

*This article presents evidence from two small samples in the United States and in England that indicates that male and female incumbents in the same occupations are not accorded equal prestige. Respondents accorded men in traditionally male occupations, such as architecture, mining, and construction work, greater prestige than their female counterparts. Women received higher prestige ratings than men in such traditionally female occupations as elementary school teaching, nursing, and secretarial work. These differences persisted throughout the prestige hierarchy, and were most notable for male respondents. The implications of different ratings of male and female incumbents in the same occupations for theory and research are discussed.*

## **The Prestige Gap**

### **DIFFERENTIAL EVALUATIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE WORKERS**

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**O**ccupational prestige scales have gained wide usage in American sociology as the dependent variable in studies of social mobility and as measures of the "social background" control variable in studies on a broad range of social phenomena. Blau and Duncan's pathbreaking work on intergenerational mobility (1967) focused on fathers and sons, as have several important subsequent investigations (Jencks et al., 1973; Hauser and Featherman, 1977; Jencks et al., 1979). In recent years the occupational status of women has received

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male-dominated and female-dominated occupations in his surveys on occupational prestige. However, because the gender of the worker was not specified, he was unable to compare the status accorded to men and women in the same occupations. On the contrary, these classic prestige studies elicited ratings of the prestige of individuals only as a means of tapping respondents' views of the prestige of occupations. In contrast, the present investigation specifically elicits responses about the prestige of male and female incumbents in the same occupations. These ratings are viewed as evidence regarding the prestige of incumbents, not as indirect evidence regarding the prestige of occupations. The focus shifts from the evaluation of occupation to the evaluation of male and female incumbents in these occupations.

Several studies have addressed the question of whether men and women in the same occupation are accorded the same prestige, with conflicting results. Walker and Bradley (1973) asked three hundred undergraduates at Georgia State University to rank the prestige of eight occupations, half of which completed a form that specified male workers, the other half rated female workers. They found that women in jobs typically held by men, especially blue collar jobs, were rated significantly lower than men in the same occupation. This discrepancy was most notable among male respondents.

Nilson's (1976) sample of 479 Milwaukee-area adults rated the prestige of males and females (single and married) employed in seventeen occupations. Nilson concluded that "an incumbent who violates the role expectation of an occupation with respect to sex is accorded lower social standing than one who conforms, especially a man in a female typed occupation" (1976: 328). Nilson also noted that male respondents were more likely to differentiate between the prestige of men and women in sex-typed occupations.

Guppy and Siltanen (1977) reported the results of a survey of 180 randomly selected individuals in a Canadian metropolitan area. They found that women received lower prestige than men overall and that both men and women in sex-atypical occupations were accorded lower prestige than the sex-typical incumbents.

Bose (1974) asked one sample of 195 college students and one sample of 197 household members in the Baltimore area to rate the prestige of 110 occupations. Respondents were given several different card-sort tasks that produced ratings of men and women in the same jobs. Bose found that the gender of the incumbent, the gender stereotype of the occupation, and the age, the gender, and the socio-

Certain attributes are typically associated with men or women (Broverman et al., 1972), and these attributes are often seen as relevant for certain occupations (Rosen and Jerdee, 1978). The competitiveness of investment bankers may be viewed as unfeminine; the nurturance expected of kindergarten teachers may be viewed as unmasculine. The prestige accorded to incumbents in occupations can be thought of as a summary measure of the popular views regarding the relative standing of different occupational roles for different incumbents. It would be surprising if individual aspects of popular opinions about men and women in occupations were frequently characterized by marked sex differences while the composite measure showed no such differentiation.

Third, the gap between male and female earnings suggests a likelihood of differences in the prestige accorded to men and women. If income is a prime determinant of occupational prestige (Duncan, 1961; Coleman and Rainwater, 1979) and if women earn much less than men overall and in the same occupations (Sommers, 1974; Henle and Ryscavase, 1978), then men and women in the same occupations will receive different amounts of prestige (or the determinants of prestige will differ). It is not possible for both the level and the determinants of prestige to be the same; either the level or the determinants must differ (Bose, 1974). This reasoning contrasts sharply with the prevailing view that both the level and determinants of prestige of male and female incumbents in the same occupations are the same (Treiman, 1977). It is possible that the level and the determinants of prestige for men and women in the same occupation may both differ.

