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Minimizing Workplace Gender and Racial Bias

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We all know the statistics: The gender gap in median weekly earnings among full-time wage and salary workers is about 25 percent (i.e., women earn 75 percent as much as men). The gap between whites and African Americans is 22 percent and between whites and those the Census Bureau classifies as "Hispanic origin" is 32 percent. The modest rate of decline in occupational segregation by gender that began in the 1970s slowed during the 1990s. The national unemployment rate is at its lowest point in a generation, yet the rate for African Americans remains twice that of whites. Among African-American teens the rate stood at 29 percent in

August of 1999, two and one-half times the rate for whites of the same age. Annually, American workers file about 80,000 complaints of discrimination with the EEOC and about as many with state civil rights agencies. Workplace bias by gender, race, and ethnicity is a reality in organizations large and small, in executive suites and in entry-level production and service jobs, in both the private and public sectors.

Workplace bias is pervasive; yet we know how to change workplace policies and practices to reduce bias—when and where we have the will to do so. Minimizing gender and racial bias in the workplace need not be a utopian project.

Social research conducted across many decades has taught us much about what generates and sustains workplace inequalities by gender and race. That same research, either directly or by implication, indicates the kinds of workplace policies and practices that are likely to minimize bias. The relevant research has applied multiple methodologies in a variety of contexts, including experiments in controlled laboratory settings; ethnographies and case studies in “real world” organizations both large and small, public and private, and in a range of industries; surveys done with representative samples of workers and employers; and historical studies based on archival materials from the United States and abroad. Thus, much of the scientific evidence about the structure and dynamics of gender and racial inequality in organizations has substantial external validity, providing a sound basis for policy designed to minimize bias.

That same body of social research can facilitate an organization’s effort to diagnose deficiencies in its personnel policy and practice and can guide proactive efforts to remove barriers to career advancement faced by women and minorities (Reskin 1998). Indeed, much of what has been learned from social research has been incorporated into the curriculum taught to human resource professionals in business schools (Cox 1993; Barrett 1996; Gentile 1996), and sometimes those who receive such training actually end up in positions where they are responsible for the design, implementation, and oversight of organizational policies for hiring, assigning, training, promoting, compensating, and terminating employees. Too often, however, those with relevant expertise are not hired at all, or they are placed in relatively powerless staff positions with little clout and no support from top management. For various reasons, organizations (and constituencies within organizations) differ in their willingness to address barriers to career advancement faced by women and racial and ethnic minorities, so any program to minimize workplace bias also must address the many ways organizations respond to pressures to address equal employment opportunity.

For the purposes of this article, I define *workplace bias* as differences in career outcomes by gender or race/ethnicity that are not attributable to the differences in skills, qualifications, interests, and preferences that individuals bring to the employment setting. In other words, I am describing strategies for minimizing the kind of

bias that is created directly by the policies and practices of an employer (which can include an employer’s impact on employees’ skills and aspirations). Other contributors to this volume are addressing sources of bias in other institutional realms, such as schooling, neighborhood, and family. I also consider those sources of bias, to the extent that they affect actions by employers—for example, when gender stereotypes about family obligations lead employers to assume that women are less committed to work than men, or when racial stereotypes lead them to assume that African Americans are more insubordinate than whites.

The review of research and policy recommendations offered here is directed primarily toward minimizing bias in medium to large organizations—that is, organizations that are large enough to be covered by EEO laws and regulations (in the U.S. context) and that are likely to have a specialized human resources or personnel function. In addition, I emphasize systematic sources of bias and discrimination that arise from organizational policy and practice, rather than the kind of explicit bias that can be traced directly to the prejudiced actions of bigoted individuals. Systematic discrimination is sometimes blatant and obvious (as when a retail enterprise has a policy not to hire African-American employees for positions involving customer contact). But more subtle and less visible barriers to equal employment opportunity are more difficult to eliminate and no doubt affect the careers of many more people than does outright bigotry. Policies I suggest below to address and minimize subtle forms of systematic bias are also likely to identify more blatant forms of discrimination as well.

Below, I first briefly summarize what we have learned from social research about factors that typically generate and sustain gender and racial bias in modern organizations. Then I analyze the policy implications of this research for minimizing bias. I conclude with some thoughts about sources of resistance to interventions to minimize discrimination and prospects for meaningful change.

