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## Work and Gender

Underpinning all human activity is work. We spend most of our lives either preparing for work, working, or resting from work. Even when we are simply watching daytime talk shows, the evening news, or Monday night football on TV, we are enjoying the results of the labor of others. The workers who bring these television shows to millions of viewers include executives and administrators, personnel managers, advertising agents, writers and editors, producers and directors, newscasters and announcers, actors and musicians, production engineers, camera operators, electrical technicians, computer programmers, clerks and word processors, and maintenance workers. Fifty years ago, neither royalty nor oil barons could summon up the labor of so many thousands simply to entertain them.

Just as we take for granted the air we breathe, we take for granted the work that creates the world around us. This book aims to make that work visible so we can examine the work that women and men do and explore how workers, the workplace, and work are often permeated with gendered meanings.

### What Work Is

Although people use the term *work* in many ways (“working on a relationship,” “working on getting in shape”), in this book, its core meaning is “activities that produce a good or a service”—such as flipping burgers, designing software, testing silicon chips, or refueling military aircraft. We define **work** to include activities that produce goods and services for one’s own use or in exchange for pay or support. This definition encompasses three kinds of work: **forced work**, which is performed under compulsion and provides little or no pay (for example, as slaves or prisoners); *paid work* (also called **market work**); and *unpaid work* (also called **non-market work**), which people perform for themselves and others.

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Note: **Boldface** terms are defined in the Glossary/Index.

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Forced work still exists. Although outright slavery is rare, debt-bondage and other slaverylike practices are widespread around the world, including in Europe and North America (International Labour Organization 2001). Women and children throughout the world, particularly recent immigrants and racial minorities, are especially vulnerable, and thousands are brought into the United States to work in the sex industry and in the domestic and cleaning industries (Domosh and Seager 2001:56; International Labour Organization 2001:5). Sweatshop conditions that we tend to associate with the developing world can be found also in the United States. In El Monte, California, for example, undocumented female Thai workers were locked inside factory walls topped with barbed wire, where they worked 17-hour days sewing women's and children's apparel for as little as 60 cents an hour (Domosh and Seager 2001:56). Men, too, are subjected to forced labor, as is the case for many prisoners, disproportionately African American, who work in prison industries and on Southern "chain gangs," where their labor is paid at rates far below minimum wage (Jones 1998:377).

An important form of nonmarket work in modern societies is domestic work—work that people do for themselves and members of their household. If you aren't convinced that unpaid work is really work, think of your experiences waxing a car, planning and cooking a meal that will impress your friends, buying gifts on a limited budget during exam week, taking care of a sick friend, or volunteering in the community.

The distinction between market and nonmarket work is a by-product of industrialization. For most of history, people did not see work as separate from the rest of their lives. Life was work, just as it was rest and recovery from work. The average person consumed what she or he produced, and few people were paid for their labor. Only with industrialization and the development of capitalism was work equated with paid activity. As people increasingly became engaged in this new form of work, the terms *unpaid work*, *nonmarket work*, and *domestic work* evolved to refer to much of the plain, old-fashioned, unpaid work that people have always done.

As more workers were drawn into paid jobs, however, people increasingly treated paid work as the only "real" work; the unpaid work that people did in their own homes became devalued or invisible.<sup>1</sup> Today, economists and statisticians who monitor the size and productivity of the workforce in industrialized countries reserve the term *work* for activities that people do for pay. American economists, for example, estimate the nation's gross national product in terms of the output of its paid workers. Defining work as paid production excludes much of the work done by

people in developing countries as well as all of the work that women and men perform at home for their families (Mies 1998:ix).

This book examines the roles that women and men play in performing paid and unpaid work. We show that workers' sex profoundly affects their work lives, although the way that it does so sometimes depends on people's race, ethnicity, and class. We show, too, that the effects of sex on the kinds of work people do, the rewards it brings, and their family lives have varied throughout history and around the world. First, however, we must clarify the terms *sex* and *gender* and introduce the concepts of sex differentiation and gender differentiation.

## Sex and Gender

Although many people use the terms *sex* and *gender* as synonyms, they have different meanings. We use the term **sex** for a classification based on human biology. Biological sex depends on a person's chromosomes and is expressed in reproductive organs and hormones. **Gender**, in contrast, refers to a classification that social actors construct that typically exaggerates the differences between females and males.

