

SOCIOLOGY FOR A NEW CENTURY



THIRD EDITION

# CHANGING CONTOURS OF WORK

Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy

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# Chapter Six

## Gender Chasms in the New Economy

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Today, the number of American women participating in the labor force approximately equals the number of men, and women's contribution to family finances is critical for household economic stability. Yet gender remains a significant force in shaping the contours of opportunity in the new economy. It affects aspirations, shapes access to jobs, influences the compensation received, sways relations with coworkers, affects opportunities for promotion, and complicates labor force attachment. When viewed from a global perspective, gender has a greater impact on life chances than any other characteristic attributed to individuals (Fuchs-Epstein 2007). While *sex* and *gender* are commonly treated as synonymous, it is important to recognize that in the world of work, gender is not something that is simply possessed, it is something people do to each other (West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender creates the expectation that women and men will be capable of different things, and conflating gender with biological sex makes it seem "natural" to divide labor along gender lines. Throughout this chapter we call this assumption into question. Furthermore, we suggest that as gender chasms in labor markets and at work subordinate women in terms of both power and resources, men lose out as well.

To illustrate these complex processes, in this chapter we consider why women and men gravitate to different types of occupations and how gender intersects with the capacity to perform work inside and outside of the home. We argue that the new economy has expanded and diversified employment opportunities for both women and men but also that enduring forces

continue to segregate workers on the basis of gender and impose hurdles that block mobility. Some of the chasms that separate men and women in the workplace can be attributed to the choices people make concerning what careers to pursue and where to concentrate their energy. But these gaps also are established by differential treatment on the job and by the various ways workers are subject to discrimination. Some inequalities are the product of interpersonal dynamics, but others result from job designs, as well as the value placed on different types of work.

While equity is a major reason to consider gender inequality, we also ask readers to consider a related problem—how work in the paid labor force affects the capacity to provide care. In a society where most adults are expected to work outside the home, developing new means to support the young, the old, and the disabled has become a pressing policy concern. For example, recall in Chapter 1 the brief discussion of Meg (the trader), who had to make some difficult choices between her job and her family. Her experiences reflect those of the baby boom generation. On the one hand, Meg's story is one of liberation, because she successfully entered into a career that had been largely sex segregated in the old economy. On the other hand, Meg's family demands ultimately dislodged her career, in part because she had to make a choice to either be "all in" or not in at all. Throughout this chapter, we reflect on the need to support work performed both inside and outside of the home and identify how disconnects between the demands of the workplace and those of the home differentially impact women's careers and undermine families.

## When Did Home Work Become Nonwork?

Our friend Erika is a stay-at-home mother who left her job to support her husband's career and raise their two young children. While Kevin is at work in his research lab at a prestigious university—a job that requires long hours and frequent travel—Erika manages the home front—tending to scraped knees, arranging play dates, and doing all the other things that keep their family integrated into their community. For his efforts, Kevin receives accolades, retirement benefits, and a handsome salary. Although she receives occasional pats on the back from her friends who speculate about "how difficult it must be to stay home with the kids all day," Erika's social status is decidedly lower than that of her husband. She receives far less social recognition for her efforts, no awards, and no pay. Her status as a nonworker is most tellingly revealed when she is asked about her intentions to "go back to work" after her children get older. Her numerous frustrations with

mothering work (which are more serious than her culture admits) are felt alone and in private. As a result, Erika is beset with ambivalent feelings about her career choices. Though taking pride in her work as a mother, she misses the rewards of having a good job in the world of paid work. And her husband also loses out, not in the workplace but in having only brief windows of time to spend with his children.

Erika and Kevin have what is commonly considered to be a “traditional” household arrangement. In reality, when viewed in a historical perspective, this clear-cut separation of husbands’ and wives’ roles is anything but traditional. For most of human existence, almost all work centered in and around the home. In these **household economies**, there were gendered divisions of labor, with some tasks primarily assigned to women (cooking and child care being the most notable), but both genders contributed to the family economy. Shared responsibilities also were common. For example, in colonial America, when husbands became ill, wives served as “deputy husbands” and assumed responsibility for virtually all the activities previously performed by their spouses. Though women were not the political equals of men, they were considered workers and their efforts were considered absolutely essential to family survival (Boris and Lewis 2006; Boydston 1990; Ulrich 1982). Furthermore, the culture did not make a distinction between “going to work” and “going home,” because work and family life were, to a great extent, one and the same. As a result, women who worked in and around the home were defined as being real workers, and their efforts were visible and socially recognized. A close approximation of agrarian work-family life worlds can still be witnessed on family farms, where the work of wives and husbands intertwines in proximate physical spaces (Cohen 1991).

Following the Industrial Revolution, and during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American culture reconfigured its orientation toward home work and embraced a breadwinner-homemaker arrangement. But this did not happen immediately with industrialization. In fact, when the early factories physically separated paid employment from work around the home, the first workers were often women and children. Men sometimes refused to participate in these new arrangements (Hareven and Langenbach 1978). However, within the two succeeding generations, men’s and women’s roles became sharply differentiated. The new system, supported by the **ideology of separate spheres**, cast men in the role of wage earners, which in turn encouraged them to evaluate self-worth in terms of career success and the ability to provide for their family’s economic needs. Many women, however, were expected to stay in the home and tend to the needs of their spouses and children. Although this husband/breadwinner–wife/homemaker arrangement is commonly termed *traditional*, it is actually a modern arrangement

unique to the new industrial order. Its influence had major effects on divisions of work in the home, women's access to jobs in the paid economy, and social policy. Women were cast as the weaker sex, were considered dependents rather than workers, and were thought of as being less capable of "real work" than men. A landmark Supreme Court decision (*Muller v. Oregon* 1908), for example, ruled that it was not only acceptable, but also desirable, for employers to limit the number of hours their female employees worked. These are the words of Justice David Brewer, who wrote the majority opinion:

That woman's physical structure and the performance of maternal function place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence is obvious . . . and, as healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring, the physical well-being of a woman becomes the object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and rigor of the race. (Boris and Lewis 2006, 81)

Justice Brewer's comments reflected the dominant cultural attitudes of the early twentieth century that a woman's place is in the home. This ideology of separate spheres not only assigned home work to women and legitimated discrimination against them, it also redefined the economic value of women's efforts in the home. Rather than the home being a place of work (as it was in the eighteenth century and before), the home came to be viewed as a haven from work, the place where men recovered from the toils of the factory and the office (Lasch 1995). What was previously considered work was recast by an emergent **cult of domesticity** that asserted that household tasks were something other than labor, could be effortlessly performed, and offered so many intrinsic rewards that financial compensation was not necessary. In 1965, for every one hour working fathers spent on household tasks, working mothers performed eight. In 2010, men were performing more of the labor around the home, but working women still perform twice the labor that working men do around the home, and this ratio has not changed appreciably since 1985 (Bianchi et al. 2012). Doing domestic labor remains a significant component of cultural definitions of femininity. Women who earn more than their husbands do more domestic labor than comparable women whose husbands outearn them. One prospect is that even when women are primary earners, they still conform to traditional female roles and thus counteract the gender-altering consequences of being the primary earner in the household (Schneider 2011). Alternately, it might reflect an unwillingness on the part of their husbands to assume a larger share of these responsibilities. Either prospect highlights the impact of gender on the way work is divided in households.

Even today, some cultural and political leaders call for a renewal of policy to support the supposedly natural arrangement of the husband/breadwinner–wife/homemaker model (e.g., Santorum 2006). Their vision of a traditional family corresponds with how families were represented on television shows that aired in the mid-twentieth century, such as *Leave It to Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, and *Father Knows Best*. These archetypes were of young, healthy, self-sufficient, heterosexual couples that could prosper on the efforts of one breadwinner. Even if they do not directly say that society is better off when women concentrate their energies in the home, the assertion that life was somehow better or easier in the 1950s as compared to today has been strongly implied. But as Betty Friedan documented in her pathbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), home work in the 1950s bore little resemblance to the image presented on television. For most stay-at-home mothers, home work entailed a grinding repetition of alienating tasks, social isolation, and subservience. Idealizing these families reflects inaccurate ahistorical assumptions about the merits of the gendered division of labor and the organization of household work and the fact that the husband/breadwinner–wife/homemaker arrangement was largely restricted to two-parent families who had opportunities to get good jobs. This arrangement was not an option for those working in low-paying jobs, which included many immigrants and members of racial minorities (Coontz 1997, 2000; Gerstel and Sarkisian 2006). Class biases are evident as well, as middle-class men typically earned incomes that enabled them to support an unpaid wife, but working-class and poor men did not. Furthermore, the notion that women should be “free” from work to tend to matters in the home was not applied to all families, as many African American women were clearly expected to work as servants in support of the new ideal household arrangements for a privileged white society (Nakano Glenn 2002). Early twentieth-century immigrant women were also far more likely than were their native-born counterparts to work outside the home. When they attempted to conform to the dominant view that women should be homemakers, they encountered financial hardship (because their husbands’ incomes were often low). In response, many found ways to make significant economic contributions to the household *within* the home by taking in laundry, managing boarders, or by producing clothing and other necessities (Amott and Matthaei 1996).

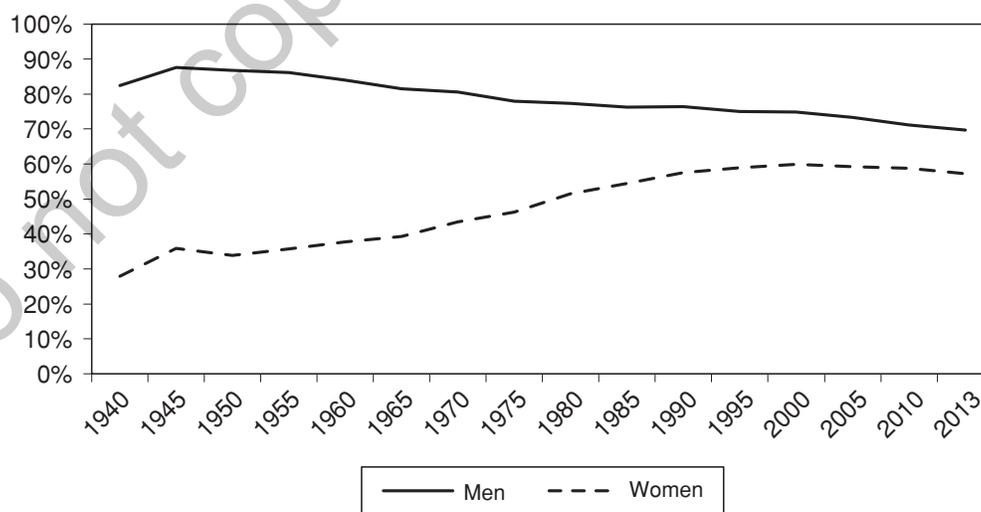
In sum, the problems faced by Erika are a legacy of her culture’s adaptation to industrialization but are also specific to her racial identity and class position in the new economy. For women in less desirable economic circumstances, the prospects of choosing to stay home and mold their lives to conform to the mythic “traditional” arrangements were (and are) not commonly available. Since the 1950s, expectations regarding middle-class white

women's paid employment have changed significantly and the cult of domesticity has weakened. However, the assumption that women will have primary responsibility for the management of the home remains. Moreover, this work is still not recognized for the vital economic role it plays in preparing the next generation for work and enabling workers (like Kevin) to put in long, undistracted hours on the job (Crittenden 2001).

