

Third Edition

WORKPLACE/ WOMEN'S PLACE

An Anthology



Paula J. Dubeck
Dana Dunn

Workplace/ Women's Place

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Table of Contents

<i>About the Contributors</i>	viii
-------------------------------------	------

<i>Introduction to the Study of Women and Work</i>	1
--	---

Paula Dubeck and Dana Dunn

Introductions to 1st and 2nd editions are combined, edited, updated.

Unit One: Becoming Workers: Girls' Socialization for Employment

<i>Introduction</i>	15
---------------------------	----

1. Parental Influence and Women's Careers	18
---	----

Sue Joan Mendelson Freeman

Explores the role the family plays in socializing gender and shaping the work orientation of career women.

2. Shortchanging Girls: Gender Socialization in Schools	28
---	----

Peggy Orenstein (in association with the American Association of University Women)

Examines educational influences (primary and secondary level) on adolescent girls' self-esteem and work orientation.

*3. Gender and the Career Choice Process: The Role of Biased Self-Assessment	37
--	----

Shelly J. Correll

Examines the role that self-assessment in math performance plays in influencing girls' (vs. boys') choice of advanced math courses and a math-science-engineering major in college.

Unit Two: Workplace Inequality: Gendered Structures and Their Consequences

<i>Introduction</i>	53
---------------------------	----

*4. Women's Employment Among Blacks, Whites, and Three Groups of Latinas: Do More Privileged Women Have Higher Employment?	59
--	----

Paula England, Carmen Garcia-Beaulieu, and Mary Ross

Examines women's labor force participation across racial/ethnic groups, particularly with regard to the influence of education, children, and recency of immigration.

* Indicates chapters new to this edition.

5.	Gendered Jobs and Gendered Workers	69
	Christine L. Williams Overview of the theory of gendered organizations and how organizations create and reproduce gender differences and gender inequality.	
6.	Sex Segregation in the Workplace	73
	Barbara F. Reskin Describes stability and change in sex-segregated employment patterns and discusses the cultural and structural causes of workplace segregation.	
*7.	The Penny Pinch	77
	Christine Larson Examines the changes in women's earnings compared to men's and issues that surround the wage gap.	
8.	Women, Men, and Management Styles	83
	Marie-Therese Claes Discusses changes in ideal-type management styles that have emerged over the past decades and women's influence in broadening the qualities associated with good managers.	
9.	The Glass Ceiling	88
	The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission Identifies barriers to the advancement of women and minorities to top levels of management.	
*10.	Gender Gap in the Executive Suite: CEOs and Female Executives Report on Breaking the Glass Ceiling	95
	Belle Rose Ragins, Bickley Townsend, and Mary Mattis An examination of overt and subtle barriers that high ranking women see as affecting their advancement and how these factors compare with what male CEOs view as influencing women's advancement to top corporate positions.	
11.	The Impact of Male Work Environments and Organizational Policies on Women's Experiences of Sexual Harassment	110
	James E. Gruber Discusses how formal organizational practices can actively remedy or reduce sexually harassing behaviors in the work place.	

Unit Three: Work and Family: Seeking a Balance

Introduction	119
12. The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home	123
	Arlie Russell Hochschild with Anne Machung Although women have moved into the full-time workforce in great numbers, traditional home-based responsibilities primarily are done by women, resulting in the "second job" at home. Family stresses that result are discussed.

* Indicates chapters new to this edition.

13. The Time Bind 134
Arlie Russell Hochschild
 Longer work hours come up against family demands straining the work/family relationship, yet some employees find work more satisfying than home life. Discusses factors that account for these competing pressures on the family.
- *14. Fast-Track Women and the 'Choice' to Stay Home. 142
Pamela Stone and Meg Lovejoy
 The complexities that high achieving women face in finally making the decision to stay home illuminate the conflicting pressures of the work situation, family, and limited options, and belies the notion of "choice."
- *15. Family and Career Trajectories Among African American Female Attorneys. 157
Mary Blair-Loy and Gretchen DeHart
 An examination of changing patterns of family formation for different cohorts of African American female attorneys.
- *16. The Work-Home Crunch. 168
Kathleen Gerson and Jerry A. Jacobs
 An examination of variations in working hours across different family forms and social statuses, with an assessment of the consequences of competing pressures for 21st century workers.

