

Chapter 3. Economic Inequality and the Division of Labor

In Western societies, men have always been women's superiors. Women have never stood on equal ground with men in industry or commerce. Nor have they had an equal access to wealth. Before industrial capitalism arose, the law limited women's property rights. It also gave their husbands or fathers control of their productive labor. In the nineteenth century, the needs of commerce and industry prompted law makers to give women the same rights as men to income, property, and inheritance. Still, women's earnings and wealth did not leap ahead to match men's. Fathers often spurned their daughters, preferring to give property to sons. The judiciary favored husbands when deciding legal disputes or interpreting laws. Employers hired women only for low status, low paid jobs. Although women's part in the economy has increased greatly during the twentieth century, even now they are far less likely to hold high status or high salary posts.

WHY ARE WOMEN ECONOMICALLY MARGINAL?

While we can easily describe women's economic marginality, it is hard to explain adequately. Several social influences joined forces to keep women out of good jobs. Men opposing women's employment have done the most to keep women in economically marginal positions. Men mainly found women's employment aspirations contrary to their own economic and personal self interests. Men also obstructed women's access to good jobs to protect their own superior status.

On top of the direct effects of men's opposition, some indirect effects also burdened women. Having little hope, women have pursued employment less vigorously. Denied education and experience, women had fewer assets to offer employers. Jobs became sex segregated, restricting women's opportunities and wages even more. And the dominant beliefs mirrored the sexes' divided destinies, forcing women (and men) to contend with ideological obstructions as well.

A masculine wish to retain dominance over women has long been prevalent, but most of men's actions that diminished women's economic achievements were responses to other concerns. I want to stress this point, because analyses of gender inequality all too easily descend into investigations of the motives and responsibility of men, the dominant gender. In any system of inequality, practices of those in the dominant group will primarily sustain the system. Yet, in stable systems of inequality, most of these practices simply assume inequality as a consideration rather than focusing on it as a goal.

With regard to gender inequality, most of men's actions that diminished women's economic standing focused on quite different motives. Men wanted to provide for their families, they wanted to appear successful in their communities, they were concerned with competition for jobs, they sought high profits. Gender inequality was a fact of life to them. They knew the consequences of inequality as conditions of their environment: men were supposed to make more money than women, women were supposed to care for children, women could not succeed in the economy, women were less educated, and so forth. Men, like women, had to adapt to the world they found themselves in.

Practicalities ruled most of the lives of both women and men. Lofty and mean-spirited actions were common, but women and men were equally likely to be particularly virtuous or vile.

Male Opposition to Women's Employment

The men who resisted women entering or rising in the economy have earned the greatest credit (or censure) for keeping women economically marginal. Men have kept women from taking part in the economy in several mutually reinforcing ways. Men obstructed women from their roles as husbands, competing workers, and employers. Because economic roles gave, or denied, people status, power, and privileges, they were critical in women and men's continuous contest for status and dominance. Women had fewer opportunities because men opposed their ambitions.

All men did not agree to exclude all women from the economy. Men and women have not faced each other only as abstract members of opposing groups. They shared the intimacy and obligations of family life as mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. They mingled in sexual passions and resentments as lovers and spouses.

Still, men have held women back from economic equality. They did so to protect themselves within several roles when they experienced women's economic aspirations as a threat to their fulfillment of those roles. In particular, men advanced economic discrimination against women in their roles as *husbands*, as competing *workers*, and as *employers*.

Other circumstances also added to women's economic marginality, but they would have had little effect without men's resistance. Women commonly differed from men in ways that were economically significant. Women did not feel as driven to gain an income or to prove economic success. Women also lacked comparable skills or the experience necessary to get jobs. Moreover, both within homes and in the economy, people narrowed women's options by making rational adaptations to the expectation that women had little or no hope for good jobs.

By accepting women's disadvantages, these efforts reinforced and exacerbated them. All these other circumstances that hampered women existed because men opposed women's entry to jobs that would put them on equal footing with men. So, we will defer talking about these other impediments to women's advancement until we have made some sense of men's opposition and its effects.

MARITAL BONDS

Men did not want their wives to take jobs because they did not welcome the rearrangement it might bring to their lives. If a man's wife had a job, he lost his justification for avoiding household responsibilities and he could lose power and status. The extra money she brought wouldn't offset these losses except in times of economic need, when he had to withdraw their opposition. Women without husbands avoided the burden a husband's resistance at the cost of having to provide for themselves.

Husband's Fears. If the husband made all the family's money, it was easy for him to disclaim responsibility for household work. But, when women had jobs, they had less time for child rearing and domestic chores such as cleaning. Conversely, men lost their clear-cut justification for denying all responsibility for these activities. Just like their husbands, working women would hurry through breakfast to join the rush hour surge for another day of work. They also came home tired at the end of the day. How could the husband justify asking his wife to do most of the housework? Thus, men felt threatened by reduced services and increased work at home that women's employment would bring.

As well, men had less power over their wives once they had jobs. A working woman had an autonomous income and gained ties to people through her job that gave her independence. If successful, she might even compete with her husband's status.

The standards defining prosperity and success have demanded (for all classes) that men have unemployed wives. Wives without jobs served as symbols of conspicuous consumption. They proved their husband's earning power. In the managerial classes, they also acted as adjuncts to their husbands careers.

Although employed wives would usually increase family income, husbands long opposed it. Husbands have feared their home life would suffer, their power over their wives would diminish, and their status outside the family would decline.

Bowing to Necessity. Not all women who wanted jobs faced resistance from husbands. Unmarried women did not have to contend with men's devotion to household supremacy. Moreover, men had to stifle their fears in hard times when their family badly needed the wife's income. Even in the nineteenth century, such

need was common among the working classes, especially among immigrants and blacks.

Women's employment patterns showed how both necessity and freedom influenced women's choices. Recall that in the United States, by World War I, about one-half of all single, widowed, and divorced women held jobs (see Chapter 2). Economic need made the proportion of women working higher among the lower classes. In the working class, wives commonly held jobs until they bore children, then withdrew from employment. Thereafter, they looked for jobs only when circumstances forced them to augment their husband's income.¹¹

As the century progressed, such periods of financial need became a recurring, even enduring, part of people's lives. Ever more families found they needed women's incomes. Like climbing ivy on the side of a building, this need crept steadily up the hierarchy of income and prestige, covering one level after another.

In short, most men have had practical, self-interested reasons to keep their wives out of jobs. They wanted to protect their living conditions, status, and family power. Yet, economic need could, and often did, outweigh these considerations.

Good Jobs Are Worse. Husbands resisted their wives taking some jobs more than others. They saw high status jobs as more problematic than low status ones, full time work worse than part time, and regular employment more troublesome than temporary. Consider a husband concerned with the quality of his domestic life, his power within the family, and his status. What he feared most was that his wife would take a high paying, full time, and permanent job. This posed a threat that she would have a committed career. The husband's risk became smallest if his wife took a low paying, part time, temporary job. In response, the better the jobs being considered, the more a husband resisted his wife's effort to take a job. This uneven opposition by husbands has pushed women toward the most marginal jobs.

MALE WORKERS' OPPOSITION

One enduring barrier to women's efforts to find jobs in most occupations was the resistance of working men. Men sometimes saw women's employment as an economic threat and at other times simply resented the intrusion of women into their masculine world.

Men's resistance to women entering their occupations has mainly occurred in the background, leaving little record of its importance. Written accounts mainly were produced when male unions or professional associations made concerted

¹¹ Tilly, Louise A. and Scott, Joan W. *Women, Work, and Family*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

efforts to deny women entry to an occupation. These should not be considered typical, but they are informative.

We can get some insight into working class men's concerns over the hiring of women by looking at the ideas of some local union leaders. First, let us consider the opinions of working class men early in the nineteenth century, as modern industry and capitalism were just starting to take shape. Then we will compare these to the ideas of local labor leaders in the 1950s

Working Class Men in the Jacksonian Era. The leading labor activists of the 1830s left us evidence of their assessments of the *Female Labor* problem. Of the various published documents, the most informative are the discussions that took place during three annual conventions of the short-lived National Trades' Union during the 1830s. These discussions reveal the understandings of men who represented both the ideological and practical leadership of the urban trades' union movement. Of these discussions, the most complete and informative was the 1836 "Report of the Committee on Female Labor."¹² The committee on female labor consisted of four men, two from Philadelphia (a saddler and a coachmaker), one from Pittsburgh, and one from Newark.

The committee's "report on the evils of Female Labor" reflected contemporary prejudices about working women. One resolution in the conclusion of the report asserted that "the present system of Female Labour is highly injurious to the best interests of the working classes, to the great object of mental improvement, and consequent corruption of good morals." This conclusion grew out of an earlier argument that "the health of the young female, in the majority of cases, is injured by unnatural restraint and confinement, and deprived of the qualities essentially necessary in the culture and bearing of healthy children." Moreover, "their morals frequently depart before their health," apparently as a consequence of exposure to men without the presence of moral supervision. Thus, "the physical organization, the natural responsibilities, and the moral sensibility of women, prove conclusively that her labors should be only of a domestic nature."¹³ In short, women do not belong in the work place because they belong in the home.

