Bringing the Men Back In: Sex Differentiation and the Devaluation of Women's Work

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One of the most enduring manifestations of sex inequality in industrial and postindustrial societies is the wage gap. In 1986, as in 1957, among full-time workers in the United States, men earned 50 percent more per hour than did women. This disparity translated to $8,000 a year in median earnings, an all-time high bonus for being male. Most sociologists agree that the major cause of the wage gap is the segregation of women and men into different kinds of work (Reskin and Hartmann 1986). Whether or not women freely choose the occupations in which they are concentrated, the outcome is the same: the more proportionately female an occupation, the lower its average wages (Treiman and Hartmann 1981). The high level of job segregation (Bielby and Baron 1984) means that the 1963 law stipulating equal pay for equal work did little to reduce the wage gap.7

This "causal model"—that the segregation of women and men into different occupations causes the wage gap—implies two possible remedies. One is to equalize men and women on the causal variable—occupation—by ensuring women's access to traditionally male occupations. The other is to replace occupation with a causal variable on which women and men differ less, by instituting comparable-worth pay policies that compensate workers for the "worth" of their job regardless of its sex composition.

I contend, however, that the preceding explanation of the wage gap is incorrect because it omits variables responsible for the difference between women and men in their distribution across occupations. If a causal model is incorrect, the remedies it implies may be ineffective. Lieberson's (1985, p. 185) critique of causal analysis as it is commonly practiced explicates the problem by distinguishing between superficial (or surface) causes that appear to give rise to a particular outcome and basic causes that actually produce the outcome. For example, he cites the belief that the black-white income gap is due to educational differences and thus can be reduced by reducing the educational disparity. As Lieberson pointed out, this analysis misses the fact that "the dominant group...uses its dominance to advance its own position" (p. 166), so that eliminating race differences in education is unlikely to reduce racial inequality in income because whites will find another way to maintain their income advantage. In other words, what appear in this example to be both the outcome variable (the black-white income gap) and the imputed causal variable (the black-white educational disparity) may stem from the same basic cause (whites' attempt to maintain their economic advantage). If so, then if the disparity in education were eliminated, some other factor would arise to produce the same economic consequence (Lieberson 1985, p. 164).
Dominant groups remain privileged because they write the rules, and the rules they write "enable them to continue to write the rules" (Lieberson 1985, p. 167; emphasis added). As a result, they can change the rules to thwart challenges to their position. Consider the following example. Because Asian American students tend to outscore occidentals on standard admissions tests, they are increasingly overrepresented in some university programs. Some universities have allegedly responded by imposing quotas for Asian students (Heckinger 1987, p. C1) or weighing more heavily admissions criteria on which they believe Asian Americans do less well.

How can one tell whether a variable is a superficial or a basic cause of some outcome? Lieberson offered a straightforward test: Does a change in that variable lead to a change in the outcome? Applying this rule to the prevailing causal theory of the wage gap, we find that between 1970 and 1980 the index of occupational sex segregation declined by 10 percent (Beller 1984), but the wage gap for full-time workers declined by just under 2 percent (computed from data in Blau and Ferber 1986, p. 171). Although its meaning may be equivocal, this finding is consistent with other evidence that attributing the wage gap to job segregation misses its basic cause: men's propensity to maintain their privileges. This claim is neither novel nor specific to men. Marxist and conflict theory have long recognized that dominant groups act to preserve their position (Collins 1975). Like other dominant groups, men are reluctant to give up their advantages (Goode 1982). To avoid having to do so, they construct "rules" for distributing rewards that guarantee them the lion's share (see also Epstein 1985, p. 30). In the past, men cited their need as household heads for a "family wage" (May 1982) and designated women as secondary earners. Today, when millions of women who head households would benefit from such a rule, occupation has supplanted it as the principle for assigning wages.

Neoclassical economic theory holds that the market is the mechanism through which wages are set, but markets are merely systems of rules (Marshall and Paulin n.d., p. 15) that dominant groups establish for their own purposes. When other groups, such as labor unions, amassed enough power, they modified the "market" principle. Steinberg (1987) observed that when consulted in making comparable-worth adjustments, male-dominated unions tended to support management over changes that would raise women's salaries (see also Simmons, Freedman, Dunkle, and Blau 1975, pp. 115-36; Hartmann 1976).