Unit Four: Women Workers Across the Spectrum

- Introduction** 177
17. Race, Class, Gender, and Women's Works:
 A Conceptual Framework 184
Teresa L. Amott and Julie A. Matthaei
 Provides a conceptual framework for understanding the social and economic factors that differentiate women's work lives and economic positions.
- *18. Negotiating Identity in Raced and Gendered Workplace Interactions: The Use of Strategic Communication by African American Women Senior Executives Within Dominant Culture Organizations. 194
Patricia S. Parker
 An examination of how African American women in high status positions negotiate meaning, identity, and power to find voice in dominant culture organizations; the issues they confront and strategies they use are presented.

- *19. Selling Women Short: A Research Note on Gender Differences in Compensation on Wall Street 207
Louise Marie Roth
 Even with equivalencies in human capital, women in major Wall Street financial corporations experience a significant wage gap compared to men. Factors influencing this gap are discussed.
- *20. Voces Abriendo Caminos (Voices Forging Paths): A Qualitative Study of the Career Development of Notable Latinas 216
Maria J. Gomez, Ruth E. Fassinger, Joann Prosser, Kathleen Cooke, Brenda Mejia, and Jeanette Luna
 An examination into the factors that influenced the career paths of notable Latinas, and factors that are similar/different to career paths of white women.
21. Gender and the Formation of a Women's Profession: The Case Of Public School Teaching 233
Jo Anne Preston
 Analyzes the process by which female-dominated semi-professions attempt to become professional, based on historical data on public school teachers.
22. 'Outsider Within' the Firehouse: Subordination and Difference in the Social Interactions of African American Women Firefighters. 251
Janice D. Yoder and Patricia Aniakudo
 Experiences of African American women firefighters are discussed in terms of inequality as well as differences from white females and African American males.
23. Police Force or Police Service: Gender and Emotional Labor .. 264
Susan Ehrlich Martin
 Discussion of the substantial amount of emotional labor required in policing and the dilemmas this creates for female officers.
24. 'Hey, Why Don't You Wear a Shorter Skirt?': Structural Vulnerability and the Organization of Sexual Harassment in Temporary Clerical Employment 272
Jackie Krasas Rogers and Kevin D. Henson
 Discusses the constraints on temporary workers in dealing with gendered work situations, particularly in regard to sexual harassment.
- *25. The Managed Hand: The Commercialization of Bodies and Emotions in Korean Immigrant-Owned Nail Salons 284
Miliann Kang
 Examines Korean immigrant women who are owners of and workers in nail salons and how their work is influenced by the profile of their clientele.

* Indicates chapters new to this edition.

26. Chicanas Modernize Domestic Service 298
Mary Romero
 Describes how Chicana domestic service workers are restructuring this occupation so as to maximize its benefits and reduce its disadvantages.

Unit Five: Policy and Assessment

Introduction 309

- *27. Are We There Yet?: Reflections on Work and Family as an Emergent Social Issue. 312

Paula J. Dubeck

Tracks the increasing attention given to work and family from the mid-1980s, including corporate responses to work-family issues and issues that remain to be addressed.

- *28. Kaleidoscope Careers: An Alternative Explanation for the 'Opt-Out' Revolution 324

Lisa A. Mainiero and Sherry E. Sullivan

Presents an alternative to the linear (male) model of career as one that responds to "opting out" of the work force, and how organizations can benefit from incorporating such a model for employees.