¹²This report is about ten printed pages in length; see Commons, *Documentary History*. VI, pp. 281-291. For other discussions of women within the National Trades' Union see *ibid.*, pp. 217-224, 250-251, 278-279. These discussions in the National Trades' Union allowed (and forced) the comparison of regional experiences so as to emphasize the general over locally particularistic understandings.

¹³Commons, *Documentary History*, VI, pp. 281, 282, 291. On the significance of authority in the family as the critical link between economic transformations in a society and reactions within the familial institutions see Smelser,

Alongside these tributes to the prevailing prejudices about women, these leaders of working men expressed their fears of threatened self-interests. They felt a real threat to their own wage and jobs posed by the increasing employment of women. The report asserted that more than 140,000 women (a large number at a time when the biggest city in the nation boasted just over 200,000 inhabitants) worked "in opposition to male labor," that in Philadelphia's fifty-eight organized trades, "twenty-four are seriously affected by female labor, to the impoverishing of whole families, and benefit of none but the employers," and that "in the New England states, printing, saddling, brush making, tailoring, whip making, and many other trades are in a certain measure governed by females." The female worker, they claimed, "in a measure stands in the way of the male when attempting to raise his prices or equalize his labor." The reasons were simple. "When the employer finds, as he surely will, that female assistance will compress his ends, of course the workman is discharged, or reduced to a corresponding rate of wages with the female operative." And in the long run, "when the females are found capable of performing duties generally performed by the men, as a natural consequence, from the cheapness of their habits and dependent situation, they acquire complete control of that particular branch of labor." In short, the competition of women in the labor markets would drive down wages and make it harder for men to find jobs.¹⁴ (Neoclassical economists could not ask for a better statement of competitive labor market processes.)

These working class leaders knew that most working women needed the wages they earned. Still, they seemed begrudging when they admitted that women worked out of the same needs as men and that the fulfillment of their needs would be difficult if women refrained from employment in factories ("mechanical labor") or in "male" trades ("opposition labor"). "We would not be understood," wrote the committee, "by these suggestions to deprive the female portion of the community from earning by honest industry a livelihood . . ." As the historian Vera Shlakman stated about the cotton mills, "thousands of girls of that period did not leave their homes and undertake hard and tedious work for long hours, even at fairly good wages, for fun." If women quit working in the occupations that men wanted to monopolize, the male workers judged they could not "employ their time usefully and profitably . . . without a corresponding change in society . . ." Yet, at one point the men offer the gratuitous suggestion that "there are sufficient openings for female industry and invention, much more profitable" although they do not try to specify what these might be.¹⁵

¹⁴Commons, *Documentary History*, VI, pp. 282-286.

¹⁵Shlakman, *Factory Town*, p. 51; Commons, *Documentary History*, VI, pp. 283-287.

The committee complained that the "females themselves are very blind as to their real interest..." But, they acknowledged that the system of female wage labor was "necessary in the present state of society," and they observed that "nothing can be done without the co-operation of the females," admitting that this meant that "the suggestions thrown out are gratuitous."¹⁶ Even if it were possible to displace women workers from their positions, that "would reduce thousands to beggary, starvation, and crime." Labor leaders attributed the rise and spread of female labor to capitalism but understood that once this system existed, working women became dependent on it.¹⁷

The committee proposed that women should organize themselves into workers' societies based on the model used successfully by men. They particularly emphasized the need for an organized collection of dues over time which would accumulate in a strike fund. They believed that the failure of women workers' various efforts against their employers resulted from their inability to maintain strike discipline sufficiently long to compel acquiescence by the employers. The successes of urban male labor agitation from 1834 to 1836 had convinced many that the salvation of working people could be found only in organization and solidarity (although they did not yet have a clear rhetoric with which to present these ideas).

The plan of organizing around the collection of a strike fund "would give confidence to the female, throws her in the company of those who were her friends, and by their united energies would do more to raise each other" than all the charitable societies in the world.

After considering "the subject in a moral, social, and pecuniary point of view," these local labor leaders concluded that getting women equal wages was "the only means of curtailing or arresting the evil" of female labor. They agreed with contemporary moral theories that women should stay home, occupied with domestic activities. They lamented employment's threat to working women's health and morals. Yet, simple economic interests outweighed their moral concern and bigotry in their analysis. They argued that employers used female labor to cut all wages and undermine the conditions of employment, and that men were suffering unemployment or underemployment as a result. They admitted that women needed jobs and employers wanted to hire them. Thus, they concluded that they needed to organize women to protect their own self interests.

¹⁶Commons, *Documentary History*, VI, pp. 284-285, 290.

¹⁷For discussions by labor activists of why factories employed women see *ibid.*, 217-224 (a discussion of factory labor at the 1834 National Trades' Union convention); cf. Seth Luther, *Address to the Working Men*.

Shop Stewards in the 1950s. Working men still ambivalently opposed women's employment in the 1950s when Sidney Peck researched his classic study, *The Rank-and-File Leader*¹⁸. Peck focused on union shop stewards, who held the pivotal role of communicating between workers, the union, and the company. Peck worked in a variety of Milwaukee area industrial concerns for four years and then systematically extracted the ideas of 184 representative shop stewards in discussion groups from seventeen union locals. Most of these stewards were men. As leaders of the rank-and-file, shop stewards both reflected the common worker's opinion and guided the men's reaction to women's employment.

The male shop stewards commonly, but not unanimously, lamented women's employment. Economic self interest, fears of a disrupted home life, and simple bigotry added to the men's reservations. These leaders of the rank and file also showed a pragmatic response to the inevitable reality of women's employment.

Two issues dominated these men's doubts about women's employment as an economic problem. First, they feared that employers used women as a source of cheap labor to drive men out of jobs or into accepting lower wages. Second, they resented families who brought home two pay checks when job shortages left some families with none. Listen to what some of these leaders said.

[I]f you remember back far enough . . . the reason women were [first] hired is because they could hire more women cheaper.

[T]he only woman I think should be working is one who really needs the job. If her husband is really sick or dead, then she's the type of woman who should be working.

I believe that we wouldn't have such a recession now if all of your married women were not working now. And the man that had a family could take those jobs.

[W]e got a lot of people, right down in the plant, some of them people working 15 or 16 years, their husbands are working right in the same plant. They don't need that money that that woman earns no more than the man in the moon. But yet, that woman is displacing somebody that's got four or five kids and is laid off.

My feeling is. . . When it comes down to layoffs, like we have now, then the women would go; the ones that aren't self-supporting. The ones that are self-supporting, well, then they would stay. They would carry the same seniority as a man.¹⁹

¹⁸Sidney M. Peck, *The Rank and File Leader*.

¹⁹*Rank-and-File*, pp. 204, 186, 187, 188, 191.

In the midst of a recession during the late 1950s, these stewards were echoing a sentiment widely expressed during the Great Depression of the 1930s: jobs should be fairly allocated among families. The expectation that the employed person would be the husband reflected gender stereotypes, of course, but notice that these men did not criticize married women who held jobs when their husbands could not. Competition between families meshed with competition between the sexes in working men's fears that employers would try to replace them with women at lower wages.

Not surprisingly, these realistic economic anxieties coexisted with bigotry and hysterical fears. The male stewards displayed these feelings predictably, by claiming that women belong home with children and out of men's jobs. Notice, however, that even the men expressing these attitudes limited their range of application, as shown in italics.

Married women working . . . no. *You got cases where their old man is sick or something, or where the old man can't support the family or that, it is a different story.* [G]enerally I'll tell you what, women working, they are taking the man out of a man, I think. . . . [T]hey're equal with them and everything and, I don't know, as far as I'm concerned I'm still kind of old fashioned. I don't even see them voting myself. They don't know what the hell they are doing! . . . I think that most people get it confused. I look at most women as being ladies, you know, I still see them in a dress. I don't see them in a goddamn pair of overalls pouring iron in the foundry.

I think that any mother has a fulltime job bringing up their daughter or their son. *There are cases where the need is there, but.* . . . I think the place is at home.

[C]ertain jobs on machines are men's jobs. Those are the jobs that should go to the men. . . . *I'm not saying that they should lay the women off. . . . They should find other jobs for those women to do a woman's job.*²⁰

These men resent women's intrusion into the workplace and seem plagued by a vague apprehension about its effects. Yet they also feel that economic need must take precedence over their image of women's proper place. If a woman must support herself or her family, they do not contest her right to a job; they just hope that this type of unfortunate circumstance will be rare.

