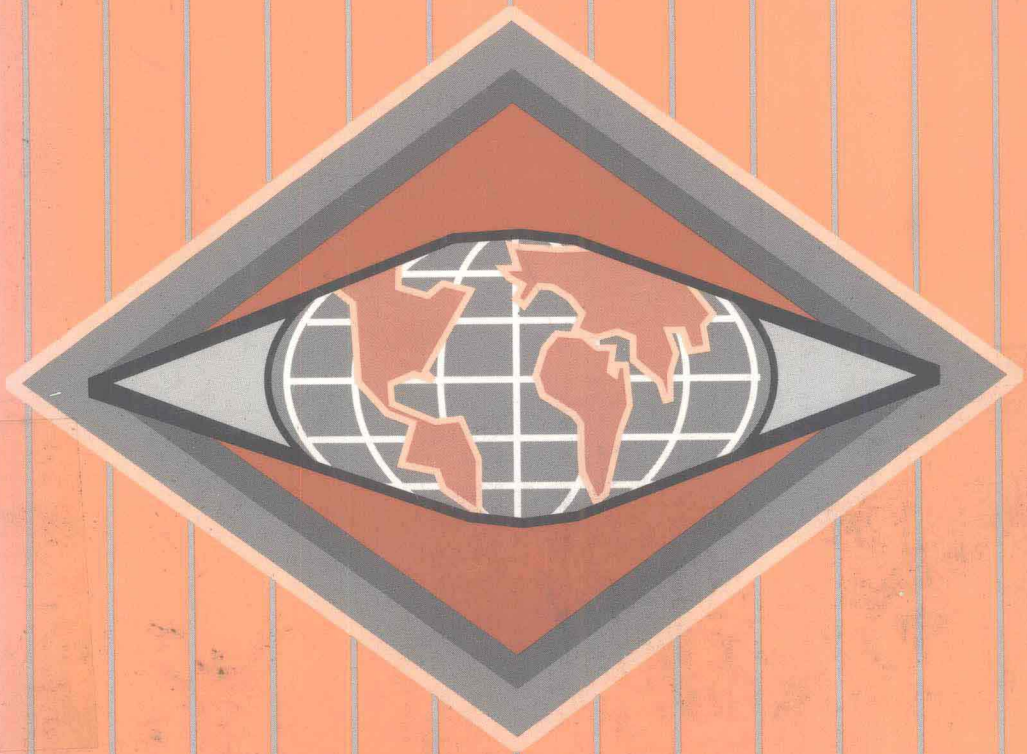
SOCIOLOGY FOR A NEW CENTURY

WOMEN AND MEN AT WORK

BARBARA RESKIN AND IRENE PADAVIC



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Foreword

Sociology for a New Century offers the best of current sociological thinking to today's students. The goal of the series is to prepare students, and—in the long run—the informed public, for a world that has changed dramatically in the last three decades and one that continues to astonish.

This goal reflects important changes that have taken place in sociology. The discipline has become broader in orientation, with an ever growing interest in research that is comparative, historical, or transnational in orientation. Sociologists are less focused on "American" society as the pinnacle of human achievement and more sensitive to global processes and trends. They also have become less insulated from surrounding social forces. In the 1970s and 1980s sociologists were so obsessed with constructing a science of society that they saw impenetrability as a sign of success. Today, there is a greater effort to connect sociology to the ongoing concerns and experiences of the informed public.

Each book in this series offers a comparative, historical, transnational, or global perspective in some way, to help broaden students' vision. Students need to be sensitized to diversity in today's world and to the sources of diversity. Knowledge of diversity challenges the limitations of conventional ways of thinking about social life. At the same time, students need to be sensitized to the fact that issues that may seem specifically "American" (for example, the women's movement, an aging population bringing a strained social security and health care system, racial conflict, national chauvinism, and so on) are shared by many other countries. Awareness of commonalities undercuts the tendency to view social issues and questions in narrowly American terms and encourages students to seek out the experiences of others for the lessons they offer. Finally, students also need to be sensitized to phenomena that transcend national boundaries, economies, and politics.

