

Gender as an Organizing Force in Social Relations: Implications for the Future of Inequality

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Although it has hardly disappeared, gender inequality in the labor market has declined noticeably in recent decades, by most standard indicators. Inequality is declining in labor-force participation rates, wages, and occupational sex segregation, even though considerable sex segregation remains, especially at the job and firm level (Jacobs 1999; Petersen and Morgan 1995; Reskin and Padavic 1999). A debate now centers on the nature of the forces behind these changes and their implications for the future. Are the forces that have been and are undermining gender inequality now unstoppable, as recent arguments posit (Jackson 1998)? Is the significance of gender as an organizing principle of inequality in society declining as a consequence? If there are forces that continue to reproduce gender inequality, what do they consist of and what is their future?

With others (Jackson 1998; Reskin 2000), I am persuaded that the growth of bureaucratic and economic rationalization and the consequent spread of universal legal rights and organizational procedures are major forces underlying the recent erosion of gender inequality. My view, however, is that gender inequality is not declining as rapidly as it would be if these forces were not slowed by powerful processes that conserve gender inequality, even if in reduced form (Ridgeway 1997). Robert Max Jackson (1998), too, recognizes that resistance to the decline of gender inequality is present in contemporary society, but he argues that this resistance must lose in the long run because no compelling force continually reproduces gender inequality. I argue, however, that Jackson has overlooked a powerful set of ongoing social processes that work to maintain gender inequality in the face of equalizing forces. These processes derive from the deep-seated role gender plays in the fundamental organization of social relations between individuals and from the stereotypes, status assumptions, and cognitive biases that result from

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that role. Such processes, I argue, underlie resistance to change in the household division of labor, the persistent gender labeling of new jobs, and continuing resistance to the authority of women. As Paula England (see chapter 8, this volume; Budig and England 2001) argues, unless the household division of labor changes, gender inequality in the labor market will persist even if discrimination in hiring and promotion disappears entirely.

None of us can tell whether the power of the forces conserving gender inequality is sufficient to actually derail, rather than merely slow, the ultimate decline of gender as a principle of inequality. I hope it is not. I have described elsewhere how the forces conserving inequality might be undermined so that progress toward equality is accelerated (Ridgeway and Correll 2000). However, I believe these conserving forces at present remain powerful enough to suggest that the road to gender equality will be a rough one without a completely assured end.

GENDER AS A STATUS INEQUALITY

Before proceeding, a few general considerations about gender as a form of inequality may be helpful. Like Jackson (1998), I view gender as primarily a status inequality rather than a positional inequality. Status inequality is based on relationships between different types of people who distinguish themselves by personal characteristics. Positional inequality is based on relationships between roles within a social structure that carry unequal rights, resources, and responsibilities (see Jackson 1998, 12-13).

Few sociologists would disagree with Jackson's (1998, 249) major contention that "to be effective, all systems of status inequality, including gender inequality, must be embedded in positional inequality." But this states only one side of the issue in understanding the effectiveness and persistence of status inequalities. A status inequality such as gender gains range and effectiveness by being embedded in specific positional inequalities such as those based on economic or political positions. Yet a status inequality such as gender loses effectiveness and significance if it ever becomes fully or completely embedded in another system of positional inequality other than that created by its own independent processes. As Peter M. Blau (1977) pointed out, when dimensions of inequality completely overlap, such that they become fully consolidated rather than intersect, they lose their independent significance and become unrecognizable as separate forms of inequality. Thus status inequalities, including gender inequality, are most effective when they are partially, but not wholly, embedded in positional inequalities in economic and political structures. This, of course, was Max Weber's (1922/1968) point in his delineation of status as a distinct form of inequality that is related to but not the same as wealth and power.

Gender inequality has persisted as a distinct, recognized form of inequality in Western societies for some time. By this analysis, then, it must have done so through some combination of embeddedness in economic and political positional inequalities and its own autonomous productions of inequality that are not fully re-

ducible to economic and political power. What might be the sources of gender inequality separate from access to economic or political power? Most would point for an answer to gender's role in organizing heterosexuality, reproduction, and the family. While not disagreeing, I consider this a partial answer because it does not fully address gender's effects as a status inequality. I will focus my own analysis of gender inequality's independent staying power on a set of intermediate processes that partially result from gender's role in reproduction and the family but that carry gender to relationships beyond the family and sustain it as a status distinction.

GENDER AS AN ORGANIZING FORCE IN SOCIAL-RELATIONAL CONTEXTS

The driving force behind gender as a distinct system of difference and inequality is gender's deep-seated role as an organizing force in social relations. Sex categorization, which is the routine process of labeling others as male or female, is a fundamental cultural and cognitive tool that people use to frame an even more fundamental human activity—relating to another, be it in person, on paper, on the Internet, or even in imagination.

Primary Cultural Frame for Social Relations

From the perspective of individuals, social life and society in general are enacted through multiple social-relational contexts. These are contexts in which individuals define themselves in relation to others in order to comprehend the situation and act. Everyday interactions, whether in person or through some other medium, are by definition social-relational contexts, but contexts where individuals act alone are social-relational as well if the individuals feel their behavior or its consequences will be socially evaluated. In such situations individuals must still implicitly define themselves in relation to relevant others in order to anticipate the reactions of those others and act accordingly.