Cognitive Foundations of Bias: Gender and Racial Stereotypes

Everyone relies on stereotypes. Research by social psychologists demonstrates conclusively that stereotypes are cognitive schemata that invariably influence how we process information about others (Bodenhausen, Macrae, and Garst

1998). The attributes we associate with specific gender and racial group labels are overlearned—that is, they are habitual and unconscious. Therefore, people are often unaware of how stereotypes shape their perceptions and behavior. Moreover, individuals whose personal beliefs are relatively free of prejudice or bias are susceptible to stereotypes in the same ways as people who hold a personal animosity toward a specific group (Devine 1989; Bodenhausen and MacCrae 1996).

Social psychological experiments demonstrate just how difficult it is to get people to attend to “individuating information” (relevant information about the individuals being considered) in assessing others, instead of relying on stereotypes about group differences. For example, in research by Thomas Nelson and colleagues, subjects were given information on both the gender (a group attribute) and personal interests (an individual attribute) for persons in a target population and asked to predict whether the college major of each target individual was engineering or nursing. Subjects in the experimental group were told that men and women in the target population were distributed equally across majors, so any stereotypes they might have about men’s and women’s vocational interests were not applicable to the predictions they were being asked to make. Subjects in the control group were not given that information. The research found that while being informed about the invalidity of stereotypes reduced the propensity to stereotype by half, it did not eliminate it, nor did it increase subjects’ reliance on individuating information (Nelson, Acker, and Manis 1996).

Experimental research by Vincent Yzerbyt and colleagues demonstrates that subjects made stereotypical judgments when they *assumed* that individuating information was present, even if no such information was in fact available. Moreover, the illusion of receiving individuating information made subjects more confident and extreme in their stereotypical judgments (Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, and Rocher 1994). The implications of studies like these for workplace practice are clear: First, the task is not to eliminate “stereotypical thinking” (it can’t be done), but rather to minimize its *impact* on personnel decisions. Second, unless done carefully, efforts to get decision makers to attend to the actual traits of individuals can backfire. Introducing negative, gender-linked, race-

linked, or simply irrelevant information may actually increase the degree to which stereotypes shape decisions while increasing decision makers’ confidence in the appropriateness of their actions (Pratto and Bargh 1991; Fiske, Linn, and Neuberg 1999). Moreover, research on stereotypes shows that minimizing bias is especially difficult when the criteria for decision making are arbitrary and subjective (American Psychological Association 1991). This is often true for both high-level jobs, where it is often believed that an employee’s qualifications and contributions are impossible to measure systematically, and lower-level jobs, where it might seem natural to assume that those traits are so readily known that no systematic assessment is necessary.

Stereotypes in Institutional Context

Experimental studies like those cited above involve random assignment within controlled environments, and they are well suited for isolating the cognitive and social psychological mechanisms involved in perception and decision making. But they are often criticized as being unrealistic and inapplicable to “real world” organizations. The decision-making contexts in laboratory settings have no history, and subjects rarely have any personal stake in the outcomes they generate. In short, they are abstracted from the cultural and institutional environments of employment decisions in the real world. Experimentalists recognize this and point out that in the workplace, decision makers approach their tasks with considerably more motivation, are often personally identified with long-standing procedures and practices, and may have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. As a result, if anything, stereotyping and in-group bias effects are probably substantially larger in the “real world” than they are in the laboratory (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978; Pratto and Bargh 1991).

Social research establishes clearly that the historical representation of women in a job has a tremendous impact on compensation and other job rewards, mobility prospects, and workplace culture (Gutek and Morasch 1982; England 1992). Experimental studies on stereotyping show that male and female job applicants with identical personal traits are matched according to their gender to jobs that are considered predominantly male and predominantly female (Glick, Zion, and Nelson 1988). And studies done in both experimental and natural settings

demonstrate the impact of "sex role spillover," whereby gender-linked traits associated with male-dominated occupations can profoundly affect the working climate for women (Gutek and Morasch 1982; Padavic and Reskin 1990; Burgess and Borgida 1997). Women who are relatively new to traditionally male-dominated work settings often attract more attention, are evaluated more extremely, are perceived as different, receive less support, and are more likely to be viewed as a disruptive force in the workplace, compared to male co-workers (Kanter 1977; Izraeli 1983). Although the history and dynamics of racial typing of jobs and occupations differ considerably from those of gender labeling, the consequences of skewed racial distributions for the social psychology of stereotyping and outgroup bias are similar to those resulting from gender imbalance, as are the resulting barriers to career advancement (Pettigrew and Martin 1987; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley 1990; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991; Devine and Elliott 1995; Collins 1997; Wilson, Sakura-Lemessy, and West 1999).

