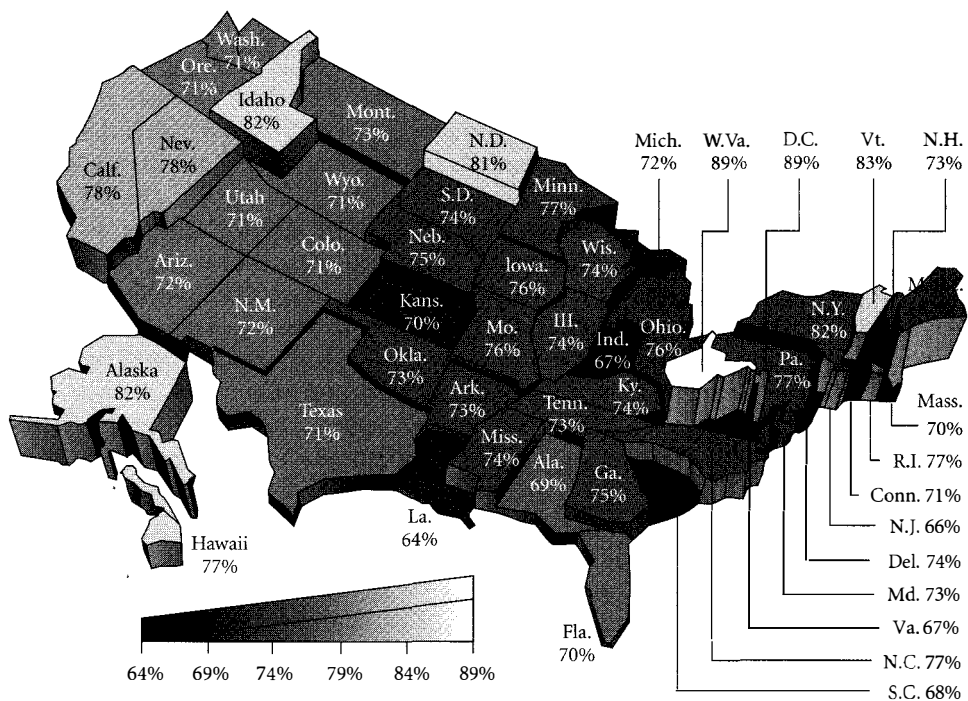


Figure 9.10. Earnings of women over 25 years old with at least a college degree as a percentage of the earnings of their male counterparts, 2003–05. Source: American Association of University Women analysis of Current Population Survey data.

difference in salaries between male and female managers actually grew by as much as twenty-one cents for every dollar earned between 1995 and 2000.³¹

Lawyers fare no better. A 2004 study, “Gender Penalties Revisited,” found that despite their increasing numbers, female attorneys had not reached the top positions in the field. Between four and ten years after law school, women attorneys were making

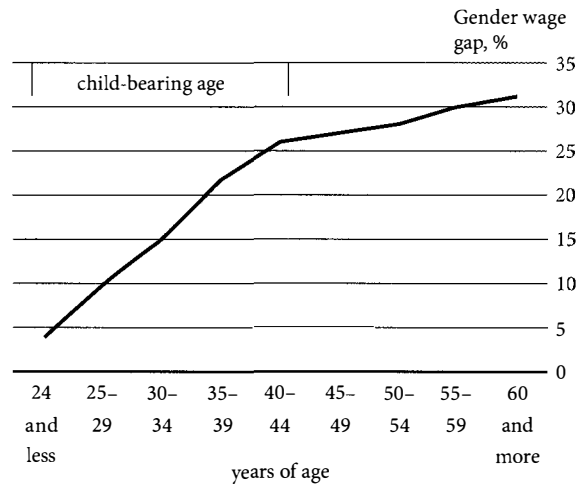


Figure 9.11. Older women have it even tougher but lose it from the start. *Source:* Federal Statistical Office for 2006.

about 96 percent of their male counterparts' salaries; but after the ten-year mark, women's salaries dipped to only 74 percent of men's.³²

Such a gap is probably better explained by women's and men's different experiences than by any conspiracy by men at the top to "permit" women to rise only so far, and no further, in their chosen fields. It's far more subtle and thus far more difficult a problem to tease apart. When men enter the labor force, they enter for good, whereas women occasionally take time out for childbearing and parental leave. This has a calamitous effect on women's wages and fuels the growing gap across the life span. In fact, women who drop out of the labor force have lower real wages when they come back to work than they had when they left. Two sociologists recently calculated that each child costs a woman 7 percent in wages.³³

Actually there's a wage gap among men also that is especially instructive about gender relations. Psychologists Timothy Judge and Beth Livingston divided male and female workers into two groups based on their gender attitudes. After they controlled for other variables—hours worked, education, occupational segregation, and the like—they found that men with "traditional" gender role attitudes—such as believing that women's place was in the home—translated into a whopping \$8,549 increase over men who held more egalitarian values. "If you are a man and you become more egalitarian, it really has a detrimental effect on your earnings," says Judge.³⁴

Within any occupation, women tend to be concentrated at the bottom of the pay scale. Across all industries, women make up nearly 50 percent of the workers but only 12 percent of the managers. Sociologist Judith Lorber described the reason why female physicians earn less than male physicians. "The fault may not lie in their psyches or female roles, but in the system of professional patronage and sponsorship which tracked them out of their prestigious specialties and 'inner fraternities' of American medical institutions by not recommending them for the better internships, residencies, and hospital staff positions, and by not referring patients," she writes.³⁵

How have women coped with this income inequality? In the 1860s, one woman came up with a rather novel solution:

I was almost at the end of my rope. I had no money and a woman's wages were not enough to keep me alive. I looked around and saw men getting more money, and more work, and more money for the same kind of work. I decided to become a man. It was simple. I just put on men's clothing and applied for a man's job. I got good money for those times, so I stuck to it.³⁶

Novel, yes, but not exactly practical for an entire gender! So women have pressed for equal wages—in their unions, professional associations, and in every arena in which they have worked. In 1963, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act and established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to monitor discrimination by race and by gender. To date, the EEOC has heard thousands of cases, among them a 1986 case in which the Bethlehem Steel Corporation was found to be paying women workers about \$200 a month less than men doing the same clerical work. (In a settlement out of court, the company paid each of the 104 female plaintiffs \$3,000.) In a widely discussed 1992 case, a female assistant metropolitan editor at the *New York Times* earned between \$6,675 and \$12,511 less than male co-workers doing the same job. What's more, she earned \$2,435 less than the male editor she replaced and \$7,126 less than the man who replaced her when she quit in disgust.