To successfully manage social-relational contexts, people need at least some shared cultural systems for categorizing and defining self in relation to others in the context so that they can correctly anticipate behavior and act in response. Studies of social cognition suggest that a small number of such category systems, perhaps three or four, serve as primary categories of person perception in a society (Brewer and Lui 1989; Fiske 1998). Primary categories define those things that a person must know about another to render that other sufficiently meaningful in cultural terms so that the person can relate to the other. Possibly because sex category is a simple dichotomous (male or female) classification with relevance to heterosexuality and reproduction, evidence suggests that sex category is virtually always one of a society's primary category systems (Brewer and Lui 1989; Glick and Fiske 1999a). In the United States, race and age are primary category systems as well (Fiske 1998).

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In fact, social-cognition research has shown that people automatically and unconsciously sex-categorize any concrete other that they cast themselves in relation to. They do this even when, as is often the case, more relevant and informative institutional roles, such as boss and employee, are readily available to define self and other in the context. Evidence indicates that actors in a relational context first sex-categorize one another and do so almost instantly (Brewer and Lui 1989; Stangor et al. 1992). This evidence suggests that actors' subsequent categorizations of each other according to institutional roles are nested within their prior understandings of each other as male or female and take on a slightly different meaning as a result (compare a male clerk and female customer versus a female clerk and male customer). We can think abstractly about an ungendered boss or employee, but we can never actually relate, even in imagination, to any specific boss or employee without gendering him or her first.

We may speculate that the origins of the sex category as a primary cultural category system lie in its relevance for heterosexuality and reproduction. Whatever the origins, sex category's role as a fundamental cultural tool for framing any social relation carries sex and gender far beyond home, reproduction, and the family. Since we cannot comprehend another sufficiently to relate to the other without sex-categorizing him or her first (and making salient our own sex category by implication), as a consequence, sex and gender are pulled in some degree into every sphere of social life that is enacted through social relations. By this analysis, sex and gender's status as a primary framing device for social relations is what causes gender to be a force in all social institutions, including those that make up the labor market (Ridgeway 1997). It is the use of sex and gender as a relational framing device that embeds (and, I will argue, continually re-embeds) gender in positional inequalities in political and economic as well as familial institutions. Yet, driven by its own logic as a framing device, gender brings its own dynamics to social relations so that it is never fully encapsulated by any given structure of positional inequalities.

Gender Beliefs as Difference and Inequality

Although we tend to assume that sex categorization is "natural," in everyday social relations it is a thoroughly social process that relies on cues of behavior and appearance that are culturally presumed to stand for physical sex differences (Kessler and McKenna 1978; West and Zimmerman 1987). In fact, sex and gender is a cultural system for framing self–other relations precisely because it is based on widely shared beliefs that describe the distinguishing characteristics of typical males and females and the way they are expected to behave. An actor may hold such descriptive gender beliefs whether or not he or she ideologically endorses them as the way men or women should be (Blair and Banaji 1996; Rudman and Kilianski 2000; Spence and Buckner 2000).

We often think of such shared, descriptive gender beliefs as stereotypes. They are that, but they are more as well. Widely shared gender beliefs are, in effect, the cul-

tural rules for perceiving and enacting gender as a distinct system of difference and inequality. It is these beliefs that constitute gender as a status inequality in society.

Studies show that roughly consensual gender beliefs do indeed exist in the contemporary United States (Fiske et al. 2002; Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, and Lueptow 2001; Spence and Buckner 2000; Williams and Best 1990; see Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann 2000 for a review). Because gender stereotypes have status beliefs at their core, they have a hierarchical as well as horizontal dimension and imply inequality as well as difference (Conway, Pizzamiglio, and Mount 1996; Eagly and Mladinic 1994; Wagner and Berger 1997; Williams and Best 1990). Status beliefs define members of one group as more status-worthy and generally competent than those of another group, while granting each group its specialized skills (Wagner and Berger 1997). Similarly, gender beliefs view men as more agentic and competent overall and more competent at the things that "count most" in society (for example, instrumental rationality) than women. Women are viewed as less competent in general, but better at more feminine, communal tasks, even though these tasks are themselves less valued (Conway, Pizzamiglio, and Mount 1996; Eagly and Mladinic 1994; Fiske et al. 2002). Such gender stereotypes are consensual in that most people know them and recognize them as the social "rules of the game" by which most others will judge them, whether or not the people themselves personally endorse these stereotypes. In fact, the likelihood that people hold consensual stereotypes as descriptive beliefs is only modestly correlated with their ideological beliefs about gender egalitarianism (Blair and Banaji 1996; Rudman and Kilianski 2000; Spence and Buckner 2000).

As a cultural device for framing social relations, gender is above all a system of social difference whose utility lies in the assumption that actors classified in one category may be expected to behave differently from those classified in another category. Yet, as an extensive body of research on social cognition and social identity theory has demonstrated, the mere classification of another as different evokes an evaluative response (see Brewer and Brown 1998 for a review). The most basic form of evaluative response to difference appears to be in-group favoritism. That is, if you and I are different, then my group is better and I will act to favor those from my group over those from your group. Thus, difference alone creates cognitive biases that are conducive to discrimination and to the development of a hierarchical as well as difference dimension in group stereotypes.

Notice, however, that the basic evaluative response to difference effectively creates competing views of the proper hierarchical relation between the two groups. Members of each group evaluate their own group above the other. If gender is a system of social difference for framing social relations among individuals and facilitating the coordination of their joint behavior, then competing views of who is "better" are an impediment to mutual relations that may be difficult to sustain over the long run. Under conditions of long-term mutual dependence between groups, competing in-group preferences tend to be transformed by one means or another into shared status beliefs (Jackman 1994). That is, members of both groups come to agree (or concede) that, as a matter of social reality, one group is more respected and status-worthy than the other. In an achievement-oriented society such as our own, status evaluations are expressed and legitimated by correspon-

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ding assumptions about differences in general competence and instrumental expertise (Glick and Fiske 1999b).