29. Job Leaves and the Limits of the Family and Medical Leave Act: The Effects of Gender, Race, and Family . . . 340

Naomi Gerstel and Katherine McGonagle

Examines those who need job leaves, those who use them and factors that account for the difference within the framework of the Family and Medical Leave Act. Limitations of the Act are discussed.

- *30. Blessing or Curse? Work-Family Policies and Mothers' Wage Growth Over Time. 351

Jennifer Glass

Examines whether women taking advantage of work-family policies do so at the cost of lower wages.

Appendix I

- 2004 Salary Survey from NAFE 365

Appendix II

- Data and Information on Women's Labor Force Participation . . 367

- Charts on Earnings for Full-time Wage and Salary Workers. . . 369

- The Wage Gap 370

- Mothers in the Labor Force 370

Introduction to the Study of Women and Work

The rapid influx of women into the paid labor market in the last thirty years of the twentieth century was one of the most dramatic social changes of that century. This change also continues to have a far-reaching impact on lives today. Women have always worked, yet much of the work they performed has not counted officially as "work." The best example of this uncounted work is domestic work, or household work.¹ Domestic work is nonmarket work. It is performed outside the formal economy in support of households and families, not for exchange on the market. While such work is clearly of great importance, it is not the focus of this book. The selections in this book focus on women's participation in paid work performed outside the home.

In 2004, women made up 47 percent of the workforce (U.S. Census 2004–05). By comparison, women comprised 33.4 percent in 1960 and 42.5 percent in 1980 (Kemp 1994). Women can be found working in virtually all occupations, and their employment contributes significantly to family and personal well-being. In 2003, it was estimated that wives employed full-time contributed 35.2 percent of the family income of dual-earner households (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005). In addition, women's participation in the labor force increasingly reflects a pattern that approximates that of men's: continuous rather than being interrupted for years of child bearing and rearing.

There are many reasons for examining women's increased involvement in paid work. The first reasons discussed here are economic. Women are a valuable economic resource in that their labor is necessary for the production of the goods and services we

all consume. Traditionally, the study of work addressed primarily male workers (Acker 1988). With women representing almost one half of the workforce today, it is equally important to understand issues such as (1) what motivates women to be productive workers, (2) what causes women to be satisfied with their work, and (3) what factors facilitate or impede women from achieving success in their work situation.

Another reason for studying working women is that the majority of women who work for pay do so out of perceived economic need (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1993). It has become increasingly difficult to support a family at what is considered to be a desirable standard of living on just one income. Further, many households today do not consist of traditional families with adult males present. Rather, women are the only economic providers in these households. Women earn less for the work they perform than men, and this contributes to disproportionately high rates of poverty in female-headed households, a phenomenon that has come to be known as the *feminization of poverty*. The economic reasons for studying women and work are that women are important producers in today's economy, as well as important economic providers for their families and households.

Studying women's increased involvement in paid work is also important for social reasons. Women's increased labor-force participation has broad social consequences that extend well beyond the economy. Families and schools provide examples of two social institutions profoundly affected by increases in women's labor-force participation. As mentioned earlier, women have always performed domestic work; in fact, they have

typically borne the primary responsibility for such work. As women begin to spend significant numbers of hours working outside the home for pay, their ability to perform domestic work and, potentially, the quality of life of their families is affected. Families have needed to adapt to women's changing work roles by making other provisions for the performance of domestic work. As we will see in Unit Three, women in many families still perform a disproportionate share of domestic tasks in addition to their paid work because these needed adaptations have not taken place. Educational institutions are also affected by women working. For example, schools can no longer depend upon the unpaid labor of the employed mothers of school children to serve as teachers' aides to support classroom activities. Issues such as providing for the transportation of children to and from school and the compatibility of school hours with parents' work hours have prompted a rise in after school care programs, which need to be examined in light of women's increased involvement in paid work.

