

Introduction to the Special Issue on Sex Segregation and Gender Stratification

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I am pleased to be able to bring current research on sex segregation and gender stratification to a wide audience. The five articles that comprise this special issue by no means represent all aspects of current research on gender stratification – surely an unrealistic goal in such a vibrant field – yet each is a fine example of the path-breaking work in its genre.

In an analysis of detailed data on supervisory responsibility collected in 1982 in Illinois, Reskin and Ross consider whether women exercise as much authority on the job as men do. The authors demonstrate that men led women in 15 of 21 types of responsibility. Multivariate analyses show that even after productivity-related measures and tenure were controlled, women garnered less authority than men and earned less than men with similar standing in their organizations. Even though women have entered management in large numbers in recent decades (Jacobs, 1992), Reskin and Ross show that they remain well behind their male counterparts in enjoying the rewards of management.

Bielby and Bielby explore the market for television screenwriters by analyzing a large data set on earnings and mobility that spans the 1980s. The study documents a sizable and persistent gender gap in earnings among screenwriters that occurs outside formal organizational structures, as screenwriters usually act as independent subcontractors. The authors maintain that persistent gender differences in earnings result from the ambiguous nature of judging creative personnel, such as script writers. In such circumstances, “social similarity, in general, and gender stereotypes, in particular, are likely to influence decisions.” This is a case of continuous, rather than cumulative, disadvantage over the course of writers’ careers. Bielby and Bielby conclude by noting modest improvements in the relative standing of recent cohorts of women screenwriters.

Steinberg delves into the mechanics of job evaluation systems, which discriminate against women. She shows that definitions of the attributes of

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jobs that deserve compensation set nearly a half-century ago continue to bias wage systems against female-dominated positions. By exploring the technical underpinnings of the Hay system, she shows the ways in which important aspects of technical, clerical, and service jobs become invisible in terms of the allocation of financial rewards. Several of her examples are especially telling. She notes that because the Hay system's definition of "Human Relation Know-How" is skewed toward managerial responsibilities rather than client contact, Hay consultants rate the human relations skills of prison guards, who have quasi-managerial authority, higher than those of nurses. Using data from the State of Minnesota and other sources, Steinberg demonstrates just how much these assumptions cost women.

Rosenfeld and Spenner reexamine the mobility of workers between male- and female-dominated fields. They employ detailed life-history data and sophisticated event-history techniques to ask who makes such moves. The article presents a striking confirmation of earlier findings on the rate of mobility: Their data on the sex-type correlation correspond with earlier results to two decimal points (Jacobs, 1989; Rosenfeld, 1983). Moreover, fully 86% of young women changed the sex-type of their occupation at least once during the study period. The authors extend previous research by showing that moves between male- and female-dominated fields have little to do with family considerations, although some moves are related to women's career aspirations, educational credentials, and preferences for higher salaries. My reading of these results is that they are consistent with a system of sex segregation that is reproduced throughout the careers of working men and women. Rosenfeld and Spenner conclude by suggesting that a typology of career moves is needed to explain individual mobility across sex-typed boundaries.

Finally, my article with Suet T. Lim explores trends in occupational and industrial sex segregation in 56 countries. This article is based on highly aggregated data, yet makes the case that *trends* in segregation tend to move in similar directions for both detailed and broad measures. The evidence indicates that sex segregation declined slightly between 1960 and 1980 in many countries; the trend is even more uniform when the growth of segregated fields is controlled. In other words, the *compositional* changes in occupations and industries are generally moving toward more integration, even while this trend is canceled in some countries by higher growth rates of segregated fields. A multivariate analysis indicates that these trends are not related to modernization indices.

Taken together, these articles suggest an active research frontier, with sociologists pursuing detailed case studies, historical research, and comparative analyses. These articles make progress in specifying mechanisms

responsible for continued gender stratification and in indicating conditions under which such inequality is attenuated. While the articles differ in the level of analysis and the type of data each employs, they share a longitudinal approach. Four of the five involve longitudinal analyses, with Steinberg arguing for institutional continuity time in sexist job-classification systems, Bielby and Bielby assessing change over time and across cohorts, Rosenfeld and Spenner examining the dynamics of moves of a cohort of young women, and Jacobs and Lim tracking trends in countries over time. Reskin and Ross's article examines cross-sectional data, but their discussion reflects theoretical debates regarding trends in discrimination against women and minorities. These articles leave me optimistic that much progress is being made toward an interweaving of social, political, economic, and organizational factors in an account of stability and change in gender stratification.

When Andrew Abbott asked me last fall to edit this special issue of *Work and Occupations*, I already had more prospects for submissions than space allowed. As a result, an open solicitation for contributions did not seem advisable. Moreover, a call for papers would have delayed publication for at least a year. Abbott has assured me that *Work and Occupations* will continue to pursue articles on gender inequality, so this issue should be seen as an initial rather than final exploration of this topic.

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