Social distinctions that are important for organizing social relations within a society tend to demarcate groups with considerable mutual dependence on one another (Jackman 1994; Ridgeway and Erickson 2000). Not surprisingly, then, important social distinctions in our society such as age, race, occupation, education, as well as gender are each associated with widely shared beliefs about the status rankings of the groups these distinctions delineate. In comparison to the groups created by other distinctions, however, there is an exceptional degree of mutual dependence between the sexes. Heterosexuality, reproduction, the way that sex cross-cuts kin relations, and the division of the population into two roughly equal-sized gender groups all increase contact and dependence between the sexes. Virtually all men and women must regularly and repeatedly enter into cooperative relations with members of the other sex to achieve what they want or need. These conditions put unusually strong structural pressures on gender as a system of shared beliefs about difference to be simultaneously a system of shared beliefs about the status ranking of men and women. Given men and women's mutual dependence, then, beliefs about gender difference and beliefs about status inequality co-determine each other, giving a characteristic structure to gender stereotypes.

Although this analysis suggests that cultural beliefs about gender difference tend to foster gender-status beliefs about inequality—beliefs about the relative status of the two genders—it does not presume male dominance. From a logical point of view, the result could also be female dominance. The historical origins of male—rather than female—status dominance are unknown. However, research shows that when some factor gives members of one group a systematic advantage in attaining influence and power in their mutual dealings with members of another group, people from both groups develop shared status beliefs favoring the advantaged group (Ridgeway et al. 1998; Ridgeway and Erickson 2000). Many theories about the origins of male status dominance posit some factor, such as superior male strength or the physical constraints faced by lactating mothers, that could have given men a systematic influence advantage in their dealings with women at some time in the past (see Wood and Eagly 2002). Whatever their origin, once status beliefs favoring men become culturally established, they root male advantage in group membership itself and thus advantage men even over their female peers who are just as strong as they and are not, say, lactating mothers. Because gender-status beliefs root inequality in group membership, they constitute gender as a distinct organizing principle of inequality that is not fully reducible to other differences in power or material resources.

Gender Interests

As a primary cultural system for framing social relations that implies both difference and hierarchy, gender creates a distinct set of interests for actors. These interests are central to the staying power of gender as a significant dimension of in-

equality. They affect the energy with which actors enact gender in different social contexts and resist challenges to existing gender arrangements. Since people are never just men or women but are also a myriad of other social identities, however, actors' gender interests always coexist with multiple other, often competing interests. As a consequence, men's and women's behaviors and judgments in social relational contexts are almost never determined by gender processes alone.

The gender-status beliefs contained within the current framework of gender beliefs obviously give men an interest in maintaining the presumption of their greater competence and status worthiness compared to similar women. Such a presumption advantages them in access to privileged positions within a wide variety of social institutions (Reskin 1988). Some heterosexual women also benefit from the current framework because their intimate association with higher-status men gives them material resources or access to power that they might not have in a society without male privilege. Yet, as Jackson (1998) notes, even these men and women often have other economic and political interests in the contemporary situation that cause them to take actions that, perhaps unintentionally, undermine men's privileged access to superior economic and political power. Furthermore, the interests of most women in bettering themselves in society cause them to continually push against the constraints of the current gender framework.

Although the current framework of male status dominance does create interests in maintaining male privilege, in my view these are not likely to be the most powerful interests that sustain gender as a system of difference and inequality, especially since most women have a countervailing interest in resisting that inequality. Gender creates another, deeper set of interests as well. Gender is so deeply embedded in social relations that few people are likely to tolerate serious disruptions to the basic system of sex labeling that sets the gender system in motion. Gender is one of the three or four identities that are central to the process by which people render themselves comprehensible to themselves and others in terms that are socially valid within their society (Ridgeway and Correll 2000; West and Zimmerman 1987). As a result, both men and women have deep cognitive interests in maintaining a clear and reasonably stable framework of gender beliefs that define "who" men and women "are" by differentiating them.

To gain a sense of the power of the cognitive interests gender creates, consider a series of skits that played on *Saturday Night Live* a few years ago. In these skits, "Pat," a completely androgynous person, wreaked havoc in even mundane interactions because the other interactants could not place Pat as a man or a woman. The social vertigo that the interactants experienced in the skits was revealing of the importance of sex categorization as an organizing force in social relations. The depth of the resulting interests people have in maintaining a stable system of sex differentiation was revealed by the audience reactions to these skits. Invariably, audience members engaged in extreme nervous laughter and an intense kind of social anxiety and discomfort.

Certainly, actors may have strong economic and political interests, but they also have very strong interests in knowing "who" they are in social terms and who others are in relation to them. These strong interests create a deep reservoir of resis-

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tance to any real erasure of gender difference. As we have seen, the preservation of beliefs in gender difference, given the mutual dependence between men and women, also tends to foster beliefs in status inequality.