### *Sex Differentiation*

All societies recognize the existence of different sexes, and all group people by their sex for some purposes. Classifying people into categories based on their sex is called **sex differentiation**. Because of the importance societies attach to sex, sex differentiation begins at birth when every new baby is assigned to one of two sexes on the basis of the appearance of the external genitalia. The term *the opposite sex* reveals how society construes males and females as not just different, but also as diametrically opposed. Sex differentiation, although it need not inevitably lead to sex inequality, is essential for a system of inequality. Distinguishing between females and males is necessary in order to treat the sexes differently. Thus, sex differentiation is usually part of a system of sex inequality—a **sex-gender hierarchy**—that generally favors males over females.

### *Gender Differentiation*

The differences between women and men must seem to be large and consequential to justify unequal treatment of the sexes. **Gender differentiation** refers to the *social* processes that create and exaggerate biological differences (Reskin 1988; West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender differentiation also distinguishes activities, interests, and places as either male or female.

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Together, sex differentiation and gender differentiation ensure that females differ from males in readily noticeable ways. Clothing fashions can accentuate and even create differences in the appearance of the sexes. For example, at times fashions have enhanced the breadth of men's shoulders or of women's hips or called attention to women's or men's sexual characteristics. After trousers were introduced in the nineteenth century, it was several years before men gave up the skintight breeches that "showed off [their] sexual parts" (Davidoff and Hall 1987:412). Shoe styles, too, have contributed to gender differentiation by exaggerating the difference in the sizes of women's and men's feet. In pre-Revolutionary China, upper-class Chinese women's feet were bound so they could wear tiny shoes; in the United States in the early 1960s, the only fashionable shoes that women could buy had narrow, pointed toes and three-inch heels.

Clothing for babies illustrates the creation of sex differences in appearance that have no natural basis. Disposable-diaper manufacturers, for example, market different designs for girls and boys. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, however, male and female infants were dressed alike—usually in white dresses. When Americans began to color code babies' clothing, they dressed boys in pink and girls in blue. Not until almost 1950 did the convention reverse, with blue becoming defined as masculine and pink as feminine (Kidwell and Steele 1989:24-27). Such shifts demonstrate that what is critical for maintaining and justifying unequal treatment between the sexes is not *how* cultures set the sexes apart but the fact that they do it at all.

#### *The Social Construction of Gender*

The process of transforming males and females—who are vastly more similar than different in biological terms—into two groups that differ noticeably in appearance is part of the **social construction of gender**. As anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1975:178) said, "A taboo against the sameness of men and women [divides] the sexes into two mutually exclusive categories [and] thereby *creates* gender." Rewards and punishments induce most people to go along with the social construction of gender and thus conform to cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity.

#### *The Relationship Between Sex and Gender*

A fable about a stranger who arrived at a village begging for food provides an analogy of the difference between sex and gender. When the villagers said they had no food at all, the stranger announced he had a

magic stone with which he volunteered to make "stone soup." As the stone simmered in a pot of boiling water, the stranger told the villagers that the soup would be tastier if they could find just one onion to add to it. Someone admitted to having an onion, which was added to the pot. When the stranger said that the soup would be even better with a carrot, another villager produced a carrot. In this way, the stranger got the villagers to add potatoes, turnips, garlic, and even meat bones. The "stone soup" the stranger eventually dished out to the villagers was hearty and delicious. Although we do not want to push the analogy too far, sex resembles the stone and gender the soup. Like the stone, biological sex is the foundation on which societies construct gender. Like the soup, gender depends little on people's biological sex and mostly on how societies embellish it. And just as the stranger tricked the villagers into thinking that an ordinary stone was the essential ingredient in stone soup, cultures often deceive us into thinking that biological sex accounts for the differences between females' and males' behavior and life outcomes. In short, gender is a social construction that results from gender differentiation, not a biological inevitability.

In this book, we use the term *sex* when we refer to people's biological sex, and so we usually use it when comparing the ways organizations or societies treat females and males. We use that term to emphasize that people's sex influences how others act toward them. For example, we refer to *sex discrimination* and *sex segregation*. In contrast, we use the term *gender* to refer to differences between the sexes that are socially constructed.

