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GENDER IN THE WORKPLACE

Women's rapid movement into the paid labor market over the past century has had an impact on childrearing, marriage, gender equality, and the labor market itself. Whereas in the past most women devoted their time to caring for their families, women's life courses are now shaped by the combined influences of family and work. In the early 21st century, women in the workplace experience many opportunities, but there are still key issues and challenges.

TRENDS IN WOMEN'S LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Women's participation in the paid labor market increased dramatically during the 20th century. In 1890 only 18% of women were in the labor force. Women's labor force participation rose slowly but steadily through the early 1900s, reaching 28% in 1940. During World War II women were actively recruited into jobs that supported the war effort, with the result that their labor force participation rates jumped to 36% in 1945. When soldiers returned home after the war, some women returned to homemaking, but the decline in women's labor force participation rates was short-lived. By 1960, 38% of women age 16 and older were in the labor force, and this participation rate increased every decade until it reached 58% in 1990. Women's overall labor force participation rate hovered between 58 and 60% until the early 2000s (Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 2006). These numbers are even higher among women who have completed their schooling and have not yet retired. For instance, in 1998, 76 to 78% of women age 25 to 34, 35 to 44, and 45 to 54 participated in the labor force

(Fullerton, 1999). The rise in women's employment occurred in most racial groups. For example, Bart Landry (2000) documented that the percentage of married African American women in the labor force increased from 1940 until 1994. The percentage of African American married women in the labor force was higher than that of White married women in each decade among both upper and lower middle class women. In addition to greater financial need, Landry explained that the Black-White difference was due to Black women, particularly Black middle-class wives, embracing a different version of "true womanhood" that included a commitment to both family and career. These racial differences in employment among married women are still evident in the 21st century. Among young single women, however, White women are working at higher rates than both Blacks and Latinas (see Taniguchi & Rosenfeld, 2002).

Women's roles as wives and mothers have typically had an impact on their participation in the paid labor market, but women's approaches to navigating work and family across the life course have changed substantially over time. In the early part of the 20th century, women typically worked when they were young and single, exiting the labor force when they married or had children—if they could afford to live on only their husband's income. However, labor force participation rates for women with young children have increased rapidly since the 1950s. For instance, only 17% of women experiencing their first birth between 1961 and 1965 were working 12 months after the birth. In contrast, between 2000 and 2002, nearly two-thirds (64%) of new mothers were working 12 months after the birth (Johnson, 2008).

The reasons for this dramatic shift have been studied extensively. Economists argue that women's labor market decisions are based on a comparison of the value of market time (or time at work) to the value of nonmarket time (or time at home). According to this theory, people's decisions are based on *opportunity costs*, that is, an assessment of the costs of making one choice relative to the costs of choosing something else. Over the course of the past century, the value of women's market time increased greatly and the value of women's nonmarket time decreased greatly, leading women to spend a larger proportion of their lives employed (Blau et al., 2006).

Increases in women's educational attainment are an important factor underlying shifts in the value of women's market and nonmarket time (Blau et al., 2006). In 1940 only 4% of women had completed a college degree, but by 2007 this had risen to 28% (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Men's educational attainment also rose over this period, but women closed, and even

OPTING OUT

Since the 1980s, the media have disseminated stories about professional women opting out, or leaving the workforce, to care for their children. The claim that society is experiencing an opt-out revolution (Belkin, 2003) has spurred debates about whether mothers with professional jobs really are opting out and, when they do, about their motivations for doing so. Evidence on the extent of the opt-out revolution is mixed. Studies examining the work decisions of all women tend to show little evidence of an opt-out revolution (Boushey, 2008; Cotter, England, & Hermsen, 2007), but one study indicated that college-educated women in their late 20s are spending less time in the labor market than did earlier cohorts of young educated women (Vere, 2007). Although some mothers who leave their jobs express a clear preference for staying at home, many others feel pushed out of work by the competing demands of an inflexible workplace and motherhood (Stone, 2007).

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reversed, gender gaps in educational attainment. In 1900 only 19% of college degrees were awarded to women, whereas in 2006 women earned more than half (58%) of all college degrees (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). These changes in educational attainment have led more women to aspire to professional careers than in the past and mean that women face clear losses in earned income and professional advancement if they exit the labor market when they have children.

