Women and the Workplace

The Implications of Occupational Segregation

Edited by Martha Blaxall and Barbara Reagan

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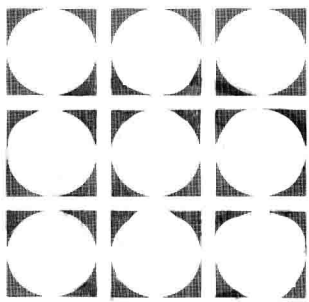

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Preface

Martha Blaxall and Barbara B. Reagan

The papers and comments in this volume represent an expanded version of the proceedings of a workshop conference on occupational segregation held in May 1975. Funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, it was jointly sponsored by the American Economic Association Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) and the Center for Research on Women in Higher Education and the Professions at Wellesley College.

CSWEP has an explicit charge to collect and analyze data relevant to the status of women economists in particular and to further theoretical and applied research related to the status of women in general. It feels that it is vital for professional associations to undertake research that might help to build a solid foundation for policy prescriptions related to the reappraisal of women's place in society. In addition, CSWEP wished to make a contribution to International Women's Year on a topic central to women in American society. Occupational segregation is such a subject. No improvement in women's economic standing can be realized unless it is diminished and the forces behind it understood.

The workshop conference had two major objectives: (1) to analyze occupational segregation as an interlocking set of institutions with sociological, psychological, and economic aspects and with deep historical roots; and (2) to consider what policy changes might be needed to achieve a society free from denial of job opportunities on the basis of sex. To accomplish these ends, economic analyses of labor market phenomena were accompanied by work from other disciplines in the social sciences. Within the several disciplines, a multiplicity of points of view were sought and obtained.

The many persons who contributed to the planning and execution of the conference and to the publication of this volume are too numer-

ous for individual acknowledgment. We are grateful for all of their contributions. Particular mention is due to all the CSWEP members who designed, planned, and participated in the conference;[1] to the staff of the Center for Research on Women in Higher Education and the Professions, especially Carolyn Elliott, director, and Bronwen Haddad, conference coordinator. Finally, we would like to thank all those who participated in the conference as paper presenters, discussants, observers, or guests. Their work made possible the publication of this volume.

National Academy of Sciences (Blaxall)
Southern Methodist University (Reagan)

1. Barbara B. Reagan, Chair, Southern Methodist University; Walter Adams, Michigan State University; Carolyn Shaw Bell, Wellesley College; Martha Blaxall, National Academy of Sciences; Francine Blau, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Kenneth Boulding, University of Colorado; Collette Moser, Michigan State University; Myra Strober, Stanford University; Phyllis Wallace, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Florence Weiss, National Economic Research Associates; and Robert Aaron Gordon, ex-officio as president of the American Economic Association.

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational Segregation in International Women's Year

Barbara B. Reagan and Martha Blaxall

That something is wrong with women's position in today's world is now evident to many. Women tend to be segregated into certain "female" occupations. Almost universally, their work is less valued than work done by men. In labor markets women are often paid less than men for work that is recognizably equal. Even more commonly, women's jobs are given different job descriptions and titles so that the equivalent nature of similar jobs for women and men is masked and the lower pay for women rationalized.[1] In some cases, occupational segregation by sex denies employment opportunities to men who wish to enter such fields as nursing, grade school teaching, or secretarial work. Eradication of sexism would benefit such males. But the preponderant effect of sexism in labor markets is denial of opportunity to women with the skills and ability to contribute more to production than they are permitted to do under present conditions.

Why should this be so? Some economists argue that women get lower pay for similar work and, to some extent, are occupationally segregated by sex because of a combination of factors such as (1) women are less efficient than men in a given job; (2) they have lower skills, which may be related to lower investment in human capital (less formal education and/or less on-the-job training); (3) they have higher turnover rates;

1. Both Martha Griffiths and Winn Newman in this volume refer to specific examples in their experience where women have deliberately been paid less than men for the same work.

and (4) they are relatively immobile. Finally, some people argue that women may have less attachment to the labor force than men. Such explanations, focusing on real or imagined deficiencies of women, often also assume competitive models of labor markets. Another set of explanations of the lower valuation of women's work focuses on the monopsony aspects of labor markets, which permit employers to implement their distaste for hiring women and/or their perception that male workers do not want female co-workers or supervisors. The residual difference in pay between men and women that may be attributable to sexism, after accounting for other appropriate differences in various types of labor markets, is currently being subjected to economic analysis.[2] The answers are not yet on the table.