A primary reason for the gendering of human activities is that it maintains males' advantages. Gender ideology and gendered organizations institutionalize the favored position of men as a group; in other words, organizations play a fundamental role in establishing a sex-gender hierarchy that favors men over women. Individual men, then, enjoy the benefits of being male without having to do anything to obtain those benefits. Most men are not even aware of the benefits they derive because of their sex. This is not surprising; almost all of us mistakenly attribute benefits we receive because of our ascribed characteristics (such as race, sex, or appearance) to our own efforts. But men's privileged position in organizations is not universal. Women have a stake in reducing gendering, and at various times and in different settings they have successfully organized to challenge it (see, for example, Schmitt and Martin 1999; Stompler and Padavic 1999).

Although sex is an important basis for differentiating people into categories, societies use other characteristics as well. Foremost are race and

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ethnicity; in many societies, religion, appearance, age, sexual orientation, and economic position are also important bases for sorting people into groups. Just as societies magnify the minor biological differences between males and females, they elaborate small differences between persons based on age, race, and ethnicity. Thus, ethnicity and age are also social constructions. The discussion of the history of work in Chapter 2, for example, shows that just over 100 years ago, families and employers treated children as small adults, who worked alongside their parents in fields and factories. Some societies still do not legally differentiate children from adults: Children can enter into marriage or be tried for murder. Today, however, Americans usually differentiate children, adolescents, and “senior citizens” from everyone else. Thus, childhood, adolescence, and “senior citizenship” have been socially constructed as special statuses. Some societies also engage in social differentiation on the basis of race and ethnicity. In the first half of the twentieth century, the designations of white and black were often matters of litigation (Haney-Lopez 1996). Patterns of immigration and world affairs have created a strong tradition of racial and ethnic differentiation in the United States, and people’s race and ethnicity may influence their work lives. When we address the effects of such differentiation, remember that race and ethnicity may also have socially constructed meanings.

### Gendered Work

To stress the fundamental role of gender differentiation in creating differences between men and women, some social scientists use **gender** as a verb. They call the process of gender differentiation *gendering* and speak of activities attached to one or the other sex as *gendered*. These terms signify outcomes that are socially constructed and usually give males advantages over females (Acker 1990:146; 1999; Britton 2000; Risman 1998). Institutions, including the institution of work, are shaped by assumptions about gender. This section focuses on three features of gendered work: (1) the assignment of tasks based on workers’ sex, (2) the higher value placed on men’s work than on women’s work, and (3) employers’ and workers’ social constructions of gender on the job.

Societies produce and maintain gender differences—that is, they engage in gendering—in a variety of ways: through ideologies that support the gender *status quo*, through interactions among people, and through reward systems that encourage gender-appropriate behaviors and discourage gender-inappropriate ones. Thus, gender is a system of



*"I see by your résumé that you're a woman."*

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social relations that is embedded in the way major institutions (including the workplace) are organized (Acker 1999; Britton 2000; Lorber 1992:748). This conception of gender encourages us to examine not only how social institutions create and maintain differences in their female and male members but also the conditions under which they effectively reduce gendering.

### *The Sexual Division of Labor*

The assignment of different tasks to women and men—which is termed the **sexual division of labor**—is a fundamental feature of work. All societies delegate tasks in part on the basis of workers' sex, although which sex does exactly which tasks varies over time and across the countries of the world. Tasks that some societies view as "naturally" female or male are assigned to the other sex at other times or in other places. For example, whereas most tailors in the Middle East, North Africa, and India are male, this is a female occupation in more industrialized countries (Anker 1998:276). Hairdressers and barbers tend to be female in the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

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Development (OECD), but not in India or China (Anker 1998:272-73). Although 85 percent of the world's maids and housekeepers are women, about half of the maids and housekeepers in Angola and India are male, as are one-third of those in Tunisia, Ghana, and Senegal and one-quarter of those in Egypt and Kuwait (Anker 1998:272).