Women thus face a double bind in their efforts to achieve workplace equality. On the one hand, traditional gender ideologies prevent them from entering those occupations that pay well; they are pushed into less-paying sectors of the economy. On the other hand, when they enter those well-paying fields, they are prevented from moving up. This is what is known as the “glass ceiling.”

THE “GLASS CEILING”

One consequence of sex segregation is discrimination against women in promotion. Women face the twin barriers of the “glass ceiling” and the “sticky floor,” which combine to keep them stuck at the bottom and unable to reach the top. The sticky floor keeps women trapped in low-wage positions, with little opportunity for upward mobility. The glass ceiling consists of “those artificial barriers, based on attitudinal or organizational bias, that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward within their organization into management level positions.”³⁷

In 1995, the U.S. government's Glass Ceiling Commission found that the glass ceiling continued “to deny untold numbers of qualified people the opportunity to compete for and hold executive level positions in the private sector.” Although women held 45.7 percent of all jobs and more than 50 percent of all master's degrees, 95 percent of senior managers were men, and female managers' earnings were 68 percent those of their male counterparts. Ten years later, women held 46.5 percent of all jobs but continued to hold less than 8 percent of top managerships, and their earnings were about 72 percent those of their male colleagues. Absent some government-sponsored policy initiatives, these numbers are likely to remain low.³⁸

A recent court case provides examples of both phenomena and a graphic illustration of how traditional gender stereotypes continue to work against women. Eight women brought suit against the Publix Super Markets, Inc., a chain of groceries with

over nine hundred stores throughout the South. One of the plaintiffs said that she was stuck in a cashier's job and was denied a transfer or promotion to stocking shelves because, as a male supervisor told her, women were not capable of holding supervisory positions. Another woman employee was denied a promotion on the grounds that she was not the head of her household—despite the fact that she was raising her three children alone! In February 1997, Publix agreed to pay \$81.5 million to settle the case.

The glass ceiling keeps women from being promoted equally with men. Women hold only 16 percent of all corporate board seats. There are only fifteen women CEOs in the *Fortune* 500 (about 2.6 percent), and only another ten in the next five hundred. And the glass ceiling's effects are multiplied when race is brought into the equation. In 1970, between 1 and 3 percent of all senior management positions in all *Fortune* 500 companies were held by women and minorities; in 1990, only 5 percent were held by women and minorities. In 1988, 72 percent of all managers in companies with more than one hundred employees were white men; 23 percent were white women; 3 percent were black men, and 2 percent were black women (figure 9.12).

Business Week surveyed 3,664 business school graduates in 1990 and found that a woman with an MBA from one of the top business schools earned an average of \$54,749 in her first year after graduation, whereas a man from a similar program earned \$61,400. This gap—12 percent—actually widened as these business graduates progressed. A 1993 study of the Stanford University Business School class of 1982 found that only ten years

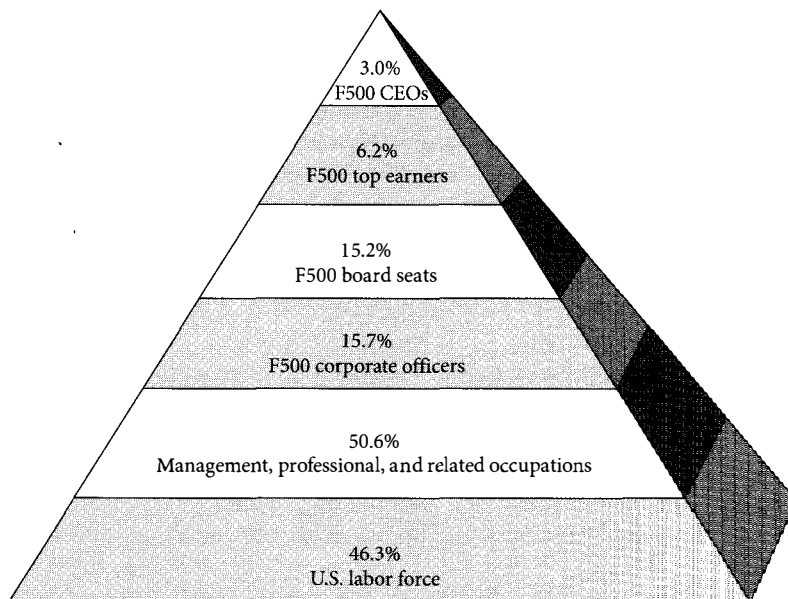


Figure 9.12. The Catalyst Pyramid: U.S. Women in Business. Source: Catalyst Research.

after graduation, 16 percent of the male graduates were CEOs, chairmen, or presidents of companies, compared with only 2 percent of the female graduates.

Again, these different trajectories have virtually nothing to do with the ambitions or aspirations of the men and women who occupy these positions. For two years, an economist followed five female and five male trainees in a large Swedish multinational corporation (with six thousand employees). All came from similar backgrounds, had similar education, and had similar goals and ambitions. All ten aspired to top management positions. After their training, they all still were similar. At the end of the two years, all the men and none of the women had entered the top management group.

The glass ceiling occurs under a variety of circumstances. Corporate management may be either unable or unwilling to establish policies and practices that are effective mechanisms to promote workplace diversity. The company may not have adequate job evaluation criteria that allow for comparable-worth criteria, or it may rely on traditional gender stereotypes in evaluation. Limited family-friendly workplace policies will also inhibit women's ability to rise.

Perhaps the most important element that reinforces the glass ceiling is the informal effort by men to restore or retain the all-male atmosphere of the corporate hierarchy. Equal opportunities for advancement would disrupt the casual friendliness and informality of the homosocial world at the top—the fact that those with whom one interacts share similar basic values and assumptions. “What’s important is comfort, chemistry, relationships and collaborations,” one manager explained. “That’s what makes a shop work. When we find minorities and women who think like we do, we snatch them up.” One British study of female MBAs, for example, found that by far the “most significant” and “most resistant” barrier to women’s advancement was the “‘men’s club’ network.”³⁹

The most celebrated decision involving a corporate glass ceiling was the 1989 Supreme Court decision in *Hopkins v Price Waterhouse*. A woman, Ann Hopkins, was denied promotion to partnership in one of the nation’s largest and most prestigious accounting firms. Although she had brought more business into the company than any of the men who were promoted, she was perceived as abrasive and demanding. Opponents of her promotion said she was “macho” and that she “overcompensated for being a woman” and that she would benefit from “a course at charm school.” One of her supporters told her that she might make partner if she could learn to “walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely, wear makeup, have her hair styled, and wear jewelry.” The court awarded her \$400,000 in back pay and fees and required that she be promoted to partner.

