
DESTINED FOR EQUALITY

THE INEVITABLE RISE OF WOMEN'S STATUS

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Excerpts on Interests ...

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Interests link structural circumstances and people's behavior. As power shifted from families to economic and political organizations, it became the servant of specialized interests distinct from men's shared interest in male ascendancy. Both power and productive economic activity moved from families to large and impersonal organizations, oriented toward profit, organizational expansion, bureaucratic control, and efficiency. As households lost control over economic productivity and family capital shrank, ordinary men's interest in preserving male dominance gradually diminished. As gender inequality weakened and women's opportunities grew, women's interests in attempting strategies to improve their social standing rose and men's interests in resisting those efforts fell.

As used in this analysis, the role of interests mirrors our ordinary understandings of human action and our commonplace expectations of reasonable behavior." *Normally, people will not, without good reason, knowingly and repeatedly make choices that will worsen their lives.* In any particular instance, other considerations may influence behavior more than interests do. These other considerations include, for example, anger, personal obsessions, or stupidity. Thus, self-interest is assumed to be one of the competing motives guiding action. We focus on interests rather than on other motives because they play a more important role in the explanation of social phenomena.

Interests gain their special significance not because they are psychologically more compelling than other motives but because they represent the relationship between the social environment and people's values. Outcomes disproportionately reinforce actions consistent with interests even when interests do not motivate actions. Those interests that are widespread and stable will exercise a broader, more consistent influence than most other motives. Whether interests are widespread and stable is determined by the social environment, not by people's psychological constitutions. The analytic concept of interests encapsulates the idea that social circumstances determine the likelihood that alternative actions will bring about more or less desirable outcomes, where the desirability of outcomes depends on cultural definitions for groups and biographical adaptations for individuals. People have similar interests if they have similar preferences and face similar social conditions. Because people in the same cultural milieu commonly share many basic goals, such as peace, prosperity, good housing, per-

sonal autonomy, prestige, and leisure, those with a common group identity will have common interests.

How far must interests change to produce a significant shift in people's actions? The characteristics of the interests largely decide how much interests control behavior. The important characteristics include homogeneity across people; severity, or the significance of different outcomes; consistency over time, or predictability; and transparency, as it affects people's ability to connect actions and outcomes. A group's typical actions will change faster and more completely when more members experience changing interests and when the changes in their interests are large, stable, and transparent.

In the historical decline of gender inequality, interests have been paramount because the driving force behind women's rising status has been the transformation of the economic and political orders, which affect people mainly through their interests. Because realigned interests have had a consistent, enduring influence that gradually increased the likelihood of actions inconsistent with gender inequality's persistence, they have had a decisive cumulative impact.

As one expression of interests, women have always resisted their subordination. No one can show that gender inequality has produced resistance by women everywhere, but all the evidence we have is consistent with this assertion. Women's constant pressure against their subordinate status was not a distinguishing characteristic of gender inequality. All inequality seems to breed resistance from people in the disadvantaged group. Even enduring systems, like the Indian castes or the Roman Catholic hierarchy, produce resistance. In subordinate groups, no matter how docile their appearance, some people always struggle against their constraints, and many people will occasionally resent and question some specific order, ruling, event, or other circumstance.

Because it was contingent on interests, men's defense of inequality was no surer than women's submission to it. Men's interest in sustaining inequality has been neither automatic nor constant. This interest has depended on trade-offs between the gains and costs involved in preserving inequality. These gains and costs depended in part on men's values or goals, but they also depended on the resources and the opportunities of both sexes. Accordingly, men's interests have varied by group and by period because these trade-offs varied.

Although sexual bigotry ruled many men's thoughts, over the long run the scope of men's efforts to resist women's bids to improve themselves subsided as the balance of men's interests changed. Over the past 150 years, changing circumstances gradually lessened the conflict between men's interests and women's advances. Successive generations of men have had smaller resource advantages and less to gain from deterring women's advance. This declining conflict of interests gradually moderated men's resistance. (Men who suffer an apparent loss of prestige might lash back more in the short run. Successive generations, however, experience the outcomes of the previous generation as a starting point, a benchmark for their assessments of what is possible and just.)

The interests of powerful men are a crucial special case. These men have controlled government and business. They also have created and enforced the laws, employment practices, and varied social policies that favored men. Through these actions, they have reinforced ordinary men's ascendance. But powerful men eventually pursued strategies that benefited women and eroded ordinary men's privileges. They adopted policies that gave women education, employment, and expanded legal rights. Powerful men were rarely ruled by some inherent, enduring interest in preserving male dominance simply because they enjoyed its privileges. Instead, powerful men's interests were most firmly tied to the sources of their power, whether business or government.

The gender-related interests of powerful men have significantly changed over the past 150 years. First, powerful men became gradually less dependent on ordinary men's responses to policies that benefited women. In part, powerful men became more distant from ordinary men and less dependent on their goodwill as government and business grew large. In part, ordinary men's potential opposition to improvements in women's status declined because their interests and resources changed. Second, powerful men's personal interests became more attached to the interests of the organizations giving them power. Third, economic and political transformations created opportunities for powerful men to exploit women as employees or political party workers, indirectly increasing women's opportunities. Fourth, after women's status started to rise, they became economic and political actors whose responses to policies had increasing weight.

As the links between powerful men's personal interests and the

source of their power were changed by economic and political development, they increasingly induced powerful men to adopt policies that benefited women's status. In the modern era, it is not that men lack sexist motives or that they have no interests in preserving male dominance; rather, other interests have greater social and historical effect. Men's interests in preserving patriarchal privileges are now much less than in the premodern family. In the modern world, organizational interests are indifferent to gender, power becomes attached to organizational interests, and the interests and actions of men who wield power become subject to the interests of the organizations that provide their power. The social significance of interests always depends on the distribution of power relative to those interests. That is why there is little explanatory value in saying it was as much in women's interests as in men's to monopolize family power or good jobs. The statement is accurate, but it is not meaningful, because women did not have the resources to realize such preferences. To be theoretically useful, interests usually must refer not simply to preferences but to the relative value of practically possible actions, taking into account their costs and the variability of outcomes. In the modern world, economic and political power, concentrated in organizations with no interests in gender inequality, eroded men's interests in preserving women's collective disadvantages and reduced men's capacity to act on what residual interests they experienced. Men's attachment to their gender advantages have gradually changed from sustainable interests toward nominal preferences.

The emergence of modern economic and political organization has been the engine of change that slowly disengaged positional inequality from gender inequality. It severed the power needed to preserve male dominance from the interests linked to it. The economic and political transformations did not directly oppose sex inequality, but they sufficiently separated the interests produced by positional inequality from the interests generated by sex inequality that the two sets of interests lost their capacity to consistently reinforce each other.

The more disembedded gender inequality became from economic and political structures, the more vulnerable it became. This separation rearranged the interests of women, men, and organizations, giving ever more people priorities that no longer fitted the actions needed to preserve gender inequality. Treating the sexes differently increasingly became more a burden than an advantage to institutions and

people with power. Although men remained in control, economic and political organizations gradually adapted policies to suit their institutional interests, even when those policies favored women's collective interests over those of men. For example, employers would hire women if they believed this would substantially increase profits even if they personally believed women should stay at home. Similarly, politicians would support women's political participation if they thought that doing so would enhance their party's power, even if they personally disliked having women in politics. As social power became ruled by institutional interests, women's interests in reducing sex inequality became more effective than men's interests in preserving it. Because of their inherent interests in bettering themselves, women continually resisted inequality and responded quickly to new opportunities. Women's constant pressure required men to maintain an equally constant defense of inequality. Ordinary men's defense of inequality, however, depended on the value they got from it and faltered as such value diminished. Powerful men's actions went even further. Their interests in stabilizing and expanding their power, economic or political, increasingly fostered policies that coincided more with women's interests than with those of men.

