

The Maternal Wall

Faye J. Crosby*

University of California, Santa Cruz

Joan C. Williams

Washington College of Law, American University

Monica Biernat

University of Kansas

Although the economic and social position of women has improved considerably in the last decades, some gendered expectations and roles have proved remarkably resilient. Increasingly, the gender gap in compensation has become an issue of “mother” versus “other,” as, for example, working mothers earn 60% of what working fathers earn. Conservatives tend to frame the gender imbalance in terms of women’s choices; but feminists, including those in this issue, debunk explanations that blame women for gender differences in earnings. Contributors to this issue, whose work we introduce here, chronicle and analyze the power of stereotypic thinking and behavior, and also discuss how to change both stereotypes and realities.

In 1963, Congress enacted the Equal Pay Act (1963). It required that men and women be given equal pay for equal work. A year later in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act—a bill originally designed to address only racial discrimination (Whalen & Whalen, 1985)—Congress for the first time prohibited discrimination on grounds of sex. Employers who explicitly discriminated against women in terms of wages, benefits, and employment opportunities could now be sanctioned.

As Title VII litigation developed, the definition of actionable sex discrimination expanded. In *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson* (1986), The Supreme Court treated quid pro quo sexual harassment (your body or your job) as a form of sex

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Faye J. Crosby, Psychology Department, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064 [e-mail: fjcrosby@cats.ucsc.edu].

discrimination. Three years later, in the case of *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* (1989), the Court, aided by an amicus brief from the American Psychological Association, recognized gender stereotyping as a violation of Title VII (American Psychological Association, 1988; Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1993). By 1993, the Eighth Circuit held that an employer who allowed pornographic pictures to hang on the wall was liable for sexual harassment (*Burns v. McGregor*, 1993).

The growth of glass-ceiling and sexual-harassment Title VII liability both reflected and spurred substantial changes in workplace norms. Virtually all large employers now have formal anti-discrimination policies, and a new industry of diversity trainers has emerged to ensure that outdated attitudes are not expressed on the job (Agars & Kottke, 2004).

Yet in some ways the change has not been as far-reaching or as secure as one would hope. Many women remain trapped in traditionally feminine jobs that typically pay less and are less prestigious and influential than jobs traditionally held by men. Using a measure called the Duncan Index, in which a score of 100 indicates complete sex segregation of the paid labor market and 0 indicates complete integration, economists find that the United States moved from a score of 64 in 1960 to a score of 55 in 1990 (Jacobsen, 1994). After 30 years of struggle, the paid labor force was still more segregated by gender than integrated. Examination of individual jobs within occupational categories (e.g., pediatrician vs. surgeon) reveals even more sex segregation than across occupations. Furthermore, even when women are employed in the same job classifications as men, they receive less compensation (Raudenbush & Kasim, 1998; Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992).

Sexual harassment, also, remains a fact of life for many women. Between 35% and 50% of women are sexually harassed at some point in their careers (Gutek, 2001). Women are nine times as likely as men to quit a job because of sexual harassment (Gutek & Done, 2001). Sexual harassment may be especially prevalent in the traditionally male professions of medicine (Horne, 1992) and law (American Bar Association, 1995).

The Crux of the Question

Change has been the most uneven with respect to employed mothers. Young single women have always been part of the paid labor market. In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s women who were married and/or mothers of young children flooded into the year-round labor market (Bianchi & Casper, 2000; Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2003). In some ways, the changes for employed mothers have been profound. Who would have thought, in 1960, that by 2001 the sitting governor of Massachusetts would give birth to twins? Yet, in other ways, gendered expectations and roles have proved remarkably resilient, and some describe motherhood as the worst economic decision a woman could make (Crittenden, 2001).

Increasingly, the gender gap in compensation has become an issue of “mother” versus “other” (Crittenden, 2001). While the wages of young women without children approach those of men, mothers’ wages lag far behind (Waldfogel, 1998). In fact, mothers still earn only 60 percent of the wages of fathers, and the family wage gap between mothers and other adults actually widened in recent decades, with single mothers falling furthest behind (Waldfogel, 1998). A study of the Canadian labor force found that women tend to be employed in workplaces where the rate of part-time employment is nearly twice as high as it is elsewhere, and that the part-time rate accounted for some 11% of the overall gender wage gap (Statistics Canada, 2002). What was thought to be a glass ceiling problem has turned out to be, in large part, a problem that might more accurately be termed “the maternal wall” (Williams, 2001).