The Hopkins case provides a perfect illustration of the ways in which traditional gender stereotypes also impede women’s progress. Had Ms. Hopkins *been* more traditionally feminine, she would never have been the aggressive and ambitious success that she became. Thus, either way, women lose. Either they are too aggressive, in which case they are seen as mannish, “ball-busting bitches,” or they are too ladylike and as a result are passed over as being too passive, sweet, and not ambitious enough (figure 9.13).

In 1991, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which established the Glass Ceiling Commission to eliminate “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias.” These barriers included management relying on word-of-mouth to fill upper-level



Figure 9.13. Courtesy of Rob Rogers: © The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette/Dist. by United Feature Syndicate.

positions (the “old boys’ network”). The commission suggested that a system of monetary compensations be instituted for word-of-mouth referrals of qualified women and minorities. Some companies have already instituted their own policies designed to enable women to break through the glass ceiling in all three areas where women experience it—hiring, promotion, and retention. These companies tend to be among the more forward-looking companies. For example, in 1992, Reebok International initiated a diversity program in hiring practices by developing effective college recruitment policies and internships for women and minorities. In two years, the company tripled its minority employment to 15 percent of its U.S. workforce and increased the number of women to more than 50 percent. The Bank of Montreal targeted promotion, and between 1991 and 1993 the bank increased the percentage of women at the executive level from 29 percent to 54 percent. The bank also initiated a program that specified targets for promoting and retaining women and minorities and developed a series of gender-awareness workshops for senior management. Finally, in 1993–1994, Lotus, the international software company, tried to increase retention of capable women and minorities who were leaving the company because they felt they did not get either the information they needed to be effective or the opportunities they expected. The company offered incentives to managers who reduced turnover and initiated disincentives for managers whose staff showed higher turnover rates. Turnover of women fell from 21 percent to 16 percent and among African Americans from 25.5 percent to 20.5 percent.

The glass ceiling has different impacts on men, depending upon your political persuasion. Writer Warren Farrell argues that all the attention paid to the ways

women are held back from promotion by the glass ceiling hides the fact that it is *men* who are the victims of sex discrimination in the workplace. Men, Farrell argues, are the victims of the “glass cellar”—stuck in the most hazardous and dangerous occupations. In fact, Farrell argues, of the 250 occupations ranked by the *Jobs Related Almanac*, the twenty-five worst jobs (such as truck driver, roofer, boilermaker, construction worker, welder, and football player) were almost all male. Over 90 percent of all occupational deaths happen to men. All the hazardous occupations are virtually all-male—including firefighting (99 percent), logging (98 percent), trucking (98 percent), and construction (97 percent)—whereas the “safest” occupations are those held by women, including secretary (99 percent female) and receptionist (97 percent).⁴⁰

Farrell has a point: Many of the jobs that men take *are* hazardous—and made more so unnecessarily by an ideology of masculinity that demands that men remain stoic and uncomplaining in the face of danger. Thus on dangerous construction sites or off-shore oil rigs, men frequently shun safety precautions, such as safety helmets, as suitable, perhaps, for sissies or wimps, but not for “real” men. But the conclusion that men, not women, are discriminated against flies in the face of both evidence and reason. Because the jobs that are the most exclusively male are also those whose workers have fought most fiercely against the entry of women in the first place. And they’re far better paying than the jobs that are almost exclusively female. For example, the nation’s fire departments have been especially resistant to women joining their “fraternal order,” doing so only under court order and often admitting women with a significant amount of harassment. It would be odd to propose that this is the result of discrimination against men or to blame women for not entering those occupations from which they have been excluded by men’s resistance.

THE PROBLEM OF TOKENS

What really does happen when women enter “men’s” occupations and men enter “women’s” occupations? In both cases, they experience tokenism. But their experiences as tokens are often very different. Tokens are people who are admitted into an organization but who are recognizably different from the large majority of the members of the organization. But tokens are more than simply the members of a numerical minority: Tokens are accepted not *despite* their minority status but rather *because* of it. They are actively discouraged from recruiting others like themselves and become eager to fit in and become part of the organizational mainstream. Typically, tokens may even become more strongly wedded to organizational norms than do members of the numerical majority.

According to Rosabeth Moss Kanter, whose pioneering work, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, first analyzed the problem, tokenism widens the contrasts between groups rather than narrowing them, as the contrasts between the token and the majority are exaggerated to become the sole difference. Tokens, Kanter writes, are thus “often treated as representative of their category, as symbols rather than as individuals.”⁴¹ The token is always in the spotlight—everyone notices him or her, but only because he or she is different. Tokens are rarely seen as similar to others in the group. Thus tokens have a double experience of visibility—they are *hypervisible* as members of their “category,” but they are completely *invisible* as individuals.

Think about a situation where you were virtually the only “something” in a group. It could be that you were the only man or woman, the only white person or person of color, the only gay or straight person in a group. How did you feel when someone would turn to you and say, “So, how do white people feel about this issue?” or “What do women say about this?” At that moment you cease to be an individual and are seen only as a representative of the group. Chances are you responded by saying something like, “I don’t know. I’m not all women or all white people. You’d have to take a survey.” If you can imagine that experience of hypervisibility and invisibility all the time in your workplace, you’ll begin to have an idea of what tokenism feels like.

Simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility have serious consequences. “The token does not have to work hard to have her presence noticed, but she does have to work hard to have her achievements noticed,” Kanter writes. The token is often forced to choose between the two—“trying to limit visibility—and being overlooked—or taking advantage of the publicity—and being labeled a ‘troublemaker.’” This can take an enormous emotional and psychological toll:

Tokenism is stressful; the burdens carried by tokens in the management of social relations take a toll in psychological stress, even if the token succeeds in work performance. Unsatisfactory social relationships, miserable self-imagery, frustrations from contradictory demands, inhibition of self-expression, feelings of inadequacy and self-hatred, all have been suggested as consequences of tokenism.⁴²

Kanter argues that her theory of tokenism holds regardless of whether the tokens are male or female. Subsequent research has suggested dramatically different experiences when women are the tokens in a largely male work world and when men are the tokens in a largely female occupation.⁴³ Men entering mostly female occupations have the opposite experience from women. They don’t bump up against a glass ceiling; instead, they ride on what sociologist Christine Williams calls the “glass escalator,” having a much easier time being promoted than even women do. Williams conducted interviews with seventy-six men and twenty-three women in four fields—nursing, librarianship, elementary education, and social work. She found that men experienced positive discrimination when entering those fields; several people noted a clear preference for hiring men. And men were promoted to managerial positions more rapidly and frequently, thus making men overrepresented in the managerial ranks. Men who do women’s work, it appears, may earn less than men who work in predominantly male occupations, but they earn more and are promoted faster than women in the same occupation.⁴⁴