Indeed, despite the common impression that women with low education and limited labor market skills (who are more likely to be single or partnered with a low earner) are the most likely to work because they need the income, in reality women with higher education levels are most likely to work when they have young children. Of women experiencing their first birth between 2000 and 2002, 62% of women with less than a high school education did not work within a year of their child's birth compared to 40% of women with a high school degree and 27% of women with a college education or higher (Johnson, 2008). In addition to the career aspirations of women with higher education, researchers have identified multiple barriers to the employment of low-educated women. High childcare costs, low childcare quality, lack of access to a car, and health limitations of the mother or the child all contribute to the challenges that mothers with low education

and wages face when trying to combine work and family (Roy, Tubbs, & Burton, 2004; Scott, London, & Hurst, 2005).

A second factor pulling women into the labor market may be changes in the availability of other sources of income, such as their partners' earnings or welfare and other government benefits. Peter Gottshalk (1997) indicated that since the 1970s the earnings of men with the weakest labor market positions (e.g., low education levels, limited job skills) have declined. The level of welfare payments and the ability to collect welfare without working have also declined (Committee on Ways and Means, 2004). These changes should push more women into the paid labor market, particularly women with low education levels and single mothers. Although mothers with low education levels are still less likely to work when their children are young than mothers with higher education levels (Johnson, 2008), in the late 1990s there was a sharp increase in the labor force participation rates of single mothers (Blau et al., 2006).

In addition to the forces increasing the value of women's time in the market, many forces have reduced the value of women's nonmarket time (Blau et al., 2006). Moving from an agrarian society to an industrial society reduced families' dependence on women's domestic labor as families became less likely to produce their own food and clothing. Domestic responsibilities continued to decrease with the advent of dishwashers, laundry

machines, and precooked meals readily available for purchase. Families are smaller than in earlier centuries, reducing the time that women spend pregnant or nursing infants. Additionally, the rapid increase in nonmaternal childcare options provides parents with more opportunities to enter the labor market.

KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Some of the key issues and challenges facing women in the workplace include the gender wage gap, discrimination, the glass ceiling, and sexual harassment.

The Gender Wage Gap Despite women's increased educational attainment and strengthening attachment to the labor force, women working full-time still earn less than men working full-time. Estimates of the gender wage gap differ somewhat based on whether researchers compare men's and women's annual earnings or hourly wages, because men tend to work more hours than women. Regardless of the measure used, the gender wage gap has closed over time but has not disappeared. From 1979 to 1998 the ratio of women's to men's hourly wages increased from 63% to 80% (Blau & Kahn, 2006). Several factors explain the gender wage gap, including differences in what women and men choose to study in school, the occupations that women and men enter, the number of years women and men spend employed, and discrimination.

As noted earlier, women are now more likely than men to complete a college degree. However, this trend masks variation that is key to understanding the gender wage gap: Women and men choose very different academic majors. In 2000–2001 women earned just 28% of the bachelor's degrees awarded in computer and information sciences, 20% in engineering, and 34% in economics. In contrast they earned 78% of the degrees in psychology, 77% in education, and 84% in health (Blau et al., 2006). Among those with college degrees, these differences in educational choice translate into women and men holding very different jobs—with very different earning trajectories.

Among those without college degrees, women and men also hold different jobs. Different jobs translate into different pay, authority, and social status (Reskin & Padavic, 1994, p. 31). Jobs that are primarily filled by women and/or minorities tend to require lower level skills and, in turn, provide low wages (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). In 2000, women represented more than half of the workers in several major occupational groups such as sales and office work, service (Gist & Hertz, 2005). A greater percentage of men (58.1%) than women

(41.9%), however, held management, business, and financial jobs, which are generally more lucrative and require more training than sales and service positions. Even after controlling for skill demands, "female occupations" (i.e., jobs comprised of mostly women) pay less than "male occupations" (England, Allison, & Wu, 2007; Huffman, 2004). Pay discrepancies rooted in gender-typed career choices are not easily remedied by public policies. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 requires equal pay for equal jobs. This law does not, however, prohibit employers from paying less to all workers in predominantly female occupations than workers in predominantly male occupations (Reskin & Padavic, 1994).