## Women's Participation in the Paid Labor Force in America

While the husband/breadwinner–wife/homemaker arrangement was only available for a portion of the families in the United States in the old economy, it was a dominant model for organizing family lives. Women, especially married women with children, were far less likely to work than were men. And, although this arrangement presented very different opportunities, the clear-cut gendered division of labor created a means to maximize collective family resources for the middle class (Becker 1981). Today, this arrangement is less common: women are almost as likely to work outside of the home as men, and most married-couple households contain two working adults. Exhibit 6.1 shows the magnitude of this change. In 1940, only one in four women were in the paid labor force, but by 2013, nearly two in three were.

**Exhibit 6.1** Men's and Women's Labor Force Participation Rates (Age Sixteen Years and Older): United States, 1940–2013

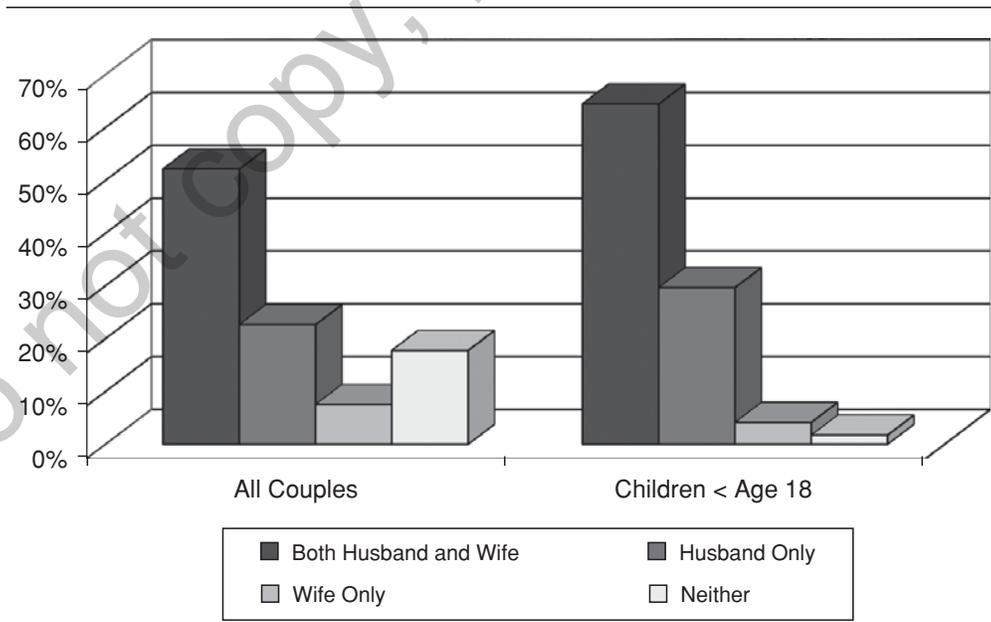


Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Men’s participation declined slightly, reflecting the aging of the population (there are now more retirees) as well as increases in the numbers of young people who delayed their entry into the labor force to complete school. Clearly a convergence is occurring with respect to the labor force participation of men and women.

Exhibit 6.2 shows that the normative arrangement of the old economy, in which the husbands went to work and the wives stayed home, is now the exception. In 2012, most opposite-sex married couples in the United States were dual earners, with both the husband and wife in the paid labor force. There are several reasons for the increase in women’s labor force participation and the growing numbers of dual-earner couples. First is the changing perception of women’s place in society and the remarkable transformation in gender role ideologies. Changes in the structure of the economy have been equally important. Stagnant male incomes made it increasingly difficult for the average husband to support a family on his wage alone (a situation long familiar to immigrant and minority families). Married women, whether they wanted to or not, found that they *had* to work if their families were to maintain their expected standard of living (Bernhardt et al. 2001; Warren and Tyagi 2003). Also, the remarkable growth of the service sector (a significant employer of female workers even in the old economy) created a demand for

**Exhibit 6.2** Employment Configurations of Married Couples: United States, 2012



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

an expanded female labor force in jobs that do not challenge conventional attitudes about gender. Exhibit 6.2 also shows that married couples with children (including those with young children) usually have two earners in the labor force, a remarkable reversal of the earlier preference for stay-at-home mothers. However, among married couples with only a single earner, it remains the case that wives are more likely than husbands to be the ones to drop out of the labor force; in that sense, children still affect the labor force attachment of wives more than husbands.

The rise of the dual-earner couple has forced families to confront issues less commonly present in the old economy, such as who will care for children while both partners are at work, whose career will take priority, and how to select and pay for day care. As we discuss later, old gender templates play a strong role in determining couples' responses to the stresses they experience in the new economy.

## Gender Inequalities in Compensation

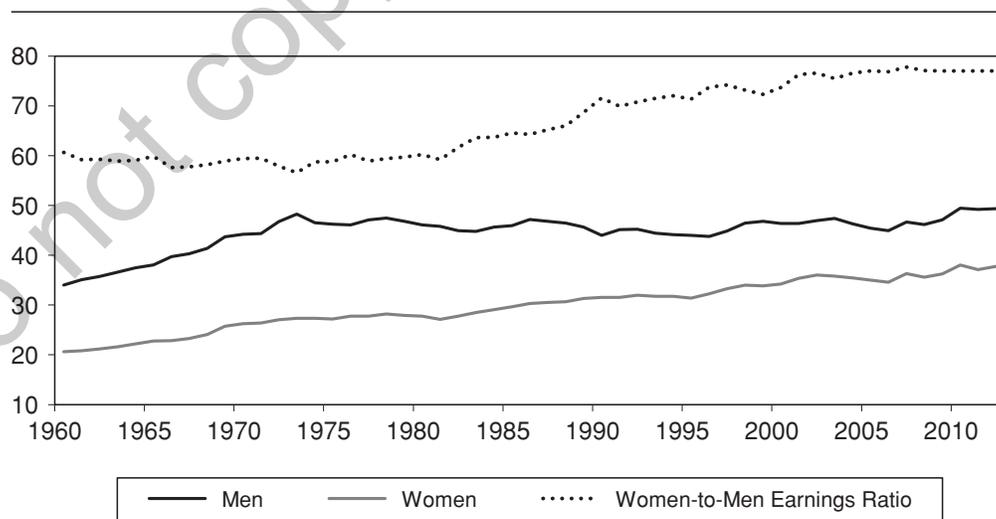
Men and women still face very different prospects of ever rising to the top of career ladders, falling off those ladders, or even making it beyond the lowest rungs. The data are sobering. On virtually every measure of earnings, women trail well behind men. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2013, the average woman worker earned \$13,165 less than the average male worker. Women are twice as likely to be poor and are much more likely to hold low-paying jobs that offer slim prospects for upward mobility (Gilbert 2003; Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson 2000). They are half as likely as men to make it into the ranks of top income earners and are far less likely to achieve the very highest of ranks in corporations. As an example, consider that in 2014, among Fortune 500 CEOs, for every woman there were twenty men (Catalyst 2014). Simply stated, while women are catching up to men with respect to labor force attachment, they have not caught up in respect to pay and position in the new economy. Recent trends indicate that the gaps are not narrowing as much as one might hope and some of the gender gaps remain as wide as ever.

Many complexities are involved in analyzing the extent of gender inequalities in earnings. For example, should one compare all women with all men or only those who are working in the paid labor force? Note that the latter analysis tends to underplay the extent of gender inequality because women who are not in a position to earn any income are excluded from the calculations. The fact that women are much more likely to be working in part-time jobs creates additional biases in wage disparity calculations that base analysis on full-time workers. But even when the comparisons of men and women

workers are restricted to those who are working full-time, year-round jobs, women still tend to earn considerably less than their male counterparts.

First consider the good news. Exhibit 6.3 shows that the women-to-men earnings gap has been closing. As the top line in the graph shows, in 1960, for every one dollar a man (working a full-time job) earned, women earned about 61 cents. In 2012, full-time women workers were earning 77 cents for every dollar earned by full-time working men. Now consider the bad news. A sizable wage gap still exists between men and women full-time workers. Again, because we have restricted the analysis to full-time workers, note that this analysis underplays the differences that would be revealed if part-time workers were included in the equation. In addition, while women's wages have been rising, much of the reason for the reduction in the gap between men and women workers is stagnation in men's wages. In other words, while women seem to be making some progress in enhancing their incomes, men's real incomes are actually a bit lower than they were in the early 1970s. So the closing wage gap can be explained both by an enhancement of women's earnings and a leveling of men's earnings. Also, the most recent decade of data suggests the rate of convergence between men's and women's earnings is slowing, at least in comparison with the gains made from 1970 through 1995. The reasons for this slowing convergence are not altogether clear. One study suggests that it may be the result of contemporary women pursuing jobs that offer lower pay

**Exhibit 6.3** Women's and Men's Earnings (in \$1,000s) and Income Ratios for Full-Time Year-Round Workers: United States, 1960–2012 (Earnings Adjusted to 2012 Dollars)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

(Blau and Kahn 2006). In other words, if women were gravitating to jobs that paid more, the gap would be closing further still. We return later to the question of why they are not. Additionally, the persistence of the gender-wage gap results not only from men's wages being higher than women's but also because men work longer hours now in comparison to women. So as more women enter into the labor force and into the types of jobs held by men, they are not working long enough to fully catch up (Youngjoo and Weeden 2014). Thus work hours, allocation of job opportunities, and compensation differentials on the basis of gender combine to create and sustain income disadvantages.