Men did experience some negative effects, especially in their dealings with the public. For example, male nurses faced a common stereotype that they were gay. Male librarians faced images of themselves as “wimpy” and asexual; male social workers were seen as “feminine” or “passive.” One male librarian found that he had difficulty establishing enough credibility so that the public would accept him as the children’s “storyteller.” Ironically, though, Williams found that these negative stereotypes of men doing “women’s work” actually added to the glass escalator effect “by pressuring men to move *out* of the most female-identified areas, and *up* to those regarded as more legitimate and prestigious for men.”⁴⁵

Williams concluded that men “take their gender privilege with them when they enter predominantly female occupations: this translates as an advantage in spite of their numerical rarity.” Men, it seems, win either way. When women are tokens, men retain their numerical superiority and are able to maintain their gender privilege by restricting a woman’s entry, promotion, and experiences in the workplace. When men are tokens, they are welcomed into the profession and use their gender privilege to rise quickly in the hierarchy. “Regardless of the problems that might exist,” writes Alfred Kadushin, “it is clear and undeniable that there is a considerable advantage in being a member of the male minority in any female profession.”⁴⁶

Such a statement goes a long way toward explaining why men continue to resist workplace equality. After all, men have a pretty good deal with things as they are; as economist Heidi Hartmann writes:

Low wages keep women dependent on men because they encourage women to marry. Married women must perform domestic chores for their husbands. Men benefit, then, from both higher wages and the domestic division of labor. This domestic division of labor, in turn, acts to weaken women’s position in the labor market. Thus, the hierarchical domestic division of labor is perpetuated by the labor market, and vice versa.⁴⁷

Workplace inequality is not only a good deal for men, but also it is often invisible to them. Inequality is almost always invisible to those who benefit from it—in fact, that’s one of the chief benefits! What is certainly not a level playing field is *experienced* as level, which leads men to feel entitled to keep things just as they are. Let me give you one example. I recently appeared on a television talk show opposite three “angry white males” who felt that they had been the victims of workplace discrimination. The show’s title, no doubt to entice a large potential audience, was “A Black Woman Stole My Job.” These men all complained that they had been the victims of “reverse discrimination,” because, they believed, they had lost a job possibility to a woman who was less qualified than they.

In my comments to these “angry white males,” I invited them to consider one word in the show’s title—the word “My.” What did that word mean? Did they feel that those jobs were actually “theirs,” that they were entitled to them, and that when some “other” person—black, female—got the job, that person was really taking “their” job? But by what right is that their job? By convention, perhaps, by a historical legacy of discrimination, certainly. Of course, a more accurate title for the show should have been “A Black Woman Got a Job” or “...Got *the* Job.” But “my” job? Competing equally for rewards that we used to receive simply by virtue of our race or our sex actually feels like discrimination. Equality will always feel uncomfortable for those who once benefited from inequality.

Another reason why men resist the gender-integrated workplace is that men say they would be distracted by women. A headline in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1991 announced that “Women as Colleagues Can Turn Men Off.” The 1995 report of the Department of Labor’s Glass Ceiling Commission quoted one male executive who said, “What’s important is comfort, chemistry, . . . and collaborations.” Many white men, he continued, “don’t like the competition and they don’t like the tension” of working alongside female colleagues. That the presence of women would distract men from the tasks

at hand or disturb the fragile yet necessary bonding among males was also the argument made by men in the military and at military schools like VMI and the Citadel.⁴⁸

Except, as we've seen, it's not necessarily true. There are many situations in which women and men work side by side without there being any "distractions." Doctors and nurses, managers and secretaries don't seem to have much problem with distraction. And all the women at VMI and the Citadel (before co-education)—all those professors, service workers, staff, maids, and kitchen workers—didn't seem to upset the cadets very much. It's not the presence or absence of women that seems to be distracting—it's the presence of women *as equals* that that men are really worrying about.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is one of the chief ways by which men resist gender equality in the workplace. The nation's current preoccupation with sexual harassment is fueled by several different trends—the increased reporting by women of their experiences at work or in school, the relabeling of behaviors that men used to take for granted, the increasing pressure that men face in the workplace, and the increasing willingness of the legal system to assign blame—costly blame—for this practice. Sexual harassment was first identified as a form of sex discrimination and litigated in the late 1970s. Feminist lawyer Catharine MacKinnon argued that sexual harassment is a violation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which makes it "an unlawful employment practice for an employer . . . to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin." Sexual harassment, MacKinnon argued, violates this law because it discriminates against women on the basis of their sex, and, what's more, sexual harassment creates a hostile environment for working women.⁴⁹ By 1982, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit declared:

Sexual harassment which creates a hostile or offensive environment for members of one sex is every bit the arbitrary barrier to sexual equality at the workplace that racial harassment is to racial equality. Sure, a requirement that a man or woman run a gauntlet of sexual abuse in return for the privilege of being allowed to work and make a living can be as demeaning and disconcerting as the harshest of racial epithets.⁵⁰

But it was not until 1991 that the extent of the problem and its effects on women in the workplace began to be fully recognized. In October of that year, Anita Hill declared that she had been sexually harassed by Clarence Thomas when she worked for him at the EEOC, and suddenly the entire nation sat transfixed before its television sets as Thomas's confirmation hearings to the U.S. Supreme Court took a dramatically different turn. Hill alleged that she had been subjected to unwanted sexual advances, vile pornographic attempts at humor, and constant descriptions of Thomas's sexual prowess—even after she had made it clear that she was not interested in dating her boss.

At the time, the Senate Judiciary Committee treated Hill as if she were the criminal, accusing her of harboring desires for Thomas, insinuating that she was "a woman scorned," and implying that she was being duped by liberals who sought to derail the nomination. And, at the time, the nation split about evenly on the question of whom

they believed, Thomas or Hill. The media declared in unison that the committee's harsh and suspicious treatment of Hill would have a "chilling effect" on American women, who would be less likely to come forward and describe the harassment that they had experienced.

A chilling effect? Have the media ever been more wrong? In the ensuing decade there has been more of a national thaw—as thousands of women came forward to describe what they had earlier kept as shameful personal secrets. The number of sexual harassment cases has more than doubled since 1991. Suddenly the nation had a name for what had been happening for decades to women in the workplace. In homes across the nation women were telling their husbands, their children, their parents, their friends of what had happened to them. By 1997, well over 80 percent of Americans had come to realize that Anita Hill had been telling the truth all along.