In sum, the basic cause of the income gap is not sex segregation but men's desire to preserve their advantage position and their ability to do so by establishing rules to distribute valued resources in their favor. Figure 1 represents this more complete causal model. Note that currently segregation is a superficial cause of the income gap, in part through "crowding" (Bergmann 1974), but that some other distributional system such as comparable-worth pay could replace it with the same effect.

With respect to income, this model implies that men will resist efforts to close the wage gap. Resistance will include opposing equalizing women's access to jobs because integration would equalize women and men on the current superficial cause of the wage gap—occupation. Men may also try to preserve job segregation because it is a central mechanism through which they retain their dominance in other spheres, and because many people learn to prefer the company of others like them. My theory also implies that men will resist efforts to replace occupation with alternative principles for assigning pay that would mitigate segregation's effect on women's wages (as pay equity purports to do).

Before I offer evidence for these claims, let us examine how dominant groups in general and men in particular maintain their privileged position. I formulate my analysis with reference to dominant groups to emphasize that the processes I discuss are not specific to sex classes. It also follows that, were women the
dominant sex, the claims I make about men’s behavior should hold for women.

DIFFERENTIATION, DEVALUATION, AND HIERARCHY

Differentiation—the practice of distinguishing categories based on some attribute—is the fundamental process in hierarchical systems, a logical necessity for differential evaluation and differential rewards. But differentiation involves much more than merely acting on a preexisting difference. In a hierarchical context, differentiation assumes, amplifies, and even creates psychological and behavioral differences in order to ensure that the subordinate group differs from the dominant group (Epstein 1983, p. 36; Jagger 1983, pp. 109–10; MacKinnon 1987, p. 38; West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 137), “because the systematically differential delivery of benefits and deprivations require[s] making no mistake about who is who” (MacKinnon 1987, p. 40) and because “differences are inequality’s post hoc excuse” (MacKinnon 1987, p. 8).

Differentiated status characteristics influence evaluations of people’s behavior and their overall worth (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch 1972; Pugh and Whahman 1983). In hierarchical systems in which differentiation takes the form of an Aristotelian dichotomy, individuals are classified as either A (“the subject”) or Not-A (“the other”). But these two classes are not construed as natural opposites that both have positive qualities; instead, A’s characteristics are valued as normal or good and Not-A’s as without value or negative (de Beauvoir 1953, p. xvi; Jay 1981).

The official response to the influx of south- and central-eastern European immigrants to the United States early in this century, when people assumed that each new group represented a distinct biological race (Lieberson 1980, p. 24), illustrates differentiation’s central role in dominance systems. A congressionally mandated immigration commission concluded that “inmate, ineradicable race distinctions separated groups of men from one another” and agreed on the necessity of classifying these races to know which were most worthy of survival. The immediate problem was to ascertain “whether there may not be certain races that are inferior to other races . . . to discover some test to show whether some may be better fitted for American citizenship than others.” (Lieberson 1980, pp. 2–26)

Thus differentiation in all its forms supports dominance systems by demonstrating that superordinate and subordinate groups differ in essential ways and that such differences are natural and even desirable.

“Sex Differentiation” versus “Gender Differentiation”: A Note on Terminology

Scholars speak of both “sex” and “gender” differentiation: the former when biological sex or the “sex category” into which people are placed at birth (West and Zimmerman 1987, p. 127) is the basis for classification and differential treatment; the latter to refer to the result of that differential treatment. In order to emphasize that the initial biological difference (mediated through sex category) is the basis for differential treatment, I use the terms sex differentiation and sex segregation. This usage should not obscure the fact that the process of converting sex category into gender is a social one or that most differences that are assumed to distinguish the sexes are socially created. I agree with Kessler and McKenna (1978) that the “gender attribution process” assumes dimorphism and seeks evidence of it to justify classifying people as male and female and treating them unequally. This article examines how and why those differences are produced.

Sex Differentiation and Devaluation

Probably no system of social differentiation is as extensive as that based on sex category. Its prevalence led anthropologist Gayle Rubin to claim that there is “a taboo against the sameness of men and women, a taboo dividing the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories, a taboo which exacerbates the biological differences between the sexes and thereby creates gender” (1975, p. 178). Moreover, although femaleness is not always devalued, its devaluation from maleness in a culture that reserves virtues for men has meant the devaluation of women (Jay 1981). Beiler’s research on biological scientists’ study of sex differences illustrates this point: the “search for the truth about differences, [implies] that difference means different from the white male norm and, therefore, inferior” (1987, p. 2; emphasis added). In consequence, men’s activities are typically valued above women’s, regardless of their content
or importance for group survival (Goode 1964; Mead 1949; Schur 1983, pp. 35–48), and both sexes come to devalue women’s efforts (Major, McFariin, and Gagnon 1984). Thus it should be no surprise that women’s occupations pay less at least partly because women do them (Treiman and Hartmann 1981).