Some leaders of the rank-and-file workers did offer direct support for working women. But they came from select groups. They were either women shop stewards, male stewards whose wives worked, stewards from shops that already employed more women than men, and stewards from shops that suffered

²⁰*Rank-and-File Leader*, pp. 181-4.

no unemployment even during the ongoing recession.²¹ One male steward with a working wife declared his "wife just feels better about getting out of the house. She never did care for housework." An Auto Workers steward remarked:

I don't know if you are aware of it, but we have some 80 per cent women here and we have many married women. And it has been highly successful here, as far as having married women in the plant. You have other plants in town, too, with the same background and the same success with married women.²²

Another steward offered this pragmatic assessment:

If you go into the shop, and try to find the reason why women are working; and in nine cases out of ten, the reason for it is because the husband isn't bringing home enough money . . . If the husband was bringing home enough money, there would be very few women who would still insist on holding on to a job.²³

Given this range of attitudes--some men dead set against women, some men supporting women's job aspirations, and most men worried that women's employment could jeopardize their own jobs--the mutually accepted policy was equal wages for women. Those supporting women favored their equal treatment, and those wanting to get rid of them thought employers would prefer men if wages were equal. As one male leader of the rank-and-file said, when they "started contracts [requiring] equal pay for equal work. . . that stopped a lot of your factories from hiring women in order to get cheaper help."²⁴

Keeping Women Out of the Work Place. Acting on their fears, men have sometimes obstructed women's efforts to get jobs when they felt their own employment threatened. Men in both low and high status occupations have resisted women's entry. Repeatedly, men have claimed that women would cut employment, lower wages, and weaken an occupation's status.

Women *were* less committed to occupations, more difficult to organize, and more willing to accept lower wages. They could hardly be otherwise, given their domestic obligations and their poor opportunities in the labor market.

Working class men, and their associations, suspected that employers hired women specifically to diminish labor's power, lessen skill, and cut wages. These men did not want more people competing for jobs in their labor market. They did

²¹*Rank-and-File Leader*, pp. 202-208.

²²*Rank-and-File Leader*, pp. 200, 202.

²³*Rank-and-File Leader*, p. 198.

²⁴P. 204.

not want to share their occupation with a group they believed vulnerable to exploitation.

In the professions, the competition men feared differed in form from that of the working class occupations. Female professionals threatened to take away male professionals' clients rather than their jobs. The consequences were the same. Whatever their status or occupation, men imagined their interests would suffer if women were to enter their labor markets.²⁵

Managers were no different. A female banker characterized men's attitudes in 1916. "They are friendly, tolerant and not very radical. They are willing to admit that they are not violently prejudiced against women in certain lines, but they have a terrific fear that they will eventually take the place of men."²⁶

Men had other reasons besides economic ones for repelling women from their occupations. They feared their wives' response if women started working next to them, and they were influenced by cultural prejudices against women. While it is difficult to document, men apparently had to contend with female coworkers' possible effects on their domestic relations. Men commonly wanted their wives to stay at home and to accept a strict division between husbands and wives' responsibilities. If men had women working by their side, it would become harder to claim that their wives should not do the same. It also would erode the men's own beliefs that they were different and superior.

More generally, the prevalent beliefs that women *should* be subordinate and domestic made men unlikely to find women's entry into their occupation pleasant or desirable. Sharing their jobs with women would rupture the web of men's work culture, violate their expectations about commendable female behavior, and raise questions about their distinctively masculine identity. The ideology of male domination prompted men to resist women in their occupations even when they had no anxieties about their economic self-interests. With both self interest and bigotry stoking the fires of men's opposition to women in their trades, its not surprising that they stayed hot so long.

Men tried to forestall women's employment in their trades through organized opposition directed both by their associations and by individual actions on the job. In the working class, unions resisted women's employment in men's jobs, particularly during the century before World War II. The unions sometimes

²⁵A reasonable overview of influences on professionals appears in Debra Renee Kaufman, "Professional Women: How Real Are Recent Gains?"

²⁶Quoted in Kessler-Harris, p. 232, from an interview of Elizabeth Cook, "Finance," April 11, 1916, file 21, box 1, Bureau of Vocational Information Collection, Schlesinger Library.

refused women membership, denied them training, and sometimes even struck employers who defied their policies.

These union efforts this amounted to more noise than action. Most unions were too weak and the issue was too peripheral to their main concerns. Sam Cohn's study of clerical workers in the British rail and telegraph industries showed, for example, that male workers consistently complained about hiring women.²⁷ Their threats had no effect, however. When employers decided they wanted to hire women, they ignored the claims of male unions. The unions' opposition to women made the male workers' fears and prejudices visible but did not hamper employers effectively.²⁸

On the job, male workers harassed women, denied them normal help, and used slowdowns to induce employers to get rid of the women. Male workers' resistance isolated the women who were starting out on the job. They made it hard for women to learn the skills needed for the job. Therefore, their employers would fire them or they would not win promotions or they quit due to frustration and bitterness. Thus men have made organized and individual efforts to prevent women from entering their occupations.

In the middle classes, professional associations withheld both training and certification from women until recent times.

EMPLOYERS' DISCRIMINATION

Men directly influenced female employment from another role, that of the employer. While men could deter women's employment as husbands or competing workers, employers made the most critical decision--whether to offer jobs to women. Most employers have, of course, been men and so they shared societal prejudices against women. Moreover, employers have believed it to be against their economic interest to hire women, especially for skilled or high status jobs. They often supposed that women would not be productive or dependable.

²⁷Sam Cohn, *Process of Occupational Sex Typing*.

²⁸This is the fundamental flaw in Hartmann's often cited article, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex." She claims that trade union opposition caused women's exclusion from skilled jobs in the United States during the period 1880-1930. While many male unions opposed female labor, their resistance was largely ineffective. Even the most unionized trades had only partial coverage. For example, by 1910 only about one-third of printers and one-quarter of carpenters were union members (Jackson 1984, p. 142); most trades were even less unionized. Hartmann's thesis implies that women should have held many more jobs in the nonunion sectors where union opposition was absent. This simply did not occur. Hartmann's error is to confuse intention with effect: male trade unions' lacked the capacity to place limits on women's employment regardless of their desires to do so.

They also feared that male workers' opposition would exact costs outweighing any advantages they could gain by hiring women.²⁹

While these conditions were some reasons that employers did not hire women for good jobs, they do not seem potent enough to have made women's competition completely ineffective. Throughout the 19th century and much of the 20th century, women received wages that averaged only about half as much as men's. If some employers hired women, the lower wages paid would give those employers a competitive advantage. They could expand markets or increase profit margins. So why didn't some speculators find it in their interests to use women in jobs traditionally held by men?

The Theoretical Problem of Discrimination. Discrimination meant that employers paid women less than men for comparable productivity. It also meant that employers favored men over women when hiring, firing, or promoting for desirable jobs. This prejudice gave men jobs *even* if they demanded higher wages or were less suited to jobs than available women. This contradicted a standard premise of economic theory. Competition in labor and product markets should have forced all workers' wages to correspond to their productivity. This problem became prominent in economic theory some time ago, when American economists were trying to make economic sense of racial wage discrimination against Blacks.³⁰ Simply put, if women would do the same work as men for considerably lower wages, why didn't profit hungry capitalists turn out their men to replace them with women?

Discriminatory practices by employers are theoretically problematic because the preservation of male dominance was not a goal overriding all others for all men. Many employers have engaged in prolonged battles against their male employees over wage rates and other employment conditions. Is it credible that the same employers also freely and consistently chose to forego higher profits rather than hire women? Did they care that much about preserving the sex advantages of men working for them? This seems unlikely. Why did employers not make greater efforts to profit from women's lower wage rates?

²⁹For a review of literature and a useful study of varied aspects of employer discrimination, see David Collinson, David Knights and Margaret Collinson, *Managing to Discriminate*.

³⁰ Becker, Gary. *The Economics of Discrimination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.

Several possible answers to this question disagree about the relative importance of employers' commitment to male dominance compared to employers' economic self-interests.³¹

First, employers may have had an extraordinary attachment to women's subordination and the ideas supporting it. This could inspire them to accept lower profits rather than violate these ideas. This implies that employers consistently valued their prejudices more than their economic self-interests.

Second, employers may have united to uphold a discrimination policy. Using informal or formal strategies, they could try to force all employers to conform to their joint policies. The organization needed to sustain controls over all employers presumably arose when some employers tried to make money by ignoring popular prejudice.

Third, if women were really undependable and did less work than men, hiring them might promise no real economic benefit. If this were true, it would imply that employers were pursuing their rational economic interests, but those self-interests did not favor hiring women.

Fourth, countervailing conditions might have denied employers the possibility to profit from hiring women. Hiring underpaid and under-used female labor might have appealed to employers as a way to increase profits. Nonetheless, circumstances beyond employers' direct control, could have kept them from exploiting these opportunities. Employers' self-interests would have demanded their discrimination against women.

Let's look at these four possibilities.

A Taste for Discrimination. According to Gary Becker, prejudiced employers accept lower profits as the price they pay for indulging their seamy values. Becker offered this influential interpretation in the 1950s, while trying to fit racial discrimination into the world view of modern economists. The problem was to explain how discrimination occurred in a competitive economy ruled by prices and profits. Traditional economic theory seemed to imply that discrimination was impossible because labor market competition would end it. Becker proposed to end this disharmony between theory and reality by applying ideas from the economic analysis of consumption. Employers willing to bear lower profits so they did not have to employ unwanted groups were displaying a *taste for discrimination*. Apparently, such employers have a powerful belief in inequality that it means more to them than money.