A portion of the wage penalty associated with motherhood stems from mothers’ distinctive work schedules. In 2001, 65.6% of part-time workers in the United States were women, and of all employed women, 27% worked part time, compared to 12.6% of employed men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Most women who work part time do so for family reasons (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2001). Two out of three mothers aged 25 to 44 still work less than 40 hours per week year-round (U. S. Census Bureau, 2002). In the desirable jobs where full time means overtime, mothers are even harder to find: Fully 92 percent of mothers work less than 50 hours per week year round, which means that more than three-fourths of women do not participate in the labor pool for jobs in which full time means be available to one’s employer more or less constantly (Williams, 2001).

Some conservatives such as Diana Furchtgott-Roth of the American Enterprise Institute and June O’Neill of Baruch College, City University of New York infer from the data on employed mothers that the persistent differences between men and women reflect nothing more pernicious than the ideology that men and women make personal choices based on their motivations, natures, and needs. According to such conservatives, women’s maternal instinct is more to blame for the gender gap in earnings than is anti-woman sentiment on the part of men (O’Neill, 1994; O’Neill & Polacheck, 1993). Furchtgott-Roth and Stolba (1999) assert: “The inequality of institutions that characterized the early years of the century have largely vanished. Policymakers have removed the legal barriers to women’s entering and participating fully in jobs and professions. Equality of opportunity now reigns” (p. 3–4).

Feminists contest the interpretation of conservatives like Furchtgott-Roth (Crosby, 2004), pointing out that good jobs are still defined around an ideal worker who starts to work in early adulthood and works full time and full force for forty years straight, taking no time off for childbearing and child rearing. Workplace ideals, say the feminists, are still defined around men’s bodies—since men need no time off for childbirth—and men’s life patterns, as American women still do 70% to 80% of the child rearing (Williams, 2001). Part-time work is often seen

as part committed and sometimes as part competent. Defining workplace ideals in such a way, feminists argue, is tantamount to sex discrimination (Williams, 2001). Is it not discriminatory, for example, to refuse benefits to part-time workers while giving them to full-time workers? What can justify a refusal to prorate benefits? Isn't this form of economic disenfranchisement sex discriminatory?

Concerning the conservatives' arguments that a mother's disadvantaged workplace position reflects personal choice rather than discrimination, feminist lawyers have responded that choice and discrimination are not mutually exclusive (Williams, 2002). That a slave chooses to obey his master rather than to attempt to break away tells us little about the slave's preferences for slavery over freedom. That a gay serviceman chooses to remain "in the closet" rather than be given a dishonorable discharge and deprived of his pension does not mean that the "don't ask, don't tell" policy is nondiscriminatory. Similarly, mothers' choices are framed within a discriminatory system.

This Issue

In 1972, with the *Journal of Social Issues* (JSI) issue on women edited by Martha Mednick and Sandra Tangri (1972), the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) helped inaugurate the feminist transformation within the discipline of psychology. That issue signaled the legitimacy of gender as a category of analysis. Also, it made explicit the extent of sexual prejudice and sex discrimination within the discipline as well as beyond it.

Since 1972, a number of issues of JSI have dealt with topics relevant to gender, paid employment, and domestic arrangements, and a number of these are relevant to this issue. In 1991, for example, Hofferth and Phillips (1991) edited an issue on child care policy research. Four years later Borgida and Fiske's (1995) issue of gender stereotyping, sexual harassment, and the law appeared. In 1996, Rosenberg and Limber edited an issue entitled *Contributions of Social Science Research to Issues of Family Policy*, and in 2000, an issue on welfare reform appeared (Zuckerman & Kalil, 2000). Also relevant are the 2001 JSIs edited by Lott and Bullock on gender and poverty, and by Carli and Eagly on gender and leadership.

Surprisingly, this issue is the first JSI to focus directly on the issue of employed mothers. We start with the observation that people's assumptions, preconceptions, prejudgments, and stereotypes influence the impressions they form, the judgments they make, and the behavior they engage in toward others. When people in power hold stereotypes they can influence organizational and societal structures that in turn shape the lives of many individuals. A number of social scientists have observed how institutionalized prejudices help prophecies to become self-fulfilling (Jones, 1998). Some social scientists, such as the authors, maintain that we can use changed realities to change perceptions so as to further change realities.