Jobs that women typically hold have been referred to as *women's work*, a derogatory label emphasizing the low status of these jobs (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). In particular, care work, which includes jobs such as childcare provider, nurse, and teacher, is synonymous with women's work. Childhood socialization, in which girls and boys are taught normative gender roles, likely plays a large role in the ultimate educational and occupational choices of women and men. Women do the majority of both paid and unpaid care work, because it meshes with gender roles emphasizing women's capacity for nurturing. The low pay and support for these workers, despite the large skill set required for these jobs, leads many to argue that care work is devalued (England, 2005). Despite continuing gender segregation in care work, other industries showed a decline in segregation between 1996 and 2003. This decline was due in part to the rise in service sector jobs, which are less segregated than jobs in other industries (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2006).

A second factor that explains the gender wage gap is the amount of time men and women spend in the labor force. The time invested in paid employment, in terms of gaining work experience as well as skills relevant to one's own employer, is often called *human capital*, those skills and experiences that a worker "sells" on the market. Men and women follow very different employment trajectories, with men more likely to work continuously and women more likely to follow a variety of paths that include transitions to and from the labor market as well as spells of part-time employment (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; Moen & Han, 1999). Researchers estimate that about 11% of the gender wage gap is due to differences in labor force experience (Blau et al., 2006).

Parenting demands are among the key reasons why women have more discontinuous work histories than their male peers, but children play a role in women's earnings beyond differences in labor force participation. Researchers have begun to study differences in earnings between mothers and nonmothers and have found what they now call a *motherhood wage gap*. Compared to

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nonmothers, mothers experience a wage penalty of about 7% per child. Here too, labor market entrances and exits explain only part of the gap in pay between mothers and nonmothers (about one-third), leaving the remaining two-thirds of the gap unexplained (Budig & England, 2001). Research in this area is still underway, but some of the hypothesized explanations for the unexplained gap include differences between mothers and nonmothers in their productivity and energy while at work, their decisions about whether to take demanding jobs or to select more family-friendly jobs, and discrimination (Budig & England, 2001).

Discrimination Most researchers acknowledge that discrimination is likely to account for some of the gap that remains between men's and women's wages after factors such as occupation and experience are taken into account (Blau & Kahn, 2006; Budig & England, 2001). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating on the basis of gender during hiring, promotion, and job assignment. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission was created to enforce this act, but given the subtlety of many employers' intentional and unintentional actions, Joan Williams (2000) points out, it can be difficult to prove gender discrimination.

In addition to gender-based discrimination, evidence suggests that caregivers also experience discrimination, such as being terminated or denied promotion due to family responsibilities. In one case, female grocery clerks were not promoted to management because their employer believed the clerks' childcare responsibilities would prevent them from working long hours (Williams & Segal 2002). Although caregiving discrimination can happen to men, it is more likely to happen to women as they typically assume more caregiving responsibilities.

Employers may also discriminate by offering women lower wages than men. Although illegal, there are still cases in which employers pay women less than men for performing the same job (see examples in Reskin & Padavic, 1994). For example, in 2001 six women filed a lawsuit claiming, among other issues, gender discrimination in pay decisions at Wal-Mart and Sam's Club. In 2004 the federal court made it a class action lawsuit applying to all female employees at Wal-Mart in the United States. The case has not been tried or settled out of court. Pay discrimination occurs at all levels of the occupation hierarchy and is partly responsible for the increasing gender wage gaps over the life course (Maume, 2004). Pay differences and differences in hiring and promotion can have a cumulative effect over time, with small differences early in a career adding up and leading to larger differences later in the life course (Maume, 2004).

Unfortunately, estimating how much of a pay gap is due to discrimination versus other factors is a difficult task as researchers rarely have information on all factors influencing wages, such as individual productivity, job experience, and whether jobs require comparable skills (Reskin & Padavic, 1994). Experimental studies can help eliminate these challenges by examining how job applicants are rated when the only substantive difference between two workers is their gender or parental status. For instance, Shelley Correll, Steven Bernard, and In Paik (2007) asked college students to rate the application materials of two job candidates for a high-level position. The students were told that their comments would be passed on to a hiring committee and may influence actual hiring decisions. The researchers constructed resumes and other materials making the applications equally qualified for the job, but they experimentally manipulated the parental status of the applicant. Their results showed that mothers were perceived as less competent and less committed to their jobs than nonmothers and that these perceptions translated into lower proposed starting salaries and higher required achievement standards for mothers.