Fourth, the extreme and persistent gender segregation of occupations may produce sex differences in the prestige of incumbents in a broad range of jobs. Work in the United States is highly segregated by gender, as in other countries. A large proportion of both men and women work in occupations mostly made up of members of their own gender. In 1970, one-half of working women were employed in occupations with over 80% female employees; two-thirds of employed men were found in occupations with over 80% male employees (England, 1979: 259). The level of occupational sex segregation has remained remarkably constant over time (Gross, 1968; Treiman and Terrell, 1975b; Burriss and Wharton, 1981; England, 1982).

In addition to rating the prestige of male or female incumbents in these occupations, all respondents were asked to rate the general standing of these occupations with the gender of the incumbent unspecified. Finally, a subsample was asked to estimate the income a person in each occupation would earn.

The format and scoring procedures closely followed the North-Hatt design. Respondents were asked to "Please pick out the statement that best gives your opinion of the general standing (prestige) that a female (male) in such a job would have." Note the difference in phrasing in this question from that of the standard NORC prestige question. Subjects are asked to rate the prestige of incumbents rather than of occupations. The following Likert-type categories were used: (1) excellent standing; (2) good standing; (3) average standing; (4) somewhat below average standing; (5) poor standing; and (6) don't know. An average prestige score was calculated for male and female incumbents in each occupation (ranging from a low of one to a high of five). The average score was then transformed to produce a range of scores from zero to one hundred. Finally, the male and female incumbents were ranked in order of the prestige scores each received. Although both the prestige ranks and ratings will be presented in this article, the correlational analysis will be based on Spearman rank-order correlations.<sup>2</sup>

The selection of the occupations followed several criteria: (1) matching the prestige hierarchy as closely as possible; (2) including occupations typically held by women; (3) maximizing the comparability of our findings to previous occupational prestige research. The mean and standard deviation of prestige scores for the sample occupations are not unrepresentative of the distribution of prestige for all 3-digit occupations,  $p < .05$ .<sup>3</sup>

Similar questionnaires using a slightly different list of 45 occupations were administered after pretesting to 119 students in a vocational school in a rural town in Cornwall, England.<sup>4</sup> The 68 female respondents were secretarial and business students, and the 51 male respondents were carpentry, engineering, and business students. The respondents rated the prestige of male and female incumbents for each occupation on the list. Perceptions of the general prestige of occupations and the income level of each occupation were also solicited. Asking respondents to rank both men's and women's prestige provides an explicit comparison by the same people.<sup>5</sup>

TABLE 1  
Occupations by Size of Male-Female Prestige Difference,<sup>a</sup>  
New York Sample (N = 108)

