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“Difference and Diversity in the Workplace” by Laurie Dougherty

Work is an important part of personal identity. For many it offers an opportunity to express talent or fulfill the need for achievement. Even where the work itself is not intrinsically interesting or rewarding, the ability to earn a livelihood contributes to one’s independence and self esteem. As William Julius Wilson points out in his recent book *When Work Disappears*, work can also have an effect on group identity, exerting a collective sense of fulfillment, achievement, or purpose, while the lack of work, when widespread, leads to disorganization and deterioration of community institutions.¹

Conversely, identity has a powerful influence on the workplace and the role of group identity, particularly race, gender and ethnicity, is a vital interest for many researchers. The summaries in this chapter reflect that interest. Because the world of paid employment has been dominated and defined by men, and in most developed countries, by white men, the efforts of women and minorities to prosper in that world are marked by a consciousness of difference. All too often difference is met with prejudice, discrimination and hostility. But difference can add diversity, creating a more textured workplace culture and introducing fresh points of view.

During the nineteenth century biological explanations of differences between human beings held sway, based on attempts to link essential differences of intelligence or character to superficial differences in skin color or other aspects of physical appearance. These attempts have been discredited and today we look to historical factors for understanding. While it is true that one is born a man or a woman into a particular racial or ethnic group (or mixture of racial\ethnic groups), the meaning attached to race, gender or ethnicity is an artifact of culture, tradition, and social, economic and political interaction. Work is one of the major building blocks in the construction of difference.

RACIAL INTERACTIONS: IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY AND ECONOMICS

Michael Omi and Howard Winant distinguish between racial awareness, formed in each historical period through interaction with “structural and cultural dimensions” of the larger society, and racism which offers ideological support for the dominance of one group over another. They describe early American history, from the European conquest through the era of slavery, as a “racial dictatorship” in which “most non-whites were firmly eliminated from the sphere of politics.”²

Three consequences followed from the imposition of racial dictatorship: American identity was defined as white; the color line became the fundamental division in the U.S.; and opposition and resistance infused the consciousness of non-whites. “The dictatorship elaborated, articulated, and drove racial divisions not only through institutions, but also through psyches, extending up to our own time the racial obsessions of the conquest and slavery periods.”³

As W.E. B. DuBois pointed out, even white people with little income or status share in “a public and psychological wage” which improves both the self esteem and the social treatment of whites as compared to blacks.⁴ David Roediger takes up this theme in *The Wages of Whiteness*. As wage labor became more prominent throughout the nineteenth century, workers of European descent first identified themselves as free laborers and not slaves, a distinction which transformed into an identification as white workers and not black.⁵

In *The Declining Significance of Race*⁶, William Julius Wilson proposed that stages in race relations in the U.S. were associated with different economic regimes. During the time of slavery, plantation owners practiced a paternalistic form of racial oppression. The Civil War was followed by a brief period democratization in race relations; but with the end of Reconstruction, black people’s attempts to achieve economic and political parity with whites were met with Ku Klux Klan violence and state-imposed segregation in the south. In the north race relations were more complex, with competition for jobs a key element in racial conflict. White workers often used emerging forms of labor organization to exclude blacks, while employers often used black workers as strikebreakers. Wilson argues that this divergence of interest between labor and management prevented a strong unified movement against blacks from coalescing in the north.

As more black workers moved into industry in the period between the two World Wars, unions began to include them, and during the post WWII economic boom, black workers achieved a substantial presence in unionized manufacturing employment. With the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s which broke the grip of legalized segregation, more and more African Americans went to college and moved into the expanding white-collar labor market. Wilson goes on to say that with the entry of many blacks into these forms of employment, and the subsequent growth of the black middle class, racial distinctions lessened in importance and class distinctions became more prominent as determinants of life chances for black people. Poor and uneducated blacks were increasingly marginalized and their situation deteriorated to the point that Wilson called them an underclass, isolated from the general prosperity of the Post War United States and from the rising fortunes of the expanding black middle class.