The Glass Ceiling A *glass ceiling* metaphor has been commonly used to describe the invisible barrier that prevents women, particularly minority women, from advancing in organizations (Williams, 2000). Although many women have management positions, the number of women holding top-level positions, such as chief executive officer of an organization, is very small. In 1995 the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission published a report documenting a stark contrast in the number of male and female senior managers in Fortune 1500 companies: 95% of senior managers were men. Furthermore, when Mary Noonan and Mary Corcoran (2004) examined gender differences in promotion among University of Michigan law school graduates from 1972 to 1985, they found that women were less likely to be promoted to partner in law firms than were men, even after accounting for differences between men and women in factors such as grade point average in law school, number of years they had practiced law, and amount of time taken off, if any, from work to raise children. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission identified three barriers that account for the glass ceiling: (a) societal barriers (differential opportunities for educational attainment, prejudices), (b) structural barriers within the business (initial placement in noncareer track jobs, lack of mentoring), and (c) governmental barriers (lack of consistent monitoring, inadequate reporting; U.S. Department of Labor, 1995).

Although women may have a difficult time "cracking" the glass ceiling, mothers tend to have an even more

difficult time, given the time constraints and responsibilities associated with managing a job and motherhood simultaneously. As noted earlier, mothers with low education and few financial resources often struggle to remain attached to the labor market, which can have immediate negative consequences for their own and their children's financial well-being. Taking time out of the workforce can also have consequences for career advancement. For instance, lawyers who took time out of the labor force to care for children were less likely to make partner and earned less if they did become partners (Noonan & Cochran, 2004).

Some accommodations for working mothers, such as reduced work hours, have led to concerns that they place women onto a "mommy track" that then prevents them from maintaining their previous status or from advancing further. Indeed even mothers who are not interested in these accommodations may be viewed differently once they have children and may experience changes in their work arrangements that move them into less prestigious jobs. For instance, the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission reported that upon returning to work after maternity leave, women often received less desirable assignments than they did before giving birth (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995).

Sexual Harassment As women have become a larger part of the American workforce, many have faced sexual harassment in the workplace. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2007a) defines sexual harassment as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature...when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment." Although sexual harassment is illegal, a 1994 survey by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (1995) found that 44% of women reported experiencing some type of harassing behavior at work during the previous two-year period. The most common behaviors reported are sexual teasing and jokes, but 10% of survey respondents indicated that they received letters, calls, or other sexual material, and 7% reported being pressured for sexual favors. Of those who reported experiencing some type of sexual harassment, only 6% reported making a formal complaint. Only half of those who made complaints reported that this improved the situation (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1995). It is unclear why more complaints were not filed, but possible reasons include fear of retaliation or job loss.

Sexual harassment can have negative consequences for health, workplace morale and productivity, and victims' career trajectories. For instance, Chelsea Willness, Piers Steel, and Kibeom Lee (2007) show that harassment has been linked to a reduction in mental wellness for

female victims and an increase in rates of posttraumatic stress disorder. Sexual harassment has also been linked to heightened stress and physical illness (Rospenda, Richman, Ehmke, & Zlatoper, 2005), which can lead to frequent absences from work, strained coworker relationships, and limited productivity (Willness et al., 2007). Sexual harassment can also have lasting effects on women's careers. Victims are more likely to be dismissed or lose promotions due to absences from work (Willness et al., 2007).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH ON GENDER IN THE WORKPLACE

One of the most promising avenues for future research on gender in the workplace asks the question: What can be done to address the challenges that women are facing? Many scholars have outlined suggestions to eliminate the glass ceiling, reduce sexual harassment, reduce gender inequality in pay, and help individuals meet their work and family responsibilities (e.g., Catalyst, 2000; Moen & Roehling, 2004; Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). A wide variety of interventions and changes have been proposed, ranging from workplace policies about flexible scheduling and sexual harassment to government policies about maternity leave and childcare.