While Becker's theory gives discrimination a simple economic *interpretation*, it fails to *explain* why discrimination persists. It ignores the impact of marginal

³¹For a useful alternative framework, see Laurie Larwood, Eugene Sz wajkowski and Suzanna Rose. "When Discrimination Makes 'Sense': The Rational Bias Theory."

employers--the least prejudiced or the least ignorant or the most adventurous. Even if most employers defend inequality staunchly, some vile cads should appear who will exploit female labor. They would hire women employees to gain the profits eschewed by the prejudiced. This would let them expand at the cost of the discriminating firms (through price competition enabled by lower production costs). Therefore, if market forces operate freely enough, they should so favor using underpaid labor that a *taste for discrimination* could not survive.³²

Thus, while some, perhaps even many, employers might be prejudiced against women, their independent efforts would not sustain discrimination. These employers might accept somewhat lower profits to avoid employing women in good jobs. But their sacrifices would prove futile. These motives would be no more effectual than employers' common wishes to have absolute power over all workers or to charge extraordinarily high prices for their products. The market processes in a capitalist economy, even when flawed, constrain the choices available. Everyone involved must accept compromises between what they would like and what is possible. A market economy abhors an unused profit potential the way nature abhors a vacuum.

This shows Becker's approach is fatally flawed. Yet, possibly, a more elaborate, but related, explanation might prove more successful.

Conspiring Against Competition. Employers can act in concert to stop anyone hiring women for *men's jobs*. This opposition might then stop innovators who want to exploit the profit potential offered by cheap female labor. As we have little direct research or theoretical work on this possibility, we can only speculate. Employers often try to restrain competition within their product markets, particularly simple price competition. If one firm adopts cheaper labor and lowers its prices to expand its market, others must follow. This pattern repeats until all have the same cheap labor, the same prices, and the same profits. If this competitive seesaw gets too wild, everyone can suffer. Some will enjoy the opportunities to win temporary advantages by innovating faster or better. But those who fear the competitive fray often outnumber those willing to jump into it. The disgruntled employers may join hands to stop competition. Cheap female labor can be one competitive resource. Thus, employers can use informal prohibitions against hiring women to control competition.

Joint action against competition might work for a while, but it is unlikely to bar women's employment effectively for a long time. Employers' organizations aimed at avoiding competition are too vulnerable to fission. It is difficult to make

³² Arrow, Kenneth. "The Theory of Discrimination." In Orley Ashenfelter and Albert Rees, eds., *Discrimination in Labor Markets*, pp. 3-33. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Thurow, Lester. *Generating Inequality*. New York: Basic Books, 1975.

an agreement equally beneficial to all. As circumstances change, those who feel the agreement against competition serves them least well have an incentive to defy it. If new firms or competitors from other areas can move into the market, this threatens employers' self-regulation. Thus, even if most employers agreed to sanction hiring women, their plan to keep others from using female labor would become ineffective from time to time. Even bolstered by prejudice against women, it still could not safeguard wide spread, long term discrimination.

Strong beliefs that women make shoddy workers also could dissuade employers from hiring women. Only firms employing both sexes could know enough to compare women's productivity and dependability to men's. If no one hires women, then everyone must depend on conjecture. This leaves considerable room for the rule of prejudice. Employers can project a strong belief in women's unsuitability for skilled work or responsibility. This will diminish the likelihood of anyone risking much money to discover if the belief is true.

Simple ignorance could not, by itself, induce all employers continuously to ignore the opportunities created by discrimination.³³ What does it take to preserve unrealistic beliefs claiming that women make poor workers? They can last for a long time only if surrounded by a general ideology of male dominance and superiority.

Did Women Have Less to Offer? Employers have often judged women a poor employment risk. Women have consistently lacked training, education, or experience comparable with that of men. Potential employers assumed that women would cost more to train and suspected that their productivity would be lower than men's. Employers knew women often quit when they married and usually quit if they had children. This reinforced employers' belief that they could not rely on women.

Influenced by the biased ideology of male dominance, employers readily believed it was risky to hire women. They feared women were not worth hiring, even at the low wages they accepted. These suspicions unfairly distorted employers' view of most women seeking jobs. Yet, employers found it easiest to treat all women as if they were the same.³⁴

³³ Aigner, Dennis J. and Cain, Glen G. "Statistical Theories of Discrimination in Labor Markets." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 30 (1977):175-187.

³⁴ This characterizes a process economists call *statistical discrimination*. It occurs when employers act as if everyone in a group exhibited the characteristics of its average members (Phelps). For example, this happens when employers treat all women as child bearers because most women bear children. To make matters worse, the beliefs applied are often stereotypes rather than true descriptions of common traits.

What if women were truly much less valuable to employers? We know that because of gender inequality, women were less educated, less experienced, and less committed to paid work than men. If these differences were great enough, the difference in wage rates might have correctly represented men's superior productivity. If this were true, our theoretical problem would disappear, because employers were incurring no cost by discriminating.

Many researchers have tried to discover if women and men with comparable qualifications and jobs receive different wages. Most follow one simple approach. They try to estimate how much women's and men's wages differ using statistical techniques to remove the effects of differences in personal characteristics. They use data from a representative sample of women and men. The data include wage rates (or income) and other characteristics of the people and their jobs. These include such attributes as education, work experience, absenteeism, length of the work week, occupation and industry, and job level. These analyses estimate a *residual* wage gap, the difference remaining between the men's and women's incomes after adjusting for all these characteristics. They believe this residual wage gap is due to employers discriminating against women (unless some unmeasured influences caused it). The more that the research variables account for the difference in wages, the less employers discriminate directly against women (compared to men with similar skills and jobs). Unfortunately this research applies only to modern conditions. And even then, it has not reached any definitive conclusions. The results of these analyses range from explaining almost none to almost all the wage differences.³⁵ As a result we can only draw tentative conclusions.

The research has shown that the gross difference between men's and women's wages is not all due to employers' discrimination, but employers clearly did discriminate a lot. Women, as a whole, have had less education and work experience. This handicap has accounted for a sizable part of the gap between women's and men's wages. Even when women accepted half as much pay as men, employers could not halve their wage costs by employing women. Lacking men's experience, women could not produce as much. Still, the research on discrimination shows that, on the average, women got worse jobs and less pay than men who had comparable personal attributes. Perhaps even more important, even when

³⁵ See the review of such studies in Lloyd and Niemi, *Economics of Sex Differentials*, pp. 202-221, 232-239. {UPDATE} The research is inherently problematic. First, it's hard to attribute a residual wage difference to discrimination confidently because it may simply result from unmeasured or poorly measured variables. Second, some of the important explanatory variables used as controls, such as job level or turnover rates, may themselves be the result of employer discrimination.

women were as productive as men, they rarely could get equal wages (thereby robbing them of incentive). In short, employers discriminated against women by treating them differently from men who were the same in every way but sex. Employers refused to hire women for *men's* jobs, they consistently denied women promotion possibilities available to men, and they paid them *woman's wage* even if they were as productive as men.

Hence, qualifications and experience accounted for part of women's and men's unequal fates while seeking jobs. Yet, they also left a large part unexplained. Excluded from training and good jobs, women could not accumulate the qualities that employers required for high status jobs. Their disadvantages included less experience, lower education, fewer skills, and less flexibility. These made women less valuable employees (owing less *human capital*, as some economists would say it). Still, these disadvantages were not the whole story. The research on wage discrimination has shown that, while the average female worker seemed less productive and committed than the average male worker, she was more productive once you took into account her lower wage. Women usually got worse jobs and lower pay than men with comparable qualifications. Employers's hiring decisions produced this *residual* difference between the sexes' employment success.³⁶ Why have employers engaged in this direct discrimination? In pure economic terms, employers should have been replacing men with women. We have already seen that prejudice and a wish to control competition can only partially account for employers' restraint. So what else is there?

Extraneous Costs of Employing Women. By hiring women, employers may incur added costs. These costs can discourage employers who prefer to pursue private profit rather than protect discrimination. The opposition of male employees's is the main problem.

The anticipation of male workers' opposition can cause employers to believe that the employment of women is against their interests. Employers can incur serious costs from conflict with their workers. The workers can strike or cut their output (withdrawing their efficiency, to use Thorstein Veblen's phrase). Employers will not adopt policies that are likely to anger their employees unless they believe the benefits will outweigh the risks. Male workers have often avidly declared their opposition and they could confirm their resistance if employers experimented with the hiring of women. A firm dependent mainly on male workers would normally hire only a few new employees at a time. Therefore, during the short run, it could save only a small amount from lower wages if it hired women. In contrast, male employees resisting the change could exact large

³⁶ Assuming it obvious that employed women do not purposely seek worse jobs than men.

costs. Calculating employers were sure to decide it was not worth the trouble to hire women if they expected too much discord among their workers.

Thus, short term costs can keep employers from adopting policies that are rational in the long term. This *adjustment* problem can cause industries to defy the predictions of economic theory.³⁷ At any given time most employers will have an investment in male employees who hold all the good paying, more desirable jobs. Those employees' opposition to the hiring of a few women can easily cost more than the employer can hope to save by paying the women less.