Occupation	Difference		Male Incumbent (N=54)		Female Incumbent (N=54)	
	Rank	Rating	Rank	Rating	Rank	Rating
carpenter	+35	+41.8*	9	78.3	44	36.5
electrician	+33	+37.2*	6	81.5	39	44.3
plumber	+32	+40.1*	13	74.9	45	34.8
soldier	+30	+40.0*	17	69.0	47	29.0
army captain	+27	+32.8*	10	77.9	37	45.1
professional athlete	+26	+27.4*	3	89.9	29	62.5
minister	+26	+24.3*	5	82.1	31	57.8
machinist	+25	+32.7*	21	64.8	46	32.1
farmer	+24.5	+25.4*	18	65.5	42.5	40.1
civil engineer	+24	+24.5*	8	79.9	32	55.4
mayor	+20	+16.6*	7	81.0	27	64.4
insurance agent	+13.5	+9.1*	14.5	73.0	28	63.9
bartender	+13	+15.0*	22	62.4	35	47.4
janitor	+13	+23.8*	35	49.8	48	26.0
banker	+12	+7.3	12	76.8	24	69.5
barber	+12	+14.6*	24	60.5	36	45.9
streetcar motorman	+12	+23.4*	37	47.4	49	24.0
chauffeur	+10.5	+11.9*	30.5	52.4	41	40.5
coal miner	+10	+32.5*	40	45.3	50	12.8
college professor	+8	+10.5*	4	86.8	12	76.3
physician	+7	+15.0*	1	92.6	8	77.6
traveling salesman/woman	+7	+7.1	33	50.9	40	43.8
lawyer	+5	+12.7*	2	90.5	7	77.8
sales clerk	+2	-6.8	29	52.6	31	59.4
buyer	-0.5	-9.0*	23	61.3	22.5	70.3
commercial artist	-0.5	-2.9	14.5	73.0	14	75.9
journalist	-0.5	-.4	11	77.3	10.5	76.9
musician	-1	-6.2	16	69.3	15	75.5
secondary school teacher	-3	-9.0*	20	64.6	17	73.6
servant	-4.5	-8.7*	47	32.4	42.5	41.1
waiter/waitress	-8	-14.3*	38	47.3	30	61.6
artist	-8.5	-11.7*	19	64.8	10.5	76.5
florist	-10	-17.3*	36	48.0	26	65.3
laundry worker	-11	-18.9*	49	25.5	38	44.4
bank cashier	-12.5	-20.7*	30.5	52.4	18	73.1
bookkeeper	-13	-21.1*	32	51.5	19	72.6
telephone operator	-14	-20.5*	39	47.1	25	67.6
factory sewing machine operator	-14	-23.9*	48	26.9	34	50.8
elementary school teacher	-20	-20.3*	26	58.1	6	78.4
clothing designer	-21	-21.8*	25	58.8	4	80.6
hairstresser	-21	-27.5*	42	43.3	21	70.8
typist	-21	-29.5*	43.5	40.8	22.5	70.3
nurse	-25	-30.9*	27	53.6	2	84.5
secretary	-25	-34.9*	45	36.4	20	71.3
professional dancer	-27	-32.7*	28	52.9	1	85.6
dressmaker	-30	-39.5*	46	34.5	16	74.0
interior decorator	-31	-30.6*	34	50.4	3	81.0
librarian	-34.5	-36.6*	43.5	40.8	9	77.4
kindergarten teacher	-36	-34.7*	41	43.9	5	78.6
housewife/husband	-37	-51.1*	50	25.0	13	76.1

a. This table was constructed by subtracting the prestige of female incumbents in an occupation from the prestige of male incumbents in the same occupation. Occupations are organized by differences in rank order: rank of 1 is highest; 50 is lowest. For example, the occupation "carpenter" was ranked higher for men (9) than for women (44). The difference in ranks is 35 in favor of men; the difference in ratings (on a scale of 0-100) is 41.8, also in favor of men.

\* $p < .05$ .

inappropriate occupational positions. The size of the penalty is highly associated with the sex composition in an occupation: the greater the predominance of the other gender, the greater the prestige penalty. The correlation between the percentage of men in an occupation<sup>7</sup> and the prestige penalty<sup>8</sup> for women is +.91 in New York and +.85 in Cornwall. The differences range from a gap of over thirty ranks in favor of males in the New York sample for carpenter, plumber, and electrician (out of a possible difference in rank of 49) to a gap of over thirty ranks in favor of women for interior decorator, librarian, kindergarten teacher, and housewife/husband.

Insights into the conflicting definitions of prestigious work are provided by examining the prestige differential between male and female incumbents in specific occupations. The occupations most dominated by men are the crafts, and, accordingly, the greatest disparity in prestige between men and women occurs for those employed in these jobs. Electrician is considered above average among the occupations listed for men, but it is near the bottom for women. The same pattern is true for plumbers and auto mechanics. Female incumbents are accorded greater prestige than their male counterparts in a number of female-dominated clerical occupations, such as bookkeepers, secretaries and stenographers.

Differences in prestige between men and women are also present in the professions. Women are systematically accorded less prestige than their male counterparts. For example, female architects score 19.7 points lower for the Cornwall sample than do male architects. Similarly, the Cornwall sample accord 10.5 more points to male judges than to female judges. Male lawyers are given higher prestige than female lawyers in both the Cornwall and New York samples (7.5 and 12.7 points, respectively). In addition, male physicians outscore female physicians by 15.0 points in the New York sample.