A number of mainstream media publications have considered an interesting trend: approximately one in five wives make more than their husbands, a remarkable change considering that in 1970 only one in twenty couples was in a comparable situation (Perpitone 2010). However, more careful study of this dynamic indicates that the change is not as dramatic as these figures suggest. According to research by Sarah Winslow-Bowe (2006), if one were to follow couples in which the wives outearn the husbands over time, within a few years the vast majority shift to the husband having a higher income. The reason for the wife's income advantage commonly occurs because the husband lost his job or is temporarily out of the labor force. It is actually quite rare to find couples in which the wife maintains an income that is consistently higher than her husband's over time. And if one were to identify couples in which wives have consistent income advantages, most of these couples are low earners. In dual-earner families in the bottom economic quintile, wives outearn their husbands 70% of the time, compared to only 34% for top quintile dual-earner families (Glynn 2012). While the wife might make a significantly higher percentage of the household earnings than the husband in these couples, the actual monetary difference in their incomes is quite small, given that both are earning low incomes.

In sum, wide gaps exist between men's and women's earnings. Some of the explanation can be found in the fact that household work is not compensated, which leaves many women without paychecks. The expectation that women will assume disproportionate household and child care responsibilities increases the odds that women will be funneled into part-time jobs, which also results in lower earnings. But even among full-time workers, women's pay lags well behind that of men. Why is this?

## **Socialization, Career Selection, and Career Paths**

The large-scale entry of women into the paid labor force reshaped how men and women view their roles and capabilities and opened doors that were previously closed. As a result, the gender composition of entire fields has

shifted. For example, women are now the majority of graduates in veterinary colleges, a profession that in the 1960s and before was exclusively male. And growing evidence suggests that men want to be more involved in intensive provision of care to their children (Harrington, Van Deusen, and Mazar 2012). Nevertheless, gender segregation remains a central part of the contours of work in the present-day American economy.

One reason for these imbalances is that gender templates encourage men and women to have different aspirations. From early childhood, individuals make choices about what kinds of activities to engage in, what skills to develop, and what interests to pursue. Along each step of the way, they develop skills that, in turn, become part of the tool kit they use to construct future encounters. Ultimately, these choices influence eventual occupational goals and destinations. However, *choice* might not be the most accurate term to use because decisions are made in the context of powerful social expectations about gender. Various **agents of socialization** (including parents, schools, and the media) instill beliefs that boys/men and girls/women are not equally suited to all tasks. The confluence of social pressures and transmission of taken-for-granted paths, over time, explains why men and women place different emphases on their identities as breadwinners, why they select different occupations, and their willingness to sacrifice their careers for the needs of their children, spouses, and aging parents. The result of socialization is that boys and girls (and men and women) are continuously molded to have interests and identities suited to different types of endeavors.

Americans are socialized to expect women to fill certain positions in society, and in that respect many jobs are “gendered.” Not every culture views gendered lines of work in the same way. For example, in the United States most secondary school teachers are women (60%), but in India, two in three (69%) secondary school teachers are men (United Nations Statistics Division 2011). Similarly, three in four doctors in the United States are men, but in Russia nearly three in four doctors are women. Statistics such as these firmly establish that expectations about which jobs should be done by men or women are culturally determined (Harden 2001). Although women have made remarkable forays into many professions that were previously nearly exclusively male, Exhibit 6.4 shows that many occupations remain almost exclusively filled by women workers. Notably, nearly all preschool and kindergarten teachers are women, as are secretaries, dental hygienists, dental assistants, dietitians, typists, and child care workers. Conversely, women are nearly entirely absent in construction industry jobs such as those performed by plumbers, carpenters, and electricians.

Gender expectations interact with class and racial differences to produce a complex, varied pattern of gender segregation in American workplaces. For women at the bottom of the opportunity divide, a major problem is the existence of **occupational ghettos**, gendered jobs that typically offer few

paths to upward mobility (Grusky and Charles 2004). As Exhibit 6.4 shows, most maids, day care workers, and secretaries are women. The fact that the income gap between white and black women is relatively small (far smaller than it is for white and black men) is linked to the fact that women of all races are funneled into lower-paying jobs such as these.

Socialization encourages workers to feel well-matched to gendered lines of work. For example, one study of secretaries found that most of these

**Exhibit 6.4** Occupations With High Percentages of Women Workers: United States, 2013

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number Employed (1,000s)</i>	<i>Percent Female</i>	<i>Women's Median Weekly Earnings</i>
Preschool and kindergarten teachers	484	98%	\$624
Childcare workers	410	95%	\$418
Secretaries and administrative assistants	2,113	94%	\$677
Receptionists and information clerks	828	92%	\$527
Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	404	92%	\$732
Billing and posting clerks	380	92%	\$629
Registered nurses	2,023	90%	\$1,086
Nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides	1,207	89%	\$450
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	702	89%	\$670
Teacher assistants	501	89%	\$475
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	605	88%	\$406
Office clerks, general	734	84%	\$596
Personal care aides	539	84%	\$445
Elementary and middle school teachers	2,138	81%	\$937
Social workers	507	80%	\$818
Cashiers	932	72%	\$379
First-line supervisors of office and administrative support workers	828	70%	\$748
Waiters and waitresses	558	70%	\$400

Source: U.S. Department of Labor.

women (especially older women) enjoyed their jobs. Rather than perceiving gender ghettoization as a source of oppression, they had accepted what they were socialized to believe—that men and women are different from one another, that women are skilled at doing tasks that men are bad at performing (especially nurturing), and that they personally possessed these skills (Kennelly 2002, 2006).

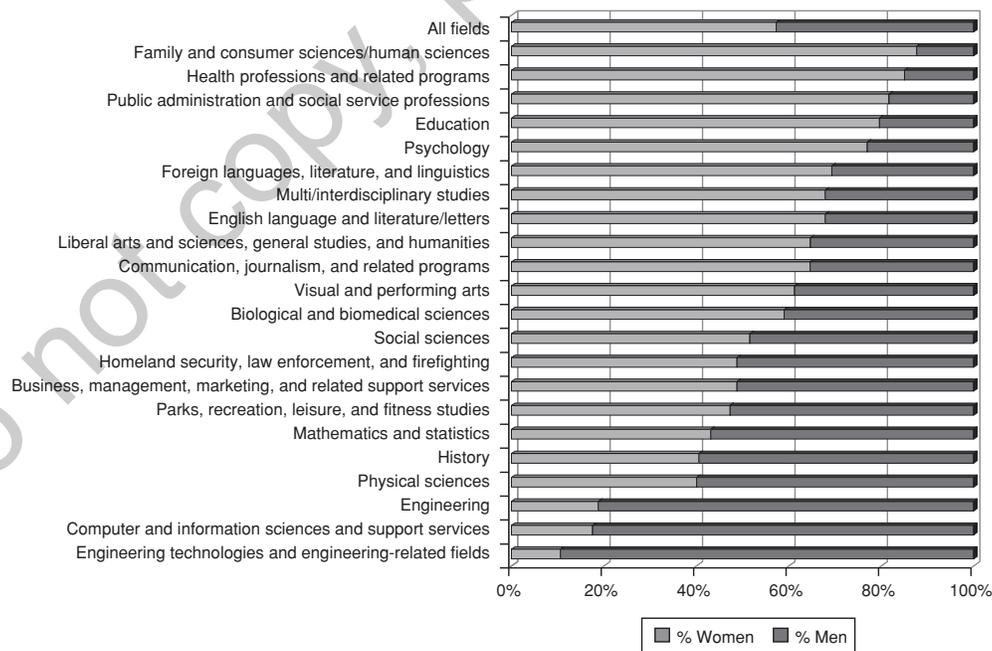
Men with lower levels of education traditionally enjoyed advantages over women with comparable credentials in the old economy. These men were encouraged to seek, and generally found, jobs in manufacturing, construction, or automobile repair—work that offered opportunities for skill and income expansion and stronger prospects for economic security in both the short and long term. But less educated African American men were a notable exception because they often were excluded from jobs of this kind. In recent years, the perception has grown that the situation of boys from poor and working-class backgrounds has deteriorated and that girls now have the advantage. The decline of well-paid manufacturing jobs, and evidence that girls are outperforming boys in school, seem to indicate that boys who do not have high levels of education are aspiring to jobs that no longer exist. However, a careful look at the evidence indicates that race, rather than class, is interacting with (not replacing) gendered aspirations. Less-educated white men are not aspiring in large numbers to enter traditionally female fields but continue to find desirable, “masculine” work in areas such as construction or criminal justice. Poorly educated African American men continue to hope for traditionally male jobs that are unavailable to them and thus are falling behind (Kimmel 2006; Young 2003). Gender segregation at the bottom of the opportunity divide persists but takes different forms for members of different racial groups.

Gender socialization also plays a role for men and women holding comparatively good jobs in the new economy. One means of illustrating its power is to consider how young adults select college majors, a critical step in determining subsequent career options. Exhibit 6.5 reveals that even today, young men continue to gravitate toward traditionally male-dominated fields (e.g., computer science and engineering) and women tend to gravitate toward college majors associated with helping professions (psychology, education, health care). In part, this is the result of gender beliefs, one of which is that men tend to be better at math than women. Research into this issue reveals that differences in mathematical abilities are actually small or even nonexistent. And even when differences are identified, scant evidence exists to support any conclusion that these are based on biology (Ceci, Williams, and Barnett 2009). But these beliefs create self-fulfilling prophecies. Once the perception of capabilities is embraced by young men and women, even

when those individuals have equivalent skills, it influences their aspirations to pursue mathematics-related professions. In other words, boys pursue math-related careers not because they actually have better skills than girls; they do so because they *believe* that they are better (Correll 2001, 2004). These beliefs, in turn, lead them to take additional courses and further develop their skills. While socialization may lead individuals to develop certain interests and skills, agency is enacted as young women and men self-select into career paths, expressing interests in college majors and particular types of entry-level jobs because these are viewed as compatible with self-conceptions (meaning “who I am”) (Cech 2013a). But this is not the only factor in play in understanding gender contours within the new economy. As we discuss later, some women enter male-dominated fields (such as engineering and science), only to find themselves marginalized or that jobs prove to be incompatible with their family responsibilities (Ceci, Williams, and Barnett 2009; Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering 2006; Preston 2004).

Aside from its role in career selection, gender socialization influences how men and women respond to work and family strains. Among working-class

**Exhibit 6.5** Gender Compositions of Bachelor’s Degrees Conferred: United States, 2010–2011



Source: Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (2013 edition).

and poor families, women are more likely than men to arrange work schedules to allow involvement in their children's lives (Garey 1999). Among higher-income families, men seldom sacrifice their careers for family (Becker and Moen 1999). In fact, the opposite is the case, as men devote themselves more intensively to their work because they see this as a duty to their families. To compensate for their husbands' reluctance or unwillingness to relinquish career goals, women modify their work lives, scale back their work hours, and redirect their professional interests toward alternate careers (Moen and Sweet 2003). As a result, dual-earner families are transforming the twentieth-century separate spheres model into new **neotraditional arrangements**, wherein women retain primary responsibility for child care while keeping one foot in the labor market in lower-pressure (and typically lower-paying) jobs.