IMPACT ON LABOR-MARKET INEQUALITY

Job searches, hiring, the development of job skills, job performance and evaluation, promotion, and the everyday conduct of worklife are largely carried out through social-relational contexts. Individuals acting in these contexts automatically sex-categorize one another. Research shows that sex categorization in turn automatically activates gender stereotypes that provide implicit, usually unconscious cognitive lenses through which self and other are perceived and evaluated (Banaji and Hardin 1996; Blair and Banaji 1996; Stangor et al. 1992). As we shall see, the extent to which such gendered lenses bias a person's behavior and evaluations can vary from negligible to substantial, depending on the context. There is increasing consensus among several researchers, however, that the cognitive biases that typically result from the automatic activation of gender stereotypes in work-related contexts are the fundamental, underlying cause of gender inequality in the labor market (Bielby 2000; Reskin 2000; Reskin and McBrier 2000; Ridgeway 1997).

The framing assumptions toward work and workers embodied in these gender biases can become embedded in the organizational structures, authority lines, job classifications, institutional rules and administrative procedures of firms (Baron, Jennings, and Dobbin 1988; Nelson and Bridges 1999; Reskin and McBrier 2000; Steinberg 1995). As this occurs, the implicit biases of gender stereotypes acquire a solidity and institutional force that shapes the work process and acts as an agent of inequality. On the other hand, organizational structures and administrative procedures can also suppress the biasing effects of gender stereotypes on the behavior and judgments of actors in firms. Bureaucratic accountability for equity, formalized personnel procedures, and open information about reward structures have all been shown to reduce the extent to which actors' behaviors and judgments in the work process are biased by gender or racial stereotypes (see Bielby 2000; Reskin and McBrier 2000; Ridgeway and Correll 2000 for reviews). It is precisely the growth of such rationalizing, universalistic organizational forms and procedures that Jackson credits with reducing gender inequality by disembedding it from positional inequality in the labor market. By my account, such forms and procedures have their effect by suppressing the biasing effects of stereotypes on the behaviors and judgments of workplace actors.

Social-Relational Processes and the Maintenance of Workplace Inequality

Since organizational forms and administrative procedures mediate the effect of actors' gender stereotyping on men's and women's labor-market outcomes, Barbara

Reskin (2000; Reskin and McBrier 2000) refers to these forms and procedures as the proximate cause of gender inequality in the labor market, even while cognitive bias is the ultimate cause. My arguments here focus on stereotyping and cognitive bias because these processes are key to assessing the staying power of gender inequality in the labor market. Reskin is correct that in bureaucratically well-ordered work contexts, the degree of gender inequality that results is largely a function of the organizational structures and administrative procedures that enact or suppress it. However, in less well-ordered work contexts, such as those at the interstices of organizations (for example, an interdepartmental task force), in some types of work, in start-ups, in newly developing forms of work, or in newly forming occupations, social-relational processes among individuals come to the fore. The impact of gender stereotypes activated by sex categorization in these social relations, I have argued, are sufficient in themselves to create gender inequality in workers' outcomes without the intervention of biased bureaucratic practices (Ridgeway 1997). There is some evidence to support this assertion: for example, the gender gap in wages and the gender typing of job assignments in television screenwriting, an organizationally chaotic, interpersonally brokered occupation, is comparable to that found in bureaucratically well-structured jobs (Bielby and Bielby 1995).

The primary significance of this assertion, however, is not its ability to account for gender inequality in established but atypical jobs that are outside well-ordered bureaucratic contexts. Instead, the significance of the ability of social-relational processes to create gender inequality lies in its implications for work that occurs at the cutting edge of economic, technological, and social-organizational change. The work sites and start-ups where new industries, new types of work, new occupations, and new forms of organizational structure and business practices are developed are not bureaucratically well-structured sites. Frequently such work sites are initially ordered primarily through interpersonal relations and informal procedures. Workers in these settings not only lack established bureaucratic rules and procedures, they often lack well-defined institutional roles. As result, the workers are especially likely to draw on personal attributes, including gender, to define themselves and others in the context and organize their interpersonal relations. Consequently, gender's effects as a framing device for interpersonal relations is likely to implicitly draw gender stereotypes into the work process at such sites, shaping in some degree workers' relations, assumptions, judgments and behavior. As this occurs, gender inequality is likely to emerge in the work site. More significant, however, is that the actors involved are likely to rewrite gender-biased assumptions into the new organizational practices, divisions of labor, job definitions, lines of authority, and occupations that they develop through their activities. In this way, social-relational processes in work sites at the edge of ongoing economic and technological transformations maintain gender inequality in the face of change by translating it into new organizational forms and work structures (Ridgeway 1997).

Note that this maintenance of gender inequality occurs in contexts that are somewhat shielded, at least for a formative period, from the bureaucratic accountability and formalized universalistic procedures that suppress the biasing effects

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of stereotypes. By this argument then, social-relational processes in work sites springing up at the edge of ongoing change continually reinstitutionalize gender assumptions and gender hierarchy into newly emerging work structures. This process in turn slows the gender-equalizing effects of bureaucratic rationalization and universalistic personnel procedures in the labor market.

Gender Status Effects in the Workplace

Having argued that gender effects in social-relational contexts constitute an important force that preserves gender inequality over economic and technological transformations, it is now time to describe more specifically the nature of these gender effects. Automatic sex categorization activates gender stereotypes in all social-relational contexts in the workplace and elsewhere, but the impact of these stereotypes on actors' behaviors and judgments can vary from imperceptible to substantial, depending on the nature of the context. Thus, the social-relational effects of gender are not invariant but, rather, context-dependent. I will describe these effects as they operate when they are not suppressed by administrative procedures and bureaucratic accountability.

Recall that gender stereotypes in the United States describe men as more status-worthy, instrumentally competent, and agentic, whereas women are seen as less competent overall but more communal and skilled at caregiving. Sex categorization in social relations activates all aspects of gender stereotypes, but I shall concentrate on the impact of their status and competence contents (which I refer to as gender-status beliefs), since these have the greatest relevance for inequality in the labor market.