GENERALIZATION FROM AN ANALYSIS BASED ON ONE NATION

Women's status has risen similarly in many countries, though at different rates and with different historical contours.¹¹ Gender inequality has declined in many nations because they have experienced comparable but independent causal conditions. International influence has played a lesser role.

Although the history of gender inequality's decline may differ in many ways across nations, the driving causal processes have been the same. In each case, power migrated into bureaucratic organizations, gender inequality became disembedded from economic and political positional inequality, and interests concerning gender inequality gradually realigned.

If this argument is correct, the crucial causes of gender inequality's decline have been conditions and processes characteristic of modern nations. To the degree that I have accurately identified these causes in the United States, the analysis is generalizable to other countries.

women's responses to these choices in one generation had the potential to change the choices facing the next generation. Those who saw this possibility vied to promote, to impede, or to pilot these changes.

THE INHERENT REBELLION

Before the modern period, women's resistance to the constraints upon their lives could not budge the social structures sustaining gender inequality. Only under modern conditions, starting in the early nineteenth century, did women's individual efforts to gain greater status become more effective. Then social power migrated from households into organizations, powerful men's interests and ordinary men's interests shifted, and women found new possibilities for improvement in their status.

The changing patterns of women's individual efforts to achieve greater freedom and status have less dramatic appeal than the suffrage movement or modern feminism. Yet they probably helped to reduce gender inequality at least as much as did organized rebellion. Women sought education, they took jobs, they had fewer children, they joined voluntary associations, they entered the political party system, they joined unions, they demanded a greater voice in family decisions, and they divorced husbands to escape bad marriages. All these actions, and others, challenged constraints on women's identity. Although these were individual actions, they had historical impact because they represented the shared interests and ideas produced by women's changing social circumstances.

To be sure, men and women still often found themselves responding to similar conditions. As spouses, siblings, and parents and children, women and men were bound together by sentiment. They lived in the same households, usually had the same class and ethnic identity, and shared the same fate. Divergent, crosscutting systems of social inequality and social identity—such as class, ethnicity, and religious affiliation—stratified these households. Women and men in the same family or social group often shared more assumptions with each other than with people of the same sex in other strata. Working together, being born into the same families, growing up and dying together, loving (and hating) each other in permanent intimate relationships, raising children together, always dependent on each other, women and men thought and acted similarly. Studies have long shown women and

men to have similar attitudes. Even today, some research suggests, working women identify their class position more with their husband's position in the work force than with their own.² While inequality and the cultural treatment of gender have stressed the differences between women and men, their attitudes, their ideas, and their agendas were strikingly similar. Women and men were more similar than different. These similarities ruled people's actions much of the time.

Yet gender inequality permeated peoples' lives, placing women and men in disparate social positions that affected their outlooks and their actions. What distinguished the actions of women from those of men were their circumstances, not their motives. Both women and men tried to fulfill their socially defined obligations and to advance their interests in a practical way. However, inequality gave women different opportunities and different resources from men, making women's actions in pursuit of their interests less effective than men's.

Although there have always been both women and men who resented the constraints of their gender roles, women's expressions of this resentment produced pressures against inequality and men's did not. Two reasons stand out. Women were more likely than men to act against the system of inequality because they suffered net disadvantages while men enjoyed net advantages. Moreover, their rebellious acts were much more likely to challenge the system of inequality.

The differing circumstances of women and men directly affected their interests and their roles in changing inequality. Women's personal resources were fewer than men's in their social stratum. Women had an inferior legal status, fewer political rights, and fewer economic resources. They also confronted cultural constraints on their behavior. This strategic disadvantage meant that most women had little opportunity to improve their circumstances individually through direct conflicts with men. To avoid the typical dependency on a husband, father, or other man, women had to endure the costs of marginal life choices, such as setting up independent households with meager income or joining a religious order. To achieve more, they had to await new opportunities or engage in collective action.

Selective mating commonly assured men's resource and status advantages in marriages. If mating had ignored other sources of status such as social background, wealth, race, and, to a lesser degree, income, then marriages would have created more variation in spouses' relative resources. Wealth, education, or family resources would have

given a minority of women leverage over less well-endowed husbands. This rarely occurred. Because most marriages took place between women and men within the same social stratum, all men had a resource advantage over their wives. Middle-class women may have fared better than both poor and more affluent women. A wealthy, prominent, or influential man usually commanded resources greatly exceeding those of his wife (even if she came from a high-status family, although such a background might sometimes mitigate the resource disparity). In poor, low-status families, where scarcity gave rule to need, any gender advantage could give men considerable power over their spouses. Such men gained advantage even though their resources seemed few compared to those of people in higher strata (although low-status men's gender advantage might have effectively disappeared, if their resources fell extremely low). Gender inequality varied in some ways by class, but women were uniformly disadvantaged.

Reflecting their contrasting circumstances, women and men had opposing relations to inequality's traditional distribution of restraints and opportunities. No matter what motives or understandings they had, men reinforced inequality by fulfilling their traditional role obligations and using the associated opportunities. No matter what motives or understandings they had, women challenged inequality by resisting unequal arrangements. Thus, when thoughtlessly pursuing normal role expectations, men's actions reinforced inequality while women's actions strained the system of inequality. These opposing stresses actively influenced inequality if, and only if, altered circumstances shifted the imbalance between them.

Throughout most days, a woman repeatedly has either to contest or to concede gender inequality. (So does a man, but the tensions are different.) The issues and alternatives have changed over time, but the pervasive implications of inequality have not. Does a young woman challenge a stereotyped comment on women she overhears her brother make to her mother (or her husband make to his buddy), or does she silently assent? If a man on the street or in some gathering makes a lewd comment on her appearance, does she smile, ignore him, frown, call him names, or kick him between his legs? If a friend bubbles over excitedly because she has found a man to make her life meaningful, does a woman make a toast to her friend's good luck or advise her to quit throwing her life away on men? Does she adopt her husband's name when she gets married? Does she accept or reject responsibility

for the kids' lunch? Much of life's ordinary activity assumes or occurs along the boundaries between male and female identities, always making these boundaries a potential object of contention.

Women's part in the give-and-take of normal female-male interactions commonly strained against inequality while men's part defended that inequality. As women and men negotiated responsibilities, joint decisions, and the shared definition of reality, they pushed and pulled against the normative definitions of their gender roles and their respective resources. Usually they did not think of these exchanges as conflicts over gender inequality. Rather, they saw them in personal terms. Yet except in extraordinary cases men held an advantaged position in these negotiations. As both women's and men's claims reflected their distinctive gender interests, they necessarily pushed in different directions.

On balance, women's preferences pushed toward greater gender equality while men's pushed away from it. This might not happen when people were mistaken about the effects a choice would cause, when they were indifferent to the particular effects, or when they were exposed to peculiar circumstances that made the expected effects of actions different for them than for most others (for example, because they were employers). However important such exceptions, inequality channeled women's interests and their resentments. Therefore, women usually contended for greater equality with men, even if they did not think of their conflicts in these terms.

Similarly, women were more likely than men to adopt a sustained strategy that challenged inequality. Men did experience resentment derived from inequality. Their resentment concerned either male responsibilities, such as those for holding jobs and providing income, or the norms that restricted men from "feminine" actions, such as the expectations that men would not care for children or express "weak" emotions. Resentment caused some men to reject the responsibilities or constraints of the male role; for example, they became criminals, dropouts, or sexual deviants. These men's violation of male role expectations did not, however, directly threaten other men's advantages. The men who rejected the typical male role also did not win any increment in status or resources to offset the social disapproval they provoked. Nothing occurred to motivate other men to follow their lead. Sometimes women rejected their gender-role responsibilities, such as

to gain any position with greater status. Like men who cast off some aspects of the male role, these women's rebellion did not place pressure on gender inequality. In contrast, some women tried to enter positions usually reserved for men. These women did directly threaten male advantages. If successful, they did win some increased status and resources that served as a model for other women.