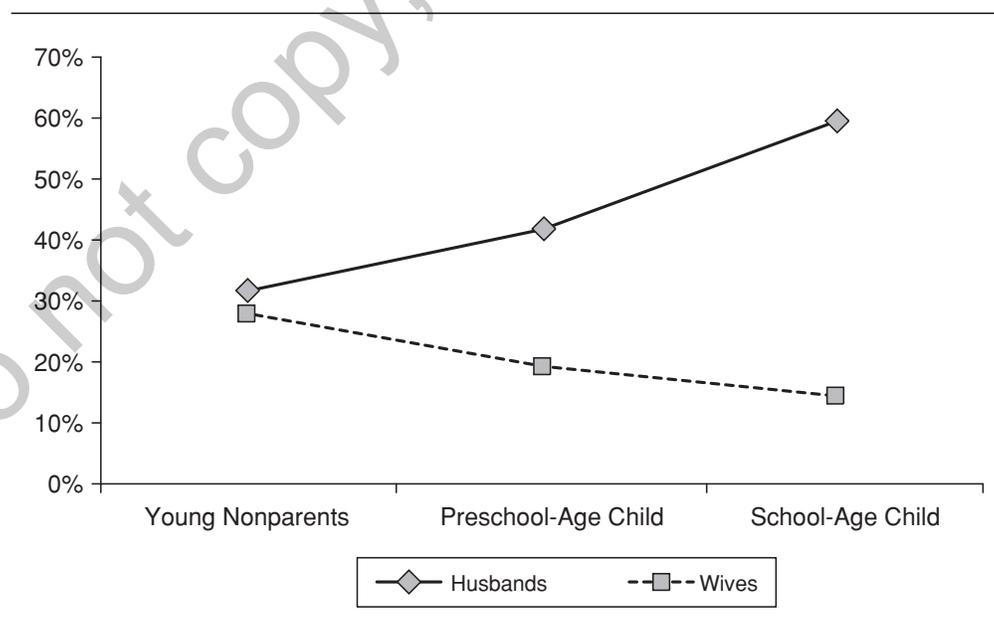
The strategic choice to scale back work hours comes with significant costs to professional women, not only in immediate compensation but also in long-term career prospects. Working women who are able to arrange shorter hours or flexible schedules with their employers are at risk of being placed on mommy tracks and assigned tasks that offer fewer rewards and less opportunity for growth compared with workers who remain on the fast track (Barnett and Gareis 2000b). And even when more attractive opportunities to scale back on work are present (which can be the case for professional workers such as lawyers and academics), there is a very real prospect that they may never get back on track once they step off (Meiksins and Whalley 2002; Moen and Roehling 2005). Particularly in occupations where time commitment is valued highly, mothers' efforts to limit their work hours are a major cause of the gender pay gap in contemporary America (Goldin 2014).

For dual-earner couples, neotraditional arrangements create marked disparities between wives' career opportunities and those afforded to their husbands. As one partner's job is put on hold, the other's continues to grow, which reverberates into subsequent life course decisions, such as whose job to favor, when and where to move, and who should assume responsibility for family care work. Exhibit 6.6 illustrates this dynamic. When dual-earner couples manage their relationships, they can choose to favor either one partner's career (leaving the other as a trailing spouse), to take turns, or to give priority to neither partner's career. Most husbands and wives start their careers on relatively equal footing, with neither partner's career being favored, but as their lives develop over time, wives' careers tend to be towed along and follow the direction charted by their husbands' job opportunities. Their options are constrained by investments in husbands' careers, which in turn limits their options to advance and grow, even after children have left the household (Pixley 2008; Sweet, Moen, and Meiksins 2007). It is

important to recognize that when jobs demand long hours, they tend to create unequal spousal commitments to work inside and outside the home. These unequal commitments play out in a gendered way, such that when husbands work long hours, wives are significantly more likely to exit the labor force. It is rare for husbands to quit their jobs in order to adjust to their wife's job demands. As such, overwork tends to exacerbate gender inequalities (Cha 2010).

Catherine Hakim (2001) argued that the reason for this type of dynamic is that many women express a preference to center their identities in the home rather than in the workplace and that this may explain some (but not all) of the divergences in husbands' and wives' careers (Ceci and Williams 2010; Kan 2007). It is important to recognize, however, that for most women the decision to leave the labor force, or to scale back on career aspirations, is not a happy choice but one that is necessary when the combined demands of work and family outstrip time and energy resources (Stone 2007). When faced with these types of tensions, a common strategy is to give up either on career goals or family goals, so it is not that women prefer to drop out of the labor force but that this is the preference among very constrained options. Some women try to resolve these tensions by locating work situations that are more compatible with responsibilities held outside of the job. For example, some women use self-employment as a means to balance

**Exhibit 6.6** Percentage of Husbands and Wives Reporting That Their Career Was Favored Over Their Spouse's Career (by Life Stage)



Source: Sweet and Moen (2006).

work and family commitments, and these types of jobs are commonly pursued after the birth of children. Such is the case for African American female entrepreneurs who establish beauty salons (Harvey 2005). In contrast, children have little effect on men's pursuit of self-employment, and men tend to use self-employment as a means to advance career objectives (Carr 1996). A more recent study revealed that a woman's social class may affect her reasons for self-employment. The study found that women in lower-level jobs pursue self-employment as a means of balancing work and family, but women pursuing higher-powered professional careers act like men, and when they do become self-employed, they do so primarily for career reasons (Budig 2006). Preferences may be changing, however. In interviews with young women about their career aspirations, Kathleen Gerson (2009) asked young women what they wanted out of life. Not surprisingly, most wanted a family (including children and a spouse), as well as a career. When she pressed them and asked, "Suppose you could only have two of these things . . . a husband/partner, a child, or a career, which two would you pick?" most of the young women chose to discard the husband! Social class plays a role when women are confronted by this choice. A recent study found that affluent women are more likely to marry because they are increasingly able to find partners willing to accommodate their careers; lower-income women have less access to such partners, so are decreasingly likely to marry, although they still work and have children (Carbone and Cahn 2014). And interviews with fathers who stay at home with their children report feeling the same types of rewards (and frustrations) that stay-at-home mothers experience (Harrington, Van Deusen, and Mazar 2012).

Exhibit 6.7 presents a graphic image of an important dynamic operating in the new economy. As revealed in the research by Phyllis Moen and colleagues, if we were to trace back to the old economy, we would find that women and men did, in fact, occupy separate worlds, and within those worlds, members of each gender had common interests and values (Moen and Spencer 2006). But the transition to the new economy has brought with it a far greater diversity of what women want and a greater diversity of what men want as well. Thus, over time, it could be said that there are "converging divergences" in interests, values, and goals. And if we were to add a life course dimension to this analysis, it becomes apparent that what any woman or man wants or needs is likely to change over time. For example, some workers might want to labor intensely when they are age twenty to thirty, to reduce work commitments in the midthirties, and ramp back up in their fifties. When they reach retirement age, some might still want to work, but in "not so big jobs" (Moen 2007). Focusing on the diversity of values and goals reveals that the career paths women and men follow are not necessarily paths

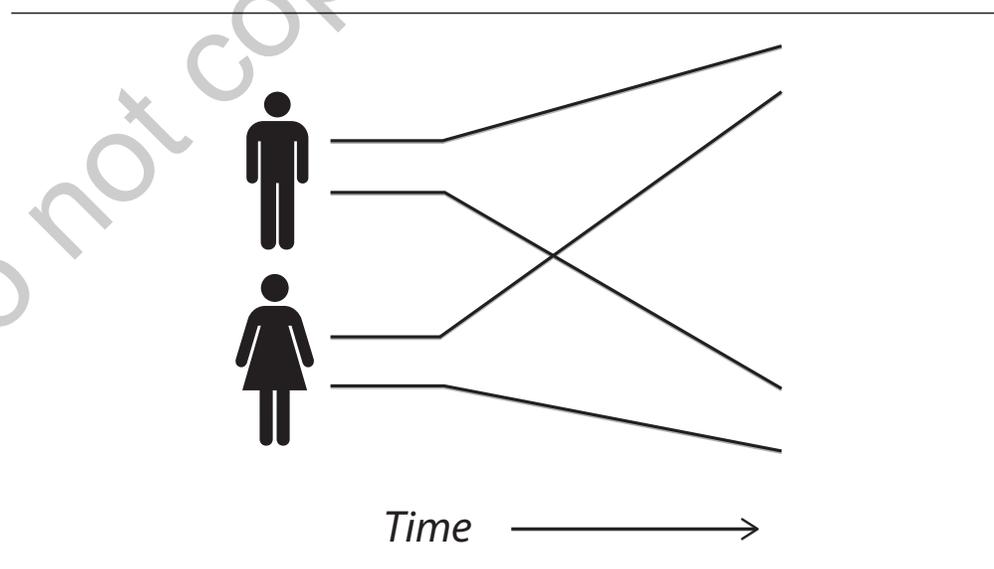
of preference and that if opportunity structures were not as limited, likely far greater degrees of gender equality would be evident in the new economy.

In sum, socialization continues to shape men's and women's career pursuits, as well as their expectations about what they should do off the job. The tensions evident in the new economy tend to push workers to revert to the gender templates established in the old economy, with women assuming primary responsibility for the management of the domestic sphere and men adopting roles as breadwinners. But this adoption of old gendered strategies for managing work and home occurs in a new economic and cultural context in which most workers want and need to remain attached to the paid labor force. Liberating work in the new economy will require a serious response to the culturally based forces that create cookie-cutter jobs that push working families to adopt neotraditional arrangements—a practice that tends to cost both men and women the opportunity to work as equals inside and outside the home.

### Interpersonal Discrimination in the Workplace

Socialization contributes to gender inequalities at work by influencing the supplies of workers seeking entry into different fields. But gender also plays a role in shaping the demand for workers with specific qualities. To illustrate how this happens, imagine interviewing a series of applicants for a demanding job, a position that will require long hours of work and some travel. Your

**Exhibit 6.7** Converging Divergences in Women's and Men's Values and Preferences Over Time



choice comes down to two candidates, Jane and John, individuals who have identical qualifications and who performed equally well at all stages of the interview process. The only difference between the candidates is that Jane is visibly pregnant, but John (obviously) is not. Which person would you hire? We have posed this question to hundreds of students over the years, but only rarely has a student offered even mild support for hiring Jane. They have eloquently (and often emphatically) argued that her candidacy poses a number of concerns, including the inevitability that she will want to take time off from her job, that she will be unable to put in as long hours as John, and that she will be in no position to travel once her child is born. As uncomfortable as it may make them, they conclude that it would be their responsibility to hire the person most fit to meet the demands of the job—John.