Since that time, sexual harassment has become a major issue in America. Between 50 and 85 percent of working women will experience some form of sexual harassment during their career. In a 1981 study of female federal employees, 12 percent reported mild harassment (suggestive gestures or remarks, pressure for dates), 29 percent reported severe harassment (touching, fondling, pressure for sex, menacing letters or phone calls), and 1 percent were raped on the job. Nearly 30 years later, in December 2008, a Harris poll found that 31 percent of female workers had been harassed at work, as had 7 percent of male workers. (All of the women reported that their harasser was a man, as did 41 percent of the males who reported harassment.)⁵¹

A 1989 study of almost a thousand female attorneys found that 60 percent had experienced sexual harassment; 13 percent had been the victim of rape, attempted rape, or assault. Only 7 percent of those attorneys reported the incident to the firm. A 1997 study of two thousand attorneys at 12 of the largest law firms found that 43 percent had experienced sexual teasing, jokes, remarks, or questions; 29 percent had experienced suggestive looks or gestures, and 26 percent had experienced deliberate touching, pinching, leaning over, or cornering—all within the past year alone.⁵²

And it's not just lawyers and other professionals. In fact, the number of cases filed with the EEOC doubled between 1990 and 1995 and has leveled off at between 12,000 and 15,000 per year ever since—and the majority of those cases were from women in blue-collar jobs. Women were far more likely to experience sexual harassment in traditionally male-only jobs like mining, construction, transportation, or manufacturing than they were in professional and white-collar jobs. Clearly, when women try to "cross over" into male-dominated jobs, they are seen as invaders, and sexual harassment is away to keep them out.⁵³

Sexual harassment takes many forms, from sexual assault to mocking innuendo. Typically, it takes one of two forms. In the most obvious, *quid pro quo* form, a trade of sexual contact is offered for a reward or the avoidance of punishment. This is the sex-for-grades model of teacher-student interaction, or the "sleep with me and you'll get promoted" or "don't sleep with me and you'll get fired" workplace scenario. Thus, for example, did U.S. Senator Robert Packwood end his congressional career—after nearly a dozen former female staffers accused him of unwanted kissing, fondling, attempts at sexual contact, and inappropriate remarks during his otherwise distinguished twenty-seven year career.

North Country

The 2005 film *North Country*, starring Charlize Theron, recounted the story of Lois Jensen, a mine-worker in Eveleth, Minnesota. Like the few other women mineworkers, Jensen, a single mother and daughter of a mineworker, was repeatedly threatened, humiliated, groped, stalked, and assaulted until she and twenty other women miners went to

court in 1984 and eventually won a landmark sexual discrimination lawsuit—the first class-action sexual harassment case in U.S. history. “It really was about getting a better paying job with benefits. I didn’t go there to bring up issues. I just wanted to make a decent life for my family,” Jensen said in an interview.

The second form is far murkier and is understood as the creation of a “hostile environment,” one in which women feel compromised, threatened, or unsafe. Women in medical schools, for example, described sexual harassment as taking several different forms, including being ignored, left behind during rounds, and not invited to assist during medical procedures. Consistently, female medical students reported being subjected to jokes or pranks, hearing women’s bodies being mocked during anatomy classes, and finding pornography shuffled into anatomy slides during lectures. Some law students recalled “ladies’ days,” when women were actually called on in class.

One of the more interesting sexual harassment cases involved the Mitsubishi Motor Corporation. In December 1994, twenty-nine women working at the car company’s plant in Normal, Illinois, filed a lawsuit alleging sexual harassment, claiming that their male co-workers routinely groped and grabbed at them. Some women had to agree to have sex in order to obtain jobs. Drawings of breasts, genitals, and sex acts were labeled with the names of women workers and attached to the cars’ fenders as they passed down the assembly line. After an investigation, the EEOC filed its own suit against the company in April 1996 on behalf of more than 280 women employees. A little over a year later, after a critical review of the company’s policies and procedures by former Labor Secretary Lynn Martin, the company settled its suit with twenty-seven of the twenty-nine original plaintiffs for \$9.5 million and began to implement broad changes in its corporate management.⁵⁴

Whether sexual harassment is manifest as *quid pro quo* or hostile environment, it is rarely about sexual attraction between employees. Men accused of harassment are seldom men who are simply awkward at asking women out for dates or men who are unusually lustful. Sexual harassment is, in fact, just the opposite. It is about making workers feel unwelcome in the workplace, about reminding them that they do not belong because the workplace is men’s space. As legal scholar Deborah Rhode writes, it is a “strategy of dominance and exclusion—a way of keeping women in their places and out of men’s.”⁵⁵

Think, for example, of sexual harassment on the street. Imagine a man making a rude, offensive comment to a woman as she walks by. “Hey, baby,” he shouts, “nice tits!” or, “You look good enough to eat!” If you were to ask this man about his comment, he might shrug off the issue by saying he was just trying to meet women or to indicate

sexual interest. But what if we were to take these men at their words? Imagine what would happen if that woman who is being harassed were to turn around and say, "Who me? Great. Dinner at eight?" Or if she had met his crude remarks with some crudeness of her own. What would that man do now?

It's clear that these remarks are not meant to attract women, but, rather to repel them and send them scurrying away, reminded that the streets belong to men and that women who dare to walk on them alone, or who show up in bars alone, are defying an unwritten ordinance. Such remarks are rude reminders of male entitlement, an unwritten and often unconscious sense that the public arena belongs to "us" and that interlopers, female invaders, will be reminded that they don't really belong.

Until recently, the workplace has been such a male space, a homosocial preserve. But that world has vanished forever. It is now virtually impossible for a man to go through his entire working life without having a female colleague, co-worker, or boss. Women have entered the former boys' clubs—the streets, the corporate boardrooms, the hallowed halls of learning—and they are not going away, as much as some men might wish them to. Just when men's breadwinner status is threatened by economic downsizing and corporate restructuring, women appear on the scene and become easy targets for men's anger. *This* is the context in which we must consider the question of sexual harassment, its gendered political economy, so to speak. Sexual harassment in the workplace is a distorted effort to put women back in their place, to remind them that they are not equal to men in the workplace, that they are, still, after all their gains, just women, even if they are in the workplace. "Harassment is a way for a man to make a woman vulnerable," says Dr. John Gottman, a psychologist at the University of Washington.