Women and Men at Work provides students with an in-depth examination of the world of work at the end of the twentieth century. Many books deal with women and men at work. Some focus on a single topic, context,

or occupation; others are primarily historical; still others employ an economic perspective that discounts or ignores sociological insights; many focus almost exclusively on women; and a few focus on women of color. This book differs from other books by comparing women's and men's work status, addressing contemporary issues within a historical perspective, incorporating comparative material from other countries, recognizing differences in the experiences of women and men from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, and—most important—seeking to link social scientific ideas about workers' lives, sex inequality, and gender to the real-world workplace in which students will work for most of their lives. Throughout this book, we integrate theory and evidence—statistics that summarize work outcomes for women and men, research about the effects of workers' sex on their jobs, and accounts of the experiences of real workers. By putting evidence about the experiences of today's workers in a historical perspective, we highlight continuities with the past and illuminate change.

Preface

On October 7, 1993, ABC's *Prime-Time Live* broadcast a segment that compared the experiences of Chris and Julie, male and female "testers" whom ABC had hired to learn whether sex discrimination still existed in 1993. Because of their sexes, Chris and Julie were not perfect doubles, but both were trim, blonde, neatly dressed college graduates in their late 20s, and both were experienced professional testers. *Prime-Time Live* showed what happened when Julie and Chris, wired for sound and equipped with hidden cameras, went through the motions of getting settled in a new city.

Julie and Chris applied for two jobs advertised in the help-wanted columns. The first advertisement mentioned several positions, and the interviewer talked to Julie about a possible job answering phones. The same interviewer offered Chris a management job. After learning that the interviews had been taped, the interviewer commented off camera that he would never want a man answering his phone. The second advertisement was for territory managers for a lawn-care firm. Julie and Chris presented similar resumes, each showing managerial experience. The company's owner gave Julie a typing test, asked her about her fiance's business and even his name, and then offered her a job as receptionist that started at "about $6" an hour. In contrast, the owner chatted with Chris about how he keeps fit playing tennis, soccer, and softball; gave him an aptitude test, not a typing test; and offered him the job of territory manager, which would pay $300 to $500 a week. Later, the owner told *Prime-Time Live* that he thought Julie was applying for a different job and that women "do not do well as territory managers, which involves some physical labor." He also said he had hired a female receptionist and several male territory managers.

We provide this detailed account because it offers up-to-date evidence of sex inequality at work. Our students sometimes feel that the studies or statistics in their books are out of date and that sex inequality has disappeared. As a matter of fact, one of sociologists' most persistent findings on this issue is that sex inequality has eroded very, very slowly.

This is not to say that change does not occur. Also in October 1993, a *New York Times* article reported that an award-winning female agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation was resigning after nine years' service (D. Johnston 1993:A7). During an undercover assignment, she charged, her supervisor grabbed her from behind, put her in a choke hold, and promised to promote her if she consented to sex. Another supervisor warned the female agent that a formal complaint could cost her job. As he and others had predicted, her career did stall after she complained. The FBI has long discriminated against women. It did not hire any female agents until 1972, and in 1993 still almost 90 percent of the agents were men. The highest-ranking woman ran a small field office in remote Anchorage, Alaska. However, a few days after the news story about the sexual harassment charge, the FBI announced that it was promoting the Anchorage woman to assistant director, along with a Hispanic man (also a first), an African-American man, and two white men.

Women and Men at Work addresses the same issues that appear in news stories: men's and women's everyday experiences on the job and their progress in the world of work. To these real issues we bring the evidence of history and the theories and data of sociologists and economists interested in work, inequality, and gender. A thorough account of women and men at work must address the questions implied in the above examples: Why doesn't an employer want a man to answer his phone? Why did the owner of the lawn-care firm offer Julie a low-paying job as a receptionist when her credentials were as good as Chris's? Why should a receptionist earn less than a territory manager? Why are women more likely than men to be sexually harassed at work and less likely to be promoted? Although we cannot answer all these questions in this book, we summarize scientists' findings that bear on them and evaluate the answers that their findings imply.