These observations stress ordinary women, but most women were ordinary in this sense. Women wielded little influence through positions of power, which men largely monopolized. The actions of powerful men had special importance, because such men exercised influence and had distinctive interests. Because very few women held positions with power, they had no comparable group. Women therefore did not influence change through decisions over institutional policies, because they did not control institutions.

Women's collective power was also less than men's. Men's gender interests received a collective defense without explicit organization toward that goal through men's economic and political links. Male-dominated government and business sustained policies favoring men. Women could achieve a countervailing collective power only if they either penetrated the institutions of power in significant numbers or created effective organizations to promote their interests. Because of women's fewer individual resources, they could successfully pursue these strategies only when changing circumstances gave them new opportunities.

Women and men had opposing experiences of the changing circumstances that led to reduced inequality. Not surprisingly, women more often welcomed and gratefully used new opportunities to engage in traditionally male activities while men more often resented and resisted an apparent erosion of their rights. Many women experienced increases in women's opportunities, available resources, and potential statuses as both practically and symbolically valuable. This positive experience prompted them to welcome and champion the changes. Some women, particularly those who could foresee no personal benefits from the changes, did sometimes feel threatened by these changes. Still, on balance, women reinforced changes that reduced inequality by using new opportunities, regardless of their motives or understandings. In contrast, men repeatedly experienced women's efforts to improve themselves as threats to legitimate rights that men had earned, and responded with resentment and opposition. As their inter-

process that can help explain how resistance could decline faster than the circumstances provoking change. Men's direct opposition to women who sought higher status has not been an absolute and unchangeable attribute of membership in a dominant group or masculine culture. Men's resistance has reflected the prevalent conditions of dominance. These conditions not only gave men the means for successful opposition; they made men's opposition appear a just and worthwhile effort to protect the rights they had earned.

Men's conscious opposition to increased equality has been most consistent and effective when men have believed themselves subject to injustice and foreseen deprivations if women's actions went unchecked. Any changes in society that reduced men's sense of right or altered their assessment of gains and losses owing to women's behavior threatened to reduce men's opposition.

THE DECLINE IN MEN'S COMMITMENT TO THE SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN

Men sustained sex inequality through two kinds of actions: incidental and purposeful. Many of men's actions indirectly reinforced sex inequality even though they were not directed at women or motivated by concern with gender inequality. Still, when threatened, men often intentionally resisted women's efforts to better themselves. Both types of actions declined over time, but the initial problem is to show why men have progressively abandoned conscious opposition to greater gender equality. The answer to this problem, however, depends on some reasons for the decline in men's actions indirectly reinforcing gender inequality.

While men of all sorts opposed women's advances for varied reasons, the distinction between the actions of ordinary and powerful men is particularly important. Men who had economic or political power have had a different relationship to gender inequality from ordinary men. As a result, while both ordinary men and powerful men reduced their resistance to women's rising status, they followed different strategies, pursued different motives, and had different effects.

The acts of an ordinary man generally only directly affected his own relations to women and indirectly added to the weight of all men's similar efforts. In contrast, powerful men could influence the circumstances of many common women and men. For example, when com-

mon men opposed their wives' employment, their actions had a far more restricted range of effects than corporate directors' decisions about female employment or government officials' decisions about the legality of discriminatory hiring practices.

Before industry exploded in the nineteenth century, men had an immediate and self-evident interest in excluding women from their economic and political roles. When male-headed households controlled access to the means of livelihood and to political participation, the men's defense of their economic and political status coincided with their defense of sex inequality. To sustain their position in the male status system, men had to gain whatever property and social position they could from their parents and to provide as much property and social position as possible when their own sons repeated this competition in the next generation. Similarly, legal and political processes, controlled by small local or national elites whose own positions were at issue, reserved most citizenship rights to male heads of households. Men's status in the household and in the public realm were linked. Male household authority and men's exclusive membership in the public realm sustained each other.

Increasingly, the absorption of economic activity by firms reduced most men to employees, and large-scale, representative government reduced most men's political participation to voting during elections. Previously, a woman could personally gain economic or political status only at the expense of her husband, father, or brother. Some man had to be losing control of the family estate if a woman was gaining it. Once jobs and political participation were gained through ties between individuals and large organizations, no direct link between a woman's gain and some man's loss remained.

Men could still identify their interests with resisting women's economic and political advancement. Men could perceive their personal interests as threatened if women entered their occupation or if their wives pursued new opportunities. Born into a system where women deferred to men and protected men from low-status domestic responsibilities, men easily experienced women's efforts to improve their status as unjust attacks. These threats were, however, mild compared to earlier circumstances that had forced men to contemplate losing their family capital or their political status. Now, men's interests in preserving their status relative to other men did not stand directly in the way of women's aspirations.

As economic expansion and related changes in the family have progressively reduced the value to husbands of wives who stay at home, more and more men have discovered that the employment of their wives will, on balance, increase their standard of living. Men once commonly opposed their wives' employment, insisting that their wives spend all their time caring for their children and household.⁵ When a woman did take a job, her husband usually demanded that his job and his plans continue to take precedence and that she continue to assume most responsibility for the household. Men's interest in their wives' domestic subordination was not absolute, however. Men's interests depended on social conditions. For those interests to clearly favor wives' continued domesticity, men had to believe they got a better life through their wives' personal service than they would gain by their wives' employment. Employers' interests in hiring women have meant that women have had increased opportunity to find permanent, full-time jobs. Men learned that their wives' additional income had more value than the lost domestic labor.⁶ Magnifying this effect in the last two decades, men increasingly stood to gain more social respect if their wives had successful careers than if their wives stayed at home.

Moreover, however unhappily men might have greeted each new experiment of more women entering into activities previously monopolized by men, they repeatedly discovered that their anticipatory anxieties were groundless. This recurring experience also diminished the value of women's subordination.

The history of men's opposition to sexual equality teems with false prophecies of imminent disaster. Men predicted doom when women gained legal equality, won the vote, entered the labor force, or took positions in government. While these fears arose from a need to justify inequality, both historical and recent data suggest that men really believed them. When believed, these fears increased the apparent value of opposing any changes that would have improved the status of women. Although some theoretical analyses grant credence to these predictions by attributing gender inequality to the better lives men gained through women's subjection, historical experience did not support them. Men's lives have changed as women's status has risen, and some of these changes were experienced as losses. The losses were balanced by gains, however, as women provided new income to their families.

Each advance by women that left men's lives undamaged gave fur-

ther evidence that such fears were dubious motives for resisting women's advances. As more women defied convention out of need or drive or circumstance, an ever wider circle of people experienced such fears as groundless. The more that women proved such fears false by broadening their social position without dire effects for men, the less commitment men had to resisting women's further advancement.'

The same changing circumstances that reduced the benefits men could expect from preserving sex inequality also diminished men's capacity to restrain women. The concentration of economic and political power outside the family gradually reduced men's capability to individually enforce the subordination of their wives, their daughters, and other women in their lives. This declining capacity held back even those men who did not recognize, or wished to ignore, the reduced value and legitimacy of women's subordination.

Every increase in women's options improved their standing in marriages and reduced men's capacity to control them. Once more jobs were available to women, they could conceive of living without husbands or be less dependent on their husbands' control over money. With a declining birth rate and increased government services for children, particularly schools, children functioned less as a handicap to women's independence. The increasing ease of divorce changed husbands' and wives' expectations. Both saw continued marriage less as their unavoidable fate and more as a possible future contingent on mutual acceptance. Men derived their family authority from their wives' dependence, and that dependence was due to women's constrained alternatives. As those constraints loosened, men's capacity to impose compliance on their wives dwindled.