In short, differentiation is the sine qua non of dominance systems. Because of its importance, it is achieved through myriad ways:

To go for a walk with one’s eyes open is enough to demonstrate that humanity is divided into two classes of individuals whose clothes, faces, bodies, smiles, gait, interests and occupations are manifestly different. (de Beauvoir 1953, p. xiv)

We differentiate groups in their location, appearance, and behavior, and in the tasks they do. Now let us turn to how these mechanisms operate to differentiate women and men.

**PHYSICAL SEGREGATION**

Dominant groups differentiate subordinate groups by physically isolating them—in ghettos, nurseries, segregated living quarters, and so on. Physical segregation fosters unequal treatment, because physically separate people can be treated differently and because it spares members of the dominant group the knowledge of the disparity and hides it from the subordinate group. Although women and men are integrated in some spheres, physical separation continues to differentiate them (e.g., see Goffman 1977, p. 316).

Cohn’s (1985) vivid account of women’s physical segregation in the British Foreign Office in the nineteenth century illustrates the extent to which organizations have gone to separate the sexes. The Foreign Office hid its first female typists in an attic, but it failed to rescind the requirement that workers collect their pay on the ground floor. When payday came, managers evacuated the corridors, shut all the doors, and then sent the women running down the attic stairs to get their checks and back up again. Only after they were out of sight were the corridors reopened to men.

This account raises the question of why managers segregate working men and women. What licentiousness did the Foreign Office fear would occur in integrated hallways? Contemporary answers are markedly similar to turn-of-the-century fears. Compare the scenario expressed in a 1923 editorial in the *Journal of Accountancy* (“any attempt at heterogeneous personnel [in after-hours auditing of banks] would hamper progress and lead to infinite embarrassment” [p. 151]) with recent reactions to the prospect of women integrating police patrol cars, coal mines, and merchant marine vessels (e.g., Martin 1980). At or just below the surface lies the specter of sexual liaisons. For years, McDonald’s founder Ray Kroc forbade franchisees to hire women counter workers because they would attract “the wrong type” of customers (Luxenburg 1985). The U.S. Army ended sex-integrated basic training to “facilitate toughening goals” (National Organization for Women 1982), and the Air Force reevaluated whether women could serve on two-person Minuteman missile-silo teams because “it could lead to stress” (*New York Times* 1984).

My thesis offers a more parsimonious alternative to these ad hoc explanations—men resist allowing women and men to work together as equals because doing so undermines differentiation and hence male dominance.

**BEHAVIORAL DIFFERENTIATION**

People’s behavior is differentiated on their status-group membership in far too many ways for me to review the differences adequately here. I concentrate in this section on differentiation of behaviors that occur in the workplace: task differentiation and social differentiation.

Task differentiation assigns work according to group membership. It was expressed in the extreme in traditional Hindu society in which caste virtually determined life work. Task assignment based on sex category—the sexual division of labor—both prescribes and proscribes assorted tasks to each sex, and modern societies still assign men and women different roles in domestic work (Pleck 1985), labor-market work (Reskin and Hartmann 1986), and emotional and interpersonal work (Fishman 1982; Hochschild 1983). Task differentiation generally assigns to lower-status groups the least desirable, most poorly rewarded work: menial, tedious, and degraded tasks, such as cleaning, disposing of waste, and caring for the dying. This practice symbolizes and legitimates the subordinate group’s low status, while making it appear to have an affinity for these undesirable tasks. As an added benefit, mem-
bers of the dominant group don’t have to do them! Important to discussions of the wage gap, because modern law and custom permit unequal pay for different work, task differentiation justifies paying the subordinate group lower wages, thereby ensuring their economic inferiority. Women’s assignment to child care, viewed as unskilled work in our society, illustrates these patterns. Women are said to have a “natural talent” for it and similar work; men are relieved from doing it; society obtains free or cheap child care; and women are handicapped in competing with men. As researchers have shown, sex-based task differentiation of both nonmarket and market work legitimates women’s lower pay, hinders women’s ability to succeed in traditionally male enterprises, and, in general, reinforces men’s hegemony (Coversman 1983).