MOBILITY

Still, for African Americans in the middle class the path is not smooth. As Jennifer Hochschild points out in her 1995 book, *Facing Up to the American Dream*,⁷ the movement of black Americans into the middle class coincided with a change in upward mobility trends beginning in the 1970s. Overall, incomes began to polarize: “more middle-class Americans fell into poverty and fewer poor people rose after 1980 but ... more middle-class Americans became rich and fewer rich fell into the middle class after 1980 than before.” Faced with increasing economic insecurity at the moment of their own rising aspirations, many middle class African Americans became disillusioned with the American Dream, which, as Hochschild formulates it, hinges on

success. Success is supposed to be within reach of everyone, resulting from individual actions and abilities and tightly bound with virtue and self image. Yet middle class black Americans are acutely aware that success often hinges on economic and political forces beyond their control.

In “The Making of the Black Middle Class”⁸ Sharon Collins maintained that federal government initiatives “stimulated and enforced” the growth of the black middle class, from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s executive order mandating fair employment in civil service, to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and provisions for affirmative action and minority set asides. In the private sector, according to Collins, employers often met the expectations of equal opportunity by hiring minorities into human resources or EEO compliance departments.

In an article summarized in this section, Collins reported on a series of interviews with African American executives in Chicago in the mid-1980s, finding that this labor market niche has the paradoxical quality of limiting mobility for minority group members while purporting to enhance the position of minorities within corporations. Many of her interviewees occupied positions which were directed toward improving corporate relationships (or the corporate image) in minority communities. However, these positions, such as Equal Opportunity Officer, or Community Relations Director, while commanding impressive titles and perhaps even impressive compensation, often served as a side track or even a dead end to the career paths of the men and women who held them. These jobs were off the beaten path to the centers of corporate power. Their occupants tended to lose out on promotions and to underdevelop the skills and internal networks needed to move into the revenue producing positions which led to the top.

The results of Collins’ interviews resonate with the results of a detailed econometric study by John Bound and Richard Freeman, also summarized here. They analyzed data on young men (since their situations reflect current labor market conditions, not the results of seniority or past experience). A decade of rapid labor market gains by African-American men reached a peak in the mid-1970s, with a few years of approximate racial equality both among young male college graduates nationwide, and among young men in the Midwest regardless of education. The rapid growth in the proportion of African-Americans graduating from college may have exceeded the growth in demand for their labor⁹. Indeed, most young male college graduates, black and white, worked in education and public administration in the 1970s; these jobs were hard hit by public sector cutbacks in the 1980s and 1990s. While such jobs are still important, a growing proportion of male college graduates work in the private sector, where racial inequality is more pronounced.

The problems of mobility for black men are not confined to executives. For young black men without a college education, the notable labor market gains in the midwest were linked to the fortunes of heavy industry, which went into decline after the 1970s. In the 1970s, 40 percent of young black men in the region worked in the heavily unionized durable goods manufacturing sector, but only 12 percent did so in 1989.

If manufacturing and the public sector were no longer providing opportunities for young black entrants to the labor force, Chris Tilly and Philip Moss ask if the evolving labor market tends to disadvantage young black men. Their interviews with employers in several industries, indicate that the demand for “soft skills” is increasing. Soft skills fall into two general categories; the first is similar to Arlie Russell Hochschild’s concept of emotion work, described below. It includes the relational skills necessary for working with customers, coworkers and supervisors. Some managers associated relational skills with the ability to learn and acquire “hard skills” (e.g., basic math and language and technical skills). The second category of soft skills is motivational, involving characteristics such as attitude or dependability.

The more importance managers attributed to these skills, the more they (including some black managers) were likely to look on young black men with disfavor. Some of these impressions are based on a realistic appraisal of black men who “act tough”, but some of the impressions reflect stereotypes gathered from the media or cultural misunderstandings based in their own experience. While some respondents attributed problems to innate failings of black men, others took responsibility for a mutual breakdown of communications or felt that the desirable characteristics could be taught or fostered by appropriate training and management practices. Moss and Tilly conclude that public and private sector policies that encourage appreciation for diversity and training in appropriate workplace behavior can reduce the disadvantages young black men face in today’s labor market.

