

University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill

Soci850-001 Social Stratification

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Module 9 – Ascriptive Distinctions I: Sex/Gender (19 Mar)

Discussion Questions

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Introduction to Module 9

In this section we read about various theories and studies that bear on labor force participation of women, discrimination (typically against) women in employment, sex segregation of jobs / occupations, and the gap in wages of men and women. While some of the readings briefly describe broader historical trends there is a focus on the 20th and 21st centuries and U.S. society. As we discuss these trends we should keep in mind topics that are out of the current focus of the readings, but that are important to put the discussion in perspectives. Such topics include the following.

1. Trends in the situation of women (as compared to men, and in relation to them) in the broader development of industrial societies (say in the course of the 20th century, or perhaps more generally in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries) with respect to education, labor force participation, position in the family, occupation, wages / income, and representation in politics / government.
2. The current situation of women in the U.S., as compared with the situation of women (1) in other industrial societies, (2) in developing (not yet industrial) societies.

Synthetic Questions

1. This question is about how gender stratification is affected by the dynamics of families and labor markets. Discuss the following topics, citing the relevant literature as needed.
 - (a) Describe in broad outline changes in gender stratification that have taken place in industrial societies in the course of the 20th Century.
 - (b) Contrast various sociological theories of gender stratification, explaining how these theories might explain such aspects of stratification as the level of women's labor force participation, access to post-secondary education (including choice of major), occupational distribution, political power, and the gender division of housework and care work.

(This question was part of the PhD Comprehensive Exam in Social Stratification – October 2006.)

2. On 14 Jan 2005 Lawrence H. Summers, then President of Harvard University, read remarks at the NBER Conference on Diversifying the Science & Engineering Workforce in Cambridge, MA, that included the following passages.

There are three broad hypotheses about the sources of the very substantial disparities that this conference's papers document and have been documented before with respect to the presence of women in high-end scientific professions. One is what I would call the – I'll explain each of these in a few moments and comment on how important I think they are – the first is what I call the high-powered job hypothesis. The second is what I would call different availability of aptitude at the high end, and the third is what I would call different socialization and patterns of discrimination in a search. And in my own view, their importance probably ranks in exactly the order that I just described. . . .

So my best guess, to provoke you, of what's behind all of this is that the largest phenomenon, by far, is the general clash between people's legitimate family desires and employers' current desire for high power and high intensity, that in the special case of science and engineering, there are issues of intrinsic aptitude, and particularly of the variability of aptitude, and that those considerations are reinforced by what are in fact lesser factors involving socialization and continuing discrimination. I would like nothing better than to be proved wrong, because I would like nothing better than for these problems to be addressable simply by everybody understanding what they are, and working very hard to address them.

Evaluate Summers' three hypotheses about the relatively lower representation of women in high-end scientific professions in light of contemporary scholarship on gender inequalities by doing the following.

- (a) Explicate the mechanisms underlying each of Summers' hypotheses.
- (b) Evaluate the extent to which each hypothesis is supported or undermined by existing empirical research. To what extent does empirical research support the relative order of importance of the three mechanisms suggested by Summers?
- (c) Are there additional mechanisms, not mentioned by Summers, that should also be considered in order to understand lower representation of women in top science and engineering departments?

(This question was part of the PhD Comprehensive Exam in Social Stratification – February 2010.)

Detailed Questions

Labor Force Participation

Hochschild; Milkie et al.

- How does Hochschild describe the time constraints on the woman in the life of a “modern” couple in which both wife and husband are employed?
- Arlie Hochschild is well known for her coining of the term “second shift” for describing the larger share of household labor performed by women who are also employed outside the home. Despite the success of the term *second shift*, Hochschild's estimate of the size of the gap in hours of household labor

rested on a small sample of mostly qualitative interviews. In their *Social Forces* article Milkie et al. investigate the size of the second shift using large survey data sets. What are their conclusions?

Discrimination

Goldin and Rouse; Correll; Petersen.

- How do Goldin and Rouse investigate the role of discrimination in the hiring of musicians by philharmonic orchestras?
- Evaluate the overall empirical strength of Goldin and Rouses’s empirical results, from the points of view of (a) Statistical significance of the results; (b) Correspondence of the significant results with (theoretically) expected patterns of effects.
- Goldin and Rouse do not focus (in this reading) on the pattern of differences in choice of instruments by men and wome. For example, women are more likely to play string instruments; and almost all harpists are women. What might be the origin of such differences in instrument types.
- Correll et al. use two distinct designs to investigate the role of motherhood as a negative “status characteristic” which places women at a disadvantage in hiring. What are these designs, and what do Correll et al. find? (What are they going to find about apple pie, next?)
- In the Petersen reading on intentional (conscious) versus nonconscious discrimination processes, how strong is the evidence presented for the existence of nonconscious discrimination?

Sex Segregation

Bielby; Jacobs; Reskin.

- What are the six “more or less distinct” mechanisms that Bielby proposes as explanations of sex segregation in the workplace. (Suggestion: See p. 792.)
- In the Bielby reading, what is the significance of Milkman’s (1987) study of the demobilization of women in the automobile industry after World War II for the importance of cultural and ideological factors in explaining of sex segregation of jobs?
- How does Jacobs define the *cumulative disadvantage* and *revolving door* perspectives on the segregation of women in the occupational structure?
- According to Jacobs, what predictions of the cumulative disadvantage model are not consistent with empirical trends in sex segregation of occupations?
- Question about Reskin TBA.

Wage Gap

England; Tam; Blau and Kahn.

- Questions about England and Tam TBA.
- According to Blau and Kahn, what has been the trend in the gap in wages of men and women in the U.S. in the second half of the 20th century? (Suggestion: See Table 1 p. 844.)

- What are Blau and Kahn's main findings concerning the sources of the wage gap between men and women in contemporary U.S. society? (Suggestion: See Table 1 p. 847.)