Chapter 1 focuses on what work is and the three components of what we call "gendered work": the sexual division of labor, the devaluation of women's work, and the construction of gender on the job—processes that we return to throughout the book. Chapter 2 provides a historical context for gendered work in the Western world. It examines the effects of industrialization and the evolution of the labor force and the sexual division of labor. Chapter 3 provides an overview of sex inequality in the workplace and introduces several general explanations for sex inequality that the following chapters employ.

Chapter 4 focuses on workers' segregation into different kinds of work on the basis of their sex, as well as their race and ethnicity. It examines the causes of segregation and mechanisms that can reduce it. Chapter 5 looks

at two expressions of hierarchical sex and race segregation in the workplace—differences in opportunities to move up and exercise authority—and evaluates possible reasons for these differences. Chapter 6 focuses on the pay gap between the sexes. It shows how men of color and all women compare to white men in their average earnings, assesses trends in the earnings ratio, reviews explanations for the pay gap, and discusses strategies to reduce it.

Chapter 7 explores how and why employers and workers make gender salient in the workplace. Chapter 8 examines the connections between paid and family work for women and for men. It considers what governments and employers can do and are doing to deal with the problems that workers face in combining paid and family work. Chapter 9 concludes by speculating on the effects of recent trends in the organization of work on female and male workers in the twenty-first century.

This book is the product of many persons' efforts. We are indebted to all the scholars whose ideas helped to shape our own and whom we cite in the pages that follow; to our students and colleagues, who make our work fun; to the millions of women and men around the world whose experiences on the job provide the focus and the data for this book; and to our friends who offered encouragement when we were ready to abandon this project, assume new identities, and leave town. That these groups are too large for us to thank by name does not diminish our indebtedness or gratitude. Among the smaller group of people who helped materially in our finishing this book are Lynda Ames, Katharine Donato, Greg Draus, Anne Draus, Randy Earnest, John Felice, Larry Griffin, Wendy Griswold, Lowell Hargens, Jane Hood, Chiara Huddleston, the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Marcia Johnson, Gail McGuire, Wanda Mitchell, John Myles, the National Committee on Pay Equity, Victoria Nelson, Ann Padavic, J. Anthony Paredes, Mary Pohl, Cathy Rakowski, Carole Ray, Claire Robertson, Ruth Rosenblum, Steve Rutter, Rebecca Smith, Verna Smith, Marc Steinberg, and Ronnie Steinberg. We particularly thank soon-to-be full-fledged sociologists Naomi Cassirer, Michelle Fondell, and Laura Geschwender, whose not-very-well-paid labor was vital in our completing this book.

Barbara Reskin and Irene Padavic

Contents

1

Work and Gender

Underpinning all human activity is work. We spend most of our lives preparing for work, working, or using the products of others' labor. Even when we are simply relaxing in front of the TV set watching *General Hospital,* the evening news, or Monday night football, we are enjoying the results of the labor of others. The workers who bring these television shows to millions of viewers include executives and administrators, personnel managers, advertising agents, writers and editors, producers and directors, newscasters and announcers, actors and musicians, production engineers, camera operators, electrical technicians, computer operators, clerks and typists, and maintenance workers. Fifty years ago, neither royalty nor oil barons could summon up the labor of so many thousands simply to entertain them.

Just as we take for granted the air we breathe, we take for granted the work that creates the world around us. This book aims to make work visible so we can examine the work that women and men do and explore the ways that workers, the workplace, and work become saturated with gendered meanings.