Organizational Policy and Practice: Generating and Sustaining Bias

Whether and how culturally based notions of devaluation and privilege get manifested in the workplace depend on an organization's policy and practice, as well as on its structure, internal politics, and external environment (Nelson and Bridges 1999). In medium- to large-scale organizations, pay and advancement prospects usually are closely tied to job titles and job ladders, so the visible trace of bias lies in patterns of segregation within and across organizations. The mechanisms that generate these patterns can be understood by analyzing organizations' policy and practice for hiring, job assignment, training, pay, and promotion.

As noted above, personnel systems whose criteria for making decisions are arbitrary and subjective are highly vulnerable to bias due to the influence of stereotypes—as, for example, when individual managers have a great deal of discretion with little in the way of written guidelines or effective oversight (American Psychological Association 1991). A high degree of segregation in such a system is usually a strong indicator that ascriptive traits are strongly influencing personnel decisions, because in most employment contexts it is unlikely that relevant traits for the more desirable jobs are absent among women or

employees of color but common among men or whites, or that decision makers are in fact assessing accurately whether each individual under consideration does or does not possess these traits. Far more likely is the kind of statistical discrimination that Baron and I found was typical in the 1960s and early 1970s: Some jobs were set aside for men and others for women, based on employers' stereotypical beliefs about traits thought to be unique to each gender (Bielby and Baron 1986; also see Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991 on racial stereotypes and hiring decisions).

Besides facilitating the impact of stereotypes, highly subjective personnel systems also reinforce the impact of segregated informal networks and personal ties in hiring and internal selection decisions. Word-of-mouth recruitment typically reproduces the existing gender and ethnic composition of a workforce (Braddock and McPartland 1987; Reskin and McBrier 1998). Subjective and highly discretionary internal selection systems (e.g., for promotions and access to training and desirable job assignments) favor those with personal ties to decision makers and fail to provide an opportunity for those outside of informal networks to have their qualifications considered (Brass 1985; Ibarra 1993, 1995).

Of course, more bureaucratic, rule-based, and seemingly objective personnel systems can also generate bias and produce highly segregated outcomes. Indeed, a substantial body of scholarship demonstrates the utility of viewing the policies and structure of a bureaucratic personnel system as an outcome of organizational politics, in which constituencies both inside and outside an organization mobilize resources to shape the system in a way that advances their interests (Reskin 1988; Nelson and Bridges 1999). An obvious example is the way white male workers sometimes seek to defend the appropriateness and legitimacy of strict seniority systems in industries with historical barriers to the entry of women or minorities, and with very little turnover in the most desirable jobs. In such a system, seniority—a trait that can be measured with virtual certainty and evaluated using a simple and objective decision rule—perpetuates past discrimination and white male dominance of the most rewarding jobs (Deaux 1984). Similarly, making as an absolute requirement for employment specific kinds of prior job experience may screen out women and minorities who

have acquired relevant skills through alternative routes. In many work contexts, it is reasonable to assume that prior industry experience enhances one's skills and qualifications. However, placing substantial weight on prior industry experience in an industry dominated by white males has the same effect as a strict seniority system in a firm that has historically excluded women and minorities.¹

Finally, as Acker (1989) has shown in her study of the state of Oregon's comparable worth initiative, organizational politics among competing constituencies can deflect and undermine the goals of bureaucratic systems designed explicitly to reduce workplace inequities. In short, cognitive stereotypes may be nondeliberative, and institutional forces may make a personnel system seem taken-for-granted by those who participate in it; but both personal and formal procedures can be and are manipulated by those in positions of privilege to preserve their advantage (Reskin 1988; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993).

Organizational Policy and Practice: Formalized Approaches to Minimizing Bias

Organizational policies and practices that create barriers to career advancement for women and minorities, once in place, become institutionalized and rarely change in the absence of any substantial change in a firm's business, technical, or legal environment (Stinchcombe 1965; Hannan and Freeman 1984; Baron 1991). This is especially true of personnel practices and policies that are reinforced by the firm's culture,

come to be taken for granted by both employers and employees (Doeringer and Piore 1971), and are actively defended by those who benefit from them (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). However, gender and racial bias in the workplace is by no means inevitable, and the same research that reveals the social psychological and organizational bases of career barriers also points the way toward policies that can effectively minimize bias.