The potential costs of male workers' resistance help explain why most employers who hired women for production jobs that could have gone to men were in competitive industries. Otherwise, employers long hired women only for jobs that had no men in place to resist women's employment. Adoption of a female labor force is more rational for new firms. It is also easier in industries with little need for skilled labor. Unskilled employees exercise less discretion in their work, and they are easy to replace. Therefore, they have little leverage to resist their employers. Labor intensive industries with small firms give the greatest opportunities to start new firms with the least initial investment. Such firms face stiff competition and often rely on unskilled labor. These conditions give employers the opportunity and motive to hire women. Thus, new firms emerge most often in competitive markets, and those new firms using unskilled labor face the least risks hiring women.³⁸

Employers' Balancing Acts. Women's low wages gave employers opportunities for higher profits. Why haven't employers better exploited these opportunities? In answering this question, we must be wary of exaggerating employers' dedication to discrimination. After all, we must not forget that it *has* declined. As described in Chapter 2, employers have hired women at an ever increasing rate throughout the twentieth century, particularly since World War II. Thus, employers hired women when it seemed enough in their interest to do so. Apparently, when the costs of discrimination exceed definite limits, some employers will defy prejudices and risks to try for bigger profits. Some male employers will abandon the protection of less fortunate members of their sex in order to advance their own personal interests. This will happen when employers believe great opportunities for profit demand strategies that are at odds with protecting male privileges.

³⁷ Arrow, Kenneth. "The Theory of Discrimination." In Orley Ashenfelter and Albert Rees, eds., *Discrimination in Labor Markets*, pp. 3-33. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

³⁸Rework this paragraph?

Male employers helped keep women outside the economy as long they had few visible opportunities to make new profits by hiring women. Employers suspected that women were a poor risk, even with lower wages, for most desirable jobs. The women they could hire did not have enough experience, seemed too likely to quit to return to family life, and raised the specter of costly rebellion by male employees. Employers' fears held enough truth to lend credibility to their prejudiced belief in women's inferiority. Most experiments in employing women *seemed* to verify employers doubts. Although everything weighed against the chances of women's success, people could still interpret the experiment's failure as further proof of women's inadequacy.

Employers' Uneven Response. Thus, employers often found it in their interest to deny women jobs. Social discrimination and social mores made women seem unlikely to prove good workers. The prospect that disgruntled male workers' would resist imposed uncertain costs. How valuable or how risky women seemed varied with the type of employment, however. Women's lack of competitive training, experience, and job commitment was least significant for unskilled employment in trades with variable labor needs. Similarly, male worker opposition was least in the lowest paying jobs. Because these labor markets frustrated unionization efforts, organized resistance was unlikely. And male employees in these low ranks spent more of their energy on finding better jobs than on protecting the ones they had. Therefore, the higher the status, wage, skills needed, and potential for promotion attached to a job, the more it was in an employer's interest to deny women entry.

THE MULTIPLE SOURCES OF MALE OPPOSITION

To summarize, men's roles as husbands, workers, and employers swayed them to oppose women's equal employment. These roles gave men good reasons to believe women's employment was against their interests. As husbands, they wanted to protect their family power, preserve their wives' responsibility for domestic services, and uphold their status in the community. As workers, men wanted to protect their jobs and wage levels. They also tried to evade a potentially troublesome discrepancy between having female co-workers and wanting their wives to stay at home. As employers, men wanted to protect profits. They believed women were inferior, undependable workers who would increase costs by exciting male workers' opposition.

Men's feeling that they had to hold jobs and provide a family income probably made them oppose women just that much more. Men's resistance to women's efforts to get better jobs did not mean that all men's jobs brought satisfaction, prestige, and high income. While women have had their movement into the economy blocked, men often have had their employment forced. While

all good jobs went to men, only a minority of men could claim such jobs. Yet, circumstance pushed most men into looking for jobs, even if the only ones they could find were oppressive and poorly paid.

Women and men often saw these circumstances differently. When comparing their advantages and disadvantages, both women and men had their vision distorted. Many women and men accepted the cultural beliefs about role differences without much reflection. When conflict or resentment provoked people to analyze the differences, both sexes were equally likely to portray themselves as bearing the greater burdens. All of us suffer from a self-serving egocentric bias. Women, particularly consciously disenchanted women, envied men's chances for jobs and careers when they compared them to their own domestic responsibilities. Men could not help but reverse the emphasis. They contrasted their need to earn a family income, even if it meant holding a tiresome job, with women's freedom from bosses and from the pressure to provide.

Men's opposition to women's employment served two goals: to keep men superior to women and to protect men's economic self interests. Sometimes the first goal was more important, sometimes the second. The male roles of husband, worker, and employer commonly produced different balances between the two motives. As husbands, men's objections to women's economic equality mainly reflected the battle between the sexes. Husbands' resistance often went against their economic interests. Men have shown more concern about keeping their wives deferent and house-bound than interest in possible increases in income and the family standard of living. As employers, the opposite emphasis guided men's resistance. They have cared more about following a strategy aimed at profit than about sustaining male dominance. As workers (including the self-employed), men have tried to prevent female employment for simple reasons of economic self-interest. Still, their opposition also seems to stem from their wish to avoid threats to men's collective status advantages. Moreover, men protected their sole responsibility for their family's income because this responsibility was the justification for authority within the family.

Each impediment to women's economic opportunities has had a variable role in pushing women toward the most marginal jobs. Women aspiring toward good jobs were more likely to meet resistance from men in all three roles--husbands, workers, and employers--than women trying for undesirable jobs. Temporary, part time, poorly paid, and low status jobs for women least threatened their husbands interests. Moreover, husbands from the lower classes have had the fewest economic resources to use as carrot or stick to control their wives. Male workers in low paying, low status jobs had the least reason and fewest chances to stop women from getting work beside them. And, employers trying to fill marginal jobs in competitive industries have had the most freedom and the most

incentives to hire women. This variable male opposition to women's employment has not barred them from all paid work. It excluded them from opportunities for jobs that carried rewards of high income, prestige, security, and the potential for advancement.

Additional Causes of Women's Economic Marginality

The obstacles raised by men, opposing women who wanted to better themselves in the economy, made it hard for women to get ahead. This exclusion from the economy burdened women with experiences and expectations different from men's. These made it even harder for them to overcome the obstacles. Thus, being disadvantaged had some effects that reinforced and exaggerated the disadvantages.

Men's opposition was like a large boulder dropped into the middle of a deeply cut stream bed. The boulder not only cut the flow past it, but it also can caused rocks and debris to clog the remaining, now narrower, openings, damming the flow even more. Husbands, employers, and male workers resisted women's entry to the economy.³⁹ This was the decisive barrier. But it led to others. For example, women gained fewer marketable skills than men. Also, job schedules did not fit the needs of families with two employed parents. These conditions had less influence over women's fate than men's resistance. Moreover, they existed mainly because the economy offered women so few opportunities, depriving them of incentives and experience. Still, they added to women's economic marginality. If you removed the boulder from the stream, the revived surge would soon wash away the smaller impediments that had collected and added to its effect. Similarly, if men's resistance evaporated, the surge of women into jobs would soon sweep away the other conditions limiting women's employment.

Several conditions that stemmed from women's meager part in the economy rebounded to worsen their status. Some effects were direct and others more indirect. With less motivation, skill, and experience, women could not offer as much to employers. Therefore they got poorer jobs. Families had to weigh women's difficulties in finding good jobs against their needs as a family. Women's domesticity might seem a rational strategy, given the world about them. Couples needed both to earn an income and to do considerable domestic work.

³⁹Men have also influenced women's economic status through the role of governmental official. Legislation such as that requiring certification by male professionals or *protective* barriers to the employment of women in some circumstances or the absence of legislation prohibiting discrimination has helped sustain women's inability to compete with men for jobs. Since men dominate government, this is another way they have contributed to the economic constraint of women.

Usually, men could make more money than women. Therefore, couples often decided men should work full time and women stay home full time. Women's low economic status also led to a separation between women's and men's occupations. This magnified the wage difference between the sexes and made it even harder for women to get ahead. The secondary causes of women's economic marginality also nourished beliefs that women had only themselves to blame. People readily noticed that women strove less for jobs and had less experience. Yet, they often didn't grasp how inequality produced this difference. This offered one ideological disguise for economic gender inequality.

Without men's opposition to women's employment, none of these conditions could have persisted. If men's opposition disappeared, these secondary conditions would decay and vanish in a few generations. Nonetheless, once they existed, each of these conditions worsened women's lot in the economy. Lets look at each major secondary cause in some more detail.

OBLIGATION AND WANT

Aspirations, obligations, and need pushed some people toward employment and some away from it. Until recently, and perhaps even now, most women have not felt so obligated and driven to find jobs as have men. Few women showed the same drive to make money or succeed that we associate with men. These differences in role expectations were a result and an expression of gender inequality. Still, while socially constructed motives and obligations did not produce inequality, they did induce people to conform so that their actions stabilized inequality.