The impact of gender stereotypes on actors' behavior and evaluations depends on gender's salience in the context as a distinction that is diagnostic of behavior and on gender's relevance to the central goals or tasks of the setting (Deaux and LaFrance 1998). Although gender's very diffuseness as a social identity allows it to function as an all-purpose orienting frame toward any other person in relation to self, by the same token it virtually never offers sufficiently detailed instructions for action in a specific situation. In defining a situation for action, people categorize one another in multiple ways and quickly focus on institutional roles (for example, file clerk or manager) that carry specific, context-relevant implications for action (Fiske, Lin, and Neuberg 1999). In work-related contexts, institutional roles are in the foreground of actors' perceptions of "who" they and others are in the situation, whereas gender generally acts as a less salient background identity.

As a background identity, gender nevertheless can be (although is not always) effectively salient for actors in a situation, meaning that it is sufficiently salient to measurably affect their behaviors and evaluations. When effectively salient, the status and competence implications of gender stereotypes bias, or modify, the behaviors and evaluations that actors undertake in the performance of their foreground roles as institutional actors. Thus gender can operate as a kind of ghostly presence in work-related contexts, one that subtly colors behaviors and judgments

that are not ostensibly gender-related. Workplace actors themselves are often quite unconscious of the background biases affecting their behaviors and evaluations, even if these effects can be measured by observers.

Indeed, actors' routine unawareness of the background biases of gender stereotypes are key to their effects. Actors are capable of suppressing stereotype biases in their behavior and evaluations, but only under demanding motivational circumstances. To suppress stereotype bias, actors must be alert to its possible presence in their behavior at a given moment, must be motivated to suppress it, and must have the time and energy to do so. Of course, women's own interests in bettering themselves suggests that they will more often be sufficiently motivated to resist the biasing effects of stereotypes in their own behavior than will men (Fiske, Lin, and Neuberg 1999). When acting routinely or pressured to act quickly, however, even committed egalitarians often act in implicitly biased ways (Blair and Banaji 1996; Kunda and Sinclair 1999; Plant and Devine 1998).

Evidence suggests that gender-status beliefs are effectively salient and likely to bias behavior and evaluations in a least two types of contexts: mixed-sex contexts—work settings with both males and females present—and gender-typed contexts (Wagner and Berger 1997)—those whose tasks, goals, or activities are culturally linked to a given sex. A wide variety of work contexts are either mixed sex or gender-linked, but not all. Once gender-status beliefs are effectively salient, the strength of their impact on actors' expectations and behavior is proportional to gender's relevance to the goals and tasks of the setting. Consequently, we should expect the effects of gender-status beliefs to be strongest in gender-typed work settings such as engineering and the military (male-linked) and nursing and elementary education (female-linked).

When gender is effectively salient in a context, theory and evidence suggest a distinct pattern of biases in the expectations actors form for each other's competence and status in the situation (for reviews, see Ridgeway 2001; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Wagner and Berger 1997). These gender-biased expectations are consequential because they tend to have self-fulfilling effects on actors' behaviors and evaluations (Harris and Rosenthal 1985; Miller and Turnbull 1986; Jussim and Fleming 1996). In mixed-sex contexts that are not gender-linked, expectations for competence and status should modestly favor men over women who are otherwise similar to them. In male-linked contexts, competence and status expectations will more strongly favor men over similar women. In female-linked contexts, men's advantage will disappear and biases may slightly favor women.

Gender-biased expectations for competence and status have been shown to affect men and women's relative willingness to assert themselves in task-oriented settings and offer their opinions; the extent to which others ask for their opinions; the evaluations that their opinions and task performances receive; the inference of ability from a performance of acknowledged quality; the development of influence over others; and the likelihood that they will emerge as leaders (for reviews, see Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1999; Deaux and LaFrance 1998; Eagly and Karau 2002; Foschi 2000; Ridgeway 2001; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999; Wagner and Berger 1997). Once a person is in a leader or manager role, gender-biased expecta-

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tions affect perceptions of the manager's competence and legitimacy in that role and the manager's ability to wield directive authority without encountering a "backlash" of hostility and resistance (Heilman, Block, and Martell 1995; Eagly and Karau 2002; Rudman and Glick 2001). Such resistance to women's authority helps create a "glass ceiling" for women who seek top positions. Finally, there is evidence that gender-biased expectations for competence can also inhibit or boost actual performance, independent of ability, by arousing anxieties or instilling confidence (Shin, Pittinsky, and Ambady 1999; Spencer, Steele, and Quinn 1999; Wheeler and Petty 2001).

These effects of gender-status beliefs on actors' behaviors and evaluations of self and others set in motion both demand- and supply-side factors that affect gender inequality in the labor market. On the demand side, gender-biased competence expectations on the part of employers, supervisors, and fellow workers can create a variety of forms of discrimination in the workplace (see Ridgeway 1997; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Gender-status and competence beliefs also encourage the process by which employers seek and prefer employees of one sex or the other, depending on the status and sex typing of the job. This process in turn supports the sex segregation of jobs and resegregation by specialty within jobs (Reskin and Roos 1990). The continual activation of gender-status beliefs in the workplace by actors' automatic sex typing of self and others contributes as well to the persistent tendency to gender-type jobs, including newly developing jobs, and to associate status value with them accordingly.