Social psychological research shows that the impact of gender and racial stereotyping on judgments about individuals can be minimized when judgments are based on timely and relevant information; when decision makers evaluate that information consistently with respect to clearly articulated criteria; and when a mechanism exists for holding decision makers accountable for the process they have used and criteria they have applied in making their judgments (Salancik and Pfeffer 1978; American Psychological Association 1991; Tetlock 1992; Fiske, Lin, and Neuberger 1999). Applied to the workplace context of hiring decisions or decisions regarding selection of individuals for promotion, training, or desirable job assignments, the implications of this line of research are clear. First, what constitutes job-relevant information should be established through a systematic job analysis. Second, a mechanism must be in place for potential candidates to make their interests and qualifications known to those making the selections. Third, substantive oversight of decision making needs to be implemented, beyond simply "signing off" by a higher-level supervisor. Bringing these features to a personnel system can short-circuit the otherwise automatic tendency to rely on stereotypes and circumvent informal networks that isolate women and minorities.

Recommending these policies is not a call for a burdensome, "one size fits all," highly bureaucratized and centralized personnel system. The scope of an appropriate job analysis depends on the nature of job skills and in the complexity and volatility of the task environment. In many contexts, relying on job analyses done for similar jobs in comparable environments may suffice. Similarly, mechanisms for making interests and qualifications known can range from a simple job-posting system (easily computerized with intranet technology) to a professionally run assessment center, depending on the nature of the job and its environment. Depending on the

¹ In class action gender discrimination cases, a common defense strategy is to compare the prior experiences of the few women employed in the desirable male-dominated jobs with those of the men in the same jobs. Not surprisingly, most women have previously worked in predominantly female jobs and most men in predominantly male jobs. Therefore, once prior job histories are controlled, statistical disparities in hiring, pay, or promotion rates by gender disappear. The obvious issues raised by plaintiffs in response to such strategies are: Did decision makers actually rely objectively and systematically on prior job histories in making personnel decisions? Is prior experience in a male-dominated job actually a job-relevant requirement? And do the women who applied to the company have job-relevant skills and qualifications acquired through other kinds of training or life experiences?

nature of the selection process, oversight mechanisms might range from a substantial narrative report for decisions requiring considerable exercise of judgment to routinely generated reports with periodic on-site auditing for those based on straightforward weighting of relatively objective information. Designing an effective system with the features I identify above is not a complicated task. The human resource profession has developed a straightforward template for deciding which system is most appropriate in a given organizational context (Gatewood and Feild 1994; Heneman, Heneman, and Judge 1997); many medium- to large-sized organizations will have the relevant expertise in-house, and those that do not can easily retain outside consultants to evaluate and design such systems and make them an integral part of an organization's personnel practices.

The Limits of Formal Approaches: "EEO Accountability" is Key to Minimizing Bias

While the program outlined above is far from utopian, to some it might seem hopelessly naïve. Over two-thirds of U.S. employees already work in organizations that have written job descriptions and written policies governing hiring, firing, and performance evaluation, according to the National Organizations Study (Marsden, Cook, and Kalleberg 1996). Yet bias is far from absent in these work settings (Huffman 1995). However, the kinds of statistics compiled from the NOS and similar studies do not tell us the extent of substantive accountability in implementing written policies or the ease with which the policies can be routinely ignored. The concepts of "wired searches" or "pre-selected" promotion candidates are widely understood mechanisms for preserving the advantages of white males in many organizations, and perfunctory performance evaluations are not uncommon in many settings with written policies that look substantial on paper. So under what circumstances will the kind of formal procedures suggested above actually help minimize bias?

Missing from the recommendations I posed above is any mention of an explicit effort to assess systematically the impact of organizational policy and practice on career outcomes for women and people of color. Research examining the relationship between organizational policies and disparities by gender and race in career outcomes demonstrates that formalized policies *per se* are insufficient to reduce bias effectively

(Huffman 1995; Konrad and Linnehan 1995). So far, the recommendations I have proposed are "identity-blind"; they are "practices designed to ensure that the human resource decision-making process is the same for each individual" (Konrad and Linnehan 1995:789). Konrad and Linnehan contrast such systems with those that are "identity-conscious" in that group identity (i.e., race or gender) is taken into consideration explicitly in monitoring personnel decisions. Their study, based on a survey of 138 employers in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, showed that only identity-conscious structures were associated with reduced gender and racial disparities in career outcomes.