Social differentiation is achieved through norms that set dominant and subordinate groups apart in their appearance (sumptuary rules) or behavior (etiquette rules [van den Bergh 1960]). When applied to sex, Goffman’s (1976) concept of “gender display” encompasses both. Sumptuary rules require certain modes of dress, diet, or life-style of members of subordinate groups as emblems of their inferior status, and reserve other modes to distinguish the dominant group. For example, Rollins (1985) discovered that white female employers preferred black domestic employees to dress shabbily to exaggerate their economic inferiority. Sex-specific sumptuary rules are epitomized in norms that dictate divergent dress styles that often exaggerate physical sex differences and sometimes even incapacitate women (Roberts 1977). An extreme example is the burqa, a Muslim women wear as a symbol of their status and as a portable system of segregation (Papanek 1973).

Etiquette rules support differentiation by requiring subordinate group members to display ritualized deference toward dominant. Relations between enlists and officers (van den Bergh 1960) or female domestic workers and their employers (Rollins 1985) illustrate their role. Although typically it is the subordinate group that must defer, gender etiquette that requires middle- and upper-class men to display deference to women of the same classes preserves differentiation by highlighting women’s difference. Women who do not express gratitude or who refuse to accept the deference are faced with hostility, shattering the fiction that women hold the preferred position.

Physical segregation, behavioral differentiation, social separation, and even hierarchy are functional alternatives for satisfying the need for differentiation in domination systems. For example, when their physical integration with the dominant group means that a subordinate group’s status differences might otherwise be invisible, special dress is usually required of them, as servants are required to wear uniforms. Physical separability can even compensate for the absence of hierarchy, a point acknowledged in the black folk saying that southern whites don’t care how close blacks get if they don’t get too high, and northern whites don’t care how high blacks get if they don’t get too close (Lukas 1985).

This substitutability explains why men will tolerate women in predominantly male work settings if they work in “women’s” jobs and accept women doing “men’s” jobs in traditionally female settings, but resist women doing traditionally male jobs in male work settings (e.g., Schroedel 1985). Physical proximity per se is not threatening as long as another form of differentiation sets women apart. But the absence of any form of differentiation precludes devaluation and unequal rewards and hence threatens the sex-gender hierarchy. Because of the centrality of differentiation in domination systems, dominant groups have a considerable stake in maintaining it.

DOMINANTS’ RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

Dominants respond to subordinates’ challenges by citing the group differences that supposedly warrant differential treatment (Jackman and Muhia 1984). Serious challenges often give rise to attempts to demonstrate biological differences scientifically.

The nineteenth-century antislavery and women’s rights movements led reputable scientists to try to prove that women’s and blacks’ brains were underdeveloped (Bleier 1987). The Great Migration to the United States in the first two decades of the century fueled a eugenics movement that purported to establish scientifically the inferiority of south- and central-eastern Europeans (Lieberson 1980, pp. 25–26). The civil rights movement of the 1960s stimulated renewed efforts to establish biological differences in intelligence. And we are once again witnessing a spate of allegedly scientific research seeking a biological basis for presumed sex differences in cognitive ability and, specifically, for boys’ higher average scores on math ques-

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tions in some standardized tests. As Bleier pointed out, "The implication if not purposes of [such] research is to demonstrate that the structure of society faithfully reflects the natural order of things" (1987, p. 11; see also Epstein 1985, pp. 32, 35, for a similar pattern in the social sciences). According to Bleier, reputable journals have published studies that violate accepted standards of proof, and the scientific press has given dubious findings considerable attention (as in the news story in Science that asked, "Is There a Male Math Gene?"). Although subsequently these studies have been discredited, the debate serves its purpose by focusing attention on how groups differ.10

MEN'S RESPONSE TO OCCUPATIONAL INTEGRATION

An influx of women into male spheres threatens the differentiation of men and women, and men resist (Goode 1982). One response is to bar women's entry. Women have had to turn to the courts to win entry into Little League sports, college dining clubs, private professional clubs, and the Rotary (Anderson 1987; Association of American Colleges 1985, p. 11; Schafran 1981). Recently, University of North Carolina trustees decried the fact that women are now a majority of UNC students, and some proposed changing the weights for certain admission criteria to restore the male majority (Greene 1987).11 Twice since a shortage of male recruits forced the army to lift its quota on women, it has reduced the number of jobs open to women (Becraft 1987, p. 3).