On the supply side, the activation of gender-status beliefs in work- or training-related contexts can bias individuals' expectations for their own competence in the situation relative to others'. This in turn can affect individuals' willingness to pursue a particular line of work or training and persist at it in the face of difficulties compared to otherwise similar people of the other sex. It can affect the assertiveness with which individuals conduct themselves in the workplace and the level of rewards they demand in compensation (Bylsma and Major 1992; Major 1989).

Self-expectations that are biased by the activation of gender-status beliefs in a work or training situation can also affect actual performance, independent of ability (Spencer et al. 1999). Even more insidiously, biased self-expectations can affect the level of ability individuals attribute to themselves, given a certain performance. For instance, Shelley J. Correll (2004) has shown that when a task is presented as male-typed, activating gender-status beliefs, men attribute more ability to themselves on the basis of the same performance than women attribute to themselves. When the same task is specifically disassociated from gender so that gender-status beliefs are not effectively salient, there are no differences in the ability men and women attribute to themselves when performances are similar. Noting that math is a male-typed task in the United States, Correll (2001) shows how women's tendency to attribute less math ability to themselves than men do to themselves, when both groups have the same mathematical performance, acts as a barrier to women's pursuit of careers in science and engineering. This in turn helps preserve the masculine dominance of these fields.

Both the demand- and supply-side effects of the gender-status beliefs that are

activated in work- or training-related contexts by automatic sex categorization occur through implicit cognitive biases. These cognitive biases shape behaviors and evaluations in ways actors are rarely conscious of. Consequently, such effects on either the demand or supply side of the equation are not best characterized as the intentional results of people's explicit choices in the workplace. They do, however, result from people's active pursuit of their interests in rendering themselves and others as socially meaningful and, therefore, gendered actors in social-relational contexts.

The cultural beliefs about gender status and competence that people draw on to define themselves and others in work contexts occasionally cause actors to explicitly assert or defend their gender-status interests. Most commonly, however, the effects of gender-status beliefs on behavior and evaluations in any given context are more subtle and modest. It can sometimes be difficult to explicitly recognize or detect these effects in a single setting, but when such implicit biasing effects are repeated over multiple work-related contexts, they accumulate over the course of a career to result in substantial differences in men's and women's lifetime outcomes in the labor market. Enforced universalistic administrative procedures and bureaucratic accountability can suppress some biasing effects on the demand side, especially in hiring and promotion. Motivated vigilance on the part of committed egalitarian actors can also suppress such biasing effects on both the demand and supply side of the process. However, the routine background effects of gender-status beliefs will continue to bias supply-side processes as long as gender-status beliefs continue to imply significant competence differences between men and women and continue to be widely held in society. Furthermore, and somewhat paradoxically, the biasing effects of gender-status beliefs are likely to operate fairly freely in the less bureaucratically structured work sites at the forefront of economic and technological change. In these sites, status-based gender inequality may be re-embedded in emerging economic and organizational structures.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

By this account, the driving force behind gender inequality is sex and gender's role as a primary framing device for social relations. Automatic sex categorization in all social-relational contexts, including the workplace, activates gender stereotypes that in turn shape people's behavior and evaluations in situationally varying degrees. To intervene in this process directly, one must either disrupt sex categorization as an automatic activity or modify the stereotypes sex categorization evokes. In my view, sex categorization is too deeply rooted as a system of relational sense making for people to tolerate a serious effort to disrupt it. A reduction in inequality is more likely to develop from a reduction in the status and competence differences implied by gender stereotypes (Ridgeway and Correll 2000). Such changes could occur through the erosion of cultural assumptions that link gender to specific workplace-relevant skills, such as technical-mathematical expertise or management ability, as well as through a reduction in presumed differ-

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ences in general competence. Changes like this in stereotype content would reduce the diagnostic value and task relevance of gender for actors in work-related contexts and thus reduce its impact on their behavior and evaluations in the workplace. As a result of such stereotype change, gender would be effectively (that is, measurably) salient in fewer and fewer workplace contexts. There are, however, reasons to believe that stereotype change of this sort will be a difficult and lengthy process.

Widely shared cultural beliefs about gender are only sustainable in the long run if the terms on which most men and women encounter one another confirm these beliefs for them, at least as a representation of the way "most people" are (Eagly 1987). In particular, current gender stereotypes require that men and women routinely experience one another as sufficiently different in ways that justify men's greater power and status. Thus, social changes that systematically rearrange the terms on which most men and women relate to one another in everyday contexts put pressure on stereotypes to change accordingly (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999).

It is exactly such a set of systematic social changes that Jackson points to in his discussion of increasing bureaucratic rationalization and universalism as forces that irretrievably undermine gender inequality. I've argued that such changes do indeed suppress the biasing effects of gender-status beliefs in workplace contexts, allowing and encouraging women to push past the subtle demand and supply barriers that result from gender-status beliefs. As they have for generations, women continue to push past these barriers through a combination of the determined pursuit of their own interests in bettering themselves and the intentional efforts of men and women committed to gender egalitarianism. Intentional egalitarian motivations and ambition in women are in turn fostered by the social changes Jackson describes. As women move into formerly male occupations and into higher-status positions in the workplace, social-relational contexts at work provide both men and women with experiences of one another that are increasingly at odds with traditional stereotypic assumptions about status and competence differences between the sexes. This is the process that pushes for gradual but accumulating changes in stereotypes that allow for sustainable reductions in gender inequality.