However, code-switching, the process of switching back and forth between two styles of language and behavior, may be difficult for some to master. As Wilson points out, in the chapter of his most recent book summarized in Section IX, years of disinvestment in inner-city communities have produced a culture of alienation from, and often hostility to, the norms and practices of white society, including the idiom and disciplines of the workplace. Even those who do not internalize these attitudes and want to participate in the wider society may display “ghetto-related behavior” in order to fit in. To succeed at work and survive at home, young African Americans must often become bicultural.

The challenge of bicultural fluency is not only a matter of switching on and off the behavior and argot of street kids. Ella Louise Bell reported on “The Bicultural Life Experience of Career-Oriented Black Women,”¹⁰ based on interviews with highly motivated black women. She found two basic patterns: “Assimilation requires blacks to conform to the traditions, values, and norms of the dominant white culture ... Compartmentalization, the alternate behavioral response, occurs when blacks established rigid boundaries between the white and black life contexts.”[p. 462] Many respondents valued both parts of the bicultural experience, but many also experienced stress, social marginality and identity crises, including conflicts over core values, affiliations and life roles.

GENDER ROLES IN THE WORKPLACE

Women in general experience conflicts over values, affiliations and roles when they enter the workplace. Many of these conflicts are involved with the relationship between women’s traditional role in the home and women’s involvement in market-based work. Of course it is impossible to avoid the biological reality that women bear and nurse children. However, many

feminists argue that the fact that women all too often are forced into dependency and denied a role in public life is not a matter of biology, but of the historical playing out of a patriarchal agenda.

Alison Jaggar, in *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*,¹¹ links several ways that women struggle for liberation to differing visions of human nature. Liberal feminists take their cue from the enlightenment which proposed a dualism between the rational activity of the mind and the irrational activity of the body. The goal of liberal feminists is to overcome the unfair projection of the irrational onto women, thereby overcoming the privileged position of men in society. Other feminist schools of thought (Marxist, radical and socialist) take biological imperatives as given, based in human needs for food and shelter and the need for reproduction of the human race. What happens to the care of home and family when women move into the marketplace is explored in Section VII of this volume.

Women's experience of gender roles is not a monolithic one, however. Wealthier women may employ less privileged women for household chores and even for nursing their children or caring for sick or elderly dependents¹². These working women, in turn, must make other arrangements for their children. In a rural subsistence economy, women may produce goods for local markets and make substantial contributions to household production of food, fuel and clothing as well as doing domestic chores and care of children. Depending on the cultural context, this may mark a dual burden for women with no gain in status, or it may win for women a share in household or community power.¹³

NICHES

Although labor markets of the modern industrial era bear little resemblance to earlier economic systems, differences along racial, ethnic and gender lines persist. The summaries in this section explore some of the dimensions of race, gender and ethnicity as they are related to the changing nature of work. One of the key points to be examined is the disproportionate concentration of men or women or members of particular racial or ethnic groups in certain job categories. The idea of labor market queues, originally proposed by Lester Thurow,¹⁴ offers a model of how employers rank the desirability of prospective employees using group identity as a factor of evaluation.

Both employers and applicants have queues, or ranking systems, for their preferences. Employers rank candidates, while candidates rank occupations - and these queues interact. Labor market queues have three characteristics: order; size of the relevant pool of jobs or applicants; and intensity. An employer with an intense preference for white men for a particular job category will choose white men until the pool is exhausted even when there are better qualified women or minorities. If the pool of preferred candidates is smaller than the number of jobs that need filling, then members of other groups will have a chance of getting hired. If the intensity of preference based on group identity characteristics is low, then any qualified candidates will have a good chance of getting hired.

In an article summarized in this section, Barbara Reskin and Patricia Roos apply the concept of queueing to gender in the labor market. A number of factors can influence employer preferences

for men or women, including customary notions about the appropriateness of certain jobs for men or for women, stereotypes about the fitness of men or women for certain types of jobs, or perceptions of the productivity of a group's members based on experience with or hearsay about individuals in that group (statistical discrimination). Some employers may be reluctant to antagonize male employees by introducing women into the workplace.

Since the 1970s, many of these obstacles to the employment of women have broken down and women have entered many occupations in large numbers. Factors such as equal opportunity laws, the rapid growth of the service sector, and the emergence of managers with more enlightened attitudes changed the order, shape and intensity of gender queues. The proportion of women in many occupations expanded rapidly, and in a few cases, the occupation shifted from mostly male to mostly female.