Scholarship on organizational responses to EEO laws and regulations is consistent with the findings of Konrad and Linnehan. Most medium- to large-sized organizations are government contractors and are required to conduct utilization analyses and prepare Affirmative Action Plans. Thus, one might think that "identity-conscious" personnel practice is almost universal in the kinds of organizations considered here. However, research studies show that firms subject to OFCCP regulation vary widely in the extent to which they implement policies and practices that have a measurable, substantive impact on equal employment opportunity and affirmative action for women and minorities. EEO regulations and laws contain considerable ambiguity regarding what constitutes compliance, and from approximately 1980 until very recently very little effective enforcement has occurred (Leonard 1989, 1994; Donohue and Siegelman 1991; Edelman 1992). Consequently, firms subject to EEO regulation have considerable discretion in the extent to which they take substantive action or merely comply symbolically by "going through the motions," e.g., by appointing EEO officers and producing plans that have no real impact on barriers faced by women and minorities (Edelman and Petterson 1999). Large organizations that are subject to outside scrutiny often have some effective programs for outreach in recruiting externally, but a close examination of internal practices often shows that the company's EEO efforts to advance minorities and women through the organization contain more symbol than substance, with little impact on actual promotion policy or practice.

Thus, besides the factors I've identified above to ensure consistency and systematic reliance on

job-relevant information in personnel practice, the final ingredient in a policy to minimize workplace bias is what could be called “EEO accountability” or explicit, substantive accountability for implementing an organization’s EEO goals. There are three components to EEO accountability. The first is to implement as part of an organization’s human resource information system the regular monitoring and analysis of patterns of segregation and differences by gender and race in pay and career advancement. Such monitoring would assess whether disparities are greater than what plausibly might be expected based on differences in job-related knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests and other job-related factors that influence an employee’s contributions to the organization. Organizations with Affirmative Action Plans usually do something like this under the rubric of “availability and utilization analyses,” but often such analyses are generic reports generated by off-the-shelf programs with little real connection to a company’s overall personnel system.² The kind of analysis I am recommending here would not be based on the generic formulae and broad occupational categories typically used in Affirmative Action Plans, but would instead rely on actual job transitions and would be based on the same information used by those who make decisions about hiring, job assignment, training, performance evaluation, promotion, compensation, and the like.

A second component of EEO accountability is systematic analysis of feedback from employees about perceptions of barriers to and opportunities for career advancement. Many organizations collect some kind of information along these lines through periodic climate surveys or “360-degree feedback” systems for performance evaluation, although use of such information to assist in identifying career barriers

is ad hoc and infrequent. Systematic monitoring of trends in employees’ perceptions of barriers to career advancement and of top management’s commitment to EEO can be quite useful in identifying subtle forms of bias and related problems not immediately apparent from analyses of more objective workforce data.

The final component of EEO accountability is explicit evaluation of managers and supervisors on their contributions to an organization’s EEO goals. Nearly all medium- to large-scale organizations have a written antidiscrimination policy, and many have a written policy stating that implementing the objectives of the Affirmative Action Plan is the responsibility of every employee. However, such policies are merely symbolic unless they also delineate explicit duties and responsibilities relating to equal employment opportunity in each manager’s or supervisor’s job description, which can then be related to specific evaluative dimensions in the performance reviews of those employees. Explicit EEO accountability of this sort is key to minimizing bias, but, unfortunately, it is probably relatively rare. In my own experience as an expert witness in employment discrimination cases, I have reviewed the deposition testimony of hundreds of managers in several dozen organizations across a wide range of industries (though, admittedly, companies that find themselves in litigation are not a representative sample of organizations). In almost every instance, top managers and EEO officers (and sometimes written policies) assert that implementing the organization’s EEO policy is the responsibility of every manager. At the same time, lower-level managers typically are unaware of any specific responsibilities they might have for EEO, and their involvement in the company’s antidiscrimination efforts typically is limited to sporadic (often less than once per year) meetings with an EEO officer and perhaps a requirement that the EEO officer sign off on certain hiring and promotion decisions. In contrast, organizations that are recognized consistently for their strong records regarding diversity almost always evaluate supervisors and managers explicitly on their contributions to equal employment opportunity and on their performance relative to their responsibilities under the organization’s Affirmative Action Plan.