Numerous studies have documented men's resistance to women entering "their" jobs (e.g., see Hartmann 1976 on cigar makers; Schroedel 1983 on a cross-section of trades). Sometimes the resistance is simply exclusion; at other times it is subtle barriers that block women's advancement or open harassment (Reskin 1978). Now that more women hold managerial jobs, one hears of a "glass ceiling" that bars middle-management women from top-level positions (e.g., Hymowitz and Schellhardt 1986), and Kanter (1987) claimed that organizations are changing the rules of what one must do to reach the top in order to make it more difficult for women to succeed.

My thesis implies that men will respond to women's challenge in the workplace by emphasizing how they differ from men. Especially common are reminders of women's "natural" roles as wife, mother, or sexual partner. Witness the recent—and subsequently disputed—claims that women who postponed marriage and childbearing to establish their careers had a negligible chance of finding husbands and were running the risk that their "biological clocks" would prevent pregnancy, and accounts of women dropping out of middle management to spend more time with their children.12

Men who cannot bar women from "male" jobs can still preserve differentiation in other spheres. Their attempts to do so may explain why so few husbands of wage-working women share housework (Pleck 1985, p. 146), as well as elucidating Wharton and Baron's (1987) finding that among men working in sex-integrated jobs, those whose wives were employed were more dissatisfied than unmarried men or men married to homemakers.

Another response to women's challenge is to weaken the mechanisms that have helped women advance in the workplace. Since 1980, the Reagan administration has sought to undermine equal-opportunity programs and affirmative-action regulations, and the campaign has partly succeeded. Efforts to dilute or eliminate Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs are advanced by claims that sex inequality has disappeared (or that men now experience "reverse discrimination"). For example, the New York Times (Greer 1987, pp. CI, 10) recently described the Department of Commerce announcement that women now compose the majority in professional occupations as a "historic milestone," adding that "the barriers have fallen."

THE ILLUSION OF OCCUPATIONAL INTEGRATION

If male resistance is so pervasive, how can we explain the drop in the index of occupational sex segregation in the 1970s and women's disproportionate gains in a modest number of male-dominated occupations (Rytina and Bianchi 1984)? In order to answer this question, Patricia Roos and I embarked on a study of the changing sex composition of occupations (Reskin and Roos forthcoming). The results of our case studies of a dozen traditionally male occupations in which women made disproportionate statistical gains during the 1970s cast doubt on whether many women can advance economically through job integration.
The case studies revealed two general patterns. First, within many occupations nominally being integrated, men and women remain highly segregated, with men concentrated in the highest-status and best-paying jobs. For example, although women's representation in baking grew from 25 percent in 1970 to 41 percent in 1980, men continue to dominate production baking. The increase in women bakers is due almost wholly to their concentration in proliferating “in-store” bakeries (Steiger 1987). Although women now make up the majority of residential real estate salespersons, men still monopolize commercial sales (Thomas and Reskin 1987).

The second pattern shows that women often gained access to these occupations after changes in work content and declines in autonomy or rewards made the work less attractive to men (Cockburn 1986, p. 76). In some occupations, the growth of functions already socially labeled as “women’s work” (e.g., clerical, communications, or emotional work) spurred the change. For example, computerization and the ensuing clericalization prompted women’s entry into typesetting and composing (Roos 1986) and insurance adjusting and examining (Phipps 1986). An increasing emphasis on communicating and interpersonal or emotional work contributed to women’s gains in insurance sales (Thomas 1987), insurance adjusting and examining (Phipps 1987), systems analysis (Donato 1986), public relations (Donato 1987), and bank and financial management (Bird 1987).

Brief summaries of our findings for two occupations illustrate these processes. First, women’s disproportionate gains in pharmacy have been largely confined to the retail sector (male pharmacists work disproportionately in research and management) and occurred after retail pharmacists lost professional status and entrepreneurial opportunities. After drug manufacturers took over the compounding of drugs, pharmacists increasingly resembled retail sales clerks; their primary duties became dispensing and record keeping. As chain and discount-store pharmacies supplanted independently owned pharmacies, retail pharmacy no longer offered a chance to own one’s own business, reducing another traditional attraction for men. The resulting shortages of male pharmacy graduates eased women’s access to training programs and retail jobs (Phipps 1987).

Second, book editing illustrates how declining autonomy and occupational prestige contributed to feminization of an occupation. For most of this century, the cultural image of publishing attracted bright young men and women despite very low wages. But during the 1970s, multinational conglomerates entered book publishing, with profound results. Their emphasis on the bottom line robbed publishing of its cultural aura, and the search for blockbusters entered book publishing, with profound results. Their emphasis on the bottom line robbed publishing of its cultural aura, and the search for blockbusters entered book publishing, with profound results. Their emphasis on the bottom line robbed publishing of its cultural aura, and the search for blockbusters entered book publishing, with profound results.