All of these conclusions are based on **gender schemas**, culturally based models concerning the core differences that distinguish men from women and assumptions about men's and women's places in society (Cech 2013a). Notice how parental status becomes a master status for Jane in a way that it does not for John (who conceivably could have an infant waiting for him at home). There is a ready acceptance of the assumption that Jane would want to have reduced hours after she had her child and that the child would detract from her work. But it is also possible that she could have a partner who wants to stay home or has an excellent day care arrangement. What takes precedence in favoring John is the emphasis on crudely constructed visions of how women and men behave in different situations and the assumption that Jane and John would behave in a corresponding manner. This is a process termed **statistical discrimination**, wherein perceptions of group tendencies become the rationale for differential treatment of individuals. Statistical discrimination is problematic for a number of reasons, not least of which is the widespread use of **stereotypes**—often erroneous assumptions about social groups that obscure the range of behaviors and abilities present within any population.

In the new economy, evidence indicates that gender schemas may have less power than they did in the old economy, but this may be conditional on parental status. An important study by Shelley Correll (2007) found that when presented with comparable job candidates, evaluators perceived women as being largely as capable and committed as men. However, she also found that childless women were called back at twice the rate of mothers. Other studies show that motherhood is associated with lower earnings, especially for those occupying lower-income jobs (Budig and Hodges 2010). In contrast to the motherhood penalty, associated with perceived deficits in competence and commitment, marriage and fatherhood status actually offer men a premium, improving perceptions of worker competence, pay, and

prospects for promotion (Bygren and Gähler 2012; Glauber 2008; Killewald 2013). So while the perceived competence of women has gained more solid footing, the perception of mothers as being good workers has not.

Women are sometimes subjected to **hostile sexism**, the belief that they are inferior to men at specific tasks (Masser and Abrams 2004). An example can be found in the comments made by former Harvard University president Lawrence Summers, who in 2005 expressed his opinion that one reason why female scientists are scarce at top research universities is because of innate differences between the sexes. When power holders accept these types of beliefs, the likelihood increases that they will operate on the assumption that women are likely to fail and to view their accomplishments with skepticism. The denial of the opportunity to succeed contributes to self-fulfilling

**Exhibit 6.8** Instead of Hiring This Woman, Most College Students Would Hire an Equally Qualified Man. Would You?

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prophecies, as workplace stratification systems lopsidedly allocate opportunities to men and then reward their successes with even more opportunities to excel. One would expect that egalitarian and meritocratic values would hold sway among entrepreneurial teams, which operate under considerable pressure to succeed. While experience counts, even here men tend to rise into leadership positions, in part because gender is used as a quick and dirty means of sorting individuals into levels of perceived leadership potential. And perhaps even more telling is the observation that when husbands and wives are members of the same team, the husband is far more likely to assume a leadership position (Yang and Aldrich 2014).

Note that women also can be the objects of **benevolent sexism**, which operates on the assumption that they are better than men at other types of activities, such as planning social events, organizing files, or caring for children. This, in turn, prompts gatekeepers to open doors for their entry into jobs that have been traditionally defined as “women’s work.” The problem here is that women tend to be viewed as exceptionally qualified for work that is less rewarding than “men’s work,” an issue we return to shortly. Benevolent sexism also can lead employers or managers to “protect” female workers and lead them not to challenge them or involve them in difficult or dangerous tasks. The result is that women may not have as many opportunities as men to develop new skills and to demonstrate their capabilities on the job. One especially compelling illustration of this dynamic can be found in the U.S. military, which protects women soldiers from field combat and in so doing, shields them from the opportunity to demonstrate the valor and leadership needed for promotion to the top ranks. Sexist practices also map onto strategies of advancing collective interests of workers. One example of this can be seen in the use of a “brotherhood” ethos in groups such as Vendors for Justice. By using “brotherhood” rhetoric, the organizers of street vendors in New York City sought to unite workers who shared particular values, including the notion that men stand with one another to protect women. On one level, “brotherhood” created cohesion among a restricted group of men, but at the same time it alienated women and men who held more progressive values (Roychowdhury 2014).

**Overt discrimination** involves visible, conscious, and intentional decisions to bar entry into occupations. In the old economy women were excluded from most professional occupational fields and it was customary for them to be paid lower wages than men, even when they performed the same work. Not until the late 1960s and early 1970s did elite colleges such as Dartmouth and Princeton admit women into many of their professional programs. Similarly, overt discrimination excluded women from well-paid jobs in the skilled trades. Entry into apprenticeship programs was difficult or impossible for

women; union membership was largely restricted to men, and women who did succeed in entering male-dominated trades were often met with a hostile reception that made it difficult for them to “learn the ropes.” Today, there are far fewer instances of overt discrimination, largely because of the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**, which prohibited employment discrimination based on sex (as well as race, color, religion, or national origin), and the **Equal Pay Act of 1963**, which prohibited paying men and women different wages for equal work. These laws, and a series of successful lawsuits against employers, helped to change work policy and employment practices, which in turn has opened avenues for women to enter historically male-dominated professions and industries. Overt discrimination still occurs in the new economy, but at least in comparison with the 1950s and before, the problem is less severe and women now have legal recourse. Notably absent are federal labor laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and limited numbers of states have legislation to this effect. This kind of legislation matters. One experiment, for example, revealed that when job seekers signaled a possibility that they were gay in application materials (for example, by listing that they were treasurer of a LGBT organization), they were only about half as likely to be contacted after submitting a job application. However, the same study revealed that the degree of discrimination was buffered in states that had prohibitions, providing compelling evidence that legislation makes very real differences in leveling playing fields (Tilcsik 2011).

When faced with overt discrimination, workers who know they are being treated in an unfair manner are ostensibly in a position to level complaints or to sue their employers. Such was the case for Ramona Scott, one of 115 women who testified in a class-action gender discrimination lawsuit against Walmart. Scott testified that, after being passed over for promotion, her manager told her, “Men are here to make a career and women aren’t. . . . Retail [work] is for housewives who just need to earn extra money.” Stephanie Odle, an assistant manager, joined the same class-action lawsuit against Walmart only after she learned by chance that her male coworker earned \$10,000 more a year than she did (Head 2004). In the summer of 2011, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that such large class-action suits were unacceptable. A major concern for the court was the question of how reasonable it is to make awards to most or all women who work for an employer, based on a limited number of identifiable instances of problems in employment practices. The decision is likely to make it much more difficult to use class-action suits in cases of suspected employment discrimination affecting large numbers of employees (Liptak 2011). An added barrier in establishing class interests is that employees often do not know when and how they have been discriminated against, in part because information on

employee pay is usually kept closely guarded. As a result, many workers never learn the extent to which they have been treated unfairly. Even female scientists at MIT had little understanding of the extent to which they were disadvantaged in work assignments, promotions, and allocation of lab space until a group of them shared their experiences and saw patterns that otherwise were invisible (MIT 1999). Leveling complaints also can involve career costs because even when these complaints are legitimate, the victims can be perceived as troublemakers.

Even when they want to, employees face uphill battles in lodging complaints against their employers. One of the most notable cases in recent history is that of Lilly Ledbetter, a manager at Goodyear who repeatedly received lower raises than the men who worked with her. Over time, the accumulation of smaller pay increases led to her making tens of thousands of dollars less than men who were hired at the same time as she was and who were working in comparable positions. In a stunning decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled (by a narrow majority) that Ledbetter was *not* entitled to damages under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because she did not protest the compensation differences shortly after each of the pay-setting decisions was made. The fact that she lacked the information needed to do so, as well as the implications that seeking redress might have had on her career, were captured in the dissenting statement by Justice Ginsberg:

The Court's insistence on immediate contest overlooks common characteristics of pay discrimination. Pay disparities often occur, as they did in Ledbetter's case, in small increments; cause to suspect that discrimination is at work develops only over time. Comparative pay information, moreover, is often hidden from the employee's view. Employers may keep under wraps the pay differentials maintained among supervisors, no less the reasons for those differentials. Small initial discrepancies may not be seen as meet for a federal case, particularly when the employee, trying to succeed in a nontraditional environment, is averse to making waves. (*Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.* 2007)

To address this concern, the first act of legislation signed into law by President Obama was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which changed how the statute of limitations for filing grievances against employers is defined. Rather than requiring that the grievance be filed within 180 days of the employer's decision in respect to *the determination* of pay levels, employees can now file a grievance within 180 days of *the receipt* of each paycheck in which discrimination is argued to be evident. While a significant step forward, the onus remains on employees to show that they have been discriminated against, and, as we discuss shortly, more often than not employees remain in a position that limits their ability to do so.

Another concern is that women and members of minority groups also can be subject to **covert discrimination**, wherein power holders structure opportunities in a biased manner but in ways that the employee may find difficult to detect or prove. A manager who is reluctant to employ or promote women, for instance, can try to increase the chances of failure by making the employee's life exceedingly difficult. An employee may find herself short-staffed, have her hours cut, or be assigned unfavorable tasks or scheduled for work at times incompatible with her needs off the job. Similarly, she may be set up for failure by being placed in situations for which she has not been properly trained or on jobs that have low odds for success. Covert discrimination is one of the most frequently cited contributors to the existence of a **glass ceiling**—an invisible barrier that prevents female white-collar workers from rising to the highest ranks.

It is also important to consider motivations when discrimination occurs. In the new economy, it is possible that discrimination is less often practiced deliberately *against* employees but rather *for* employees whom managers see as especially worthy of opportunity. Among managers, “fitting in” is of paramount importance, which influences their tendency to gravitate to, and create, gender and racially homogenous work teams. White men hold most positions of power, so they have the greatest leverage in reproducing gender and racially homogeneous managerial teams (Elliott and Smith 2004). The protégé, the junior employee who looks, acts, and identifies with the (white male) boss, has a decided advantage in this culture and may be rewarded by supervisors’ designing new jobs fitted to his strengths. The women excluded from “old boys’ clubs” sometimes suspect that they have been wrongly passed over, but proving the existence of discrimination in such a culturally mediated process can be challenging (if not impossible).

An additional problem confronting women (as well as racial and sexual minorities) can be the existence of a **hostile work environment**, a situational context so caustic that it undermines the ability to perform jobs. Although not formally barred from working in the company of men, women can find themselves in uncomfortable situations or subjected to unwanted sexual propositions. Fully one in three women in their midtwenties has experienced unwanted touching or invasions of their personal space on the job (Uggen and Blackstone 2004). Work in such contexts can send subtle and not-so-subtle messages to women that they either do not belong or that they are primarily valued on the basis of sexual interests; it also can undermine their productivity and advancement. Of note, similar reports of hostile work environments are offered by men who try to enter traditionally female-dominated professions such as clerical work or nursing (Henson and Rogers 2001). However, the uncomfortable gender environment men

encounter in these situations also can produce **glass escalators** that lead them into higher-level, better-paid jobs. A classic study found that male kindergarten teachers encounter a difficult work environment (especially from hostile parents) in which questions are raised about their motives, their sexuality, and so forth. Far from harming their career prospects, this can actually encourage the transformation of these teachers into school principals, a more conventionally male role in which they acquire greater authority and higher pay (Williams 1991). More recent research confirms the continued existence of glass escalators for men in many female-dominated occupations (Smith 2012).