Men did not simply have more opportunities for employment than women. Modern culture made them feel they had to use these opportunities. Men who did not take part in the economy offended the ordinary expectations that every person do his or her share in society. People shunned and snubbed them because they had refused to accept their responsibilities. People felt society owed no support to someone who was *a lay about*, *lazy*, or *a bum*. A person had to earn the obligations of family and community. This was not an accidental or eccentric cultural trait. The cultural obligations for men to hold jobs grew from the economy's need for a disciplined labor force.⁴⁰ Parents, schools, churches, and the surrounding culture all prepared a man for this obligation and punished him if he failed to meet it.

⁴⁰ Theorists representing several divergent perspectives have adopted a similar argument. See, for example, Talcott Parsons, the Frankfort school, and E. P. Thompson. These analyses all implicitly assume that employment is often exhausting, sometimes demeaning, and rarely uplifting.

The cultural expectations about jobs for women have contrasted sharply with those guiding men. Popular beliefs portrayed employment as an unfortunate necessity for women whose men failed or for women who failed to get the right men. Therefore, women did not compete for jobs and promotions with the same compulsive intensity as men.

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

No matter how much women wanted employment, they did not have the skills and experience needed to compete against men for good jobs. Historically, women could not get the knowledge and training open to men. Until recently, women had fewer places to go for good secondary or college education and their families gave them less support for education. Professional schools and advanced academic programs systematically and openly denied women entry. In the working classes, women had no path into the male mechanical trades. Young males did not let women take part in the informal settings where they picked up early skills, formal apprenticeship programs barred women, and technical schools would not admit them.

The exceptions when employers did seek women for jobs needing skilled work happened where men did not control the skills. Working class women got skilled jobs only in industries using household skills that men could not deny them, for example in the needle trades. The educated daughters of the middle class found employment possibilities opening in lower professions like teaching and nursing. After the turn of the century, growing bureaucracies also hired women as clerical help. Class privilege gave middle class women a better education and a more acceptable social style for these jobs than working class men. Families often educated women to give them social graces and turn them into desirable wives. It was a coincidence that this prepared them to fit an unexpected need for low paid, educated employees. Usually, if men controlled an occupation, women could not gain access to its knowledge and skills. This left only jobs depending on knowledge traditionally controlled by women or jobs so new that no one controlled them. Only in these areas could women reach skilled or professional jobs.

Because most good jobs required skill or experience, women could be effectively barred by guarding only the *ports of entry* to an occupation or job hierarchy. Until recently, most desirable positions needed no active defense against women, as no women had the schooling or the experience needed to compete for the jobs. Men held these jobs, men competed for openings to these jobs, and men decided who would fill the openings. None of these men had to think about women striving for these positions. Resistance to women was unnecessary.

BALANCING FAMILY RESOURCES AND THE DIVISION OF LABOR

Occupational inequities and family needs often gave people strong, rational reasons for married women to leave jobs. Families needed one spouse to stay at home, usually because they had children. As husbands could earn more money than their wives, it made economic sense for the wives to shoulder the household responsibilities. This happened when couples wanted to give personal attention to children or other dependents for moral reasons. It also happened simply because people found it cost more than a wife could earn to replace her at home with hired help.

Thus, the need for household work and the difficulty women had in finding a good job led to family strategies that exaggerated the differences between male and female career patterns. Economists have long contended that families try to get the most income and achieve the highest well-being possible, given their circumstances.⁴¹ To do this, people have had to choose a strategy. They knew that women did domestic work at least as effectively and productively as men, but most women could not hope to earn as much as their husband. This meant the husband, at least, must hold a job. Then, a couple had to ask if the wife would add more to their lives by earning a low income, often at a job she didn't like, or by caring for their household. Although people might not reason through the problem, step by step, these costs and rewards would still influence their decisions.

OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION

The jobs that women could get were usually not the ones that hired men. Male resistance, women's domestic duties, and employers hiring strategies channeled women into select occupations, especially ones with temporary, low status, low paid jobs. Cultural expectations that women and men should inhabit *separate spheres* augmented the split between female and male occupations. By limiting their choices to *female* jobs, this segregation further cut women's opportunities. It also pushed their wages even lower than they would have been.

Women's and men's jobs became segregated for several reasons (see the earlier discussion in Chapter ?).⁴² As described before, male opposition pushed

⁴¹Mincer, Jacob. "Labor Force Participation of Married Women." In **Aspects of Labor Economics**, ed. H. Gregg Lewis. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.

⁴²On occupation segregation by sex, see Barbara F. Reskin (ed.), *Sex Segregation in the Workplace: Trends, Explanations, Remedies*; Jerry A. Jacobs, *Revolving Doors: Sex Segregation and Women's Careers*; James N. Baron and William T. Bielby, "Organizational Barriers to Gender Equality: Sex Segregation of Jobs and Opportunities;" William T. Bielby,

women toward marginal jobs. Women's lesser experience and commitment also kept them in marginal jobs. The same reasons that men resisted women entering male occupations also prompted men to avoid jobs in women's occupations. Moreover, employers' found that it was easiest to make more money by hiring women if they did not already have a male labor force. Historically, this has happened most often during the rise of new occupations.⁴³

As the number of employed women increased throughout this century, most got jobs in occupations that hired only women. Many entered new occupations that became *women's jobs* soon after they first appeared. This happened on a national scale to such jobs as clerical work and nursing. New jobs also became *female* on a smaller scale within localities or individual firms. For example, women became wrappers while men became mailers in a new packaging department. Women rarely *took over* a formerly male occupation. Such gender reversal usually happened only when changing technology or a new division of labor created new occupations which replaced older ones. For example, clerical work changed from a male to a female occupation around the turn of the century. Previously, clerks had managerial duties, acting as the owner's agent. As firms grew, they divided the work, giving managers the administrative duties and clerks or secretaries the purely routine chores. They hired women as clerks and men as managers.

LOW WAGES

Once it existed, sex segregation helped further depress women's wages.⁴⁴ Since women and men worked in different jobs, the processes deciding wage rates

"Men and Women at Work: Sex Segregation and Statistical Discrimination," *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (1986): 759-799; Jessie Bernard, "Historical and Structural Barriers to Occupational Desegregation," *Signs* 1 (1976):87-94; Heidi Hartmann, "Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex" *Signs* 3 (1976): 137-171; Solomon W. Polachek, "Occupational Segregation among Women: Theory, Evidence, and a Prognosis."

⁴³Probably, as women's employment within the economy as a whole or some parts of it passes through some threshold, women's presence becomes so ordinary that no one any longer gains from or supports it.

⁴⁴See Barbara R. Bergmann, "Occupational Segregation, Wages and Profits When Employers Discriminate by Race or Sex," *Eastern Economic Journal* 1(1974): 103-110; Barbara R. Bergmann, *The Economic Emergence of Women*; Mary Stevenson, "Women's Wages and Job Segregation," *Politics and Society* 4 (1973): ; Harriet Zellner, "Discrimination against Women, Occupational Segregation, and the Relative Wage," *American Economic Review* 62 (May 1972):157-160.

affected them separately.⁴⁵ Women's wages fell below what men in comparable jobs were paid. Women's restriction to select occupations--ones that were unstable, low paying, and undesirable--produced crowded labor markets. Too many women competed for the jobs available, yet some women always accepted these jobs despite the low pay.

It was practically impossible for women to remedy these conditions through collective action. Women's limited commitment and unstable career patterns made them difficult to organize. Moreover, because so many worked for competitive firms in marginal labor markets, they had little chance of affecting wages much if they could achieve organization.

So women's jobs paid low both because the jobs were marginal and because they were women's. The jobs they received would have paid poorly even if men took them. As *women's* jobs they received even lower payments, because employers could exploit women's collective economic marginality through lower wages. These twin effects held women's average wage levels considerably lower than those of men.

As a result, only a minority of women whom employers could have recruited actively sought jobs. A considerably larger number might have taken jobs if they had been readily available. Many women felt little hope of finding anyone willing to hire them. It is hard to say how many women fit this description. We can only keep in mind that this was always a significant group.

IDEOLOGICAL EFFECTS

The beliefs spawned by women's economic marginality also worked against them. Both employers and women assumed that women would only work in *female* occupations. They also expected women to move in and out of jobs as family conditions changed. By acting on these beliefs, women were caught in the cycle of a self-fulfilling prophesy.

In our society, people commonly believed that *success* in the economy revealed how competent a person was and how hard a person worked. If success showed merit, then those with worse jobs must be inferior. People with good jobs had *succeeded* because they had talent and worked hard. Those with poor jobs had *failed* because they did not. These ideas suggested that women's absence from high status jobs showed that they were unfit. Women received lower wages

⁴⁵For organizational effects on women's wages, see James N. Baron and Andrew E. Newman, "For What It's Worth: Organizations, Occupations, and the Value of Work Done by Women and Nonwhites;" William Bridges and Robert Nelson, "Markets in Hierarchies: Organizational and Market Influences on Gender Inequality in a State Pay System" *American Journal of Sociology* 95 (1989): 616-58.

than men and worked under their authority. This mirrored women's inferiority in the family and added weight to the conviction that women were not as good as men.