Studying women's paid work is also warranted for what can be referred to as personal or individual reasons. Social scientists agree that work is far more than the means to an economic end. Work has personal meaning because individuals in modern society are defined, in large part, by the work they perform (O'Toole, et al. 1973, Pavalko 1988). "What do you do?" means "What type of work do you perform?" and this is often the first thing we ask a new acquaintance. The answer to this question conveys a myriad of information, including economic status, social class, level of education, interests, abilities, political views, and personality traits (Hedley 1992). "What do you do?" is shorthand for "Who are you?" and others respond to us on the basis of our answer. College professors are assumed to be intelligent and "bookish"; nurses, nurturing; engineers, detail-oriented; and salespersons, gregarious. These assumptions about who we are, derived from others' knowledge of our work, eventually impact our own perception of who we are (Dunn 1995). For this reason, we can say that work contributes to feelings of self-esteem. In order to understand who

women are today and how they feel about themselves, it is necessary to examine their participation in the workforce.

Work affects self-concept and feelings about oneself by contributing to feelings of efficacy and worth. The connection between feelings of efficacy, the power to produce effects, and work is obvious. Producing goods and services is a form of mastery over self and the environment, and is proof of one's ability to "get things done." If the output from one's work is valued by others, then work enhances feelings of worth. On the other hand, if one's work is not socially valued, self-esteem is likely to be low. Consider, for example, the often under-valued, unpaid work performed by homemakers. The fact that domestic work has become under-appreciated caused many homemakers to respond to the "What do you do?" question with "I'm just a housewife" (Matthews 1987). That domestic work is insufficient for producing a positive self-concept is further supported by evidence of sub-standard mental health among full-time homemakers (Bernard 1972). Women's increased participation in paid work is therefore personally important because it provides an opportunity for empowerment and increased self-esteem.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, examining women's paid work is important because the type of work performed by each sex and the social valuation of that work is the best indicator, across societies and throughout time, of the degree of equality between the sexes. When women are judged to be performing valuable work, especially work for pay outside the home, on a comparable basis with men, then gender inequality is minimized.² It is not surprising then that many battles for gender equality have been fought in the workplace. Much women's movement activity in the 1960s and 1970s was centered around issues of hiring discrimination and equal pay on the assumption that if women could gain access to the same types of jobs as men for similar rates of pay, they would be treated equally (Daniel 1987). Since that time, we have learned more about how organizations operate with regard to a changing composition of the work force. Issues that seemed to be resolved at "entry" level positions of vari-

ous occupations have "moved up the organization" to the very top levels; for example, women have had considerable access to entry level managerial jobs, but their move to the very top positions in organizations seems to be blocked. The more we learn about women's work experience and the context in which women work, the more we understand the structures and processes that influence that experience and either facilitate or impede women's opportunities. In doing so, we are gaining some measure of the extent to which there is equality between the sexes.

The chapters that follow explore a wide range of issues related to contemporary women's involvement in paid work. Before introducing these chapters, it is necessary to provide some historical perspective on working women. The following sections of this introduction will explore the changing patterns of women's work participation and examine the causes that underlie that change. A final section will highlight issues that emerged and are emerging in the study of women and work.

The Changing Patterns of Women's Work

Human societies have always divided labor by sex, reserving certain work tasks for men and others for women. While a division of labor by sex has existed in all known societies, the form of the division of labor has varied. The section below describes the typical sex-based division of labor in early human societies and how that division of labor changed as societies evolved with regard to four broad types of societies: hunting and gathering societies, horticultural societies, agricultural societies, and industrial societies. Changes in women's labor-force participation and patterns of work will be examined in more detail for contemporary, post-industrial societies.