Some women are placed by their superiors in no-win situations, forced to choose whether to acquiesce to unwanted relationships or resist and experience near-inevitable, career-damaging repercussions. Male-dominated workplaces tend toward masculine cultural values and behavior, and in this world, sexual jokes and horseplay can be especially problematic if only a few women are represented. This also poses problems for sexual minorities, whose participation in sexual discussions or office romance is unwelcomed and received with hostility. It is commonly assumed that the victims of sexual harassment are the least powerful members in organizations, but this is not always the case. In fact, female supervisors experience more harassment than nonsupervisors. One likely contributing factor is that women are statistical minorities among supervisors, suggesting that the performance of work in male-dominated social contexts leaves women especially vulnerable to harassment (McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone 2012).

Policing sexuality in the workplaces of the new economy is problematic for a number of reasons. One concern is that many consensual romantic encounters (and marriages) are formed as the result of working together, and it is not unusual for spouses to seek work within the same organization (Creamer and Associates 2001; Schiebinger, Henderson, and Gilmartin 2008; Sweet and Moen 2004). Additionally, work cultures (accepted by both male and female employees), such as those of restaurant waitstaff, are often accepting of sexually tinged coworker interplay, including pinching, joking, and even casual encounters (Williams, Giuffre, and Dellinger 1999). Other jobs, such as those of comedy writers and those in the publishing industry, require employees to develop materials that some may find objectionable, and this in turn may influence the gender composition of fields (see Exhibit 6.9). Attempting to constrain discussions or eliminate potentially offensive materials could ultimately undermine the prospect of actually doing this work (Dellinger and Williams 2002). In the service economy, selling sexual titillation (such as at a Hooters restaurant) is part and parcel of some jobs.

**Exhibit 6.9** *Colbert Report* Writers Receive Their Emmys in 2013: Why Are There So Few Women?



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How do most workers respond when they feel they are being discriminated against or find themselves in hostile work environments? Among those in low-level jobs, such as employees in the fast-food industry or retail sector, the most common response is to tolerate the situation and when that fails, to try to find work elsewhere. But for women in higher-level positions, harassment or inequitable treatment on the job can present a classic catch-22. Even in situations where the worker can document unfair treatment, registering a complaint (which typically would require complaining to someone in authority) tends to be taken as evidence of a failure to “fit in” or “get along.” Ultimately the boundaries of acceptable conduct in the new economy will be played out in the courts, as well as in the ongoing negotiation of informally established workplace cultures.

## Structural Dimensions of Gender Discrimination

Thus far, we considered the problem of gender discrimination largely by focusing on how individuals respond to one another on an interpersonal

level. If gender inequality were simply a matter of interpersonal discrimination, solutions would involve changing attitudes through sensitivity training initiatives or by penalizing misconduct (such as leveling fines against those who act irresponsibly). However, even if these initiatives were successful, deeper structural forces that reinforce gender inequities in the new economy would remain. In this section, we focus on two institutionalized practices that limit women's ability to compete in the modern workplace: the ways women's work and men's work are valued and the ways job designs conflict with gender scripts.

### The Devaluation of "Women's Work"

Consider the differences between two low-status occupations, one of which is primarily occupied by men, the other by women. The job descriptions in Exhibit 6.10 are quoted from the Bureau of Labor Statistics *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, a handy source of information about the nature of different jobs and the economic returns workers receive for their efforts.

**Exhibit 6.10** Two Different Job Descriptions: Why Does One Job Pay Less Than the Other?

*Hand Laborers and Material Movers*

Hand laborers and material movers typically do the following: manually move material from one place to another; pack or wrap material by hand; keep a record of the material they move; use signals, when necessary, to assist machine operators who are moving larger pieces of material; and ensure a clean and orderly workplace. In warehouses and wholesale and retail operations, hand material movers work closely with material moving machine operators and material recording clerks. Automatic sensors and tags are increasingly being used to track items that allow hand material movers to work faster. Some workers are employed in manufacturing industries in which they load material onto conveyor belts or other machines. **Median pay in 2012: \$11.04/hour; \$22,970/year.**

*Child Care Workers*

Child care workers typically do the following: supervise and monitor the safety of children in their care; prepare meals and organize mealtimes and snacks for children; help children keep good hygiene; change the diapers of infants and toddlers; organize activities or implement a curriculum that allows

*(Continued)*

(Continued)

children to learn about the world and explore interests; develop schedules and routines to ensure that children have enough physical activity, rest, and play-time; watch for signs of emotional or developmental problems in children and bring the problems to the attention of parents; and keep records of children's progress, routines, and interest. Child care workers introduce babies and toddlers to basic concepts, such as manners, by reading to them and playing with them. For example, they teach young children how to share and take turns by playing games with other children. Child care workers often help preschool-age children prepare for kindergarten. Young children learn from playing, solving problems, questioning, and experimenting. Child care workers use play and other instructional techniques to help children's development. For example, they use storytelling and rhyming games to teach language and vocabulary. They may help improve children's social skills by having them work together to build something in a sandbox or teach math by having children count when building with blocks. They may involve the children in creative activities, such as art, dance, and music. Child care workers also often watch school-age children before and after school. They help these children with homework and take them to afterschool activities, such as sports practices and club meetings. During the summer, when children are out of school, child care workers may watch older children as well as younger ones for the entire day while the parents are at work. **Median pay in 2012: \$9.38/hour; \$19,510/year.**

*Source:* Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, 2010–2011 edition.

Why do hand laborers and material movers earn on average \$1.66 per hour more than day care workers? One could suggest a variety of reasons, but none of them eliminates the fact that day care work is more challenging and requires greater skill. Even the argument that greater pay to compensate for the dirty nature of work crumbles when one remembers that providing care for young children involves more than a little dirt and quite a few unpleasant smells! Disparities such as these have led feminist scholars to consider the **comparable worth** of different types of jobs. Their research indicates that wage disparities are not simply the result of labor supply and demand; instead they are intrinsically tied to the valuation of the jobs that men and women are expected to perform. Of course, one should use caution in generalizing from a selective comparison of two specific occupations. To address this concern, Paula England and her colleagues developed a variety of statistical approaches to document how comparable worth affects women's earnings, considering not so much who is working but, rather, the jobs

associated with men's and women's roles in society. England's statistical models show that if a man with the same level of education moved from an occupation entirely composed of men to an occupation entirely composed of women, his earnings would substantially decline. Jobs that require care work (which is culturally associated with women's responsibilities) pay 5% to 10% less than do jobs that do not, even if other relevant factors are considered (e.g., jobholders' education, years on the job, supervisory responsibilities). It is hard not to conclude that "women's work" is systematically undervalued in the paid economy (England, Budig, and Folbre 2002; Karlin, England, and Richardson 2002).

There are often marked disparities in the comparable worth of *tasks* within jobs as well. Most occupations require workers to perform a wide range of activities, all of which are central to organizational success. New employees need to be trained, notes need to be taken, interpersonal conflicts need to be resolved, and a variety of other personnel and technological concerns need to be addressed on a day-to-day basis. Men and women employed in the same type of job may be directed to perform different aspects of that work. For example, women professors tend to be assigned a disproportionate share of student advisees, which in turn frees their male colleagues to spend more time on more highly valued research activities. Although colleges and universities give lip service to the importance of advising students (and cannot succeed without this work), the time spent on this work can hurt, rather than enhance, an employee's performance review. In the end, the tasks that men tend to be assigned carry greater weight in decisions about promotions and pay increases (Fletcher 2001).

### How Job Designs Discriminate

Discrimination is commonly understood in terms of unfair evaluation of people who perform the same type of task. However, it is also possible to discriminate on the basis of selecting what tasks to use as a basis for evaluating performance or to structure jobs in such a manner that it disadvantages particular groups of workers.

Consider police work and careers within policing. Nearly all police departments require patrol officer candidates to demonstrate physical aptitude for the job and rely on tests that commonly include measures of physical prowess. On the surface, tests of agility and strength appear to be gender-neutral because the same standards can be applied to all candidates. But when one looks at the effects, and how fitness exams tend systematically to screen out women applicants, structural biases in their construction and application are revealed. At one police department in Pennsylvania, for

example, only about one in ten (12%) female applicants successfully passed the running test, compared with more than half (60%) of the men (Brooks 2001). On measures of strength, women also fare poorly. The average woman can only perform sit-ups and push-ups at about 75% the capacity of men, and the average grip strength for women is only 57% of that of men (Shephard and Bonneau 2002). These differences are real, but one must ask how often a police officer actually will need to perform push-ups or run long distances in the line of duty. One also wonders how much grip strength it actually takes to fire a pistol and why tests of strength, such as these, are on fitness exams. Nevertheless, these are the standards commonly used to screen applicants.

Part of a patrol officer's job requires physical work, and applicants should not be exempt from those responsibilities. However, it should be the case that the tests used to assess applicants are *relevant* to the job. Most day-to-day police work involves mundane rides in patrol cars, writing up reports, processing people, and handing out tickets. When force is needed, it is commonly performed as a team effort rather than being performed by lone officers. Technologies such as Tasers also make the successful management of physical altercations depend less on strength. Perhaps most devastating to the argument regarding the need for physical tests for police work is the observation that physical tests are used to determine who can *enter* into police jobs but not who can *keep* them.

Beyond these observations, consider how the existing selective testing techniques tend to ignore the skills that women are especially likely to possess. For example, only about half of all police departments include situational tests, wherein a simulated real-life encounter is constructed and recruits are judged on their ability to handle routine traffic stops or more dangerous encounters (Shephard and Bonneau 2002). In these simulation exams, the ability to read emotional states and intentions is the needed skill, a strength more commonly associated with feminine qualities than masculine attributes. Arguably, interpersonal tests are more important than physical tests because the ability to read a person's motivations and emotional state, and respond accordingly, could help officers avoid having to use physical force in the first place. Because these tests are not as widely used, the likelihood that candidates with poor interpersonal skills will make it through the screening process is increased, which favors the candidacy of underqualified male applicants. Also, note that the work of police supervisors or detectives almost never requires the use of force, but the career path to those positions is through patrol jobs, which in turn requires demonstration of physical prowess.