From these beliefs, it was a small jump to deciding that it was sensible and fair to deny women chances for jobs. Expecting only the worst, employers did not want to gamble on women. They would hire them only if they didn't care about stability or skill. Or, of course, if they had no choice. Moreover, most people thought this was fair. If women just weren't as good as men, they shouldn't complain about their fate.

A MULTIPLIER EFFECT

Thus, a tangled, thorny social underbrush of secondary effects grew alongside the wall of male resistance, further obstructing women's passage from the household to good jobs. The varied social strains in this undergrowth included skewed obligations, experience restrictions, strategic family needs, opportunity channeling, and prejudiced beliefs. All impeded women's chances for a decent job, although they were not primary causes of women's difficulties. Remove men's resisting wall, and women's rush through would trample these secondary causes underneath. Yet these thickets were enough to turn many women back, and this often let people lose sight of the wall created by men's opposition.⁴⁶

These secondary barriers to women's progress had their roots at several levels of social organization: individual, family, economy, and ideology.⁴⁷ At the individual level, women have not felt men's drive or need to earn an income and to show their worth through economic success. Also, women trying to get jobs have had lower education, fewer skills, and less experience than men. At the family level, it often seemed rational for women to stay at home because men had such better chances to earn a good salary. If women could produce more goods and services than their income would buy, they better served family interests by retreating from the economy. At the level of the economy, the sex segregation of jobs added to the barriers restricting women. It also helped keep women's wages low. And at the level of ideology, popular beliefs assumed that women were not as good workers as men. This quelled women's resentment and bolstered men's resistance to their employment. Because these effects at different levels of social

⁴⁶Is the emphasis on male resistance presented in such a way as to excite interpretations that believe I am attributing inequality to men's unnecessarily mean spirited actions against women?

⁴⁷Use the **levels** in this paragraph to organize the introduction to this (A level) section and in the chapter conclusion?

organization were mutually reinforcing, their total effect was greater than the sum of parts.

While these conditions made it harder for women to get good jobs, they alone would not have kept women subordinate to men for such a long time. But men repeatedly opposed women's efforts to get ahead, and that opposition ensured each generation of women faced the same problems as the one before it. Men's defense of their advantages was crucial. Take away men's defense of their ascendancy and each of these reinforcing conditions would wane. If men had not sought to keep their opportunities and privileges, no group or institution would have had a commitment to preserving the conditions that made it hard for women to get good jobs. Yet, the women who wished good jobs would devote themselves to overturning these conditions. None of these conditions has a functional advantage in society, except to help preserve gender inequality. Without committed defenders and without a functional social purpose, these conditions would decline and disappear under women's continuous siege upon them.

Women's Domestic Labor

Spurned by the economy, most women have devoted their time to work within the home. They clean the house, its contents, and its occupants' clothing; they choose, buy, and prepare food; they care for children; and they do a variety of other chores. Over the past two decades, theorists have repeatedly tried to assess the relation between women's work in their homes and their economic marginality. These theorists have ranged from feminist Marxists to conservative, neoclassical economists. While at odds in many ways, the arguments at both ends interpret market and home labor as comparable activities with similar goals.⁴⁸

Work in modern societies, they agree, occurs in two distinctive ways: paid labor in the economy and unpaid domestic labor within families. They discard the ideological distinction that considers paid labor to be work while domestic labor is a different activity. All labor is work. But some labor gets paid while some other labor does not. And some work takes place in public arenas while some does not. Historically, men have done most of the paid work within labor markets and women most of the unpaid work at home.

What produced this division of labor? The preceding analysis has attributed responsibility to a complex process within which men's multifaceted resistance

⁴⁸Among the more influential contributions are Gary Becker, "Human Capital, Effort, and the Sexual Division of Labor;" Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation;" Richard A. Berk, "The New Home Economics: An Agenda for Sociological Research;" Jacob Mincer, "Labor Force Participation of Married Women."

to women's advancement has tried to sustain gender inequality since preindustrial days, bolstered by varied secondary effects of inequality. Two alternative approaches that emphasize the causal centrality of domestic productivity deserve consideration. A Marxist-feminist perspective suggests that the value of women's domestic labor for capitalism determined women's confinement to the household. A neoclassical economic perspective suggests the value of women's domestic labor for families determined their choice to stay at home. Each of these perspectives offers some insights but both exaggerate the explanatory potential of women's household productivity.

THE DOMESTIC SERVANTS OF CAPITALISM

In an onslaught from the left, a group of authors has sought a Marxist explanation of women's subordination in modern societies. This curious body of work began in 1969 with a widely read article by Margaret Benston called "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation." Shorn of encumbering jargon, her argument contended that women's social inferiority has its roots in the economy, not in psychology, biology, or sexual conflict. In particular, women must defer to men in society because although money governs social worth, only men's work earns monetary compensation. Women lose because they don't get paid for their work.

This approach raised one vital question: why have women continued to do household work? The culture surrounding us long denied women's household work was a social problem, making it seem too natural and ordinary to merit thought. A Marxist perspective pierced this shroud. It stressed that capitalism expanded by putting more and more men to work. More wage workers meant more profit. Why, then, wasn't capitalism just as eager to put women to work as men? Marxist feminists answered that women's unpaid domestic labor helped sustain profits and discourage working men from rebelling against capitalism.⁴⁹

Women working at home boost capitalists' profits, the argument goes, by taking care of male workers and raising a new crop of workers for the future. They do this work cheaply. They accept less than they would demand for comparable jobs in the economy. The argument implies that the economy would have suffered if as many women as men had taken jobs. This could happen in two ways. Women's departure from the home could produce a general breakdown

⁴⁹ The relevant literature is extensive and much of it is encumbered with fruitless debates based on Marxist economics, often poorly interpreted. These debates wander down odd pathways seeking to understand *use values* and their effect on social status and investigating the significance of a distinction between *productive* and *unproductive* labor. See, e.g., Gardiner, or the discussion in Sokoloff (pp.112-137).

in social organization that would cripple the economy (and all else). Or the general profit rate would drop because wage earning women would demand better compensation than women get as wives.

This elegant analysis has one major problem. Almost no evidence supports it. At its core, the analysis uses simple functionalist reasoning. The analysis observes that capitalism left women at home rather than exploiting their labor. It infers that capitalism must therefore profit from women staying home. This inference assumes that a social arrangement must be functional to the surrounding social system that accommodates it. Let's consider what this claim implies. If it is true, it predicts that we will find that the profits of capitalism vary from society to society depending on the treatment of women. It contrasts capitalist economies that leave women in the household with others that offer them jobs equally with men. Supposedly, profits will suffer in a society that employs women as paid labor. Little evidence exists to support this inference. Where could we look for confirmation? We can make cross national and historical comparisons among capitalist economies with varying levels of female employment. Or we can compare theoretical models. With either method, we should compare profits when women do all the domestic work with profits when the sexes equally share paid employment and unpaid domestic labor. Neither approach shows that capitalism prospers more when it refuses jobs to women.⁵⁰

Still, some groups and some aspects of economic organization probably did get a boost from gender inequality. But it was a small boost. In return, the economy adapted to women's low status and thereby supported it. For example, by burdening men with the need to provide income for their families, the economy created a powerful mechanism to discipline the labor force. Men worked hard because their families depended solely on them. They decided their moral worth in others' eyes by how well they fulfilled that responsibility.⁵¹ Yet, we should not exaggerate this. Men did not degenerate into slackers and bums when more and more of their wives got jobs during the twentieth century. As another example, the employers who did hire women benefitted by their low wages. Some may have made higher profits than they would have if women were

⁵⁰ The more strictly Marxist analyses have also suffered from a theoretical class blindness about women. The subordination of women has cut across class boundaries. Their analysis implies that affluent women could not get good jobs or careers because their domestic production contributed to capitalist profits. This does not make much sense.

⁵¹ The economic contribution of employed wives is more often a necessity in the lower classes. It usually serves only to provide a marginal increase in discretionary income among the affluent classes. Therefore, it is likely that employment gives a greater boost to the status of working class women than affluent women.

paid the same as men. But not too many. Competition probably often forced down prices, transferring the savings to consumers.

Whether or not gender inequality helped capitalism, the economy has surely helped hold women down. Women's inferior status and dependence on men were fundamental assumptions guiding the organization of economic life. Employers assumed most employees would have a wife who took care of domestic work and problems. This pervasive assumption biased their hiring practices, their expectations about career commitments, and the benefits they offered their employees. Other aspects of social life also adapted to the stereotypical woman who stayed home while her husband held a job. Examples included the services offered to families, advertising, consumption patterns, education, and even the location of housing and work places (witness suburbia). These arrangements have all neglected working women.