² One consulting company offers an “Advantage Package” with “Easy AAP Software” that “organizes your data and makes reports that are in compliance with the standards set forth by the Office of Contract Compliance Programs. So even if you do get chosen for a random desk audit, Easy AAP will help it go smoothly, with the least disruption. . . . Easy AAP shows your utilization figures in the best possible light. With its weighted 8 Factor Availability Analysis it lets you perform trial and error configurations quickly and easily so you can find the one that shows your figures to maximum advantage.”

Concluding Thoughts

The policies I have recommended for minimizing workplace racial and gender bias are neither utopian nor radical. They are straightforward applications of organizational principles based on decades of social research. It is not difficult to make the case that implementing them will lead to more effective use of human resources and improve organizational performance. So what's holding things up?

Virtually all medium- to large-sized organizations in the United States have written nondiscrimination policies and at the very least attempt to signal to relevant constituencies that they value diversity and do not discriminate, even if such gestures are largely symbolic. Most large organizations already have implemented some aspects of what I have proposed, and the kinds of organizations that are recognized repeatedly for their efforts in the areas of EEO and diversity management usually have implemented nearly all of them in some way. The greatest deficiencies are typically in the area of EEO accountability, although I am constantly surprised at the number of very large companies that make personnel decisions based on highly arbitrary and subjective criteria. These latter companies are typically ones that emphasize both a strong organizational culture and union avoidance, and whose senior executives view any move toward structured policy as a threat to management discretion (Kochan, Katz, and McKersie 1994). The challenge in moving such companies in the direction I have recommended is to convince them that their organization can have a more formalized personnel system with effective accountability that also allows for flexibility, delegation of authority, and exercise of judgment by lower-level managers and workers. And, of course, in any organization there are individuals and constituencies who benefit from and have a stake in the structures and policies that are currently in place, and they will correctly view changes in the directions I have recommended as against their interests. Without question, minimizing workplace bias is a project that can substantially rearrange power relations within organizations, and outside coercive pressure from external constituencies (e.g., civil rights organizations and other political groups, professional associations, unions), regulatory agencies, or litigation is sometimes the only way to transform a company's personnel policy and practice.

What about affirmative action? I have avoided the term, except in referring to a specific kind of plan that organizations typically produce in response to EEO regulations. In fact, I believe what I have proposed is affirmative action as it has been understood by those who have worked to design gender- and race-conscious policies that actually move organizations toward equal employment opportunity. Unfortunately, in contemporary public discourse, the term *affirmative action* has been successfully recoded to mean "quotas" and "preferences." Nothing that I have proposed recommends anything like quotas (which are unlawful in the United States except when imposed by courts to remedy past discrimination) or granting explicit preferences in personnel decisions based on gender or race. Indeed, simply imposing preferences is a superficial response to a far more challenging problem, which is to substantively analyze an organization's personnel system, identify and remove barriers, and to "act affirmatively" to put in place systems for hiring, assigning, training, evaluating, compensating, and promoting employees that create true equal employment opportunity.

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Envisioning the Integration of Family and Work: Toward a Kinder, Gentler Workplace

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In trying to uncover just what it is about women's jobs and career profiles that creates a stubbornly persistent wage gap, I—like most other scholars of gender stratification—have been forced to look at the fundamental incompatibility between succeeding in a capitalist labor market and raising reasonably well-adjusted children. This incompatibility is experienced as an individual problem for the millions of parents, especially mothers, who must struggle to carve out time for adequate family care while holding down jobs. But the real culprit is the institutionalization of job structures unresponsive to workers' care-giving responsibilities and household/community structures that excessively privatize child-rearing responsibilities. The economic and social cost to children and families is staggering in the United States, although it is somewhat blunted in the welfare states of Western Europe that have developed family policies to ameliorate the harsher aspects of a wage labor economy (Bergmann 1996; Kamerman 1996). In this essay, I sketch out a

historically grounded understanding of how we got where we are, and therefore how we can best extricate ourselves from this situation.

The Incarnation of the Problem

Before we can begin to craft even a reasonably useful utopian solution to a problem, we must understand its historical and sociological origins, and the dynamics that have prevented successful resolution in earlier incarnations. In reading historical accounts of the transition from an agrarian household economy to a capitalist market structure, hastened by the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe and the United States, one can't help but be struck by the extent to which reproduction and child rearing become problematic as the household ceases to be the site of market production. As long as the central economic unit remains a large and flexible household, reproduction can be accommodated easily. The level of productive activity in the household, particularly the pace and timing of work tasks, is determined