Contrasting evaluations of "men's work" and "women's work" are particularly evident in the teaching profession. The greatest prestige penalty against male incumbents in the New York sample (excluding househusband) is assessed against male kindergarten teachers. Similarly, male elementary school teachers (termed "infant school teachers" in the Cornwall sample) are penalized seriously for entering a field in which the tasks involved are considered to be nurturant and to be typically handled by women. In contrast, women college professors, although rated high in prestige, nonetheless receive notably less prestige than their male colleagues.

incumbents is statistically significant,  $p < 01$ .<sup>9</sup> Income may be considered less relevant to prestige for women workers than for their male counterparts. Thus not only does the level of prestige of male and female incumbents vary, but the importance of income as a determinant of men's and women's prestige also differs.

(6) Male respondents exhibit more sex-stereotyped attitudes than do their female counterparts. As indicated on Table 4, men view women's prestige as markedly different from men's prestige and from general prestige than did the female respondents. Women respondents also view women's prestige as notably different from men's prestige and not as closely connected to income. Female respondents, however, do not distinguish appreciably women's prestige from the general occupational prestige hierarchy.

In sum, consistent differences in the estimation of men and women in the same occupations are evident throughout the subsamples analyzed in this paper. The size of the differences is smaller in the Cornwall sample, although the direction of the results is the same for both samples.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although we feel certain that this research raises important questions for the understanding of the prestige of male and female workers, the tentative nature of the present findings needs to be emphasized. The research presented here relies on two regionally distinctive samples, each relatively modest in size. The generalizability of these findings cannot be taken for granted. The respondents are students from rural areas, who may not be representative of the population as a whole.

On the other hand, the representativeness and the size of the sample may not be especially important concerns in the study of occupational prestige. Hodge, et al. note that "ratings from a few respondents, however chosen, duplicate very well those obtained from larger and more representative samples" (1964: 313). Further, evidence indicates that student samples produce prestige ratings that are strikingly similar to those obtained from the population at large (Treiman, 1977: 68; Balkwell et al., 1981).

Moreover, the general occupational prestige rankings found in this study match the ranking found in previous occupational prestige

*(text continues on p. 300)*

Cornwall Sample  
N=176

prestige of male incumbents	.90	
prestige of female incumbents	.79	.51
perceived income of occupations	.86	.76
NORC prestige scores*	.94	
International Prestige Scores**	.89	

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\*NORC prestige scores are from Siegel (1971); 47 matching in New York, 51 matching in Cornwall.

\*\* International Prestige Scores are from Trieman (1977) for 47 matching titles.



Cornwall Sample	male respondents		female respondents	
	N= 77	N= 99	male respondents	female respondents
general prestige of occupations				
prestige of male incumbents	.91	.86		
prestige of female incumbents	.64	.86	.30	.64
perceived income of occupations	.85	.83	.82	.80
			.46	.64

and female incumbents in the Cornwall sample. Although the Cornwall results indicate a strong pattern of sex differences, the results are less striking than those obtained in the New York sample. These differences can be attributed to several factors.

The larger differences in the New York case may be due in part to different methods of administration. Bose found that administering questions about only one gender of incumbent "heightened the sex-differences obtained compared to the mixed-sex treatment." (1974: 57). This finding is consistent with the smaller effect in the Cornwall case, where the respondents were asked to rate both male and female incumbents.

The smaller differences in the Cornwall sample may be in part a consequence of cultural variations. Previous cross-cultural comparisons of occupational prestige have noted the higher prestige accorded to blue-collar occupations in the United States than in England (Inkeles and Rossi, 1956). If we examine the blue-collar occupations, we note that the prestige ratings of females in blue-collar occupations are approximately the same in both samples, while blue-collar males in the United States are rated much higher than their British counterparts. For example, the ratings of female electricians is 44.3 in the New York sample and 44.0 in the Cornwall sample. In contrast, the ratings of male electricians are 81.5 and 70.3, respectively. Thus the larger sex-differences in the New York sample results in part from the higher prestige accorded to blue-collar males in the United States.

These differences may also reflect the differences in the educational systems in these two nations. The students in the New York sample have not yet been compelled to make any serious career decisions, whereas the students in the Cornwall sample have already made at least an initial career commitment. Because students become aware of occupational choices at an earlier age and because they may encounter individuals making sex-atypical occupational choices, the English students may have become more receptive to such sex-role deviations.