Simultaneously, ordinary men lost their collective capacity to induce large economic and political organizations to deny women equal access or equal status in these spheres. As power migrated to these institutions, their interests gradually favored abandoning differential concern for women and men. Ordinary men could not combine effectively against this institutional momentum. The power wielded by these large organizations and the social distance between the top and bottom tiers made the organizations impervious to the concerns of ordinary men. These institutions listened to ordinary men only when their concerns were backed by widely organized efforts. As men's interests became increasingly fragmented and as the reasons for resisting women's assimilation lost their importance, such organized resistance

became implausible. Ordinary men could and did still make difficulties for women entering their occupations or violating their expectations that women should defer to men. But these efforts could only slow, not substantially change, the societal movement toward less gender inequality.

With each successive generation, men also were less forceful and less successful when they resisted women working in their occupations and competing for jobs. Male opposition did not disappear, but its location and intensity changed. A century ago, men rarely worked with women. Today, men have women co-workers in most occupations and work settings. Cashiers, assembly-line workers, doctors, teachers, police officers, and managers are examples of occupations in which men now normally have female colleagues but seldom did a century ago. While many women in male-dominated occupations have had to contend with poor treatment from their male co-workers, most men now seem to abide women's presence. Sometimes this acceptance may be mere resignation, but even reluctant acceptance has allowed women much greater opportunity than the active opposition of the past.

Men in low-status blue-collar jobs or low-status white-collar jobs faced the greatest threat from competition with women, but they also had the least power to resist. They had no influence over hiring, promotion, or training, and they were often poorly organized. If the organization of the industry or labor process sometimes allowed male workers to organize lasting unions, as in some parts of the textile industry, then the male unions were apt to organize women for self-protection. If the labor process demanded cooperation among workers, then men could try to withhold cooperation from female workers. However, employers could, and often did, defeat this last strategy by segregating women from men. Not surprisingly, these low-status jobs offered employers the greatest opportunities to replace men with women. This substitution happened repeatedly, for example, to sales clerks and to many machine operators in factories. Until the 1960s, women's progressively increasing employment occurred mostly in low-status positions. The relative weakness of male worker opposition helped to concentrate women at the bottom.

The formal, organized opposition of male unions to women's entering male-identified, working-class jobs began its conclusive decline after the rapid rise of large industrial unions in the 1930s, but it had

never been effective. When employers had strong economic incentives for hiring women, they usually did so even if opposed by male labor. Over time, unions switched their emphasis to organizing women rather than excluding them. This strategy extended the same logic that American unions applied to other kinds of marginal workers. Sometimes a group of workers became a competitive threat that the union could not hope to eliminate. Sometimes organizing a new group of workers promised to increase the union's power. In either circumstance, organization became union policy.⁸ Even in the nineteenth century, male unions organized women when they decided this strategy was more effective than trying to prevent their employment.⁹

Self-interest drove male labor organizations to support women workers, albeit in a roundabout way. The final occasion for widespread union opposition to working women occurred during the Great Depression of the 1930s. This opposition took a special form, however. The arguments focused on married women with employed husbands. They claimed that in such hard times jobs should be rationed to families, justifying restrictions on female employment. Implicitly, these arguments accepted women's employment if it did not lead to many families' getting no jobs in a time of high unemployment. During World War II, male labor organization in the United States had to respond to a rapid increase in female employment. War transformed the leading employment issue from finding enough jobs to finding enough workers. As women replaced men in many jobs, the unions that assumed male control of occupations or industries faced a grave threat to their organizations. This threat forced them to adopt a strategy that had been evolving and applied selectively since the nineteenth century. They would demand that women entering an occupation had to receive the same wages and benefits as men. They usually did not make a general issue of discrimination against women. They mainly opposed discrimination against women when it gave employers incentives to adopt strategies that would harm male workers. Through such policies, male union strategies largely reflected their organization interests. They resisted women's entry to an occupation until women employees seemed inevitable, then they demanded equal treatment for women. Both strategies aimed to protect labor organization by protecting the position of male employees, although the first strategy also gave outlet to men's prejudices against women.

The history of informal, on-the-job opposition to women's employ-

ment (and training) is harder to evaluate. Numerous personal accounts depicting the experiences of women entering male-identified jobs during the 1960s and 1970s provide explicit testimony that such opposition still persisted. When compared to similar accounts from early in the century, however, these stories have a different impact. They commonly suggest that the informal male opposition had become significantly weaker and shorter-lived. In recent years, the women who pioneered entry into modern male occupations still needed considerable courage and tenacity. Those that followed have much for which to thank these trailblazers. While the information available is scanty, it seems likely that at some time in the past, courage would not have been enough to gain success against male resistance. However, in lower-status occupations, both blue-collar and white-collar, once employers became committed to hiring women, men's resistance could no longer hold them back. With only a weak capacity to oppose women's employment, these men's interests shifted toward accommodating women co-workers. While men's informal on-the-job opposition once effectively prevented women's entry to a job or an occupation, this resistance is now like a decaying dam bursting before a flood.

Men in high-status blue-collar or high-status white-collar jobs encountered less threat from women and had more power to resist them. To enter the occupational world of managers, professionals, supervisors, and skilled craftsmen, a person usually needed training and promotion by people already in that occupation. Employers were much less able and less motivated to place women directly in these positions. The men in these higher-status occupations had less reason than men with lower-status jobs to fear loss of jobs or salary reductions from the general competition of women. Yet, while they may have had less inherent interest in resisting women's advancement, they also had no reason to support it. Instead, the self-interest of such men usually favored training and supporting men. This strategy would avoid any possible recriminations from other prejudiced men, and it promised much more likely future benefits than did supporting women. Because employers had considerably less leverage, because employers had fewer reasons to impose women on these occupations, and because women found it hard to get the needed skills, credentials, or experience, men in high-status occupations could effectively bar women with little apparent effort.

In middle-class occupations, professional organizations largely avoided women's entry into the prestigious professions through the 1950s. They achieved women's absence with little conscious strategy and little effort. In the prestigious professions—medicine and law were the prototypes—members of the profession, subject to professional sanctions, controlled admission to professional schools, licensing to practice, and hiring for most professional jobs. Faced with these surrounding fortifications, which seemed impregnable, most women gave up any aspirations without challenging the gatekeepers. Once the equal opportunity legislation of the 1960s gave women a battering ram, they found that these gatekeepers' flimsy bars gave way surprisingly easily. As the doors flew open to women, some of the more prejudiced and outspoken men in these professions made a lot of noise to express their despair. But the new state policies decreed women's assimilation. The modern feminist movement and fervently ambitious young women actively demanded women's assimilation. Against this pressure, the prestigious professions made little organized effort to challenge or oppose women's entry)

Laws against discrimination shifted the balance of interests for men in higher-status positions. These men had a greater stranglehold on entry and promotion, but they also had less direct interest in resisting women's entry. Their influence over recruitment and training deprived employers of a sufficient incentive to force the employment of women. Women were left with no means to gain the skills and experience that would make them seem a valuable commodity that employers should exploit. Yet laws against sex discrimination altered the costs and risks enough to change the balance of interests guiding men in high-status occupations and those of their employers. The penalties attached to flagrant discrimination were more costly than the reduced likelihood of profiting from advancing the careers of men. Moreover, once the state made sex discrimination illegal, women became a better risk than in the past. One could assume that they would do better than women in the past because the same laws against discrimination would influence their future.

Ultimately, the residues of male resistance to women have fallen in one occupation after another through the sheer weight of resignation. Opposing the first women entering an occupation or workplace seemed both a plausibly practical strategy and a good outlet for resentments. As men saw the number of women employed rise, and also

often experienced their own wives' taking jobs in other occupations, these motives lost their power. Women's presence became ordinary and inevitable. People rarely resist the ordinary and the inevitable, however much they may wish it were otherwise.