Within the same country and the same general line of work, either sex may perform a particular job. Although women were twice as likely as men to work as food servers in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century (U.S. Census Bureau 1998, 1999, 2000a), many restaurants—especially fancy ones—employed only waiters. Neither sex has a monopoly on the skills needed to serve food, but restaurants often enact a sexual division of labor in which one sex cooks and the other serves. Race, ethnicity, and age frequently figure into job assignments as well. For example, although most domestic laborers in the late nineteenth century were women, in California and Hawaii they were Asian men (Glenn 1996:122). Chapter 4 describes these divisions of labor in greater detail.

The division of labor between women and men varies over time, as the production of cloth illustrates. Up to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, producing silk was women's work, but during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it became an exclusively male task (Kowaleski and Bennett 1989). Over the succeeding centuries, at one time or another, textile manufacturers have hired women or men or sometimes both. Cloth production is not the only arena where the sexual division of labor has changed hands over time. In the world as a whole, women are more likely to be in "men's jobs" now than in the 1970s and 1980s (Anker 1998:412, 415). For example, in small countries that expanded textile exports because of the arrival of multinational corporations, the percentage of women doing jobs that men had formerly done has swelled over those two decades (in Mauritius the percent of females in such jobs climbed from 37 to 65 percent and in Fiji from 41 to 61 percent [Anker 1998:416]).

Changes in which sex performs a task usually occur slowly, however, because the existing sexual division of labor shapes social expectations about who should do certain types of jobs and because in many occupations turnover of an existing male workforce is slow.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in most of the world, the occupational categories that include production supervisors and general foremen, blacksmiths, toolmakers, bricklayers, carpenters, and other construction workers remain almost exclusively male (Anker 1998:274). Types of work become labeled in people's minds as belonging to one sex and being inappropriate for the other. In the African country of Gambia, for example, women have cultivated rice since the fourteenth century. During



a desperate food shortage in the nineteenth century, the government tried to encourage men to help grow rice. The men refused, insisting that rice was "a woman's crop" (Carney and Watts 1991:641).

Under some conditions, however, the sexual division of labor is less rigid. Consider an example from U.S. history. In colonial America, survival required that everybody work. The sexual division of labor made men primarily responsible for growing food and women for manufacturing the products that their families needed. The sexes often cooperated, however, as in the family production of linen from flax plants. Boys pulled the flax and spread it out to dry. Then men threshed it to remove the seeds. After the stalks had been soaked, cleaned, and dried, men broke the flax with wooden daggers. Then women combed out the rough material and wound the flax around a distaff, from which they spun linen thread (and women got the nickname the "distaff sex"). Women repeatedly washed, bleached, and "belted" the thread with a branch against a stone before they wove it into fabric. When necessary, however, each sex did work usually done by the other (Earle 1896).

Women and children frequently do "men's jobs" when production pressures are high. In the Troyes section of France, at the turn of the nineteenth century, working the knitting frame was a decidedly masculine preserve. Yet women and older children operated the frame when a push was on to finish the week's production (Chenut 1996:87-88). When circumstances required assigning a person of the "wrong" sex to do a job in the family business, the work was sometimes hidden behind closed doors in order to avoid losing status (Davidoff and Hall 1998:242).

Nor did North American slave owners exhibit much regard for a conventional sexual division of labor. Enslaved African American women, men, and children were forced to work in factories, mills, and mines, as well as in fields. Although some tasks were assigned based on sex, women and children worked alongside men in processing iron, textiles, hemp, and tobacco; refining sugar; and lumbering. In fact, half the workers who dug South Carolina's Santee Canal were women. Female and male slaves together maintained railroad tracks. In iron mines and refineries, women lugged trams, loaded ore into crushers, and operated the furnaces and forges. Neither on plantations nor in factories did their sex spare enslaved women from grueling work (Jones 1998).

In sum, societies gender work by labeling activities as appropriate for one sex or the other. These labels influence the job assignments of women and men, and they influence employers' and workers' expectations of who ought to perform various jobs. Across societies and over time, however,

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no hard-and-fast rules dictate which sex should do a particular task, as long as men and women do different work.

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

A sexual division of labor need not lead inevitably to inequality between the sexes. According to historians, although women and men in preindustrial Europe had different spheres, neither sphere was subordinate (Scott and Tilly 1975:44-45). In practice, however, sex differentiation fosters the tendency to devalue female activities and, hence, to sustain sex inequality.