Structural forms of discrimination are built into the very design of work. Therein lays the problem, because most jobs and professional expectations

have been designed with men in mind. For example, to become a pilot in the U.S. Air Force, one needs to be sixty-four to seventy-seven inches tall, a standard that is squarely in the midrange for American men but that screens half of all women from eligibility.<sup>1</sup> Here we observe something different from the police exams, in that height criteria are not arbitrary or irrationally selected. Pilots need to be able to reach the levers and buttons that surround them on all sides of their cockpit seats. In this case, the structural discrimination occurred in the design of the plane itself, which was tailored to fit a typical man, not a typical woman. And sometimes professional communities distinguish masculine/high-value jobs from feminine/low-value jobs, as is the case of engineers who divide themselves into “technical” and “social” subfields. Women are more likely to be directed into (and direct themselves into) the engineering subfields that require “soft” (people) skills but pay lower wages as well. As a point of comparison, consider that an engineer’s limited ability to interact effectively with others can be viewed as a marker of being especially well suited to higher-paid work opportunities on technical matters (Cech 2013b). Similarly, within the medical profession women doctors tend to gravitate to “people oriented” specialties, such as family practice or pediatrics, whereas men gravitate to technical specialties such as surgery, radiology, or pathology (Ku 2011). Again, the latter subspecialties within the profession tend to offer greater financial rewards, but one must wonder if the job demands warrant the pay differentials. Both of these examples illustrate the ways professions need employees with diverse skills but divide, assign, and value work according to a gender regime.

Legal scholar Joan Williams (2000) identified a number of interesting cases such as these in her book *Unbending Gender*, which examined the templates used to construct job expectations. She concluded that the current structure of work itself can be discriminatory because it uses the image of the male worker as the metric for determining the characteristics of **the ideal worker**. Ideal workers, in today’s economy, are people who can put in long hours, uninterrupted, throughout their careers. They are available when the company needs them, can work late when called on, can spend weekends in the office, and will not have any prolonged absences from the job. Their performance will not be hindered by sickness, aging parents, children, or pregnancy. These expectations are largely insensitive to the normal life courses of women and their roles off the job. In a word, ideal workers are men.

As another example, consider how inhospitable most workplaces are to breastfeeding—a normal part of women’s lives but not men’s. Exhibit 6.11 reveals the numerous health benefits of breastfeeding, for both children and nursing mothers. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that newborn children be exclusively fed breast milk for the first six months of

life and then be provided with breast milk along with other food until at least twelve months of age. But fewer than one in four American women who work full time nurse their children to the six-month marker, a much smaller percentage compared with new mothers who are out of the labor force (Galtry 2000, 2002). And when working women do breastfeed their children to the six-month marker or longer, they suffer significant income losses in comparison to women who rely on formula or a shorter duration of breastfeeding combined with formula use (Rippeyoung and Noonan 2012).

The breastfeeding problem can be attributed to the fact that most working women cannot afford temporary leaves from their jobs and that newborn children are not welcomed in most workplaces. However, there exists an underused technological solution that can help women stay strongly attached to jobs. Breast pumps (which used to be bulky and somewhat noisy appliances) are now quiet and small enough to be carried like briefcases. These devices enable nursing mothers to express milk while away from their children and then store it for later use. Using these machines only requires privacy, access to a refrigerator, and the provision of brief breaks (twenty to thirty minutes a few times a day). These are modest resources to provide, but they remain unavailable to most workers. In 2010, the Fair Labor Standards Act was amended to require employers to provide reasonable break time and a private, nonbathroom place for nursing mothers to express breast milk during the workday, for one year after the child's birth. Time will tell if this legislation has a marked effect, and as with other similar types of legislation, compliance is not always assured. Nonetheless, this type of responsiveness to concerns central to the operation of the new economy provides hope, as it illustrates that expectations about workplace practices are shifting.

**Exhibit 6.11** Health Benefits to Breastfeeding

<i>Benefits to Children</i>	<i>Benefits to Mothers</i>
Less urinary tract infection	Less breast cancer
Less respiratory infection	Less ovarian cancer
Less diarrhea	Less osteoporosis
Less allergic disease	Earlier weight loss
Less middle ear infection	Enhanced self-esteem
Less bacterial meningitis	Enhanced infant bonding
Less botulism	Enhanced feelings of success
Less bacteremia	
Less gastrointestinal infection	
Less atopic eczema	

*Source:* American Academy of Pediatrics (2005).

In sum, a focus on job designs and the standards used to evaluate employees reveals structural considerations that disadvantage women in the paid labor force. Creating change in this area requires rethinking taken-for-granted assumptions concerning the best means to attach people to jobs and how to design jobs and careers such that they do not create de facto disadvantages that are predictable. This requires new talent management strategies to generate interest in jobs, screen applicants, design work spaces, construct work schedules, and evaluate employee performance. The first step in this process is to rethink who is the “ideal worker” and thereby bring workplace policy and practice into line with what is reasonable to expect from today’s diverse workforce.

### **Strategies to Bridge the Care Gaps: International Comparisons**

The increased participation of women in the paid labor force has contributed to resource gaps in the provision of care for children and aging parents. This problem will escalate in coming decades as the aging baby boom generation continues to transition into retirement and then into old age. As this happens, ever-larger proportions of the workforce will find themselves sandwiched between the need to work, care for their parents, and care for their children (Neal and Hammer 2006; Sarkesian and Gerstel 2004). Here we consider two core policy considerations—provision of care alternatives and family leave options—and how those policies in the United States compare with those in other advanced societies.

America’s approach to handling child care is a hodgepodge of stopgap approaches that create divergent experiences among different classes in the workforce. For workers at the top of the class structure, such as Erika, the stay-at-home mother discussed at the beginning of this chapter, high incomes afford not only the luxury to stay home but also the resources to employ others to cook, clean, and at times watch children. Professional women with demanding jobs can purchase care privately, although usually at considerable expense, and rely on a variety of prepackaged care items, such as prepared foods. These strategies work but eat into couples’ incomes and stall careers. They are also not the preferred arrangements, as many parents feel deprived of the opportunity to engage fully in the provision of hands-on care of their children. For workers in jobs that pay low wages, the strains are far greater and solutions are even less satisfactory.<sup>2</sup> Many parents in working-class families deliberately work alternating shifts, so that someone is home at all times. This can work, but it has obvious negative effects on marriages

and can create high levels of stress in people's lives (Presser 2003b). It is not unusual for children in low-income families to be left to care for themselves (Heymann 2000). Note also that a full understanding of the problem with the American system of care provision requires considering the ways that care needs are connected with class and racial relations. Today, America's child care system operates on the backs of poorly paid workers, who are almost exclusively women and disproportionately members of minority groups or recent immigrants. The affordable labor they provide makes it possible for professional women to devote time to their jobs, revealing that the ability of some women to integrate themselves into the new economy depends on the exploitation of other women (Mohanty 2003).

The uneven quality of child and elder care options in American society compares unfavorably with the situation in many countries in Western Europe, which have implemented national child care programs that fund publicly financed child care centers, which in turn promotes high use (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Pettit and Hook 2005). For example, because most child care workers in Sweden are well paid and have university degrees, virtually all working parents can go to their jobs assured that their children are receiving high-quality care (Morgan 2005). Some embrace the notion that children are best raised in the warm arms of their mothers and consider paid care providers to be comparatively "cold." This perception is not shared in Denmark, a country with universal child care supports. Danes believe that children served in quality state-sponsored centers receive "warm" care that helps them grow and mature, and it is not considered inferior to the care received in the home (Kremer 2006a).

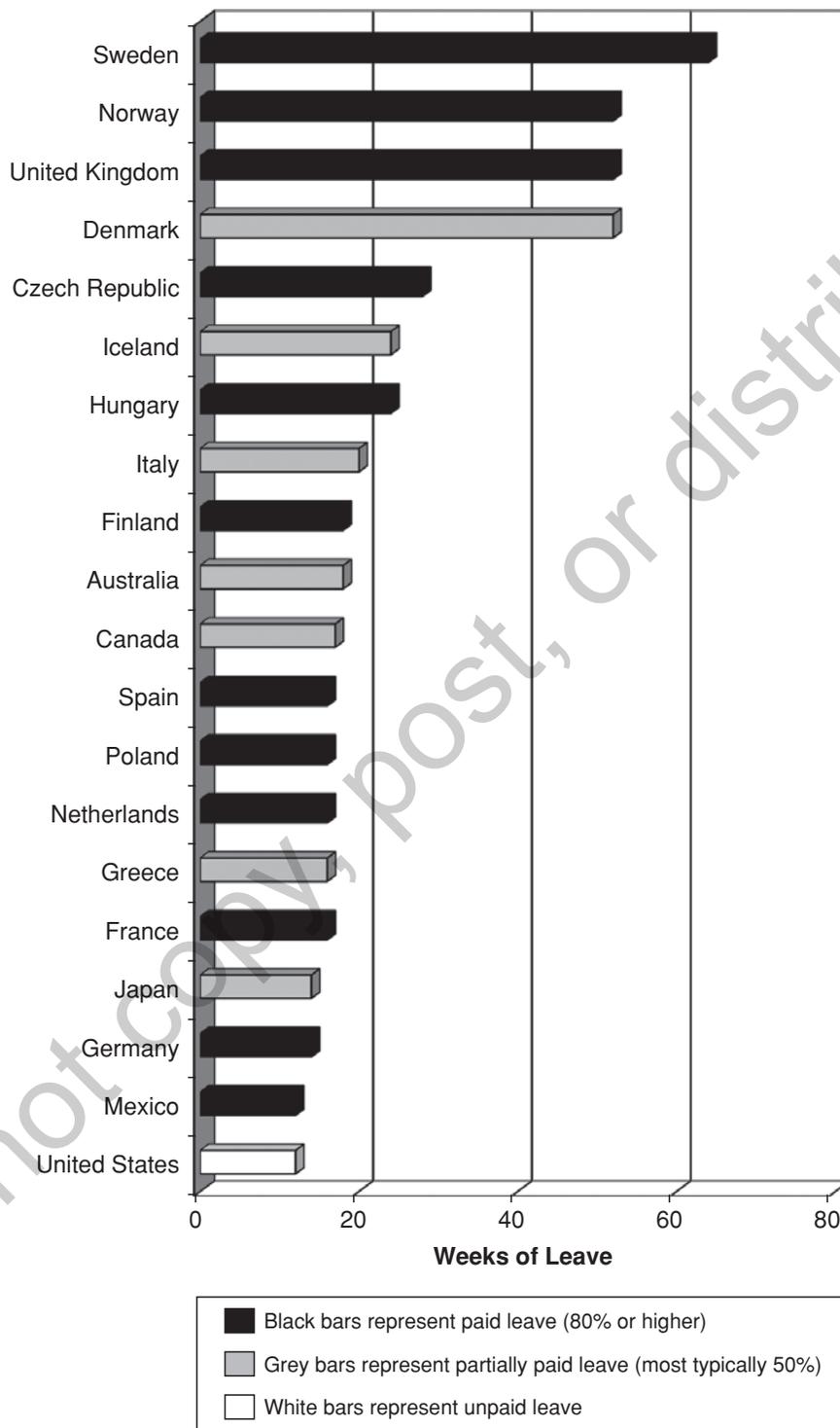
Subsidizing care centers is one means of promoting family responsive policies. But this does not address the fundamental problem that most care work is uncompensated and performed by family members (Crittenden 2001). Here another social experiment is enlightening—the provision of direct payments to individuals to purchase care assistance. In the United States, professional home health care assistance, such as in-home nursing, is available only to those who have financial resources. Those lacking resources commonly go without care or rely on family members to provide this care (which in turn can interfere with their work). In Denmark, those needing home assistance are given a "Personal Budget" that they can use to purchase the assistance of their own choosing. Notable is that two in three of the people employed by those controlling their own Personal Budgets are the spouses, parents, or adult children of the person purchasing care. In essence, this system enables family members to compensate each other financially for providing care work and legitimates their taking time out from the paid economy. However, this system is not without its own problems,

because role conflicts can result when family members employ one another. It also has undermined the power of professional groups to define reasonable care standards (Kremer 2006b).