Often this shift reflected interaction with the job queues formed by men and women. Some occupations became less desirable to men, either because new opportunities were opening up, or because changes in technology or other conditions of work made particular occupations less desirable to men. For women, though, the niches that men abandoned often represented a better opportunity.

Although she does not make particular reference to queueing, Arlie Russell Hochschild, in a chapter from her book *The Managed Heart* summarized in this section, describes the process by which women more often than men are slotted into workplace roles where "emotion work" is a major occupational characteristic. Hochschild defines emotion work as the work of producing a particular emotional state, such as gratitude or fear, in a customer, client or coworker. Flight attendants, for example, attempt to produce gratitude among passengers, while bill collectors produce fear among delinquent debtors. There is a tendency for women to be more prominent among flight attendants and men to be bill collectors, since women are considered to be more nurturing and men to be more authoritative. In general, however, women are considered to be both more emotional than men and better able to manage their own emotions and to manipulate the emotions of others. According to Hochschild, about half of the jobs that women do in the United States and about a quarter of the jobs that men do involve emotion work.

In another summarized article, Marilyn Power and Sam Rosenberg point out that young women often begin their work lives in service sector jobs which are poorly paid, but which offer easy entry and flexible hours. However, white women are much more likely than black women to move into occupations with better earnings potential. Following a cohort of women service workers 18 to 28 years old in 1972 interviewed by the national Longitudinal Survey of Young Women, the authors found that by 1988 74 percent of white women had moved into other categories of employment, but only 47 percent of black women had done so.

When looking at overall statistics from Census data (not just those women who entered service sector jobs at an early age) the proportion of black women in service work dropped from 60 percent in 1960 to 26 percent in 1994. In 1960 only 20 percent of white women workers were in the service sector, dropping to 17 percent by 1994. However, few women of either race moved into highly paid male-dominated occupations.

WOMEN IN THE GLOBAL WORKFORCE

In 1970, Esther Boserup noted that the economic role of women is often marginalized during the early years of industrial development as production moves out of home and community into factories. After a period of adjustment, women's participation in the industrial labor force will begin to rise, tracing a U shaped pattern over time¹⁵. According to Nilüfer Ça_ atay and _ule Özler, in an article summarized in this section, the imposition of structural adjustment policies by global financial institutions to manage debt reduction in many developing countries has altered this pattern, drawing women into the industrial workforce earlier in the development process. On the one hand, these policies encourage export-oriented production as a way to acquire foreign currency for debt repayment; the export sector employs women disproportionately for the hand assembly of goods like small household appliances, electronic components, toys, and garments. On the other hand, structural adjustment often demands austerity in government programs, resulting in employment instability and higher prices for essential goods and services. Under these conditions women may need paid employment to supplement or stabilize family incomes.

The particular choices women make are linked to large scale forces in the global economy. Ching Kwan Lee draws on both feminist analysis and labor process theory to explore differences in management practices in two factories, one in Hong Kong and one in Shenzhen in the People's Republic of China. These factories are in the same company, both employ women production workers to perform similar work, and some managers travel frequently between them. Yet control over production is different in each plant. Ching attributes this to differences in the intersection of gender and power in each plant.

In Shenzhen, young women seek opportunity in rapidly industrializing urban centers, but employment depends on maintaining connection to networks rooted in their home communities. Within the Shenzhen factory in this case study, discipline is rigidly applied and these networks serve as a mechanism of control. Young women remain in a similar relationship to their elders, particularly male elders, as they would at home. In the Hong Kong factory, on the other hand, older, generally married women work in a less rigid environment. Manufacturing is declining in importance and workers are moving to more promising sectors. However, for these women, it remains a congenial niche and their family responsibilities are accommodated within reason as an inducement to stay.

Humor reinforces labor and gender relationships. In Hong Kong, teasing by supervisors and among the women themselves reinforces their matronly status. This status accommodated and humored by supervisors and a limited amount of self-management is allowed. The women workers, whose primary identification is with their family role, feel sorry for male supervisors whose identity and livelihood is tied up with a dying industry. In Shenzhen, teasing, like other ways of relating at work, such as sharing breaks, tends to take place among people from the same village or region, reinforcing the networks which structure the expanding labor market. Both conditions in the two labor markets and traditional attitudes toward women, i.e. as matrons or as maidens, influence the organization of work at the shop floor level.