What is now clear is that, even if equal pay for equal work in the real sense is achieved, equality of opportunity will not occur simultaneously. This is because occupational segregation of the sexes results from the interaction of a well-entrenched and complex set of institutions that perpetuates the inferior position of women in the labor market, since all pressures within society, be they familial, legal, economic, cultural, or historical, tend to reinforce and support occupational segregation. All social and behavioral science disciplines must be used for a complete analysis of the key questions. Even a new discipline, "dimorphics," may be necessary, according to Kenneth Boulding, to permit us to shed our traditional habits of thinking about occupational segregation and target our research efforts more precisely at those elements which perpetuate the current unequal system.

No agreement was reached at the Wellesley conference on defining occupational segregation—or desegregation—in quantitative terms. However, Martha Griffiths provided fact after fact illustrating that women receive an unequal share of the benefits in the labor force due to the discrimination they suffer under the "justification" that men, not women, are the breadwinners. In fact, she points out, many women are breadwinners—two-thirds of all women workers are single, divorced, widowed, separated, or with husbands earning less than $7,000 per year. If society wishes to give equal treatment to "breadwinners," then women should have the same opportunities as men in the labor market. We can no longer afford occupational segregation, the former congresswoman concluded.

That these issues are also beginning to be seen worldwide as an important topic is shown in the preliminary working papers and later deliberations of the United Nation's World Conference of International Women's Year in Mexico City in June 1975. The main theme of the conference was equality, development, and peace. Patricia Hutar, head

2. See Francine D. Blau and Carol L. Jusenius, "Economists' Approaches to Sex Segregation in the Labor Market: An Appraisal," in this volume, for a survey of economists' explanations of occupational segregation.

of the United States delegation, called for greater equality for women in her official address to the conference: "We hope that from this conference men will gain a vision of a more just society in which a new equality for women and participation by them will mean a more varied and equitable sharing, to the benefit of men as well as women."[3] Furthermore, the provisional agenda of the *World Plan of Action* called for equal pay for equal work[4] and an end to occupational segregation by sex. "Special efforts should be made to foster positive attitudes towards the employment of women, irrespective of marital status, among employers and workers and among women and men in society at large, and to eliminate obstacles based on sex-typed divisions of labour."[5]

One of the results of the World Conference was to recognize the deep-seated as well as the pervasive nature of the problem by calling for a decade of effort to end sexism in occupational segregation. In order to accomplish this, the way in which sexism and our social institutions mutually reinforce each other must be identified and understood.

Thus, for the conference at Wellesley, CSWEP commissioned three papers and a major comment by the session chair to look at the social and institutional structures which maintain occupational segregation by sex. Jean Lipman-Blumen suggests a conceptual framework for understanding how we have arrived at a world that is widely segregated by sex. Judith Long Laws analyzes women's work aspiration and the way role relationships are used to control, inhibit, or support behavior. She concludes that work orientations of women have been constrained by role relationships that give precedence to the sex role. This, then, is one of the current determinants of a woman's work motivation and aspiration.

3. Address by Mrs. Patricia Hutar, head, United States delegation to World Conference of International Women's Year, June 20, 1975, p. 8.

4. Through the work of the International Labor Organization, eighty-one member countries had ratified, by November 1974, the Equal Remuneration Convention (1951), which calls for equal pay for work of equal value. This refers to rates of remuneration established without sex discrimination. See International Labor Office, *Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers,* Report 8 (Geneva, 1974), p. 100.

The World Plan of Action drafted for the United Nations World Conference of International Women's Year used the phrase "equal pay for equal work." Many of the countries, including the delegation from the United States, and trade union representatives on delegations or among official observers worked to get the wording of the World Plan of Action changed to "equal pay for work of equal value," as in the ILO Convention. The New Zealand delegation opposed the change of wording in a press conference held on June 27, 1975 because they feared that, given the general undervaluation of women's work, this too would be used against women. The New Zealand delegation preferred a phrase such as "equal rate for the job." (New Zealand is one of several countries, including the United States, which has not ratified the ILO Convention but does accept and implement the principle. See p. 33 of publication cited above.) The final version of the World Plan of Action in some places changed the draft wording of "equal pay for equal work" to "equality in conditions of employment, including remuneration, regardless of marital status."

5. *World Plan of Action,* Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda, E/Con F. 66/5, p. 18.

Similarly, Margaret J. Gates, in her paper on occupational segregation and the law, concludes that though legislation and the legal system have seldom created occupational segregation, they have often reinforced it. Only in the past five to ten years have legal remedies to break down gender-related barriers in the work force been devised. At the same time, she notes, "the legal profession has remained male dominated."