In sum, although sex integration appears to have occurred in the 1970s among census-designated detailed occupations (Beller 1984), our findings indicate that within these occupations, women are segregated into certain specialties or work settings and that they gained entry because various changes made the occupations less attractive to men. The nominal integration that occurred in the 1970s often masks within-occupation segregation or presages resegregation of traditionally male occupations as women’s work. In short, the workplace is still overwhelmingly differentiated by sex. Moreover, our preliminary results suggest that real incomes in the occupations we are studying declined during the 1970s; so reducing segregation at the occupational level appears to have been relatively ineffective in reducing the wage gap—and certainly not the remedy many experts predicted. This brings us to the other possible remedy for the wage gap—comparable worth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPARABLE WORTH

The comparable-worth movement calls for equal pay for work of equal worth. Worth is usually determined by job-evaluation studies that measure the skill, effort, and responsibility required, but in practice, assessing worth often turns on how to conceptualize and measure skill.

Although some objective criteria exist for assessing skill (e.g., how long it takes a worker to learn the job [see Spender 1985, pp. 132–136]), typically the designation of work as skilled is socially negotiated. Workers are most likely to win it when they control social resources that permit them to press their claims, such as a monopoly over a labor supply or authority based on...
based on their personal characteristics such as education, training, or sex (Phillips and Taylor 1980). As a result, the evaluation of "skill" is shaped by and confounded with workers' sex (Dex 1985, p. 100).

Groups use the same power that enabled them to define their work as skilled to restrict competition by excluding women (among others) from training for and practicing their trade or profession (Dex 1985, p. 103; see also Hartmann 1976), as Millicent Fawcett recognized almost a hundred years ago when she declared, "Equal pay for equal work is a fraud for women." Because men use their power to keep women "from obtaining equal skills, their work [cannot be] equal" (Hartmann 1976, p. 157). Roos's (1986) case history of the effect of technological change on women's employment in typesetting illustrates these points. When a Linotype machine was developed that "female typists could operate," the International Typographical Union (ITU) used its labor monopoly to force employers to agree to hire as operators only skilled printers who knew all aspects of the trade. By denying women access to apprenticeships or other channels to become fully skilled and limiting the job of operating the Linotype to highly skilled printers, the ITU effectively barred women from the new Linotype jobs. In short, the ITU used its monopoly power both to restrict women's access to skills and credentials and to define its members as "uniquely skilled" to operate the Linotype.

Excluded from occupations male workers define as skilled, women are often unable, for several reasons, to press the claim that work in traditionally female occupations is skilled. First, as I have shown, the devaluation of women's work leads whatever work women do to be seen as unskilled. Second, women's powerlessness prevents their successfully defining their work—caring for children, entering data, assembling microelectronic circuits—as skilled. Third, because many female-dominated occupations require workers to acquire skills before employment, skill acquisition is less visible and hence unlikely to be socially credited. Fourth, the scarcity of apprenticeship programs for women's jobs and women's exclusion from other programs denies women a credential society recognizes as denoting skill (Reskin and Hartmann 1986). Finally, "much of women's work involves recognizing and responding to subtle cues" (Feldberg 1984, p. 321), but the notion of "women's intuition" permits men to define such skills as inborn and hence not meritizing compensation. Thus women are both kept from acquiring socially valued skills and not credited for those they do acquire (Steinberg 1984–85). As a result, the sex of the majority of workers in an occupation influences whether or not their work is classified as skilled (Feldberg 1984; Gregory 1987).

In view of these patterns, how effective can comparable worth be in reducing the wage gap? As with the Equal Pay Act, implementing it has symbolic value. Moreover, it would bar employers from underpaying women relative to their job-evaluation scores, the practice alleged in AFSCME v. Washington State (1985). But setting salaries according to an occupation's worth will reduce the wage gap only to the extent that (1) women have access to tasks that society values, (2) evaluators do not take women's sex into account in determining a job's worth, and (3) implementers do not sacrifice equity to other political agendas.