The Sex-Based Division of Labor in Pre-Industrial Societies

The earliest human societies, hunter-gatherer societies, had a simple division of labor by sex: men hunted wild game, women gathered naturally occurring vegetation, and

those too old or too young to participate in these activities stayed home and cared for one another. The sex-based division of labor in hunter-gatherer societies was efficient because women's reproductive role was incompatible with physically demanding hunting activities that often required travel far from home (Bradley 1989). Imagine, for example, the difficulty involved in hunting large game while pregnant or nursing an infant. The gathering tasks reserved for women were compatible with pregnancy and child care because they were less physically demanding and could be performed close to home. Hunter-gatherer societies were small, and survival was often difficult in these subsistence-based groups (Lenski and Lenski 1982). For this reason, women's reproductive role was highly valued. The level of equality between the sexes was high in these societies because the work performed by women and men was judged to be of roughly equal importance (Boulding 1976; Chafetz 1984; Nielsen 1978). Men's hunting activities often yielded substantial subsistence resources for support of the group, but hunting activities were sometimes unreliable, and hunters often came back from their long hunts empty-handed (Friedl 1975; Sanday 1981). Women's work contribution became especially important in these periods. The nuts, roots, berries, and tubers gathered by women provided edible foodstuffs which enabled group members to survive during periods when the hunt was unproductive. Thus, the stability of women's economic contribution was highly valued, as was their reproductive role, and these factors contributed to a greater degree of equality between the sexes than in any subsequent period in history (Yorburg 1987; Nielsen 1990).

Over time, horticultural societies developed as a result of technological advancements and new forms of social organization. Rather than depend on hunting wild game and gathering naturally occurring vegetation, people in horticultural societies met their subsistence needs by domesticating plants that resulted in a more reliable and significant yield (Lenski and Lenski 1966). Women, having established a tradition of contributing to subsistence needs by gathering plants, made the rather smooth transi-

tion to domesticating plants. Men were typically responsible for claiming the land used for planting. The resulting male ownership of land placed control over the means of production in the hands of men and began to erode women's status (Friedl, 1975; Dunn et al. 1993). Men also continued to hunt, and when successful, provided the scarce and highly valued animal protein. At some point, men also began to domesticate animals in many societies, raising small herds not only for meat, but also for milk and other animal by-products (Lenski and Lenski 1966).

Horticultural societies grew in size with the advent of new technologies (e.g., more sophisticated implements, irrigation). Eventually a transition occurred from a subsistence orientation to a surplus orientation. In surplus-oriented societies, people can produce more than is required for meeting subsistence needs, making it possible for some people to be freed from food production in order to engage in other forms of work. Specialized full-time occupations emerged at this point in history. Some involved turning raw materials into handcrafted goods, others involved providing services (e.g., shopkeeper, educator). These new occupations were performed away from the homesite, so they were considered the domain of men. Domestic work, performed in and around the home, was reserved for women.

The invention of the plow marked the transition to the agricultural stage of development, and the ability to produce a surplus increased dramatically. Animal-drawn plows transferred much of the hardest labor involved in producing food to animals. Having established a tradition of working with animals—first hunting them and then domesticating them—men worked behind the animal-drawn plows and produced increasing amounts of surplus (Yorburg 1987). Other men, freed from the need to produce food, entered newly developing specialized occupations in even larger numbers. A complex market economy resulted where foodstuffs were exchanged for dollars (or other goods), which were then used to purchase goods produced by workers in the new occupations.

What were women doing while men were plowing, shopkeeping, blacksmithing, leather

crafting, and so on? First, women often assisted with these activities when needed (during harvest time, for example). Their primary work responsibilities, however, remained in the home. Women were responsible for providing an array of services to their families including cooking and storing food, sewing and manufacturing clothing, medical care, education, and even religious training (Yorburg 1987). These types of work activities are referred to as use-value production because what is produced is consumed by the family unit. In contrast, the work performed by men in agricultural societies is referred to as exchange-value production because the products are intended for exchange through the market. Exchange-value production is more highly valued than use-value production because the former provides greater flexibility in terms of what can be consumed and also affords the party performing the work the opportunity to develop social networks and ties (Nielsen 1990).