Every step in women's economic and political assimilation reduced ordinary men's means to oppose those women seeking the next step. As employers offered more jobs to women, ever more women either had their own income or could foresee getting an income. When income opportunities, even at low-status jobs, combined with increasingly liberal divorce laws, women gained alternatives to marriage. Simultaneously, the state increasingly denied men the right to use violence against women. The state also reduced men's legal hold over their wives and daughters. While female suffrage did not propel women into political power, it did make the female electorate a growing concern of politicians. Losing the ability to intimidate women with threats of economic deprivation or violence, and faced with women's greater ability to support themselves, men had less capacity to maintain dominance.

As it became less practical, opposing women's access to opportunities enjoyed by men has gradually lost social legitimacy. This moral shift has magnified men's response to the falling value of women's subordination. Over the past hundred years, the legitimacy of suppressing women's efforts to better themselves dwindled. Belief in such actions fell victim to meritocratic ideals expanding within society's major institutions and women's partial assimilation by those institutions.

The meritocratic and individualistic ideas developed by the educational, economic, and political systems did not eliminate men's belief in dominance, but they eroded its justification. In consequence, men had a shrinking supply of symbols to use in public claims against women. They also had a declining capacity to motivate their dominance through moral outrage. Meanwhile, mounting evidence discredited the belief that women were unable to fill men's jobs or political roles. Education gained more and more recognition as the measure of an individual's employability. Women's performance in school matched men's. Moreover, the experiments of employers tempted by the low cost of female labor belied beliefs that they were unable to perform well. When given skilled jobs with responsibility and authority, women did fine.

The evidence for these changes can be found by comparing men's statements about gender inequality issues over time. These statements appear in legislative debates, judicial decisions, social studies, popular press reports, and literature. In the early nineteenth century, the idea of women holding male positions was generally regarded as so obviously ludicrous that it could be used to make fun of other proposals. Anything as silly as women holding political office and running firms was silly indeed. By the early twentieth century, men's comments on women's place seem much more measured. Women should not be like men, but the differences in their rights and responsibilities must be weighed carefully and expressed thoughtfully. As the twentieth century progresses, men's comments favoring higher women's status become more frequent and more assured, while those supporting sex inequality become more strained and defensive. The men speaking against women's advances in the 1970s display bitterness and fear rather than the humor and confidence characteristic of men speaking against women's advances in the 1870s. Thus, uncontrollable changes in ideology made it harder for men to convince themselves or others that actions to keep women down were necessary or just. Even so, many men clung to their beliefs in male superiority, refused to apply meritocratic norms to women, and resisted giving women credit for their performance at work or in schools. These defensive efforts to sustain an ideology of female inferiority, however, became increasingly shrill and less compelling.

Over the past 150 years, ordinary men's interests have been shifting. Each generation has got less value, found fewer means, and faced less legitimacy for subordinating women than did the preceding generation. Not surprisingly, these changing circumstances dampened their opposition to women's improving status. Over time, men's generalized or abstracted opposition to women's advancement also declined. In this form, men opposed the advancement of women with whom they had no direct relationship. This included, for example, men opposing the entry of women into male occupations other than their own or men opposing the increasing political participation of all women.

How much did men oppose the advancement of women when the change they resisted would have no known, direct effect on their own lives? Theoretical work on gender inequality sometimes refers to generalized resistance by men, but concrete evidence that would allow us to compare such resistance over time and place is hard to find.

The idea that men act to protect their common interests also raises conceptual problems. Does this mean that all men's immediate self-interests consistently equal the collective interests of men? Does it mean that a common identity produced through ideology or socialization produces common action despite men's divergent self-interests? Neither seems compelling, as we know that men did not consistently defend the interests of their gender.

The many referenda on woman suffrage show this emphatically. All across America, these referenda occurred from the Civil War until woman suffrage finally realized success after World War I. In the state referenda, from one-third to three-quarters of the men who voted supported woman suffrage." These men could vote any way they pleased without concern for repercussions. So, why did many men seemingly vote against men's collective interests by supporting woman suffrage? No sensible answer is possible unless we accept that *men did not possess a universal commitment to oppose general improvements in women's status*. When men did not see their own self-interests at stake, they were likely to respond mainly to the symbolic aspects of issues concerning women's status. While the proper place of women and men was one symbolic concern men would consider, it did not have an inherent priority over other symbolic concerns such as democracy, justice, or the defense of class identity.

POWERFUL MEN'S DECLINING OPPOSITION

The actions of men in positions of power embody the collective force of male dominance. These men's capacity to defend male dominance probably did not suffer significant reductions comparable to those of the average individual male. Their interests, however, were more responsive than ordinary men's when the value and legitimacy of subordinating women declined.

Powerful men could and did take actions that reduced the subordination of women in general. The conditions of power made such men responsive to practical considerations of policy effectiveness and administrative rationality. Social power also detached such men's personal interests from their actions' consequences for gender inequality. Their policies affecting women followed an erratic path. Powerful men were usually more knowledgeable than other men. Nonetheless, prejudice and ignorance often blinded them to the reality of their situation.

woman suffrage. Resistance to woman suffrage was a complex mix of symbolic antagonism and political anxiety. These motives were played against a backdrop of rapidly changing social conditions.

Looking back from today's perspective, we might mistakenly infer that the state consistently fought to keep the vote from women. In reality, the state did not have to do anything to keep the vote from women. Or, to be more precise, the state did not have to act unless women agitating for suffrage could threaten the government's power or men (in or out of government) showed strong support for giving women the vote. Only men were in government, and only men could vote (at least initially). The issue before the state was not how to keep the vote away from women but whether (or when) to give it to them. Until legislators had strong reasons for giving women the vote, however, they needed only weak reasons to sidestep the issue.

The franchise was a constitutional issue, requiring a high level of support to win (at both the state and national levels). As only men had voting rights, this required a high level of acceptance by men. To give women the franchise, most states needed a two-thirds majority in both chambers of the state legislature and a majority popular vote. Similarly, the federal amendment needed a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress, then affirmation by three-quarters of the state legislatures. Usually, then, substantial acceptance by men was not enough. Only overwhelming support could give women the vote. Often, even when woman suffrage suffered defeat in legislative votes or popular referenda, considerable male support was present.

The state's graceless resistance to granting woman suffrage should not lead us to infer that it had some substantial, integral reasons for its actions. A few legislators may have envisioned themselves as Knights, with fealty sworn to Men, fighting back the infidels, agreeing with U.S. Senator Garrett Davis of Kentucky, who stated in 1866: "The great God who created all the races and in every race gave to man woman, never intended that woman should take part in national government among any people." Most, however, seem to have approached the issue with less commitment and more pragmatism, spiced with odd mixtures of prejudice and confusion.

Once working-class men had received the vote, men's interests concerning woman suffrage shifted. The middle-class men who held sway in government found the inclusion of middle-class women politically less threatening than admitting working-class men. In the reforming

atmosphere of Progressive politics, women even seemed a possible stabilizing force. Ordinary men's growing acceptance of woman suffrage, shown in state referenda on the issue, suggests that they did not experience voting as a resource for preserving gender advantages.

The earlier process extending legal rights to women through the Married Women's Property Acts and the process granting them suffrage had some similar underlying causes, although their outward appearance differed markedly. Suffrage repaired women's political disabilities, which did not fit the emerging social order, just as the property acts repaired women's legal disabilities that were no longer functional. The electoral government concentrated and rationalized authority as did the market economy. Each could tolerate, even reinforce, other existing systems of inequality, but this tolerance broke down if it proved too costly. Accordingly, the state abandoned women's common-law legal disabilities because they interfered with commerce and middle-class inheritance, and it conceded the vote to women because the modern political process took away both the reason and the means to keep women out.