Constantina Safilios-Rothschild discusses the marginality of women in the labor market, analyzing it in terms of its linkage with the family system and suggesting that structural changes in the occupational and family systems must be made to accommodate the equal occupational status of husbands and wives. Her discussion of the model of the USSR and the Eastern European societies and the resulting strains and oppression is particularly interesting in view of the position of the official delegations of these countries at the plenary sessions of the World Conference of International Women's Year. They strongly recognized the importance of eliminating discrimination against women but consistently denied that sexism exists in the USSR and the Eastern European countries. Gail Warshofsky Lapidus in her comparative paper on the United States and the Soviet Union concludes, "the Soviet experience seems to suggest that, contrary to earlier expectations shaped by Marxian theory, economic participation does not, in and of itself, guarantee equality of status and authority for women."

Ideas about the historical roots of occupational segregation were also explored at the conference. Heidi Hartmann deals with the interrelation and mutual accommodation of capitalism and patriarchy throughout history and across cultures from the viewpoint of an economic historian. From the viewpoint of a sociologist, Elise Boulding looks at familial constraints on women's work roles beginning with hunting and gathering societies, with emphasis on Western cultures. She sees women's role as a triple one of breeder-feeder-producer. However, the woman's producer role is differentiated from the male producer role. In commenting on these papers from the point of view of the developing nations, Hanna Papanek observes that "occupational segregation must be studied on an internationally comparative basis," so that those nations which are just beginning to industrialize can learn from the experience that the industrialized countries have had with respect to segregating women in the marketplace. She notes that it is not surprising that many of the new opportunities for women in these developing countries have tended to be in occupations where "traditional men's jobs" have turned into "women's occupations" with relatively low wages.

Three papers deal with the economic dimensions of occupational segregation. They focus almost entirely upon the U.S. labor market. Francine Blau and Carol Jusenius discuss the limited utility of neoclassical (traditional) economic theory for understanding the causes of sex segregation and the need to incorporate further institutional

hypotheses—including overcrowding into women's occupations—into the mainstream of economic thinking about discrimination. Isabel Sawhill demonstrates the way in which sex segregation and the lower value associated with women's work tend to contribute to the poverty status of many female-headed families. Marianne Ferber and Helen Lowry further demonstrate the economic costs associated with sex segregation. Discrimination can help to explain women's inferior position in the labor force directly and indirectly as women adapt to the inferior labor market opportunities they find open to them. Higher unemployment for women is one result. In an Appendix, Myra Strober and Barbara B. Reagan analyze the occupational segregation by sex within the occupation of economist with respect to field specialization and suggest a path model of field choice for women economists. In commenting on these papers, David Gordon points out that none of the orthodox economic theories really permits the kind of analysis that is likely to lead to real improvement in employment conditions for women. To remove the inequality in the current economic and social division of labor, Gordon sees only one course of action—the overthrow of capitalism—although he recognizes that even this condition is not sufficient.

The six panelists offering policy recommendations for alternative courses of action offer nothing as radical as David Gordon's solution. Policy prescriptions range from enforcement of existing discrimination laws to more realistic counseling practices if women are to be prepared to fit into the kinds of technological opportunities which will be available in the labor market in ten years' time. There was no consensus that women's position in the labor market would rapidly improve, but there was overwhelming agreement that the struggle for more equality and better opportunity would have to continue at an intensive level if existing gains were to be maintained.

In her perceptive summary, Myra Strober admits that the conference did not adequately address policy issues. She calls for another series of conferences to explore policy alternatives to eliminate occupational segregation. The absence of occupational segregation can mean the equal distribution of men and women among occupations. It can also mean the freedom to elect any occupation one desires regardless of sex, race, or other characteristics.

We hope that the sharing of our deliberations will help others to further analyze the causes of occupational segregation and develop policy alternatives to achieve a society free from denial of job opportunities on the basis of sex.

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Can We Still Afford Occupational Segregation? Some Remarks

Martha W. Griffiths

As of October 30, 1974, there were 33 million women working in the civilian labor force, women of all ages, of every race and ethnic group, single, married, divorced, and widowed. Although these women represented 37 percent of the total labor force, they were employed largely in teaching, health, and clerical occupations. A substantial majority of women workers—58 percent—were married and living with their husbands. More than 50 percent of all married women have been employed outside the home since 1972.