The results may also indicate that the English are less prone to rigid sex-role stereotyping than are Americans. In particular, the males in the American sample provide the most inflexible sex-based evaluations, much more so than the males from Cornwall. The differences between female respondents in the two samples are less sharp. This finding corresponds with the commentaries regarding the rigid sex-role socialization experienced by males in the United States (Fasteau,

of that job with other options for men; the ranking for a female nurse is higher because it is considered more appropriate for a woman and because the alternative employment options thought to be available for women are less desirable in comparison. We feel such reasoning was implicit in the findings of other occupational prestige research, such as Siegel's (1971), when the sex-stereotypical incumbent may have been implicitly used as the basis for prestige attribution. If prestige ratings for women conflate what is desirable with what is typical, they may not be universalistic indicators of occupational achievement. If rankings of occupational prestige have built-in sex-appropriate reference points, they may not be appropriate measures for comparisons across the sexes.

Goode (1978) has argued that prestige can be viewed as a mechanism of social control. His analysis highlights how "granting or withdrawing prestige or esteem controls the actions of both individuals and groups" (1978: 15). The present evidence suggests that the social control vested in the prestige hierarchy is experienced differently by men and women. The differences in prestige for men and women found in this study are closely associated with the sex-composition of occupation. Prestige differences thus reflect sex-typical patterns and, as Goode might argue, reinforce these patterns. The young adults in our samples who are about to begin their participation in the labor force clearly perceive differential evaluative judgments regarding males and females in the same occupations. Their occupational aspirations and choices are likely to differ because the social esteem accorded to male and female incumbents in occupations varies.

These findings also pose important questions for current stratification theories. These data suggest that the prestige hierarchy may not be an invariant, universalistic characteristic of modern industrial societies. The evidence suggests that ascription plays an important role in what is assumed to be the achievement-oriented realm of occupations. The general ordering of incumbents in occupations is thus not solely a reflection of the technical and functional importance of positions but is also influenced by the gender of the individuals.

The practical difficulty suggested by these data for measuring social mobility illustrates a further theoretical concern. The data suggest that in certain cases a move considered upward mobility for women might be considered downward mobility for men. Based on our findings, this divergent patterning would be true for such moves

of prestige for men and women justify the use of separate equations for predicting men's and women's occupational prestige.

2. We have compared the results using rank-order and Pearson's product-moment correlations. The results reveal very similar patterns.

3. The mean NORC prestige score for the 47 occupations that matched the 3-digit Census titles was 44.7, st. dev. = 16.5, as compared to a mean of 42.0 and a st. dev. of 16.0 for all 3-digit Census titles. The teaching profession was over-sampled in order to enable comparisons of the evaluation of males and females in different educational settings.

4. The New York and Cornwall questionnaires have 43 occupations in common.

5. In the New York administration respondents rated either male or female incumbents, and the Cornwall respondents rated both men and women workers. The method used in Cornwall allows for an explicit comparison of male and female incumbents in the same jobs by the same respondents, and the New York method provides ratings uninfluenced by the ratings of the other sex. Both approaches were used in order to determine whether sex differences would be obtained by both methods of administration.

6. Those responding were not unrepresentative of the school as a whole. Respondents had a free study period in which to complete the questionnaire while non-respondents generally did not. The vocational orientation of this group does not make them a biased or unrepresentative group. First, most individuals in the labor force work in sex-segregated occupations. Second, if differentiation between men and women in the same occupation occurred among this group alone, it would be important to know. Third, we sampled both vocational and sixth-form students in Cornwall, and thus covered the range of educational options.

7. Labor force information reported in this section was obtained from the Statistical Abstract, 1974; Britain 1974-An Official Handbook, and Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1974.

8. We define prestige penalty as the difference in rank/rating accorded to male and females. A gap in favor of males (i. e., males have higher rank/rating than females in the same occupation) is indicated by a positive score and a gap in favor of females is indicated by a negative score.

9. The study examines the perceived income of occupations rather than actual income. The subjective indicator is substantively interesting because we were able to examine the effect of perceived income on perceived status. This approach differs from Duncan's use of actual income based on census data.

10. The rankings in the New York sample differed from the NORC prestige scale mostly for the craft occupations, which are ranked higher in the New York sample. This difference may be accounted for by the prominence of craftsmen in this particular community.

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