Neither of the first two conditions holds. As I have shown, men already dominate jobs society deems skilled. Moreover, the tendency to devalue women's work is embedded in job-evaluation techniques that define job worth (Steinberg 1984–85); so such techniques may yield biased evaluations of traditionally female jobs and lower their job-evaluation scores (Treiman and Hartmann 1981; Marshall and Paulin n.d., p. 5). Beyond these difficulties is the problem of good-faith implementation. Acker (1987), Brenner (1987), and Steinberg (1987) have documented the problems in implementing comparable-worth pay adjustments. According to Steinberg (p. 8), New York State's proposed compensation model negatively values working with difficult clients, work performed in historically female and minority jobs (in other words, workers lose pay for doing it!), and Massachusetts plans to establish separate comparable-worth plans across sex-segregated bargaining units. For these reasons, the magnitude of comparable-worth adjustments have been about half of what experts expected—only 5 percent to 15 percent of salaries (Steinberg 1987).

Moreover, to the extent that equity adjustments significantly raise salaries in women's jobs, men can use their power to monopolize them. It is no accident that the men who integrated the female semiprofessions moved rapidly to the top (Grimm and Stern 1974). The recent experience of athletic directors provides an additional illustration. Title IX required college athletic programs to eliminate disparities in resources between women's and men's programs, including salaries. Within ten years the proportion of coaches for
women’s programs who were male grew from 10 percent to 50 percent (Alfano 1985). Finally, men as the primary implementers of job evaluation have a second line of defense—they can and do subvert the process of job evaluation.

CONCLUSION

Integrating men’s jobs and implementing comparable-worth programs have helped some women economically and, more fully implemented, would help others. But neither strategy can be broadly effective because both are premised on a flawed causal model of the pay gap that assigns primary responsibility to job segregation. A theory that purports to explain unequal outcomes without examining the dominant group’s stake in maintaining them is incomplete. Like other dominant groups, men make rules that preserve their privileges. With respect to earnings, the current rule—that one’s job or occupation determines one’s pay—has maintained white men’s economic advantage because men and women and whites and nonwhites are differently distributed across jobs.14

Changing the allocation principle from occupation to job worth would help nonwhites and women if occupation were the pay gap’s basic cause. But it is not. As long as a dominant group wants to subordinate others’ interests to its own and is able to do so, the outcome—distributing more income to men than women—is, in a sense, its own cause, and tinkering with superficial causes will not substantially alter the outcome. Either the rule that one’s occupation determines one’s wages exists because men and women hold different occupations, or men and women hold different occupations because we allocate wages according to one’s occupation. Obviously the dominant group will resist attempts to change the rules. In Lemons v. City and County of Denver (1980), the court called comparable worth “pregnant with the possibility of disrupting the entire economic system” (Steinberg 1987). “Disrupting the entire white-male dominance system” would have been closer to the mark.

If men’s desire to preserve their privileges is the basic cause of the wage gap, then how can we bring about change? The beneficiaries of hierarchical reward systems yield their privileges only when failing to yield is more costly than yielding. Increasing the costs men pay to maintain the status quo or rewarding men for dividing resources more equitably may reduce their resistance.

As individuals, many men will gain economically if their partners earn higher wages. Of course, these men stand to lose whatever advantages come from outearning one’s partner (Hartmann 1976; Kolllick, Blumstein, and Schwartz 1985). But more important than individual adjustments are those achieved through organizations that have the power to impose rewards and penalties. Firms that recognize their economic stake in treating women equitably (or can be pressured by women employees or EEO agencies to act as if they do) can be an important source of pressure on male employees. Employers have effectively used various incentives to overcome resistance to affirmative action (e.g., rewarding supervisors for treating women fairly [Shaeffer and Lynton 1979; Walshok 1981]). Employers are most likely to use such mechanisms if they believe that regulatory agencies are enforcing equal-opportunity rules (Reskin and Hartmann 1986). We can attack men’s resistance through political pressure on employers, the regulatory agencies that monitor them, and branches of government that establish and fund such agencies.