And it works. Harassed women report increased stress, irritability, eating and sleeping disorders, and absenteeism. Often, as one researcher writes, they feel humiliated and helpless and describe the "daily barrage of sexual interplay in the office as psychological rape." Harassment occurs most frequently in the most recently integrated workplaces, like the surgical operating theater, firefighting, and investment banking, where women are new and in the minority. "Men see women as invading a masculine environment," says Dr. Louise Fitzgerald, a University of Illinois psychologist. "These are guys whose sexual harassment has nothing whatever to do with sex. They're trying to scare women off a male preserve."⁵⁶

One other thing that sexual harassment is typically *not* about is one person telling the truth and the other person lying. Sexual harassment cases are difficult and confusing precisely because there are often many truths. "His" truth might be what appears to him as an innocent indication of sexual interest or harmless joking with the "boys in the office" (even if those "boys" happen to include women). He may experience sexual innuendo or references to pornography as harmless fun, as what the workplace was supposed to be like for men. He works there, therefore, he's entitled to treat the workplace as an extension of the locker room. "Her" truth may be that his seemingly innocent remarks cause stress, anxiety about promotion, firing, and sexual pressure.

The law about sexual harassment has reflected these two truths. The legal standard of harassment has been whether a "reasonable person" would see the behavior as harassment. A 1991 Ninth Circuit Court case, *Ellison v Brady*, nearly changed all that.

For the first time, the court “saw” the invisibility of gender—and ruled that the “reasonable *person*” actually meant a reasonable *man*, and that men and women might well see the situation differently. Harassers often “do not realize that their conduct creates a hostile working environment,” the court found, but “the victim of sexual harassment should not be punished for the conduct of the harasser.” Thus the court established a “reasonable *woman* standard,” because, as the court opinion stated, “a sex-blind reasonable person standard tends to be male-biased and tends to systematically ignore the experiences of women.”

Unfortunately, this reasoning didn’t hold for too long, as cases became so complex and convoluted that the Supreme Court stepped in two years later and ruled in *Harris v Forklift* again that the “reasonable person” standard is sufficient. However, the effect was noticeable: Now, no longer is the intention of the harasser the standard against which the crime is measured—it’s the perceived effect on the victim by a “reasonable person.”⁵⁷

And this change has predictably caused a significant amount of defensiveness and confusion among American men. After all, the rules have been changed. What used to be routine behavior for men in the workplace may now be called “sexual harassment.” “Clarence Thomas didn’t do anything wrong, that any American male hasn’t done,” commented Dale Whitcomb, a thirty-two-year-old machinist during the Thomas confirmation hearings. Two-thirds of the men surveyed said they would be complimented if they were propositioned by a woman at work, giving some idea about how men have misperceived the problem.

At the societal level, sexual harassment stymies women’s equality. And it is costly. Both private and public sectors lose millions because of absenteeism, reduced productivity, and high turnover of female employees. One study by *Working Woman* magazine indicated that the top 150 of the *Fortune* 500 companies lose \$6.7 million *per year* due to sexual harassment. The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board reports that absenteeism, job turnover, and lost productivity because of sexual harassment cost the government an estimated minimum of \$189 million a year. Corporate executives and partners in large law firms say they are terrified about massive lawsuits from charges of sexual harassment.⁵⁸

Men are also harmed by sexual harassment. Male supervisors and employers are hurt when sexual harassment makes women less productive. With increased absenteeism, higher rates of turnover, and greater job-related stress, women will not perform to the best of their abilities. Some men may find such compromised performance a relief—competing with women as equals and losing may be too great a blow to fragile male egos—but supervisors cannot afford to have women working at less than their best without it eventually also affecting their own performance evaluations. Supervisors and employers should want *all* their employees to feel safe and comfortable so that they may perform to the maximum of their abilities. Men’s ability to form positive and productive relationships with equal colleagues in the workplace is undermined by sexual harassment. So long as sexual harassment is a daily occurrence and women are afraid of their superiors in the workplace, innocent men’s cordial and courteous behaviors may also be misinterpreted.

And finally, men can be harmed by sexual harassment from other men. In March 1998, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that men can be the victims of sexual harassment from other men, even when all the men involved are heterosexual. Fewer than

10 percent of all cases filed with the EEOC in 1999 were by men, but that percentage has steadily climbed to over 14 percent today.⁵⁹ Although the majority of the harassers in such cases are also male, there are some cases in which a female supervisor has harassed a male subordinate. Sexual harassment, then, has been expanded to include men who are not traditionally “masculine” and are therefore punished for it by other men, as well as women who are harassed when they act “too” masculine or when they don’t act masculine “enough.” And people still believe that the workplace isn’t gendered!

REMEDIES FOR WORKPLACE INEQUALITY

Despite all the arguments about gender difference that presume that men and women are from different planets, the fact is that comparable percentages of women and men are in the workplace and for the same reasons. Yet the workplace remains a decidedly unequal arena, plagued by persistent sex segregation, wage inequality, sex discrimination, and sexual harassment. These inequalities exaggerate and even create the differences we think we observe. How can the workplace become a more equal arena, a place in which women *and* men can earn a living to support themselves and their families and experience the satisfaction of efficacy and competence?

One arena of change is the application of existing law. A good beginning might be full compliance with the 1963 Pay Equity Act, which prohibits employers from paying different wages to men and women who are doing the same or essentially the same work, or Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which guarantees the absence of discrimination based on race, sex, or national origin. To date, thirty states have undertaken some form of pay equity reform, and about \$527 million has been disbursed by twenty state governments to correct wage discrimination.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is charged with prosecuting cases of discrimination and harassment based on race, gender, national origin, and pregnancy. And since the EEOC was established, lawsuits have spiraled upward every year. Between 1992 and 2001, sexual harassment charges increased 146 percent, pregnancy discrimination 126 percent, sex discrimination 112 percent. Since 1980, sexual harassment charges have increased 150,000 percent—thanks to that one brave woman, Anita Hill, who had the courage to name what had happened to her while working for now–Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas—at the EEOC!⁶⁰

But a simple strategy of pay equity would be unlikely to make wages more equal, because, as we have seen, wage inequality depends on sex segregation for its legitimacy (and its invisibility). Comparable-worth programs require that “dissimilar work of equivalent value to the employer be paid the same wages.” Thus comparable-worth programs require a systematic review of jobs, ordering them on criteria of complexity and skills required so that they can be compared and thus wages allocated on a more gender-equal basis. Some social scientists have devised the Gender Neutral Job Comparison System to measure jobs more accurately; the system also factors into its equations such traditionally invisible (and traditionally “female”) skills as emotional labor or undesirable working conditions.⁶¹

Comparable-worth programs have become necessary because sex segregation is so intimately tied to wage inequality. But such programs have generated significant opposition, largely based on misperceptions of what the idea entails. For example, some

argue that it is impossible to determine the worth of jobs, despite the fact that nearly two-thirds of all companies already utilize job evaluations. Others say such programs will interfere with the normal operations of the labor market—as if the labor market set wages to begin with, and not bureaucracies, union officials, and managers relying on gender stereotypes. (If the labor market operated perfectly, there would be no wage discrimination, would there?) Others argue that such programs open a door for a paternalist government to set wage levels or that they would bankrupt employers forced to pay women higher wages. But each firm could set its wage levels based on skill, not sex. And besides, women earning higher wages would have increased consumer purchasing power, which would help the economy, not hurt it.⁶²