What Work Is

Although we use the term *work* in many ways ("working on a relationship," "working on a suntan"), its core meaning is activities that produce a good or a service—such as mowing the lawn, selling encyclopedias, testing silicon chips, and refueling military aircraft. In this book, we define **work** to include activities that produce goods and services for one's own use or in exchange for pay or support. This definition encompasses three kinds of work: *paid* work (also called **market work**), which generates an income; **coerced work,** which people are forced to do against their will and with little or no pay (for example, as slaves or prisoners);

Note: **Boldface** terms in the text are defined in the Glossary/Index.

and *unpaid* work (also called **nonmarket work**), which people voluntarily perform for themselves and others. An important form of nonmarket work in modern societies is **domestic work**—work that people do around their homes for themselves and members of their household. If you aren't convinced that unpaid work is really work, think of your experiences waxing your car, planning and cooking a meal that will impress your friends, or buying groceries or gifts on a limited budget during exam week.

This distinction between market and nonmarket work is fairly recent. For most of history, people did not see work as separate from the rest of their lives. Life was work, just as it was rest and recovery from work. The average person consumed all that she or he produced, and few people were paid for their labor. Only with the development of capitalism and industrial work did work come to be seen as paid activities. As more people became engaged in this new form of work, the terms *unpaid work*, *nonmarket work*, and *domestic work* came to refer to the plain, old-fashioned, unpaid work that people had always done.

As more workers took paid jobs, however, people increasingly treated paid work as the only "real" work; the unpaid work that people did in their own homes became devalued or invisible. Today economists and statisticians who monitor the size and productivity of the workforce in industrialized countries reserve the term *work* for activities that people do for pay. American economists, for example, estimate the nation's gross national product in terms of the output of its paid workers. Defining work in this way excludes much of the work done by people in developing countries as well as almost all the work that women—and sometimes men—perform at home for their families.

This book examines the roles that women and men play in paid and unpaid work. We show that workers' sex profoundly affects their work lives, although the way that it does so also depends on people's race, ethnicity, and class. We show too that the effects of sex have varied throughout history and around the world. However, before we discuss the ways that people's sex affects the kinds of work they do, the rewards it brings, and its effects on their family lives, we must clarify the terms *sex* and *gender* and introduce the concepts of sex differentiation and gender differentiation.

Sex and Gender

Although many people use the terms *sex* and *gender* as synonyms, they have different meanings. We use the term **sex** for a classification based on human biology. Biological sex depends on a person's chromosomes

and is expressed in the person's genitals, internal reproductive organs, and hormones. **Gender,** in contrast, refers to a classification that societies construct to exaggerate the differences between females and males and to maintain **sex inequality.**

Sex Differentiation

All societies recognize the existence of different sexes and group people by their sex for some purposes. Classifying people into categories based on their sex is called **sex differentiation.** Because of the importance societies attach to sex, sex differentiation begins at birth. However, in our society each new baby is assigned to one of just two sexes on the basis of just one indicator, the appearance of the external genitalia.[1] The term *the opposite sex* reveals our society's preoccupation with the differences between males and females.

Sex differentiation usually exists as part of a system of sex inequality—**a sex-gender hierarchy**—that favors males over females. Although sex differentiation need not inevitably lead to sex inequality, it is essential for a system of inequality. Distinguishing females and males is necessary in order to treat them differently.

Gender Differentiation

To justify unequal treatment of the sexes, the differences between them must seem to be large and important. **Gender differentiation** refers to the social processes that exaggerate the differences between males and females and create new ones where no natural differences exist (West and Zimmerman 1987:137; Reskin 1988). Gender differentiation also distinguishes activities as male or female.

Together, sex differentiation and gender differentiation ensure that females differ from males in easy-to-spot ways. Clothing fashions, for example, accentuate physical differences between the sexes. At times, fashion has enhanced the breadth of men's shoulders or of women's hips and has called attention to women's or men's sexual characteristics. After trousers were introduced in the nineteenth century, it was several years before men gave up the skin-tight breeches that "showed off [their] sexual parts" (Davidoff and Hall 1987:412). Shoe styles, too, have contributed to gender differentiation by exaggerating the difference in the

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[1]Biologically, most people are one sex or the other, although a few people have a combination of chromosomes, reproductive organs, and hormones that is not unambiguously male or female.

sizes of women's and men's feet. In prerevolutionary China, upper-class Chinese women had their feet bound so they could wear tiny shoes; in the United States in the early 1960s, the only fashionable shoes women could buy had narrow, pointed toes and 3-inch heels.