Impediments to Stereotype Change

What are the forces that blunt the process of stereotype change and slow the erosion of assumptions about status and competence that undergird inequality? Organizational processes in the labor market, such as the continuing sex segregation of jobs within firms and specialties within occupations, play an important role by recasting women's gains within an institutional frame that reaffirms cultural stereotypes about gender difference and men's greater status significance (Kilbourne et al. 1994; Reskin and Roos 1990). And there are other forces that are likely to slow, although not stop, changes in gender stereotypes in the face of changes in

men's and women's workplace experiences. Some of these forces derive from the tendency for any cultural belief system to lag behind changes in corresponding experience. Others draw more specifically on gender's distinctive role in organizing social relations.

Widely held stereotypes about socially significant distinctions among people in a society, such as gender or race stereotypes, have several characteristics that buffer them somewhat from the impact of disconfirming experience. Studies of social cognition have shown that individuals have powerful tendencies to perceive and interpret people and events in terms that confirm their prior expectations and concerns (Fiske, Lin, and Neuberg 1999). Such confirmation biases, as they are called, cause people to selectively attend to events and experiences that confirm what they want or expect to see and to fail to notice, to ignore, or to discount events and information that disconfirm their expectations. The deeper people's emotional and cognitive commitments to their prior expectations, the more they unconsciously distort what they see to fit those expectations.

Most people's deep investment in gender as a fundamental cultural dimension for understanding self and other potentially fuels powerful tendencies either to not recognize stereotype-disconfirming events as such or to reinterpret them in stereotype-confirming ways. Evidence shows that people find it easier to cognitively encode, and thus to recognize, think about, and remember information that matches gender-stereotypic expectations (Von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, and Vargas 1995). People also spontaneously fill in unspecified details of male and female behavior to make an experience consistent with gender expectations (Dunning and Sherman 1997). Indeed, given the actual diversity and range of men's and women's real behavior and traits, it is likely that the reason shared cultural stereotypes about "men" or "women" in general are sustainable at all is by dint of such expectation-confirming cognitive distortions.

Given such stereotype-confirming biases, men's and women's gender-atypical workplace experiences with one another will likely have only modest effects on their taken-for-granted assumptions about gender status and competence, although these modest effects will slowly accumulate over longer periods of time. Studies of stereotype change show that even when confronted with a person who forcefully disconfirms cultural stereotypes, most people react first by cognitively reclassifying the person as "an exception" with little import for what can be expected of most others (see Hewstone 1994 for a review). The more "exceptions" people encounter, however, the greater pressure they are under to modify their underlying stereotypes.

A second process that buffers people's widely held stereotypes from their disconfirming experiences derives from people's taken-for-granted presumption that these stereotypes are consensual in society (Zelditch and Floyd 1998). As we have seen, evidence indicates that people in the United States do in fact presume that people generally know and accept gender stereotypes as descriptive of most people (see Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann 2000 for a review). When people presume cultural beliefs are consensual, they assume others will treat them according to these beliefs. Consequently, they must take these beliefs into account in their own be-

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havior, whether or not they personally accept these beliefs as descriptive of themselves or consider them ideologically preferable or obnoxious. Gretchen B. Sechrist and Charles Stangor (2001) have shown that the assumption that others hold a stereotype has a substantial impact on the likelihood that individuals act, or refrain from acting, in accord with that stereotype. The presumption of consensus about gender stereotypes buffers them from disconfirmation by encouraging people to act in accord with established stereotypes even when their own and perhaps others' conviction about these stereotypes has begun to waver. Thus, even if disconfirming experiences raise doubts in growing numbers of individuals, these individuals may often inadvertently act to confirm established stereotypes. This blunts the impact on stereotypes of people's self-conscious ideological belief in gender egalitarianism.

Given the processes that blunt the impact of changing workplace experiences on gender stereotypes, we should expect that changes in gender stereotypes will lag substantially behind changes in labor-market inequality and in explicit gender ideology, which will slow the erosion of that inequality. Lagging gender stereotypes continue to inject into relational contexts cognitive biases and behaviors that support both supply and demand aspects of labor-market inequality unless these biases are suppressed by organizational procedures or demanding acts of individual vigilance. This will occur even in the face of countervailing forces that work against inequality. Furthermore, since these lagging gender stereotypes are less likely to be suppressed in institutionally less-scripted work sites such as those at the edge of economic and technological change, these work sites continue to propel gender stereotypes into the future. These less-structured work sites write lagging gender stereotypes into the developing organizational forms and procedures of emerging industries, even as these stereotypes are increasingly suppressed in established, bureaucratically well-ordered industries.

Stability and Change in Contemporary Stereotypes

Not surprisingly, studies of contemporary gender stereotypes show that they have indeed lagged substantially behind declines in workplace inequality. Current and longitudinal studies of gender stereotypes show that descriptive beliefs about the attributes of the typical man or woman are still largely shared and largely unchanged in the United States since the 1970s (Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, and Lueptow 1995, 2001; Spence and Buckner 2000; Twenge 1997). This relative stability has been maintained despite substantial declines in labor-market inequality during the same period. It has also been maintained despite growing egalitarianism in people's conscious gender ideologies, as reflected in increasing percentages of people who report a willingness to vote for a woman for president (National Opinion Research Center 1998).