Nonetheless, recognizing that the economy has adapted to gender inequality is different from claiming that capitalism causes women's subordination because *it* profits. This Marxist feminist argument is not compelling. No evidence substantiates that capitalist economies reap more from women's subordination than do other economies. More importantly, capitalist economies do not function better or generate higher profits if women remain housebound than they would if the sexes had equal employment. Neither empirical data nor theoretical models show an advantage to keeping women at home. So, if refusing women jobs does not benefit the economy, then women's disadvantages did not persist because they were functional to capitalism.

A more restrained, modest version of this Marxist-feminist argument, aimed at the *transition* to capitalism, might have more validity. This version would drop the crude, implied comparison between capitalist and noncapitalist societies. It also would assume women's changing position in society. Start by thinking of the division between women at home and men in jobs as a *temporary* phase in economic development. This division of labor might have eased the long term transition to a market economy. It probably gave greater flexibility to the use of labor and the movement of production from households into firms.

Simply put, as capitalism developed, a moderate transition to an intermediate state--where most permanent wage earners were men--was simpler than a more drastic, direct transition from a household economy to full external employment for both sexes. If gender inequality had not preceded capitalism, an analogous transitional stage might have developed such that one spouse in most marriages would stay home, except that the spouse could have been a man as often as a woman. But gender inequality did predate capitalism and women became housewives.

THE DOMESTIC SERVANTS OF FAMILIES

Some theorists have taken a different tact in explaining the relationship between women's employment and their household responsibilities. They use modern microeconomics in an approach called the *new home economics*.⁵² Unlike Marxist analyses, these consider women's difficulty in getting good jobs as a simple fact outside the range of their analysis. They treat families as entities who try to consume as much as possible or who aim at the best ratio between consumption and effort. Paid work and unpaid domestic work are simply different ways to get commodities and services. Most women have a low income potential. Often, such theorists contend, wives can add more to family consumption by doing household work full time than by getting a job. This is almost never true of the husband because his earning potential will be higher. Thus while the Marxist feminists claim that women's domestic labor bolsters capitalist profits, the new home economics claims that it maximizes family well being.

Unfortunately, this analysis turns out to be a sheep in wolf's clothing. Depending on how we interpret it, it is either an overdressed truism or a well disguised falsehood.

In its modest form, this approach merely accepts that people try to use family well-being as one important criterion in making employment decisions. In particular, if women can only get poor paying jobs, it becomes irrational for them to take jobs unless it is economically necessary or the jobs offer nonpecuniary rewards. When conditions are extreme, this is indisputably true. Few women will take jobs that pay a terrible wage. But then again, few will refuse a job if you offer them enough money. Both theory and history confirm this expectation. As discussed earlier in this book, the long term decline in the worth of women's household labor probably helped push them into employment. Still, you don't need a microeconomic formula to reach this conclusion.

If you try to push the theory farther, it fails. People have nothing but the crudest sense of the value of women's household labor, so they cannot make precise comparisons. Even if they could, the outcomes would not have too much influence. As shown throughout this discussion, women face many, complex conditions affecting their decisions about jobs. A rational comparison of what

⁵² Becker, Gary. "Human Capital, Effort, and the Sexual Division of Labor." *Journal of Labor Economics* 3 (Supplement, 1985): S33-S58. Berk, Richard A. "The New Home Economics: An Agenda for Sociological Research." Pp. 113-148 in *Women and Household Labor*, ed. Sarah Fenstermaker. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980. Berk, Sarah Fenstermaker. *The Gender Factory: The Apportionment of Work in American Households*. New York: Plenum, 1985.

they can earn with what they can fabricate at home might play a part, but it will usually be a small role.

Consider an analogy. In the American plantation economy of the first half of the nineteenth century, black slaves faced little hope of success but a high likelihood of intense punishment if they sought freedom. Thus, social conditions made it rational for most blacks, if acting alone, to accept their status as slaves. Just as it was rational for women to stay home when they had no hope for a decent job. Few would claim, however, that this *insight* advances our quest for an explanation of slavery.

Women's responsibility for household work, including child rearing, was caused by men's control of employment opportunities. Women's domestic labor did not produce their subordination, it revealed it. Women's domestic labor was not the chief purpose of men's resistance to women's economic advancement. It was a by-product of men's power and became one facet of strategies to maintain that power. Women's domestic labor was not a general goal of the capitalist economy, either. Under capitalism, women's restriction to households helped men stay ascendant. But capitalism itself alternately tolerated, exploited, or undermined women's domesticity according to historically specific circumstances of labor markets.

Economic Compulsion

While men's income helped them hold their advantages over women, men did not freely chose their place in the economy. It is theoretically mistaken to think the economy simply gave men opportunities it denied women. Men were not offered a choice. Just as the shortage of decent jobs and moral duties has long forced women into domestic life, obligations to provide income have long pushed men into employment.

While men's economic activities enabled their dominance over women, the desire to dominate did not drive them to take jobs. Men worked out of need, both pragmatic and status related. Neither family nor state accepted responsibility for, or accorded respect to, men who refused to earn an income. Unemployed men could escape stigma and get financial support only if they were disabled or they were old or if jobs were impossible to find. The state, religion, culture, community, family, and even his own conscience held a man responsible for his family. If a man did not provide enough family income, all these authorities would judge him a failure. If he did not make more than his wife, he courted derision. If he wished to excel rather than do just enough, he had to work even more exhausting hours at generally unfulfilling duties. Employment was

compulsory for men, and failure to conform to social expectations would bring indigence and censure.

Most men felt ambivalent about their work, and many indulged fantasies of unimpeded leisure. Neither money, power, nor status could dispel this ambivalence. Nor could the fear of losing their jobs. From most men's standpoint, women had a lucky escape from the need to hold jobs and make money. When a woman stayed in the home, her husband had only a superficial awareness of his wife's labor. To such a man, it seemed that women enjoyed leisure and freedom from authority.

The sexual division of labor between male employment and female domestic work gave each gender both resentment of the other sex's work conditions and distaste for them. Men were glad to have escaped women's dreary household toil that garnered no income. Still, they easily resented their own compulsion to work at jobs and compete at careers. Women could enjoy escape from the responsibility that forced men to work continuously. Yet, they resented their inability to get decent jobs and their confinement to the household world.

The sexual division of labor both drove the sexes apart and kept men in a superior position. It created endless misunderstandings and mutual resentments. These feelings aggravated the hostility between women and men and fueled their conflicts over power. As always, resources went far in deciding who would win conflicts. Jobs gave most men more. So men could win much more often than women.

From Economic to Social Inequality

Women's inability to get good jobs burdened them in all spheres of life. The income, status, and social ties men got from their jobs gave them an advantage over women in other social arenas, particularly the family and community. Men's economic roles linked them in a network. These links eased the flow of beliefs and complaints among men and built their solidarity. This latent organization stiffened their will and bolstered their power to dominate women. Male economic advantages translated into male social power.

Husbands's higher earnings had given them influence while wife's inability to earn a decent income had made them dependent. Their income gave men domestic power over their wives because they had the capacity to give or withhold the money women needed and wanted. Women had less attractive choices outside marriage than did men. Women usually had to raise whatever kids a couple had. They found it harder to support themselves. They usually had a harder time finding a new spouse. Women had few opportunities for independence. Women, therefore, deferred to their husbands.

These differences in opportunity sustained an example of what W. Waller termed the *Principle of Least Interest* a half century ago. Waller contended that the party who cared less about keeping a relationship would have a strategic advantage. During disputes, the less committed person could start to withdraw or threaten to withdraw sooner and more freely than the other. The more indifferent person therefore won. Even a small difference in personal investment could give the less committed person the upper hand. This power often grew over time as people adapt to it, although it also could decline if its use (or other things) diminished the other person's commitment.

Neither their higher income nor their lower dependence on marriage meant that all husbands had power over their wives. Emotional dependence also affected the calculation of least interest. As a result, a husband's emotional dependence could outweigh his wife's economic dependence. Alternatively, the strong emotional ties between spouses caused some men to forego using their power. Some men found any exercise of power aversive and avoided it at home. So, personality predispositions could push couples toward egalitarian practices or even give a wife dominance. Still, men's economic superiority granted them a strategic advantage over women in marriages.

Men's economic ascendancy also enhanced their collective power by giving them a latent organization that women didn't have. Economic ties supplied the yarn that modern societies wove into the fabric of political structure. These ties could take varied forms. They included jobs in the same workplace, managerial networks, professional organizations, and unions. Being in the same economic position gave people common interests. It furnished them a network of institutional ties that could underwrite political organization. And it gave them the money needed to take part in politics. In contrast, women without jobs stayed more isolated from each other. They had to depend on families and neighborhoods (and sometimes other institutions such as religion) for their social ties. Moreover, women's dependence on men for money and their household obligations curbed their political activity. Only a few men became politically important. Still, most politically important people were men. These men favored their sex's interests, even if they do not consciously recognize their bias.

Economic inequality therefore further divided the sexes in their other activities and institutions and helped men stay on top. It gave men a freedom that women did not have. It supplied husbands the capacity to dominate their wives. It gave men political power with two major effects. First, this caused the law and government policies to favor men's social ascendance. Second, it kept women from taking part in the fundamental political decisions that affected all people in society.