Analyses of sex inequality in the 1980s implicitly advance a no-fault concept of institutionalized discrimination rather than fixing any responsibility on men. But men are the dominant group, the makers and the beneficiaries of the rules. Of course, most men do not consciously oppose equality for women (Kluegel and Smith 1986) or try to thwart women’s progress. When men and women work together, both can gain, as occurred when the largely male blue-collar union supported the striking Yale clerical and technical workers (Ladd-Taylor 1985; see also Gilzer 1987). But as a rule, this silent majority avoids the fray, leaving the field to those who do resist on behalf of all men (Bergmann and Darby 1981). It is time to bring men back into our theories of economic inequality. To do so does not imply that women are passive agents. The gains we have made in the last two decades in the struggle for economic equality—redefining the kinds of work women can do, reshaping young people’s aspirations, and amassing popular support for pay equity despite opponents’ attempt to write it off as a “loony tune” idea—stand as testimony to the contrary. Just as the causal model I propose views the dominant group’s self-interest as the source of unequal outcomes, so too does it see subordinate groups as the agents of change.
RESKIN / BRINGING THE MEN BACK IN

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Author's note: This article is a revised version of the Cheryl Allyn Miller Lecture on Women and Social Change, presented at Loyola University on May 1, 1987. I am grateful to Sociologists for Women in Society and the friends and family of Cheryl Allyn Miller who prompted me to develop these ideas. The present version owes a great deal to Judith Lorber and Ronnie Steinberg for their extensive comments. I also wish to thank James Baron, Cynthia Epstein, Lowell Hargens, Mary Jackman, Kathleen Much, Deborah Rhode, Patricia Roos, and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful suggestions, but I ask readers to remember that I did not always take their advice and that they will not necessarily agree with my final conclusions. This article was partly prepared while I was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, where I was supported in part by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Grants from the National Science Foundation (SES-85-12452) and the Rockefeller Foundation Program on the Long-Term Implications of Changing Gender Roles supported the larger study that contributed to my developing these ideas.

NOTES

1. Women's incomes are not depressed uniformly. Women of color continue to earn less than white women, particularly when their hours of work are controlled. As I indicate below, the same general social processes that subordinate women as a group—differentiation and devaluation—operate to preserve the advantages of white men and women.

2. Workplace segregation occurs across occupations and, within occupations, across jobs. For convenience, I speak primarily of occupational segregation because most segregation and income data are for occupations, but my remarks apply as well to jobs.

3. My informant said his campus now weights the admissions essay more heavily for this reason.

4. For example, Smith and Ward (1984) attributed the wage gap's failure to narrow to the influx of less-experienced women into the labor force during the 1970s.

5. Some employers do reward productivity, as neoclassical economists predict, but for the most part, wages are attached to occupations—the proximate cause of workers' wages.

6. Of course, only a subset of men—predominantly upper-class whites—actually make rules, and the rules they make protect class- and race- as well as sex-based interests.

7. A full explanation of the specific forces that produce the sexual division of labor is beyond the scope of this article, but social-control systems, including gender ideology, "custom," socialization, and myriad institutionalized structures, shape the preferences of wives and husbands, workers and employers, women and men (Reskin and Hartmann 1986). These preferences in turn are played out in concert with institutional arrangements (training programs, personnel practices, child-care facilities, informal organization) to give rise to the task differentiation we observe in the home and workplace.

8. This is not to say that all tasks assigned to subordinate groups are unimportant or undesirable. Many, such as reproducing, socializing the young, and burying the dead, are essential. Others are more intrinsically pleasant (e.g., office work) than the work some dominant-group members do (which has led economists to argue that men's wages are higher than women's partly to compensate them for doing less desirable jobs [Filer 1985]).

9. This perspective elucidates the importance that the media attached to the wearing, spurning, and burning of brass in the early 1970s. Shedding or burning these symbols of women's sex (and hence their status) constituted insubordination.

10. For example, at the 1987 meetings of the American Educational Research Association, 25 sessions reported research on sex differences in interest or achievement in math and science (Holden 1987, p. 660).

11. Trustee John Pope remarked, "Any time you get over 50 percent, it's becoming more and more a girls' school . . . and I don't think favoritism should be given to the females" (Greene 1987). It apparently did not strike him as favoritism when the rules produced a male majority.

12. The return in the late 1970s of feminine dress styles following the entry of large numbers of women into professional and managerial jobs is probably not coincidental. Although caution is in order in drawing conclusions about changing dress styles, a quick trip through a department store should persuade readers that dresses and skirts have supplanted
pants for women (see Reskin and Roos 1987). Although fashion is ostensibly a woman’s choice, most women are aware of the sanctions that await those who fail to dress appropriately.

13. Limited space forces me to condense sharply the causes of women’s disproportional gains in these occupations. For a full account, see the complete studies.

14. It also serves the interest of the economically dominant classes by legitimizing a wide disparity in income. Comparable-worth pay would largely preserve that disparity, in keeping with the class interests of its middle-class proponents and its implementers (Brenner 1987).

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RESKIN / BRINGING THE MEN BACK IN


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