There have been some advances in the U.S. approach to work-family policy, but they are modest by international standards. One of these occurred in 1993 with the passage of the **Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)**.<sup>3</sup> This legislation provides workers with the right to take twelve weeks of leave from their jobs to care for newborn and newly adopted children or to assist other family members in need. By recognizing workers' need to take "time-outs" to tend to family matters, the FMLA was a tremendously important step in helping address existing care deficits. But it has not helped all workers. Because the leave allowed is relatively short (twelve weeks), the amount of time that care work can be performed is very limited. Employees who have worked for their employers for less than one year, those who work part time (less than twenty-five hours per week), and those who work for smaller employers (with fewer than fifty workers) are not covered by the FMLA. This disadvantages low-income workers, who are much more likely to be employed in smaller enterprises, to have less stable job histories, and to work part time. Most importantly, because the leave is unpaid, it is useful only to those workers who can afford to take time away from their jobs. Ironically, the result is that those who most need to take time away from their jobs—those who cannot afford to pay for care services—are excluded from reaping the benefits of the FMLA. And when employers voluntarily offer the option for care leaves, they are more likely to be offered to men in upper-tier professions than to women in lower-tier occupations (Swanberg, Pitt-Catsouphes, and Drescher-Burke 2005).

The FMLA is family leave American style; it assumes that most families have a breadwinner who can remain in the labor force to provide for family economic needs. For those eligible at the lower end of the economic spectrum, family leave can be considered a right but not an option. Exhibit 6.12 shows that the American approach is vastly inferior to the leave policies adopted in nearly all other developed nations. For example, Norway and the United Kingdom offer new parents an entire year off after the birth of a child, and these workers receive 80% or more of their base pay during that time. As we discuss next, provisions in Sweden are even more generous. In most of the countries that have paid parental leave, it is not the employer who pays (as Americans commonly assume would be the case). Rather, the government provides stipends (supported through higher taxes) that replace the wages new parents would have earned from their jobs. Though most Western European countries have developed more supportive family responsive policies, important cultural variations also influenced the forms these

**Exhibit 6.12** Statutory Family Leave Entitlements in Developed Countries



Source: United Nations Statistics and Indicators on Men and Women (2011).

policies take. Some societies seek to emancipate women from the home and to dismantle traditional gender roles (e.g., Finland), while others seek to facilitate the fulfillment of traditional gender roles with some integration of women into the paid labor force (e.g., the Netherlands and Germany) (Haas and Rostgaard 2011; Pfau-Effinger 2004).

Sweden offers an interesting case study of the possibilities for policy change, as well as cautionary findings on the impact family responsive legislation can have on men's and women's behavior inside and outside the workplace. Currently, families are entitled to a total of 480 days of family leave, most of which is compensated at 80% of the salary earned (with a cap on higher-earning households). In the early 1970s, the Swedish government formed a commission to study family needs. Its findings pushed the nation to enact and actively promote family leave with legislation that was initially designed to encourage both mothers and fathers to be involved in the nurturing of children. It soon became clear that men, on the whole, were reluctant to make use of parental leave benefits. In response, in 1995 the government initiated legislation and public relations campaigns to promote a "daddy month"—an incentive specifically directed to encourage men to take paid time out from their jobs to tend to their children. Of note, the impetus for this initiative to motivate men to take time out for work came first from women's groups, who saw rebalancing family divisions of labor as a critical condition for increasing gender equality. Later men became highly involved and helped win passage of the legislation (Bergman and Hobson 2002). Because the daddy month is defined such that one must either "use it or lose it," men were motivated to take time out from work. Having observed the impact on parental behavior, Sweden subsequently expanded fathers' leave to two months, which in turn has led to more men taking longer leaves from work. Other countries, such as Iceland, have tried even more aggressive schemes, such as expecting equal shares of leave to be taken by husbands and wives, and have seen even stronger effects on men's willingness to pursue parental leave. These case studies show that "gender blind" policies are not sufficient to reshape commitments in the home; what is necessary are incentives that draw men into committing time for care work and policies that minimize the penalties associated with temporarily leaving work (Haas and Rostgaard 2011).

Sweden's experiments with family responsive programs also helped reveal a paradox. While paid family leave facilitated women's participation in the labor force and helped them care for young children, it also *exacerbated* the level of gender occupational segregation and the earnings gap that separates men from women workers. The reason for this dynamic is that paid family leave is almost exclusively used by women (Morgan and Zippel 2003).

When employers know that men are unlikely to request time away from the job, but that women are more likely to make that request, clear incentives are created to discriminate against women workers, especially those who will be expected to assume positions of responsibility. As a result, countries with the most family friendly legislation (such as Sweden) have even higher levels of sex segregation than the United States does, and women are less likely to advance to the highest levels in the paid labor force (Mandel and Semyonov 2004, 2006). This paradoxical outcome—the more generous the family leave, the more severe the gender inequality—has intrigued researchers interested both in supporting gender equality and in resolving work-family tensions. What is clear is that the provision of family leave tends to expand gender inequalities for those in upper-tier professions, but inequalities are leveled among those further down the occupational scale. Thus there needs to be caution in assuming that any work-family policy affects all classifications of workers in the same way (Mandel 2011; Misra, Budig, and Boeckman 2011). It is also clear that the type of work-family policy being considered, and the quantity of resources provided, can make a marked difference in shaping women's attachment to the labor force and men's attachment to care work (Hegewisch and Gornick 2011). Therefore, even if some unanticipated consequences are identified, these do not indicate a need to discard family leave policies but rather to modify them—for example, by introducing use incentives for men.

At a time when many European countries have been expanding their supports for working families, the United States enacted regressive policies directed at those at the bottom of the class structure. Ironically, as the need to care for disadvantaged children increased, welfare reform undermined the prospects for poor single mothers to stay home with their children. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 reworked the previous major welfare program, called **Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)**, into the current program called **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**. The AFDC system provided monthly welfare checks to poor families as a substitute for attachment to the labor force. Political leaders came to believe that this approach was promoting a culture of dependency, one in which poor people accepted “welfare as a way of life” (Murray 1995). In its stead, TANF was designed to limit support to a lifetime maximum of five years (states are free to set the limit lower, and some have done so), as well as to create an expectation that recipients work while receiving assistance and continue to work after the assistance ends. In this way, TANF was designed to get the poor into the labor force. But it did so with inadequate provisions to enable poor families (disproportionately single mothers) to manage the care of their children (Hays 2003). Studies of

these families on the fault line indicate that they are typically placed in jobs that pay at or near the minimum wage, that these jobs seldom have any prospects for upward mobility, that care responsibilities interfere with women's abilities to keep these jobs, and that the lack of child care resources forces families to place children in situations untenable by middle-class standards (Crouter and Booth 2004). So, whereas many societies in Europe have enabled women to take sabbaticals from their jobs, America introduced initiatives to require the participation of the poor in jobs that pay little and offer few opportunities for advancement. Time will tell what impact this has on the next generation, but it is reasonable to predict that forcing poor women to take low-wage jobs will do little to alter existing gendered wage disparities and will maintain or even exacerbate racial disparities as well.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we surveyed and mapped the contours of gender inequality in the workplace, as well as considered the reasons for their occurrence. We showed that even though women comprise nearly half of the American workforce, only a small fraction rise to the top and become corporate or government leaders. Instead, they are disproportionately funneled into lower-paying jobs and face greater prospects than men of having their careers dislodged midstream. We also showed that women perform substantial amounts of work that is economically unrecognized or undervalued. Although interpersonal discrimination remains an important consideration in the new economy, deeper structural problems exist that differentially affect women's and men's careers. To be successful in today's workforce requires molding oneself into jobs designed for men who had stay-at-home wives.

The chasms that separate men's and women's careers are created by a variety of forces that have the consequence of fostering disadvantages that accumulate over their life courses. Women are coached early on to have different aspirations than men, and men and women are encouraged to accept—as a given—that “women's work” is of lesser economic value. If this work is undervalued, men will not seek it, with the result that large numbers of women will remain trapped in low-paying occupational ghettos. There have been advances in encouraging girls to aspire to enter “men's” careers. But there is a crying need to teach boys (and men) the rewards that can be obtained in the performance of “women's work,” both in the home and in the paid economy, and to alter existing practices that systematically undervalue care work.

Although not a panacea or without problems and concerns, America's adjustment to the new economy can benefit from considering the far bolder European social experiments that advance opportunities to care for children and other community members. Ultimately, the future structure of the new economy will reflect the decisions made to address the question of gender inequality, the level of commitment to dismantling the gendered divisions of labor both inside and outside the home, and the concern for providing care when most parents are in the paid labor force.

## Notes

1. The average height of American men is 69.2 inches, for women, 63.8 inches.
2. Parents in the United States can take a pretax deduction for child care expenses, but this policy does little to help low-income families who commonly pay little in income taxes to begin with.
3. In California, legislation took effect in 2004 mandating that employees be eligible to receive as much as half pay for a period of six weeks to care for a sick or injured family member or following birth, adoption, or foster care placement. Unlike the FMLA, there is no restriction on organizational size or tenure with the employer. Time will tell if the country follows California's lead, one that was met by considerable opposition from business groups (Nowicki 2003).