However, economic and political progress did not create direct institutional interests in giving women the vote comparable to the interests that favored extending property rights to women. The economic and legal system *needed* women to have property rights like those of men. So it created them. Or, to be more accurate, the system needs created strong interests in change among people with political influence. In contrast, these systems had no direct need for women to participate through voting. They did not create strong interests in extending the franchise among those with power. Yet these institutions also had no need to deny women the franchise. At first many politicians did resist woman suffrage. But to a large degree this resistance reflected their prejudices, not their real interests. They initially feared that woman suffrage threatened their political interests. Experience showed, however, that this was not the case, and their opposition shriveled. Moreover, many found that they actually had interests in defending woman suffrage. As members of the state, they could benefit from the assimilation of women, who would then cease being a source of disorder and become a new potential source of support for contending political parties.

Still, because the economy had no interest in woman suffrage and the state had only marginal interests, change largely awaited political

agitation that could convince politicians they would benefit (although some western states and some localities that first granted woman suffrage apparently did so with little or no agitation from women). In the face of this agitation, the state gradually abandoned women's political exclusion, finding that it had no interest in preserving men's suffrage monopoly, but it did have an interest in reducing social disorder, increasing state legitimacy, and incorporating potential political rivalries.

THE LEGAL PROSCRIPTION OF DISCRIMINATION

Government actions opposing sex discrimination have produced a third major legal transformation of women's status since World War II. Legislation, judicial decisions, and executive actions combined to create a series of policies that aimed to stop discrimination against women. These policies demanded that organizations treat women and men the same under most circumstances. They applied to hiring, promoting, educating, giving services, granting divorce, judging credit eligibility, or engaging in other activities where impersonal standards seem appropriate. Previously, bureaucratic rationality and competitive opportunism had gradually induced employers and other organizations to apply more impersonal standards. These new state policies dictated that organizations must rapidly adopt impartial procedures. The rules applied to most arenas outside the family, excepting some limited domains that could somehow justify their exclusion.

Before this, most laws aimed specifically at women tried to give them *special protection*. Shielding women from the worst rigors of jobs, aiding mothers, and guarding wives against irresponsible husbands were some goals that gained legislative and judicial support. These policies did not try to reduce the difficulties facing women's efforts to get ahead. Instead, they tried to ameliorate some unavoidable ill effects that modern societies visited on women.²⁸

The policies erected against sex discrimination, however reluctantly granted, constituted a much different response by the state. By opposing institutional resistance to women's assimilation, they placed the forces of the state (or, to be precise, some of these forces some of the time) directly on women's side. Through antidiscrimination legislation, the state has eased and speeded women's assimilation by the

roles and women's status rarely became an issue, however, unless feminist agitation challenged it. Otherwise, state support for prevailing sex roles was so ordinary that state officials and the public rarely even recognized it.

While the state's usual acceptance of sex inequality was unexceptional, the state's contribution to sex inequality's decline was truly remarkable. Realistically, we should be surprised that state actions advanced women's interests. The pervasiveness of male dominance made it implausible that the state would repeatedly reduce women's legal and political disadvantages. Yet over the long term the state granted women legal equality, political equality, and a guarantee of equal treatment by other institutions. Indeed, in each period the state made some of its early policy concessions to women while facing little or no organized effort for women's causes. Examples of this pattern included the early Married Women's Property Acts, the first states to give women the vote, and the initial antidiscrimination legislation of the 1960s. By adopting policies favoring gender equality, the state seemingly contradicted the reasonable expectation that a state will always protect the interests of dominant groups.

In fact, increasing male indifference was a primary cause of the state's willingness to alter women's legal and political status. Each significant improvement in women's rights did of course have to overcome resistance from men. But, if weighed against the possibility of a truly adamant opposition, male resistance at each stage was notably weak. When nineteenth-century state legislatures passed laws enlarging married women's legal rights, no male backlash occurred. During the half-century that women sustained the suffrage movement they were frustrated by groundless forebodings, political intransigence, and plain pigheadedness. Calculated resistance to their goals was uncommon, however. When women's suffrage rights appeared on state ballots, a significant and progressively increasing proportion of men voted favorably. Modern feminist demands met considerable derision from journalists and politicians. Nonetheless, laws and policies prohibiting discrimination against women did not prompt defenders of male interests to offer substantial resistance or even notable protest. Since the middle of the twentieth century, men answering opinion polls have consistently shown almost as much support for government policies treating women equally as have women.

When equalizing policies did incite serious opposition, the oppo-

nents were more likely to focus on safeguarding the family or market-place freedom than on stopping the spread of gender equality. Opposition linked to these goals was almost as likely to attract women as men.

While perhaps only a few men enthusiastically greeted all the changes that improved women's status, progressively fewer men faced significant real threats to their interests from these changes. Without such interests, male opposition depended on prejudice and custom. As men's interests ceased to be at issue, they, particularly powerful men, became increasingly indifferent to changes enhancing women's status. This gave the state and other institutions the freedom to reap benefits from supporting women's assimilation without fearing reprisals.

Over time, state officials were subject to fewer potential costs if new policies reduced gender inequality. They were shielded by the remoteness of the state, the obscurity of the issues, and the tentativeness of ordinary men's opposition to new policies. The state, like economic organization, was becoming increasingly remote from the system of gender inequality. This separation governed the history of legal and political concessions to women. In each case, the government had become remote enough from gender inequality that conceding the right to women had no direct implications for the structure or functioning of the state. Moreover, most decisions were about incremental changes in formal rights. As few of these policy decisions clearly implied a significant loss for men, politicians could adopt the changes without straining their commitments to male advantages. When a policy seemed more significant, as in the case of suffrage, the transition was more difficult, but led to the same end.

State interests recognized gender inequality as a fact, not a goal (although state officials' prejudices against women often belied this distinction). Most of the time, the state assumed men's dominance but did not display a committed interest in preserving it. State policies adapted to preexisting inequality may have retarded progress toward equality (this is difficult to judge), but the state took few actions *aimed* at preventing women's rising status.

Changes in the organization of the state seem to have reduced its unquestioned commitment to male interests or to the interests of any specific group. Gender inequality did not serve the institutional interests of the state. Beyond their personal prejudices, politicians' interests in preserving women's inferior status derived largely from fears of

political costs that they or their party might suffer from disenchanted men. Policies and laws diminishing gender distinctions adapted state actions to emergent state interests. They reflected the organizational concentration of political power. As status inequality became disembedded from positional inequality, the prejudices that had governed decisions supporting gender inequality gave way to the practical calculations of political interest and problem solving. Once passed, legislation and policies improving women's circumstances were highly resistant to retreat.

With time, politicians had to consider the potential political costs of opposing improvements for women. Initially, while the polity excluded women, their political response was irrelevant. After women's assimilation had gone far enough to draw them into the political process in significant numbers, considerations changed. To the degree that women's political behavior seemed distinctive from that of men, politicians had to consider the possible costs of alienating women.

As the dominant pattern of state activity changed, so did the critical interests leading the state to enact policies favoring women, a disadvantaged group. Over the long run, the state's actions affecting women's status have gone from serving business, to impartial balancing of competing claims, to strategic advocacy for greater equality. During the era of separate spheres, a largely instrumental state gave women property rights because the classes controlling commerce decided this legal rationalization served their interests. During the era of egalitarian illusions, a struggling trustee state increased the state's independence from industrial class conflict by giving women political rights while it also reduced disorder and stabilized existing social patterns. During the era of assimilation, a relatively autonomous, institutional state adopted policies against sex discrimination that increased state legitimacy and gained political advantages from an active women's movement.

Class interests permeate the state policy transformations that benefited women. In each of the three phases, middle-class women benefited more than working-class or poor women. In each phase, middle-class women gained a class privilege. The Married Women's Property Acts allowed middle-class women the rights to own property and to form contracts already held by working-class men. Women's suffrage gave middle-class women (along with other women) the right to vote that working-class men had gained in the first half of the

nineteenth century. As applied to women, the antidiscrimination legislation of recent decades has assured women of middle-class origins that they can enter middle-class careers. They are not condemned to the same occupations as the offspring of the working classes.