Clothing also creates differences between the sexes that have no natural basis. Disposable-diaper manufacturers now market different designs for girls and boys—for example, police cars and cement trucks on boys' diapers and frolicking teddy bears on girls'.[2] Until the beginning of the twentieth century, however, male and female infants were dressed alike—usually in white dresses. When Americans did begin to color code babies' clothing, they dressed boys in pink and girls in blue. Not until almost 1950 did the convention reverse, with blue becoming defined as masculine and pink as feminine—and hence taboo for boys (Kidwell and Steele 1989:24–7). Such shifts demonstrate that what is critical for maintaining and justifying unequal treatment between the sexes is not *how* cultures set the sexes apart but *that* they do it.

The Social Construction of Gender

The process of transforming males and females who differ rather minimally in biological terms into two groups that differ noticeably in appearance and opportunities is called the **social construction of gender.** As anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1975:178) said, "A taboo against the sameness of men and women [divides] the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories [and] thereby *creates* gender." Various rewards and punishments induce people to go along with the social construction of gender and thus conform to cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity.

A fable about a stranger who arrived at a village begging for food provides an analogy of the difference between sex and gender. When the villagers said they had no food at all, the stranger announced he had a magic stone with which he volunteered to make "stone soup." As the stone simmered in a pot of boiling water, the stranger told onlookers that the soup would be even more delicious if they could find just one onion to add to it. Someone admitted to having an onion, which was added to the pot. When the stranger said that the soup would be truly superb but for the lack of a carrot, another villager produced a carrot. The stranger got the villagers to add potatoes, turnips, garlic, and even bones with a

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[2]When our research assistant was in the supermarket checking diapers, she overheard a mother ask a little girl which "pull-up" diapers she wanted. The little girl shouted, "Boys'!"

bit of meat. The "stone" soup the stranger eventually dished out to the villagers was hearty and delicious. Although we do not want to push the analogy too far, sex and gender resemble the stone and the soup. Like the stone, biological sex is the foundation on which societies construct gender. Like the soup, gender depends little on people's biological sex and mostly on how societies embellish it. And just as the stranger tricked the villagers into thinking that an ordinary stone was the essential ingredient in stone soup, cultures often deceive us into thinking that biological sex accounts for the differences between females' and males' behavior and life outcomes.

The emphasis that cultures place on sex blinds us to the far greater importance of gender differentiation in producing differences between men and women. Gender is a social construction, not a biological inevitability. This distinction is clear in the striking variability anthropologists have observed in male and female behavior across different cultures (Mead 1949).

In this book, we use the term *sex* when people's biological sex is the basis for how societies, organizations, or other people treat them. We use the term to stress the point that people's sex influences how others act toward them. For example, we refer to *sex discrimination* and *sex segregation*. In contrast, we use the term *gender* to refer to differences between the sexes that are socially constructed.

Societies produce and maintain gender differences—that is, engage in **gendering**—through several social processes: socialization, the actions of social institutions, and interaction among people (West and Zimmerman 1987). Thus gender is a system of social relations that is embedded in the way major institutions (including the workplace) are organized (Acker 1990; Lorber 1992:748). This conception of gender encourages us to examine the ways that social institutions embody gendered arrangements and at the same time create and maintain differences in their female and male members.

A primary reason for the gendering of human activities is to maintain male advantage. Gender roles and gendered organizations institutionalize the favored position of men as a group; in other words, organizations play a fundamental role in establishing a sex-gender hierarchy that favors men over women. Individual men then enjoy the benefits of being male without doing anything special to obtain those benefits. Most men are not even aware of the benefits they derive solely because of their sex.