The devaluation of women and their activities is deeply embedded in the major cultures and religions of the world. For example, the Judeo-Christian religion, a strong influence on Western culture, ascribed to female servants three-fifths the value of male servants (Leviticus 27:3-7). Although the extent to which women's work is devalued varies over time and across locales, it continues both because it is part of the ideology in many parts of the world and because it is in men's interest. Men, who more often than women occupy positions that set value on human activities, tend to accept male activities as the standard and see other activities as inferior—regardless of the importance of these activities for a society's survival (Lorber 1994:33-35).

The devaluation of women and their work is a key factor in the pay gap between the sexes. In the United States, for example, where most doctors are male, doctors are near the top of the income hierarchy; in Estonia, a country of the former Soviet Union where three-quarters of doctors are female, doctors' incomes are much closer to the average income (Barr and Boyle 2001:33). According to an 1825 British government report, spinning (a woman's job) contributed at least half the value to linen textiles, yet weavers (who were men) earned a minimum of 10 pence a day, compared to a spinner's three or four pence (Gray 1996:43). This calculation does not count the unpaid work that women put in as cultivators and preparers of the flax.

Generally, as Chapter 6 shows, the more heavily female an occupation, the less both female and male workers earn. Living in a culture that devalues female activities makes the practice seem natural. Consider 13-year-olds' afterschool jobs. A neighbor pays a boy \$20 for 30 minutes' work shoveling snow and a girl \$8 for an hour's baby-sitting (although these figures vary by geographic region). Why does the baby-sitter accept this pay gap? She may not realize how much less she earns per hour. But she has probably already absorbed her society's attitude that girls' jobs are

worth less than boys'. Women are taught from childhood to have a reduced sense of entitlement; as a result, they expect less pay than men expect for the same level of performance, effort, or ability (Ridgeway and Correll 2000:117). In addition, men may grow up with an exaggerated sense of entitlement. In a series of experiments, college students assigned lower values to identical tasks when women did them and judged women's performance as inferior to men's, although the female students actually worked more quickly and accurately than the men did (Major 1989:108-10). Students who were told that women usually did the job thought it deserved less pay than those who had been told that men usually did it (Major and Forcey 1985).

In sum, cultural attitudes that devalue women are expressed in the lower value that many employers, workers, and societies place on the work that women usually do. This devaluation of women's work reduces women's pay relative to men's. In this and other ways (discussed further in Chapter 6), devaluation can help to preserve the sex-gender hierarchy.

### *The Construction of Gender on the Job*

The construction of gender on the job is a by-product of the ways that employers organize work and workers produce goods and services. Employers and workers bring gender into the workplace through either conscious or unconscious sex stereotypes that may have little basis in reality and through policies and behaviors that assume that the sexes differ. Such gender differentiation plays a key role in sex inequality, and so it is prevalent to varying degrees in every social institution, including the institution of work.

Within the workplace, employers play a primary role in gendering (Acker 1990, 1999; Britton 2000). Employers often have a particular sex in mind when they create new jobs, set pay levels, and organize how work is to be done and under what conditions. For example, the machinery employees use will be designed quite differently if employers envision workers who average 5'11" and 175 pounds than if they envision workers averaging 5'4" and 130 pounds. Similarly, if employers have adult male workers in mind, they are more likely to assume that they will accept shift and overtime work. In contrast, employers who plan to hire women are more likely to organize jobs as part time and to create pay and benefit systems that encourage turnover.

When modern paid jobs evolved, most paid workers were male. As a result, the assumptions surrounding the creation of these jobs were gendered. The consequences of those assumptions have survived in many

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workplaces because of inertia in employers' personnel practices. This inertia stems from habit, the fact that people see change as more risky than doing business as usual, and ignorance of the impact of outmoded practices. Until the late 1960s, for example, many states barred employers from assigning women to jobs that could involve lifting more than 25 pounds. For years after the California Supreme Court struck down such "protective" laws as illegal under a 1964 federal antidiscrimination law, many employers continued to exclude women from such jobs. These employers did not consciously decide to disregard the court's decision; rather, they just conducted business as usual. Often it took an external event to prompt them to change their operating practices.