Despite the overall stability in beliefs about the typical man or woman, there nevertheless have been some hints of change in other aspects of people's descriptive gender beliefs during this period. People's self-reports of their own instru-

mental and expressive traits are usually less gender-typed than are their beliefs about the typical man or woman. In many social contexts, people's estimates of gender stereotypes are more important determinants of their behavior than their own self-reported traits because gender stereotypes represent the rules by which people assume they will be judged by others (see Milkie 1999). Still, according to two studies (Spence and Buckner 2000; Twenge 1997), people's self-reports of their own gender traits, while also generally stable over recent decades, have changed more than their gender stereotypes as applied to others, although a third study disagrees (Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, and Lueptow 2001). In general, both men and women describe themselves as more instrumental than earlier cohorts did, but the effect is stronger for women. As a result, there seems to be a narrowing of the gender gap in men's and women's self-descriptions of their instrumental abilities. It is, however, interesting that there have been either no differences in men's and women's self-reported expressive traits or an increase in expressive traits reported by women. Consistent with the relative stability in the household division of labor, women still attribute much stronger expressive traits to themselves than men attach to themselves. Other studies show that women are evaluated more positively and less negatively than earlier and are now seen by both sexes as similar to men in overall favorability, even though these gains are due to women's being seen by both sexes as "nicer" than men. Men are still rated more highly on the socially valued dimension of instrumental competence (Eagly and Mladinic 1994).

Overall, then, the core structure of cultural beliefs about gender is still intact in both its hierarchical and difference dimensions. The gap on the hierarchical dimension, reflected in beliefs about valued instrumental competence, shows encouraging signs of narrowing. However, the ordinal evaluation of most men as better than most women in valued competence has not yet been eroded.

A Reservoir of Resistance

If a narrowing of the gap between the status and competence ascribed to men and women seems to be occurring, can we extrapolate that a virtual closing of this gap is simply a matter of time, even if a lengthy time? In my view, this may occur. However, we cannot yet be confident that it will because of the capacity of fundamental changes in gender beliefs to activate people's deep seated interests in maintaining clear cultural understandings of gender difference. Modest changes in cultural understandings of men and women can be incorporated into widely shared gender beliefs without evoking much resistance if they do not threaten the core structure of these beliefs that establishes both difference and ordinal hierarchy. Indeed, the Western system of gender inequality has not persisted over centuries through unchanging cultural conceptions of men and women, but through ongoing evolutions of these conceptions in ways that nevertheless continue to reaffirm basic gender differences that justify male dominance (see Bern 1993; Cancian 1987). I suspect that this pattern of change within stability has occurred partly

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because people react to deep threats to the core structure of their understandings of gender difference by reinterpreting events and behavior in ways that reestablish that core structure, even if in an altered, more moderate form.

This resistance process, motivated by people's investment in gender as a fundamental cultural tool for framing social relations, has a powerful capacity to push back against the gender-leveling effects of economic and political change and the motivated actions of ambitious women and gender egalitarians of either sex. For instance, people's deeply held beliefs that men and women are separate categories of people may cause them to implicitly resist beliefs that there are absolutely no instrumental competence differences between men and women in the "things that count." This resistance may facilitate cultural redefinitions of "what counts" as a sign of high-status instrumental competence. It used to "count" to be a pediatrician, for instance, but it no longer counts as much now that many pediatricians are women.

Furthermore, as widely held gender beliefs attribute fewer and fewer differences to men and women in instrumental competence, these changes not only begin to undermine the legitimacy of the hierarchical dimension of gender stereotypes, but they also cause the stability of cultural conceptions of gender difference to depend increasingly on assumptions about women's distinctive communal or expressive skills and traits. If it is harder to believe that men and women differ in instrumental competence, it may be more important to believe that men cannot and should not do caregiving in the way that women do. Recall that beliefs in women's greater expressive or communal traits are the aspects of gender beliefs that have changed least in recent decades, both in terms of gender stereotypes and self-attributions (Spence and Buckner 2000).

In a sense, the cultural battleground over the maintenance of gender as a system of difference and status is shifting toward the feminine arena of nurturance and away from the masculine arena of instrumental competence as a result of progress toward workplace equality (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). To the extent that this shift occurs, however, it activates a deep cultural reservoir of resistance to fundamental changes in the household division of labor or to changes in the status evaluation of caregiving activities. This resistance can be seen in men's persistent unwillingness to take on primary responsibility for caregiving tasks and in some women's unwillingness to relinquish these responsibilities. It can also be seen in the way that women and men who openly represent themselves in the workplace as caregivers as well as workers (say, by taking parental leave) are judged to be less competent and committed workers (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Williams 2000). As Paula England (chapter 8, this volume) points out, persistent inequalities in the household division of labor are sufficient in turn to maintain gender inequality in the labor market, even if gender discrimination in hiring and promotion disappears.

The dynamic, almost devilish ways that cultural understandings of difference and status inequality support and reconstitute one another in widely shared cultural definitions of gender make the core structure of taken-for-granted gender stereotypes difficult, although not impossible, to erode. Without substantial

changes to this core structure, gender will continue to persist as a significant organizing principle of inequality in society, even if the degree of inequality that it produces is reduced in a growing range of workplace contexts. As the degree of inequality that gender produces becomes less and less, however, the cultural foundations of gender difference are also undermined. Basic threats to gender difference in turn threaten people's deep interests in sex and gender as a fundamental tool for rendering themselves and others meaningful as socially valid actors in society. It is difficult to estimate the power of the resistance to full equality that such interests create. I remain hopeful that we can come considerably closer to equality than we have so far. Achieving greater equality will require not only the economic and legal changes that Jackson points to but also the continuing efforts of committed gender egalitarians who call for accountable procedures in the workplace that suppress stereotype bias (see Bielby 2000). Yet the depth of people's interest in gender as a category of meaning for self and other causes me to believe that we dare not be sanguine about the final outcome of the economic and political changes that we are now seeing.

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