These class interests received some voice in the political debates surrounding these issues in each period, but they were never the dominant justifications used. Although isolating the importance of class interest is difficult, it seems to have influenced both middle-class women's agitation for rights and middle-class men's willingness to concede those claims. Seemingly, middle-class men's shared class interest with middle-class women, reinforced by ties of kinship, was more important than middle-class men's shared gender interest with working-class men.

Others writing about the relationship between the state and gender inequality have largely depicted the state and the men who directed it as acting consistently to protect men's advantages. In this literature, women's legal and political gains appear as victories attributable to effective organization by women or expressions of a general moral shift.

In contrast, this analysis has stressed why and how a male dominated state has progressively conceded greater legal and political equality to women over the past 150 years. Women's agitation for more rights and more participation was an important ingredient to this process. Equally important, however, were the state's development of interests distinct from and sometimes inconsistent with those of men's gender interests and the general decline of men's interests in preserving women's exclusion from these rights.

Ultimately, the logic of modern state organization has simply proved inconsistent with the needs for maintaining gender inequality. Some crucial decisions were independent of women's efforts and some were concessions to women's campaigns. Whatever the precipitating events to specific changes, the state slowly but progressively withdrew from policies that treated the sexes differently. Eventually, the accumulation of these decisions disengaged the state from the preservation of gender inequality. Since women would require years to translate new rights into political power, those wielding power could grant concessions safely, knowing their own fate did not depend on the state's concessions. After the state had largely abandoned the principle of treating men and women differently and once women had become a

significant political force, the state even began to root out gender discrimination in other institutions actively.

Because gender inequality was inherently inconsistent with the logic of the modern state's development, the state repeatedly resolved policy issues in ways that favored women's status. Most men running the state were prejudiced against women and did not wish to diminish men's advantages. Yet few had such a great commitment to gender inequality that they would risk serious damage to the state, the economy, or their political status in order to defend male dominance. Each time the state improved women's rights, it was responding to other changes that were already under way, changes beyond the state's control. The state's response was partially an effort to guide and complete these externally driven events. The state repeatedly found itself caught in a whirlwind of social change that it did not initiate, often could not understand, but could not ignore.

Changes in state policies toward women ground forward like a rusty gear linked with a ratchet. Each twist forward might take time and effort, but once it happened the ratchet engaged the new position. The gear would not slip back.

CHAPTER THREE

EMPLOYMENT: GAINING EQUALITY FROM THE ECONOMY

For more than a century, the proportion of women earning a wage has increased with every decade. Furthermore, the proportionate increase in the number of employed women has exceeded the proportionate increase of employed men for every decade at least since 1870. This extraordinarily consistent record of growth exemplifies a powerful tide of change, swelling slowly until it builds up force, then breaking forth with great power.¹

The juxtaposition between men's economic power and women's rising economic status seems paradoxical. Men have held virtually all control over businesses, have run schools at all levels, have controlled inheritable wealth, and have largely dominated families. Men's superior status—in the modern family and in modern society at large—has been predicated on a clear role division between the sexes. Men have held jobs and made money. Women have stayed home and raised children. Everyone, it seems, has understood that female deference to men, men's control over the family, and men's advantages in the economy were predicated on this role division. Yet women's part in the modern economy has risen steadily over the last century and ultimately uniformly across classes.

Not surprisingly, in their varied roles men have impeded women from gaining an equal stand in the economy. Employers refused women good jobs or high wages, male workers resisted women entering their occupations, husbands obstructed wives who sought jobs or careers, and fathers undermined aspiring daughters.

The evidence for these changes can be found by comparing men's statements about gender inequality issues over time. These statements appear in legislative debates, judicial decisions, social studies, popular press reports, and literature. In the early nineteenth century, the idea of women holding male positions was generally regarded as so obviously ludicrous that it could be used to make fun of other proposals. Anything as silly as women holding political office and running firms was silly indeed. By the early twentieth century, men's comments on women's place seem much more measured. Women should not be like men, but the differences in their rights and responsibilities must be weighed carefully and expressed thoughtfully. As the twentieth century progresses, men's comments favoring higher women's status become more frequent and more assured, while those supporting sex inequality become more strained and defensive. The men speaking against women's advances in the 1970s display bitterness and fear rather than the humor and confidence characteristic of men speaking against women's advances in the 1870s. Thus, uncontrollable changes in ideology made it harder for men to convince themselves or others that actions to keep women down were necessary or just. Even so, many men clung to their beliefs in male superiority, refused to apply meritocratic norms to women, and resisted giving women credit for their performance at work or in schools. These defensive efforts to sustain an ideology of female inferiority, however, became increasingly shrill and less compelling.

Over the past 150 years, ordinary men's interests have been shifting. Each generation has got less value, found fewer means, and faced less legitimacy for subordinating women than did the preceding generation. Not surprisingly, these changing circumstances dampened their opposition to women's improving status. Over time, men's generalized or abstracted opposition to women's advancement also declined. In this form, men opposed the advancement of women with whom they had no direct relationship. This included, for example, men opposing the entry of women into male occupations other than their own or men opposing the increasing political participation of all women.

How much did men oppose the advancement of women when the change they resisted would have no known, direct effect on their own lives? Theoretical work on gender inequality sometimes refers to generalized resistance by men, but concrete evidence that would allow us to compare such resistance over time and place is hard to find.

The idea that men act to protect their common interests also raises conceptual problems. Does this mean that all men's immediate self-interests consistently equal the collective interests of men? Does it mean that a common identity produced through ideology or socialization produces common action despite men's divergent self-interests? Neither seems compelling, as we know that men did not consistently defend the interests of their gender.

The many referenda on woman suffrage show this emphatically. All across America, these referenda occurred from the Civil War until woman suffrage finally realized success after World War I. In the state referenda, from one-third to three-quarters of the men who voted supported woman suffrage.¹¹ These men could vote any way they pleased without concern for repercussions. So, why did many men seemingly vote against men's collective interests by supporting woman suffrage? No sensible answer is possible unless we accept that *men did not possess a universal commitment to oppose general improvements in women's status*. When men did not see their own self-interests at stake, they were likely to respond mainly to the symbolic aspects of issues concerning women's status. While the proper place of women and men was one symbolic concern men would consider, it did not have an inherent priority over other symbolic concerns such as democracy, justice, or the defense of class identity.

POWERFUL MEN'S DECLINING OPPOSITION

The actions of men in positions of power embody the collective force of male dominance. These men's capacity to defend male dominance probably did not suffer significant reductions comparable to those of the average individual male. Their interests, however, were more responsive than ordinary men's when the value and legitimacy of subordinating women declined.

Powerful men could and did take actions that reduced the subordination of women in general. The conditions of power made such men responsive to practical considerations of policy effectiveness and administrative rationality. Social power also detached such men's personal interests from their actions' consequences for gender inequality. Their policies affecting women followed an erratic path. Powerful men were usually more knowledgeable than other men. Nevertheless, prejudice and ignorance often blinded them to the realities

For a manager or a government official, objectivity was usually, at most, a possible ingredient in practical strategies. Even when managers tried to be objective, they had to resolve the inherent ambiguity involved in assessing how well people administer, cooperate, lead, or innovate. These men were not rational robots, springing to maximize their returns. However, profitability, political stability, and administrative rationality consistently commended policies that would reduce gender inequality. Over time, powerful men gradually accepted the logic of their situation to bring such policies into being.

As the power of the state and the economy over individual lives grew, so did the power of the men who controlled these institutions. This power was not without restraints. Market, organizational, and political processes imposed requirements on those in power. Men who exercised their power arbitrarily within these systems jeopardized that power. Still, no evidence suggests that the men in power lacked the capacity to continue, or even expand, policies of economic, political, and legal discrimination against women. They could have continued, *if* they had had a collective commitment to such policies.