Thus, this issue starts with a theoretical overview (Ridgeway & Correll, this issue) and with empirical demonstrations (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, this issue; Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, this issue; Peplau & Fingerhut, this issue) of the power of stereotypic thinking, but ends with discussions of how to change both stereotypes and realities (Krieger, this issue; Williams & Cooper, this issue). In between, the issue documents the perceptions of young women as they contemplate their families and their futures (Franco, Sabattini, & Crosby, this issue), the self reflections of nurses who, in essence, work around the clock (Bullock & Waugh, this issue), and the ruminations of a sample of mothers working as academics and managers and were tracked over a 13 year period (Tiedje, this issue). Two articles show how aspects of the social structure interrelate. Specifically, using large quantitative data sets, Riger, Staggs, and Schewe (this issue) prove how intimate partner violence impedes the ability of low income women to find and keep employment, and Bub and McCartney (this issue) attest to the positive impact of day care on women's attachment to the paid labor market.

This issue extends earlier work on stereotyping. The traditional focus of much social psychological research on stereotyping has been on how gender stereotypes regarding women's low "agency" or competence create situations in which women are devalued, discredited, and offered fewer opportunities than men (e.g., see Heilman, 2001). One purpose of this issue is to highlight that, in many workplace situations today, women—not women in general, but mothers in particular—are systematically disadvantaged by unexamined assumptions. However, as much as we may profess a belief in gender equality, the persistent notion that a good mother is "always there" for her children serves as an important engine of traditionalist gender roles (Kobrynowicz & Biernat, 1997). Women with demanding careers may be judged to be inadequate mothers, and may even lose custody of their children (Prost v. Greene, 1995; Jacobs, 1998).

This issue is unusual in the degree to which it is interdisciplinary and how it emphasizes diversity. Samples studied include lesbians as well as heterosexual women; people of color as well as white people; poor and working class people as well as middle class people. Some of the articles are conceptual and some are empirical. Among the empirical articles, some rely on qualitative methods while others use quantitative methods in either laboratory settings or large community samples. Among the contributors are scholars working in the law (Krieger, this issue; Williams & Cooper, this issue), in public health (Tiedje, this issue), in sociology (Ridgeway & Correll, this issue), in educational and developmental psychology (Bub & McCartney, this issue), as well as in social psychology. It is the authors' hope that all gain from exposure to divergent methods, rooted in a variety of disciplinary backgrounds.

We hope, also, that the scholarship presented here will prove of use not only to those who study discrimination but also to those who seek to redress the inequities faced by women in the workplace. In her prefatory article Rosalind Barnett (this

issue), a leading authority on work-life issues, notes that history is condemned to repeat itself as long as stereotypes about women and men persist. We would like to believe that with knowledge comes the possibility for true and lasting change. Social psychologists played an important role in crystallizing public and judicial understandings of glass ceiling discrimination. Now a similar role beckons with respect to maternal discrimination; we think this issue can contribute to that effort.