An important exception to this pattern of restricting women's work to the domestic sphere occurred in cases of slavery, wherein enslaved groups performed coerced labor. Africans brought to the United States as slaves, for example, did not conform to the sex-based division of labor described above. While it is the case that some black women slaves were forced to work primarily in the slave owner's home, many others were forced to work alongside men in the fields, engaged in extremely physically demanding labor (Deckard 1975; Matthaei 1982).

As women became increasingly associated with domestic labor and use-value production, their status relative to men declined (Nielsen 1990). Gender inequality reached its peak in agricultural societies, not because women were no longer working hard and making an economic contribution, but because of the changed nature of their work. Men were the more visible producers, they owned the means of production (land), the product of their labor was now relatively stable, and what they produced could be exchanged for an almost infinite variety of goods and services through the market. Women, working "behind the scenes" in the less glamorous domestic arena, supported

their husbands' work by attending to his needs and those of the rest of the family (Cott 1977).

The Impact of Industrialization on Women's Work

The next major societal transition that had an impact on the nature of work and the division of labor between the sexes was the emergence of industry. Industrialization involved using forms of power other than human and animal (e.g., water, steam, mechanical, electric) to produce manufactured goods. Efficient utilization of these new forms of power meant that workers had to be located in a common work setting and resulted in the rise of the factory mode of production. During the early phases of industrialization in both Europe and the United States, some women—especially unmarried women, women from the lower classes, and minority women—worked in factories (Matthaei 1982). A sex-based division of labor developed for the specialized factory jobs. Women worked with smaller equipment and machinery, on average, and were concentrated in jobs in the textile industry. The jobs women performed paid lower wages than those performed by men (Deckard 1975). Men, with higher wages, were viewed as the primary breadwinners for families, and women's economic contributions, although often necessary, were considered supplemental. Women employed in factories continued to be responsible for domestic work at home, creating for the first time a "double shift" for women consisting of eight or more hours of paid work to be followed by a night shift of use-value work in support of the family (Andersen 1988). Married women, especially white women who could afford to do so, stayed home as full-time homemakers (Matthaei 1982).

By the turn of the twentieth century (1900), just under 19 percent of all working-age women participated in paid work, and the majority of these women were under the age of 24. Less than 6 percent of married women worked for pay outside the home at this time (Kessler-Harris 1982; Costello and Krimgold 1996). Married women's rates of labor-force participation remained low during the first three decades of the twentieth

century due to what has come to be known as the cult of domesticity. The cult of domesticity, also referred to as the doctrine of separate spheres, was borrowed from the English upper-middle classes and held that a woman's proper place was in the home (Reskin and Padavic 1994). Under the cult of domesticity, the homemaker's absence from the paid workforce served as a symbol of the husband's masculinity (Matthaei 1982). Married women only entered the labor force when their husbands were incapable of providing a family wage—a wage sufficient for providing for the family. The cult of domesticity encouraged married women to be economically dependent on their spouses, and thereby led to a decline in women's status.

Poor women and women of color, forced to work out of economic need, retained a higher degree of independence than white women. Ironically, for these women who could not afford the "luxury" of the full-time homemaker role, paid work resulted in somewhat more equal standing with their male peers. Even today, some minority groups have higher rates of female labor-force participation than white women, and the sexes also share resources more equally in these groups (Almquist 1987).

In the early decades of the twentieth century, women who worked outside the home had limited options. Single white women were sometimes employed in new vocations as clerical workers, teachers, and nurses (Andersen 1988). Working class women and women of color worked in factories as laborers, and many immigrant women were employed as domestic servants in other women's homes. There were slow but rather steady increases in the rates of women's labor-force participation until the early 1940s, when World War II created severe labor shortages and an increased demand for female labor. Over five million more women were in the labor force in 1944 than in 1940 due to wartime efforts (Herz and Wootton 1996). During the war years, the sex-based division of labor in manufacturing broke down as many women worked—and performed well—in nontraditional jobs (Kemp 1994). However, despite their successful job performance, women were often displaced from the previously