In addition, employers may introduce gender into the workplace through current practices. Sometimes employers use gender to control workers, to get more work out of them, or to sell products. When workers adhere to masculine gender-role norms requiring strength, endurance, and sacrifice, employers benefit. For example, when a male coal miner assigned to lift heavy steel rails remarked that it looked like a four-man job, his supervisor asked him, "Aren't you man enough?" (Yarrow 1987:9). Such gender norms can become self-enforcing, as when a meatpacker shrugged off a comment on his work-damaged hands, saying he was a man who earned his pay (Fink 1998:110).

Some employers emphasize workers' sex to divert workers' attention from bad working conditions or to prevent collective action (Tiano 1994:183). For example, global assembly lines that subject young women to long, dangerous work at low pay sometimes feature fashion shows and cosmetic sales on company property (Freeman 2000:185). A Caribbean firm offered in-house self-improvement programs on such topics as personal grooming, makeup, and prenatal care (Freeman 2000:188). Managers of a Hong Kong factory encouraged married women's orientation to family by granting women (but not men) paid one- or two-hour leaves to take care of family emergencies. For management, facilitating women's family orientations discouraged them from orienting to themselves as workers interested in higher wages or promotions (Lee 1997:130). By introducing programs and policies that orient young women to their appearance and to marriage and that orient married women to their families, companies reduce the likelihood that these women will protest working conditions.

Employers who turn a blind eye to sexual materials in the workplace also maintain gendered workplaces. A woman firefighter complained that, despite the supervisor's repeated warnings, a coworker still displayed

pornographic pictures in his locker that were visible because he left the door open (Chetkovich 1997:76). A woman construction worker claimed: "There was a lot of pornography on the job, and when I would complain about it they would take it down and they would put up more" (Eisenberg 1998:72). Importantly, just as employers' actions and policies can introduce gender into the workplace, employers' policies can also curtail it. For example, employers' enforcement of sexual harassment policies has discouraged such practices in many workplaces.

Workers, too, construct gender at work. They may do so in order to forge bonds with other workers of the same sex, to express their gender identity, to attract or to exclude workers of the other sex, to get back at their employers, to control one another, and to entertain themselves.

Male and female workers sometimes differ in the ways they bring gender into the workplace. Many observers have commented on how all-male work groups affirm group members' masculinity by discussing such "male" concerns as sports and sex. Predominantly one-sex work groups may also engage in **gender displays**, which are language or rituals so characteristic of one sex that they mark the workplace as belonging to that sex. Male gender displays include sexual language and conversations about sex, as when military drill instructors call male recruits "girls, pussies, and wimps" (Barrett 1996). Blue-collar settings particularly encourage macho behavior. For example, men in dangerous settings such as offshore oil rigs often refuse safety helmets, and some men working around coal dust shun masks. Macho behavior also includes that by workers who use brute force rather than standard procedures to accomplish a task. Gender displays that signal the importance of bravado and muscle on the job imply that women don't belong (Eisenberg 1998; Weston 1990:146). White-collar workers, too, engage in such macho behavior. According to one study, male lawyers specializing in litigation likened themselves to "Rambo" in their single-minded pursuit and conquest of the "enemy." One said, "It's a male thing. . . . It's a competition. Men beating each other up, trying to show one another up. Only these aren't fistfights, they're verbal assaults." Men who lose were considered "weak," "impotent," or lacking "balls" (Pierce 1995:68). Such practices are not universal, however; employment practices and antidiscrimination laws can be effective in discouraging them.

Social interaction can also mark a workplace as off limits or open to the other sex, although gender is often a "ghost" in the background of interaction, rather than the focus of what is going on (Martin 2001; Ridgeway and Correll 2000). Sometimes, however, workers explicitly use

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gender to reinforce inequality. Male superiority can be asserted through words, as with the male judges who referred to women as “bitches, cats, and ball-busters” (Padavic and Orcutt 1997:694), or a lone woman electrician, who found “fucking lesbian electrician bitch” written on the bathroom wall (Eisenberg 1998:81). The only woman in a power-plant crew saw on a work room bulletin board a list headed “Twenty Reasons Why Beer Is Better Than Women” that sexualized and disparaged women (“You always know you’re the first one to pop a beer”; “When a beer goes flat, you can throw it out”). The list reminded the woman that she was in male territory, where women were welcome primarily as sex objects (Padavic 1991).