The men who ran the state and the economy—bureaucratic officials, elected officeholders, and property owners—had, however, no inherent interests in using their power to sustain men's common advantages over women. Proven adherence to the norms of male dominance was not a significant criteria affecting their capacity to gain or hold positions of power. The same processes that reduced most men's personal capacity to dominate women also helped to insulate influential men from the concerns of the ordinary. Most of influential men's power came from their positions in the economy or the political order. They did not depend on women's general subordination for their personal capacity to dominate women (and men). Therefore, for such men, preserving the health of the institutions that gave them power was considerably more important than perpetuating male dominance. Competition for economic and political advantage and a concern for strength of their organizations gave powerful men opportunities to serve their interests through strategies that benefited women.

Men exercising institutional power saw women through an interpretive lens molded by their institutions' interests. Employers saw women as potential employees who might add profits to their firms. Politicians saw women as voters, contributors, and election workers. Organizations and the judiciary increasingly viewed women as peo-

ple, the objects of rules and rationalization, who could not be usefully distinguished from men. These alternative perceptions of women gradually gained control of influential men's actions.

In special circumstances such as wars, labor shortages, or election battles, influential men often found greater opportunities to increase their power by advocating policies advantageous to women. Such policies would either give them an edge over other influential men who were their competitors or they would fortify the institutions on which their power was based. Repeatedly, men used their political or economic power to discipline ordinary men into accepting these policies. Firms forced their lower-status male employees to accept female employees. The state forced men to accept women's expanding legal and political status.

Powerful men's desire to protect their personal positions did not generate an interest in opposing women's movement into positions of power. Of course, powerful men were unlikely to contemplate women overrunning their own positions with the same detachment they could apply to a similar fate for ordinary men's positions. The historical record does not, however, show powerful men exhibiting much concern that women would displace them. Men with power had little real vulnerability to competition from women. Powerful men were not a cohesive, permanent status group. Instead, the main result of granting women equal access would be to stop the entry of men in the next generation who would otherwise have climbed to power. As these men would never achieve power, they could not defend it against women. The men who pursued power would not actually experience more competition; they would merely find that the competition now included a mix of women and men. The number of men competing for power at any specified level was not an independent constant, but was a socially constructed condition dependent on the way in which the competition was organized. Of course, men's concern for their immediate self-interest and their ignorance might still cause them to fear competition from women, however irrationally. Still, powerful men's fears about women competing over power never realistically concerned a reduction in the positions available to men.

More important to powerful men was the possibility that women could not fit into men's networks of power and therefore would develop or facilitate alternative ones. Because men in power saw no ready way (and had no desire) to integrate women, they had reason

to fear that advancing women might undercut the network of support on which they depended. Also, powerful men rarely had reason to invest their resources and reputations to support women seeking power. Women seeking power could seldom offer anything special that powerful men could not get from other aspirants seeking to rise. Even the popular fantasy of women offering sex to get ahead belies these men's ready access to sex from preferable alternatives.

Assessments, recommendations, and promotion decisions involve considerable discretion. Relying on people's judgments allows considerations irrelevant to job performance to influence people's movement up a job hierarchy. As one common strategy to reduce this ambiguity, people often favor those who seem similar. While trying to explain managerial promotions within a corporation, Rosabeth Kanter called the resulting masculine bias *homosocial reproduction*.¹² Simply put, if all managers are men in an ambiguous, risky environment, they will favor other men over women just as they will favor men who think like themselves over men who think differently. Indeed, they will usually believe that men like themselves are truly superior.

Two conditions must prevail for homosocial reproduction of managers to be widespread and stable. In most circumstances, either the skill of managers must have limited practical significance or social conditions must assure that the occasional outstanding women who are allowed to advance up the hierarchy do not do well. Firms stress profits and competitiveness. If the quality of individual managers significantly and noticeably affected profits and if homosocial reproduction were the only impediment to women's advancement, then we would expect a significant minority of unusually qualified women to have worked their way up managerial ranks. The most likely reason that this rarely occurred was the presence of the other impediments to women's success. In other words, when prejudiced discrimination is widespread, even those who are not prejudiced usually find that their rational self-interests direct them to discriminate as well.

On balance, these concerns meant that powerful men's circumstances inherently gave them a mild interest in excluding women from power and no interest in aiding women into power. Also, few women were in any position to compete for powerful positions. Powerful men, therefore, had neither much opportunity nor much incentive for helping women achieve positions of power.

The general political and economic assimilation of women—partially supported by the strategies of powerful men pursuing their self-interests—ultimately caused powerful men to accept women into power in order to preserve their own power. Political and legal actions against discrimination were needed to achieve women's assimilation into high-status positions. The processes that caused women's assimilation into low-status positions—such as labor shortages, women's lower wage rates, and the drive toward rationalization—had proportionately less impact as women rose higher up the status ladder.

The political process showed a similar pattern of assimilating women into low-status positions as campaign workers or local officials but rarely promoting women to the more influential positions. The processes differed somewhat in the political realm as, for example, political actors competed for votes rather than profits and sought campaign workers rather than employees. Again, however, established politicians eschewed supporting women more because it conflicted with their personal interests for maintaining and enhancing their political power than because they wanted to keep women from political power to defend the dominance of men.

Women's general economic and political assimilation gave them the potential to exercise a political voice and made their economic activity a vital concern for men with power. Their political organization altered powerful men's interests in favor of supporting women's ascent to power." Neither the assimilation of women into lower positions nor the political organization of women would have had this effect without the other. Together, they created a specter of alternative political organization with enough power to alter the outcomes of the political process. They did not have and did not need enough power to oust men. They did accumulate enough potential influence that men and (male-dominated) political parties competing for power felt that they must attract the women to compete with their male opponents.

Women's ascent into positions of power occurred less because women's political organization and institutional assimilation gave them the collective power to exact their demands than because these new conditions altered the interests of powerful men in favor of conceding these demands. Thus, the interests generated by men competing for power had changed dramatically over the long term. Once, helping women advance was a risky violation of interests. Ultimately, men

found that resisting women's advancement had become a personally and organizationally risky violation of interests.

MALE REBELLION

If men experienced their position of dominance not only as a right but also a responsibility, and if the right lost its value while the responsibility remained, did some men then find it all too much of a burden? If the beliefs legitimating male dominance were losing credibility, might some men have begun to chafe at the constrictions of their identity? Since World War II, according to Barbara Ehrenreich, middle-class men have increasingly rejected their stereotyped role. They have defied the cultural expectation that they must marry and support a family to be judged mature, responsible, and worthy of public esteem. Focusing exclusively on the affluent, she portrays young, educated men starting a promising career in the 1950s as pummeled on all sides—family, work, professionals, and the media—by the message that they must marry and have children. Yet, according to Ehrenreich, these men increasingly found their wives—dedicated to childrearing and suburban domesticity—to be tiresome bores." Numerous alienated men greeted and supported cultural alternatives that rejected the cult of the family. These alternatives included *Playboy* magazine's message of sexual freedom and personal consumption, the male centeredness of the "beat" literature, the self-indulgence proclaimed by the new individual-growth psychologies, and the rejection of male responsibilities characteristic of hippies.¹⁵ Each of these cultural phenomena reflected and reinforced middle-class men's dissatisfaction with family life, which motivated increasing numbers to avoid or flee marriage.

The most plausible reasons for the possible decline in men's commitment to families are the same circumstances and processes that reduced men's opposition to greater gender equality. As the subordination of women became progressively less valuable to them, men were increasingly likely to perceive all family life as a burden. The same rising affluence and improved availability of goods and services that reduced the amount of necessary domestic work for women meant that men could replace a wife's domestic services through the marketplace. The liberalization of sexuality that accompanied the improvements in women's status also made sex more easily available to men outside marriage.