Comparable-worth and pay-equity schemes are not, of course, without their problems. They might have a remedial effect of evening out women's and men's wages at lower levels, for example, but they would also preserve the gap between lower-level jobs and upper-level management jobs, because both pay equity and comparable worth preserve "the idea that some jobs are worth more than others." What's more, they mute the effect of persistent gender stereotypes in the evaluations of positions, so that some men would be able to continue to resist gender equality by embedding it in performance evaluations.⁶³

Workplace equality also requires interventionist strategies in hiring and promotion. Although in recent years the trend has been for the United States to abandon affirmative action policies, such policies have been enormously effective in leveling the playing field even a little bit. (Could that be why there's so much opposition? After all, as political commentator Michael Kinsley notes, affirmative action is one of the few policies that "gives white men whining rights in the vicimization bazaar, just like minorities and women.") One reason why well-meaning Americans say they oppose affirmative action is that members of minority groups would find it demeaning to accept positions strictly on the ground that they are members of an underrepresented group, despite the fact that few women or minorities actually are hired or promoted for that reason alone. Anyway, it's probably more demeaning to be *denied* a position or a promotion because of membership in that group. When Barbara Babcock, an assistant attorney general in the Carter administration, was asked how she felt about getting her position because she was a woman, she replied, "It's better than not getting your job because you're a woman."⁶⁴

Another remedy will be the elimination of the "mommy track"—a subtle way that workplace gender inequality is reproduced. The mommy track refers to the ways in which workplace discrimination transmutes itself into discrimination against those workers who happen to take time off to get pregnant, bear children, and raise them. Though it is illegal to discriminate against women because of pregnancy, women are often forced off the fast track onto the mommy track because of what appear to be the demands of the positions they occupy. Young attorneys, for example, must bill a certain number of hours per week; failing to do so will result in their being denied partnerships. A woman thus faces a double bind: To the extent that she is a good mother, she cannot rise in the corporate world; to the extent that she rises in the corporate world, she is seen as a bad mother.⁶⁵

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act, passed in 1978, makes it illegal for employers to use pregnancy (or the likelihood that an employee will become pregnant) as the basis

Oh Really?

In the United States, our commitment to “family values” enables working women to opt out of working to take care of their families.

Such myths abound today. But let’s look a little closer. First, the only women who seem to be “opting out” are women at the very top of the economic pyramid, since virtually all young people want to work—and have families. And those very few women who do opt out do so largely because their husbands do virtually no housework or child care. And who can balance work and family all by themselves? Did you know that in one survey of 173 countries, only 5 offered no paid leave for either parent in any segment of the labor force: Lesotho, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Swaziland, and the United States. “Family values” encompasses the workplace as well as the family, and it requires placing the recourses of the state at the service of families. That is, family values requires that we actually, in our policies, value families.

Source: Jody Heymann, Alison Earle, and Jeffrey Hayes, *The Work, Family, and Equity Index* (Boston: Project on Global Working Families, 2006).

for decisions concerning hiring or promotion. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 provides up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave to care for a child, an adoptive child, or an ill child or relative. Compare this with the policies in the Nordic countries, where couples receive from twelve to fifteen months of *paid* parental leave to care for their newborn babies and in which both mothers and fathers are encouraged to take some portion of it.

Policies to remove the glass ceiling, especially on corporate boards, will likely have to come from governments that are brave enough to wade into intervention in corporate governance. Some governments have issued targets—the percentages of women they want on corporate boards. The European Union, as a whole, has begun to set such targets. Norway recently established a quota, mandating that the board of each company listed on its stock exchange be 40 percent female by 2008; France followed by mandating 20 percent for its boards by 2009.⁶⁶

The most obvious set of remedies falls under the general heading of “family-friendly workplace policies”—that collection of reforms, including on-site child care, flexible working hours, and parental leave, that allows parents some flexibility in balancing work and family life. *The National Report on Work and Family* reported in December 1997 that these were among the most significant criteria in helping companies to retain qualified and well-trained personnel.

Turns out it’s good business strategy as well. Roy Douglas Adler, a marketing professor at Pepperdine University, has looked at data from the *Fortune* 500 for the past thirty years. Consistently, the companies that most aggressively promoted women outperformed the industry medians, with overall revenue profits about 34 percent higher (equity profits were more than double that, or 69 percent higher). The Top 10 firms with the best record of promoting women showed even greater increases than those who were “merely” good. (Of course, one needs to be careful with such correlations. It might simply be that those companies that are more profitable may feel freer to experiment with promoting women. But when you find such results coming from

other countries as well, as we do in Britain, Sweden and Norway, then perhaps there is something to the other explanation: that promoting women is good for the company's bottom line.⁶⁷

In the end, workplace equality will require significant ideological and structural change—both in the way we work and in the way we live. We still inherit such outmoded ideas about what motivates us to work and what skills we bring when we get to work. John Gray's book *Mars and Venus in the Workplace* rehashed his stereotypes about how men and women approach situations differently. According to Gray, in the workplace men “retreat to a cave” when they have a problem to work out by themselves, whereas women “demonstrate sharing, cooperation, and collaboration.” Except that such interplanetary styles depend at least as much on the problem to be solved as on the gender of the person solving it. To make men feel more comfortable, Gray recommends that we take photos of male workers alongside their achievements and ask about their favorite football teams—ideas that Lucy Kellaway, a writer for the *Financial Times*, found “ill conceived, outdated and bizarre.”⁶⁸

Structural change is equally important as replacing tired clichés. As sociologists Ronnie Steinberg and A. Cook write:

Equal employment requires more than guaranteeing the right to equal access, the right to equal opportunity for promotion, or the right to equal pay for equal, or even comparable worth. Additionally, it warrants a broader policy orientation encompassing social welfare laws that assume equality within the family; widespread use of alternative work arrangements that accommodate the complexities of family life within two-earner families; and a rejuvenated union movement, with female leadership more active at work sites in defending the rights of women workers. Social welfare laws, family policy, and government services must create incentives toward a more equal division of responsibilities for family and household tasks between men and women. Increasing child care facilities, as well as maintaining programs to care for the elderly, would help alleviate some of the more pressing demands made on adults in families... This also means that tax policy, social security laws, and pension programs must be amended to make government incentives to family life consistent with a family structure in which husbands and wives are equal partners.⁶⁹

Another sociologist, Karen Oppenheim Mason, writes that gender inequality in the workplace is likely to remain “unless major revisions occur in our ideology of gender and the division of labor between the sexes.” Ultimately, she concludes, “job segregation is just a part of the generally separate (and unequal) lives that women and men in our society lead, and, unless the overall separateness is ended, the separateness within the occupational system is unlikely to end either.”⁷⁰

But reform will be worth it. Workplace equality will enable both women *and* men to experience more fulfilling lives—both in the workplace and outside of it.