One of the challenges in this area is philosophical. A debate has existed for generations about how to define equality between women and men and what the goal of related policies should be (Loutfi, 2001; Vogel, 1993). Does equality mean that women have the same opportunities as men and receive the same penalties as men for factors such as reduced time in the labor market, or does equality mean that women and men have the same outcomes on issues such as time spent in caregiving and occupational attainment?

This controversy is still apparent in policy debates about how to address employees' needs to balance their work and family responsibilities (Lewis & Guillari, 2005). Jennifer Glass (2004) categorizes commonly proposed work-family policies into three groups. The first set promotes reductions in work hours, allowing workers (typically mothers) to reduce their time in the labor market in order to perform caregiving at home. The second set promotes schedule flexibility (adapting the timing and location of work), allowing workers to meet their caregiving responsibilities without minimizing their overall time in the labor market. The third set provides assistance to workers (such as on-site childcare or assistance finding elder care) and helping workers pay others to provide care when it is needed. These policies reflect very different choices (providing care oneself vs. purchasing care in the market) and may have very different

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effects on the career trajectories and the well-being of workers and their families.

Although addressing the challenges that women face in the workplace involves grappling with the philosophical question about ultimate policy goals, research can greatly inform these debates by providing concrete information about the costs and benefits of various workplace and government policies. These studies need to be complex, because interventions with positive impacts in one domain (e.g., career attainment) may have negative impacts in another (e.g., individual or child well-being). They also need to reflect the reality that policies that are plausible and beneficial to one group of workers (e.g., professional workers, married workers) may be unfeasible or not beneficial to others (e.g., workers in less skilled occupations, single parents).

SEE ALSO Volume 1: *Socialization, Gender*; Volume 2: *Careers; Dual Career Couples; Employment, Adulthood; Job Characteristics and Job Stress; Occupations; Policy, Employment; Sexism/Sex Discrimination*.

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GENETIC INFLUENCES, ADULTHOOD

One of the most influential developments in science is the growing understanding of genetics. During the last half century, the body of knowledge about genes and their consequences has flourished. As scientists' understanding of genetics has increased, the relevance of genetics to the study of a wide variety of issues has been highlighted. In this vein, understanding adult life trajectories requires taking into account individuals' genetic inheritances and their interplay with the social and physical environment.

GENES AND EVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

A gene is a single coding segment of DNA, which is the hereditary material in all organisms including humans. The hereditary directions in DNA are stored in 3 billion bases. The order of these bases provides the blueprint for building and maintaining an organism. Genes are grouped onto chromosomes, of which humans have 23 pairs. The pairing of chromosomes means that humans have two copies of all genes, with the exception that males have only one copy of sex-linked genes (those that occur on the X chromosome and those that occur on the Y chromosome; females have two X chromosomes, males only one). Different forms of a gene are referred to as alleles, and the combination of allele forms for a particular gene are known as a genotype. A genotype corresponds to a particular set of gene products, whereas a phenotype is the observed end result of the gene process.

To understand the nature of genes as well as how they influence human lives, it is important to recognize their evolutionary past. Genes are passed along from parents to child, so a gene's "success" is measured in the number of copies it transmits to future generations. To pass genes on, an individual must reproduce offspring. Thus, genes that increased the reproductive success of an individual were more successful in the course of evolution and are more prevalent today. Conversely, genes that are present today must have been selected for reproductive advantage over evolutionary history. Because the modern world differs dramatically from the circumstances under which these genes were selected, characteristics that were advantageous then may not be advantageous today. For example, humans have evolved excellent physiological mechanisms to store energy when food is abundant, so as to sustain them in times when food is in short supply. Contemporary humans can be considered as selected for genes that favor energy storage and that defend against weight loss. Contemporary industrialized societies, however, are characterized by low levels of physical exercise and abundant food supply. It is this misfit between one's primeval genes and modern lifestyles that accounts for the current U.S. epidemic in obesity at the population level. Individuals differ considerably in the risk of obesity, however, because they are exposed to different sets of genetic and environmental factors. This evolutionary perspective is a helpful way to interpret research on genes and the life course, because it frames the narrative on the origin of a genetic effect.

The effect of genes on complex phenotypes, such as behaviors, has been explored in a number of ways that have evolved as scholars' understanding of biology has increased. Studies on twins and adopted children allowed researchers to explore the heritability (i.e., the degree to