The summary by Saskia Sassen-Koob focuses on the relationship between labor market niches and patterns of female migration. While many women migrate to accompany or follow husbands who move in search of work, women themselves are increasingly being recruited into the labor force in both developing and developed countries so that distinct patterns of female migration are discernible. The growing integration of the economy on a global basis encourages a series of migrations on the part of women from industrializing countries. The growth of international investment in export platforms in developing countries draws young women from rural areas into export manufacturing jobs in urban industrial centers. With this emigration and a shift from subsistence to export agriculture, the social and economic structure of rural communities has been disrupted.

Although it appears paradoxical, the same countries which are experiencing an expansion in employment are also experiencing emigration to developed countries, in particular the U.S. Although only a small percentage of women work in the export manufacturing sector, a point made by Lourdes Beneria in an article summarized in Section III, the export sector is influential in generating migration patterns in developing countries.

There is high turnover in export manufacturing due to poor working conditions, and to employers' preference for young women as employees, so older workers are let go and there is a continual drawing in of new workers. High employment and high unemployment coexist. The movement of young women into the cities in search of employment has a disruptive effect on their home villages encouraging more young men to migrate and making the rural areas less likely to draw women back. Although Sassen-Koob does not devote much space to agriculture, in the early part of this article she seems to give equal conceptual weight to export agriculture as a disruptive element on traditional patterns of work, also setting migration in motion, particularly of men. Finally, the presence of multinationals brings western material culture into people's field of vision, acting as an inducement to emigration. Change in the countryside and turnover in the cities is a push factor to migration within developing countries; the foreign presence is a pull factor to immigration into developed countries. Within developed countries themselves, the service economy has produced a bifurcated labor market which is able to absorb immigrant workers: a highly paid professional and technical workforce demands specialty goods and services produced by low wage service workers.

CONCLUSION

The image of the worker as "the man in the grey flannel suit" or the hard hat construction worker, an image that is essentially male and white, is giving way to the reality that men and women of all races and nationalities perform work that is productive and necessary. In trying to understand which economic factors fulfill human needs and which ones threaten them, one of the greatest challenges is to balance respect for diversity against the danger of discrimination based on differences (whether real or perceived). Striking this balance has important implications for how effectively and productively we make use of our human resources. It also has important implications for the extent to which people from all parts of our diverse population are able to make use of their talents and fulfill their aspirations. As work changes, so do we.

Notes

1. A chapter from this book is summarized in this volume in Section IX.
2. *Ibid.*, P. 65.
3. *Ibid.*, P. 66
4. See the discussion of W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in the United States, 1860-1880* in David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991.
5. Roediger, *op.cit.*, Ch. 3.
6. William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race - Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.
7. Jennifer Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream - Race, Class and the Soul of the Nation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995
8. Sharon M. Collins, "The Making of the Black Middle Class," *Social Problems*. Vol. 30 No. 4 April 1983. Pp.369-82.
9. This would suggest the existence of a labor market queue, as described later in this essay, for educated black men; however black women who graduated from college continued to find jobs and experience rising incomes.
10. Ella Louise Bell, "The Bicultural Life Experience of Career-Oriented Black Women," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 11 No.6 November 1990. Pp 459-77.
11. Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Savage, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1988.
12. See Alan R. Meyers, "Global Development and Personal Dependency: The High Cost of Doing Well," *World Development*, Vol 19, No. 1 January 1991, pp. 45-54 for a discussion of the employment of immigrant women from developing countries to care for elderly and disabled dependents in developed countries.
13. See Teresa L. Amott and Julie A. Matthaei, *Race, Gender and Work*. Boston: South End Press, 1991. Ch. 1 & 2.

14. Lester Thurow, *Poverty and Discrimination*. Washington, DC; Brookings Institute, 1969. Cited in Reskin and Roos.

15. Esther Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970. Cited in Ça_ atay and Özler.