Although sex is an important basis for differentiating people into categories, societies use other characteristics as well. Foremost are race and

ethnicity; in many societies, religion, appearance, age, sexual orientation, and economic position are also important bases for sorting people. Just as societies magnify the minor biological differences between males and females, they elaborate small differences between persons of different ages or races. The discussion of the history of work in Chapter 2, for example, will show that just over 100 years ago, families and employers treated children as small adults, who worked alongside their parents in fields and factories. Some societies still do not legally differentiate children from adults: Children can enter into marriage or be tried for murder. Today, however, Americans differentiate children, adolescents, and "senior citizens" from everyone else. Thus childhood, adolescence, and "senior citizenship" have been socially constructed as special statuses. Some societies also engage in social differentiation on the basis of race and ethnicity. In the United States, for example, patterns of immigration and world affairs have created a strong tradition of racial and ethnic differentiation, and people's race and ethnicity may strongly influence their work lives. When we address the effects of such differentiation, remember that race and ethnicity may also have socially constructed meanings.

Gendered Work

To stress the fundamental role of gender differentiation in creating differences between men and women, some social scientists use **gender** as a verb to refer to the process of differentiating the sexes. They call the process of gender differentiation *gendering* and speak of activities that organizations or cultures have attached to one or the other sex as *gendered.* These terms signify outcomes that are socially constructed and give males advantages over females (Acker 1990:146). They describe the production of assumptions about gender as well as the institutions that are shaped by those assumptions. One such institution is gendered work, which is the subject of this book. This section focuses on three features of gendered work: the assignment of tasks based on workers' sex, the higher value placed on men's work than on women's work, and employers' and workers' construction of gender on the job.

The Sexual Division of Labor

The assignment of different tasks to women and men, or the **sexual division of labor,** is a fundamental feature of work. All societies delegate tasks in part on the basis of workers' sex, although which sex does ex-

actly which tasks has varied over time and differs across the countries of the world. Tasks that some societies view as naturally female or male are assigned to the other sex at other times or in other places. In Muslim societies, for example, where religious law requires strict sex segregation, men hold such jobs as elementary school teacher, secretary, and nurse; Westerners think of these as women's work (Papanek 1973:310–1). In the United States, only one-fifth of physicians and less than 4 percent of street sweepers are female; in Russia, women are the majority in each of these occupations.

Within the same country and the same occupation, either sex may do a particular job. Although women were four times as likely as men to work as food servers in the United States in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992a), many restaurants—especially fancy ones—employ only waiters. Neither sex has a monopoly on the skills needed to serve food, but many restaurants create a sexual division of labor in which one sex cooks and the other serves. Race and age frequently figure into particular job assignments as well, and Chapter 4 will describe these divisions of labor.

The production of cloth illustrates how the sexual division of labor can shift. Up to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, producing silk was women's work. The delicate nature of spinning and weaving silk by hand might have explained this division of labor, but during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries an all-male weavers' guild in London not only took over silk work but also prohibited members from teaching the trade to females (Kowaleski and Bennett 1989). In contrast, female silk workers in Paris, having formed their own guilds, were able to remain in the trade. Over the succeeding centuries, textile manufacturers have hired women or men—or sometimes both—at one time or another.

Changes in which sex does a task occur slowly, because the existing sexual division of labor shapes social expectations. Kinds of work become labeled in people's minds as belonging to one sex and inappropriate for the other (Oppenheimer 1968). In Gambia, for example, women have cultivated rice since the fourteenth century. During a desperate food shortage in the nineteenth century, the government tried to encourage men to help grow rice. The men refused, insisting that rice was "a woman's crop" (Carney and Watts 1991:641). Of course, there is nothing inherently female about raising rice: In parts of Asia, men have traditionally been responsible for growing rice (Schrijvers 1983).

For each example of a rigid use of sex to assign tasks, there is another in which the sexual division of labor is blurred. Consider an example from U.S. history. In colonial America , survival required that everybody work. The sexual division of labor made men primarily responsible for