CONCLUSION: TOWARD A BALANCE OF WORK AND FAMILY

Despite enormous and persistent gender inequality in the workplace, women are there to stay. Women work for the same reasons that men work—to support themselves and their families, to experience the sense of accomplishment, efficacy, and competence

that comes from succeeding in the workplace. Both men and women work because they want to and because they have to. The social and economic realities of most American families' lives these days are that both partners are working, which means that both are struggling to balance work and family life.

And a struggle it is, in part because our lives have changed faster than the institutions in which we find ourselves. "Our jobs don't make room for family obligations," writes Stephanie Coontz. "To correct this imbalance, we need to reorganize work to make it more compatible with family life." That is to say, we will never find that balance if all we do is tinker with our family relationships, better organize our time, outsource family work, juggle, or opt out. It will be possible only when the workplace changes as well.⁷¹

Several different kinds of policy reforms have been proposed to make the workplace more "family friendly"—to enable working men and women to effect that balancing act. These reforms generally revolve around three issues: on-site child care, flexible working hours, and parental leave. By making the workplace more family friendly, by implementing these three policy reforms, the workplace would, we think, be transformed from Ebenezer Scrooge's accounting firm into the set from the hit film *9 to 5*. Suddenly, overnight, when the evil boss was gone, the workplace was transformed. Green plants were everywhere. The women's desks had photographs of their children, while their children played in playpens right behind them. And, of course, productivity shot up so high that the corporate CEO decided to maintain these changes permanently.

But in the United States, we continue to think of these reforms as *women's* issues. It is women who campaign for them and women who say they want them. One recent best-selling book put all the pressure on women to accommodate themselves to the virtual impossibility of balancing work and family. Sylvia Hewlett found startlingly high percentages of childlessness among high-achieving women and argued that "the brutal demands of ambitious careers, the asymmetries of male-female relationships and the difficulties of bearing children late in life conspire to crowd out the possibility of having children." Childlessness becomes, as she puts it, a "creeping non-choice," and she urges a woman to be "intentional" about family life—grabbing a husband and having babies in her twenties and putting the career on the back burner.⁷²

Hewlett's solutions may appear overly voluntaristic, assuming that individual women need to make individual choices, rather than structural changes to the workplace itself, but they do have a ring of truth to them—because they are half right. The research does suggest that having children does stymie women's career ascendancy and that putting one's career first may hinder one's ability to have children.⁷³ But in both of these halves of the equation there is a variable missing: men. Women's career chances are stymied and their maternity is eclipsed *only if the men in their lives don't change*.

But on-site child care, flex time, and parental leave are not women's issues, they're *parents'* issues, and to the extent that men identify as parents, men ought to want these reforms as well. Politically, women probably cannot get the kinds of reforms they need without men's support; personally, men cannot have the lives they say they want without supporting these reforms. Women have already become what we might call "private careerists"—people who are willing to claim their workplace ambitions in the private

domain of their homes and families, willing to reorganize the shape, the size, and the timing of their family lives to try to balance both. Now we need a “public fatherhood” to complement that—men who are publicly committed, in their workplaces, to reorganize their career trajectories to accommodate their family responsibilities and commitments. Private careerism needs a public fatherhood.

Which was, you may recall, the trap that British Prime Minister Tony Blair fell into when he and his wife were expecting the birth of their son in 2000. Could he take the parental leave that he and his government had fought to institute? Did he dare? Of course, his wife, Cherie, a high-prestige lawyer who earns three times what Blair earns as prime minister and is the family breadwinner, took all of her allotted thirteen weeks of unpaid parental leave. Could Blair take a week off?

The answer was “almost.” Public opinion was split: Overwhelmingly (72 percent) Britons supported the idea of men taking parental leave, but over half (57 percent) thought Blair shouldn’t use it. His wife urged him to follow the example of the Finnish prime minister, who had just taken six whole days off when his daughter was born. In the end, Blair took two days off and worked from home.⁷⁴

It’s celebrated cases like this that make clear the problems we will continue to have in balancing work and family. These problems are both structural and attitudinal. Often the problem is that there are no policies in place that enable mothers and fathers to also be productive workers—that is, to balance their work and family commitments. And often the problem is that workers don’t avail themselves of the policies. Men are afraid they’ll be seen as less than fully committed to their careers, and their masculinity will be threatened; women fear they’ll be forever pegged as “mommies” and not as employees. Both fear the mommy or the daddy track. “Young fathers need to feel very secure in their careers, and they believe that asking for flexibility is seen as a lack of commitment—which makes them more vulnerable,” commented one British parental leave advocate. When Erika Kirby interviewed women and men about their experiences with parental leave policies she heard statements like this:

“No one talked to me directly and said ‘Gee, I resent the fact that you were on maternity leave,’ but I know that people felt that way.”

“People don’t understand that when I had six weeks off [for maternity leave] I needed six weeks off. I didn’t sit there and play cards, you know what I mean, go shopping every day.”

“Someone wanted paternity leave, and everybody laughed. I mean, they thought that was funny.”

“I wanted to take two weeks [of paternity leave] and the supervisor was saying ‘No, I don’t think, you know, that’s probably not a very good idea.’ ”

No wonder Kirby titled her article on the subject with another line she heard repeatedly: “The Policy Exists but You Can’t Really Use It.”⁷⁵

Balancing work and family will enable women to live the lives they say they want to live. Working mothers are happier and more productive, both as mothers and as workers, than are full-time mothers, notes psychologist Faye Crosby. Another psychologist, Joan Peters, writes that “mothers *should* work outside the home. If they do not, they cannot preserve their identities or raise children to have both independent and family

lives.” But to do so will require a dramatic change in the lives of American men. Men will need to take on their share of housework and child care—not merely to “pitch in” or “help out.” Balancing work and family will also enable American men to live the lives they say they want to live. As one man recently put it:

It’s amazing. I grew up thinking a man was someone who was gone most of the time, then showed up and ordered people around and, aside from that, never said a word. I don’t want my sons to have to deal with that kind of situation or to think that’s how the world is.⁷⁶

With more men like him—and a generation of women whose members refuse to remain second-class citizens in the workplace—his sons and his daughters may come to know a very different world.