The more education a woman has, the more likely she is to be in the labor force. Seventy percent of all women workers in 1972 had at least a high school education, and one in eight was a college graduate. Although these women, on the average, are as well educated as men, there is a difference in the distribution of men and women in the labor force by occupational category and median income. For example, 7 percent of men workers and 35 percent of women workers are employed as clerical personnel. Despite the larger numbers of women, however, the median income for a female college graduate was only $5,551; for men in the same occupation, median earnings were $8,617. Although 14 percent of both male and female workers were in the professional and technical fields in 1972, the median income that year was $11,806 for male college graduates, but only $7,878 for women. Although I shall not dwell on this, it is clear that America is deprived of half its resources when a woman is denied a good job or a policymaking position. And the personal toll on the woman is enormous. One of the illuminating books on this subject is *Women and Madness* by Phyllis Chesler.[1]

The argument which men have used to claim the best jobs and the

1. Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972).

most pay invokes traditional male and female stereotypes: men are breadwinners and women are wives or widows; men provide necessary incomes for their families, but women do not; women and families are supported by men, not women. The prevailing view in Congress is that every woman is born to a rich father who gives her in marriage to a rich husband, who in turn thoughtfully dies ahead of her, leaving her well provided not only with money but also with tender, loving sons.

Using this stereotype, society flagrantly and severely discriminates against women in the labor force, despite the fact that society's attitudes toward women are based on myths rather than reality. For example, many women are now rearing children without any financial assistance from their husbands. Families with a female head are increasing in our society. Divorce and separation are forcing many women without wage-earning skills into the primary support role for themselves and their children. Unless a woman has adequate alimony or other sources of income, she faces financial difficulty in this role. Yet, in divorce actions, 50 percent of the women involved do not receive alimony or child support, and for the other 50 percent who do have such court orders, the median payment is approximately $1,300 per year. The preliminary version of a report that I requested from the General Accounting Office before I left Congress found that the combined average monthly income of women and children receiving both welfare benefits and earned income in 1975 was sometimes less than $300 a month, whereas the median income of the man who had abandoned them was about $800 a month. These data are derived from an analysis of 1,700 cases that were specifically selected to represent a national sample.

This report did not consider wives who were not on welfare. Many of these latter women are divorced and supporting two to four children with incomes from jobs which pay from $5,000 to $7,000 per year. The median annual wage for a woman-headed family is $5,116, and with these earnings the woman must pay the costs of child care while she is absent from the home. In many cases the husbands of these women contribute nothing to the families' support. Even if the court decrees that the husband pay a substantial sum of money for the support of the children, a woman can rarely find a lawyer who will initiate legal proceedings for her until thousands of dollars are due and the lawyer determines that the husband is in a position to pay the uncollected amounts.

Thus, while men have been given jobs, high pay, and preferential promotion on the supposition that they are supporting wives and children, the facts show that this supposition is not true in a large percentage of cases. However, if the breadwinner argument is applied in fact rather than in theory, women can no longer be denied the right to the education, the jobs, the pay, and the promotions which have traditionally gone to men. If women are in reality the providers, then they should

have the benefit of the law on their side. Nevertheless, despite recent gains, the facts are that women are still confined to low-paying jobs by virtue of their educational level, the type of career counseling they receive, and society's unwillingness to accept the real reasons why women work.

Women work because of economic need, just as men do. Two-thirds of all women workers are either single, divorced, widowed, or separated or have husbands who earn less than $7,000 per year. Working wives employed full time contribute almost two-fifths of their families' incomes, and in many cases these earnings make the difference between a middle- and a low-income standard of living.

Despite these facts policymakers continue to ignore the real role which women play in the labor force. When Willard Wirtz appeared before the House Ways and Means Committee to speak on unemployment compensation as secretary of labor, he explained that the unemployment situation was not as bad as one might think, because there were many "secondary workers" counted in those statistics. I asked Mr. Wirtz, "Since you are the secretary of labor, and since secondary workers probably have secondary rights, just who are the secondary workers?" Well, there was some hemming and hawing and scuffling about, and of course it turned out that they were women and children. So I said, "Well, I think when you come before this committee as the secretary of labor, you should have an objective definition of secondary workers, because I think the secretary of labor should treat all workers alike. Therefore I would like to make a suggestion for a definition of a secondary worker. The primary worker is the one who buys the children's clothes, the groceries, and pays for the music lessons and the books; and the secondary worker is the one who buys the fishing tackle, the outboard motors, and the booze."

No satisfactory response was made by the secretary, but shortly after the hearing that day, a young man came up to me and said, "Mrs. Griffiths, when you made that suggestion to the secretary, I personally felt I had been hit in the stomach. My children are now all in school, and on Monday my wife is going back to work. I wasn't paying much attention to the secretary, but as he was talking I was thinking to myself, when my wife goes back to work, we will buy an outboard motor."

The facts are that women experience rates of unemployment substantially greater than those of men, and over time the ratio of female unemployment to male unemployment has risen. The exception is during this current recession, when for some reason women have not been as badly hit as men. The greater proportion of women in service jobs may help to explain this situation. Yet those women who are able to find jobs work primarily in "women's" occupations.

Although the median school years completed is the same for both women and men in the labor force, women with the same educational