Women also bring gender to the workplace. Sometimes they do this by swapping stories about their male partners and children or by celebrating marriages and births. Such stories can brag about husbands’ successes; others can be contemptuous of men, for example, by describing men’s incompetence at various tasks. Women meatpackers scorned their supervisor for his lack of stereotypically male attributes: “Oh, Clyde,” Annie groaned in disgust, “Clyde can’t even fix his own car” (Fink 1998:31). Women can also enact gender by defying conventional gender roles.<sup>3</sup> A sociologist observed this phenomenon in Mexico among female factory workers during the bus ride home from work. When a man boarded the bus, the women “chided and teased him. . . . They offered kisses and asked for a smile. They exchanged comments about his physical attributes and suggested a raffle to see who would keep him” (Fernandez-Kelly 1983:131-32). Both women and men workers also use gender to resist their employers. A company’s policy of encouraging a family orientation among women workers backfired when the company asked workers to commute between Hong Kong and mainland China for training. Women who did not want to go argued that spending the night away from home violated their obligations as wives and mothers (Lee 1997:131). Likewise, male unionists have invoked notions of manly dignity to encourage other workers to join them in opposition to management.

In sum, employers and workers engage in gender differentiation at work by making sex salient when it is irrelevant and by acting on sex-stereotyped assumptions. Employers also gender work by sex-segregating jobs, by setting pay based on workers’ sex, and by permitting the kinds of workers’ practices discussed earlier. In other words, gender is constructed within places of work through organizational practices and interaction (Acker 1999; Ely and Meyerson 2000; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999). It is eroded by changes in these features.

### *Diversity in Gendered Work*

How and how much work is gendered depends on the work site, the employer, and the characteristics of the workers. In some situations, workers' race has a greater effect than their sex does on jobs, pay, and day-to-day experiences. More commonly, sex, race, and other characteristics interact to shape workers' outcomes. At colleges and universities, for example, although most female workers do clerical work, white women are more likely to hold such jobs than women of color, who disproportionately hold custodial jobs. Meanwhile, being a white man increases a worker's chance of being an administrator or a professor; minority men more often hold blue-collar jobs. The chapters that follow show that sometimes the patterns are the same regardless of workers' race and ethnicity, and other times they differ. When race or ethnicity has been shown to make a difference in the effect of sex, we discuss it. Unfortunately, the available research on such differences is limited. Thus, without losing sight of this diversity, we focus on the importance of people's sex on their lives as workers.

### Summary

Sex differentiation and gender differentiation are fundamental features of work. First and foremost, they operate through the sexual division of labor that assigns tasks to people partly on the basis of their sex and that labels certain tasks as "belonging to" or being appropriate for one sex or the other. Sex and gender differentiation also are expressed in the undervaluation of women's work or the overvaluation of men's work. These processes occur in the day-to-day interactions among workers and their bosses, as well as in the policies and practices of employers, governments, and families. Their result can make work a gendered institution, in which employers and workers often place undue emphasis on people's sex. It is important to recognize, however, that neither sex differentiation nor gender differentiation is universal or inevitable. Some employers hire both women and men for all jobs. In some places of work, neither sex introduces gender into the workplace to an appreciable degree. Instead, workers interact as individuals. This variability in the amount of sex differentiation across workplaces is not an accident. It results from how employers organize work, the tasks involved, organizational leadership, and the existence of external pressures. In the chapters that follow, we call attention to factors that exacerbate or reduce sex differentiation at work.

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### Notes

1. According to one estimate, women's unpaid household labor accounts for about one-third of the world's economic production (United Nations Population Fund 2000).
2. Jobs can change sex labels rapidly when men's labor is unavailable, as during wars or strikes, or an occupation changes in ways to become less attractive to men (Reskin and Roos 1990). But such changes are rarely permanent. In Japan during the twentieth century, for example, women worked underground as miners until a post-World War I recession led to laws sending women above-ground. They returned to the mines in response to the need for laborers during World War II, only to be forced out in 1947 after the war (Mathias 1993:101-105; Saso 1990:25-26).
3. Men in macho workplaces may be less able to draw on strategies that defy conventional gender roles because coworkers can punish men who are viewed as effeminate.