References

- Agars, M. D., & Kottke, J. L. (2004). Models and practice of diversity management: A historical review and presentation of a new integration theory. In M. Stockdale & F. J. Crosby (Eds.), *The Psychology and Management of Workplace Diversity* (pp. 55–77). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- American Bar Association. (1995). *Unfinished business: Overcoming the Sisyphus factor—A report on the status of women in the legal profession*. Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychological Association. (1988). *Amicus Brief for Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* (490 U.S. 288, 1989). Washington, DC: Author.
- Bianchi, S. M., & Casper, L. M. (2000). American families. *Population Bulletin*, 55, 2–43.
- Borgida, E., & Fiske, S. T. (Eds.). (1995). Gender, stereotyping, sexual harassment, and the law. *Journal of Social Issues*, 51(1).
- Burns v. McGregor, 989 F.2d 959, 966 (8th Cir. 1993).
- Carli, L. L., & Eagly, A. H. (Eds.). (2001). Gender, hierarchy and leadership. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4).
- Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C.A. §§2000e - 2000e-17 (1964).
- Crittenden, A. (2001). *The price of motherhood: Why the most important job in the world is still the least valued*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Crosby, F. J. (2004). *Affirmative action is dead; long live affirmative action*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Equal Pay Act of 1963, 29 U.S.C. §206 (1963).
- Fiske, S. T., Bersoff, D. N., Borgida, E., Deaux, K., & Heilman, M. E. (1993). What constitutes a scientific review? A majority retort to Barrett and Morris. *Law and Human Behavior*, 17, 217–233.
- Furchtgott-Roth, D., & Stolba, C. (1999). *Women's figures: An illustrated guide to the economic progress of women in America*. Washington, DC: AEI Press.
- Gutek, B. (2001). Working environments. In J. Worell (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Women and Gender: Sex similarities and differences and the impact of society on gender: Vol. 2* (pp. 1191–1204). New York: Academic Press.
- Gutek, B. A., & Done, R. (2001). Sexual harassment. In R. K. Unger (Ed.), *Handbook of the Psychology of Women and Gender* (pp. 367–387). New York: Wiley.
- Heilman, M. E. (2001). Description and prescription: How gender stereotypes prevent women's ascent up the organizational ladder. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57, 657–674.
- Hofferth, S. L., & Philips, D. A. (Eds.). (1991). Child care policy research. *Journal of Social Issues*, 47(2).
- Horne, G. (1992). *Reversing discrimination: The case for affirmative action*. New York: International Publishers.
- Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2001, May). *Today's women workers: Shut out of yesterday's unemployment insurance system* (Pub. #A127). Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research.
- Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2003, June). *40-hour work proposal significantly raises mothers' employment standard* (Pub. #D457). Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research.

- Jacobs, M. A. (1998, July 17). Court custody rulings favor at-home dads. *Wall Street Journal*, pp. B1, B6.
- Jacobsen, J. P. (1994). Sex segregation at work: Trends and predictions. *Social Science Journal*, 31, 153–169.
- Jones, J. M. (1997). *Prejudice and racism* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Kobrynowicz, D., & Biernat, M. (1997). Decoding subjective evaluations: How stereotypes provide shifting standards. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 33, 579–601.
- Lott, B., & Bullock, H. E. (Eds.). (2001). Listening to the voices of poor women. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(2).
- Mednick, M. S., & Tangri, S. S. (Eds.). (1972). New perspectives on women. *Journal of Social Issues*, 28(2).
- Meritor Savings Bank, FSB v. Vinson, 477 U.S. 57 (1986).
- Neill, J. (1994, October 7). The shrinking pay gap. *The Wall Street Journal*, p. A10.
- O'Neill, J., & Polacheck, S. (1993). Why the gender gap in wages narrowed in the 1980s. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 11, 205–208.
- Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins, 109 S. Ct. 1775 (1989).
- Prost v. Greene, 652 A.2d 621, 624 (D.C. 1995).
- Raudenbush, S. W., & Kasim, R. M. (1998). Cognitive skill and economic inequality: Findings from the National Adult Literacy Survey. *Harvard Educational Review*, 68, 33–79.
- Rosenberg, A. A., & Limber, S. P. (Eds.). (1996). Contributions of social science research to issues of family policy. *Journal of Social Issues*, 52(3).
- Statistics Canada. (2002, June). *The “who, what, when and where” of gender pay differentials*, no. 4 (71-584-MIE). Retrieved September 16, 2004, from <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/71-584-MIE/71-584-MIE02004.pdf>
- Stroh, L. K., Brett, J. M., & Reilly, A. H. (1992). All the right stuff: A comparison of female and male managers' career progression. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 77, 251–260.
- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, U.S.C., §2000e-703, 42 (2002).
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2002). *Historical income tables—People Table P-41. Work experience—workers by median earnings and sex: 1967–2001*. Retrieved September 16, 2004, from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/income/histinc/p41.html>
- Waldfogel, J. (1998). Understanding the “family gap” in pay for women with children. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 12, 137–156.
- Whalen, C., & Whalen, B. (1985). *The longest debate: A legislative history of the 1964 Civil Rights Act*. Washington, DC: Seven Lockes Press.
- Williams, J. (2001). *Unbending gender: Why work and family conflict and what to do about it*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, J. (2002). It's snowing down south: How to help mothers and avoid recycling the sameness/difference debate. *Columbia Law Review*, 812, 827–828.
- Zuckerman, D., & Kalil, A. (Eds.). (2000). The impact of welfare reform. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(4).

FAYE J. CROSBY is a social psychologist who has specialized in issues of gender and justice. She is currently Professor of Psychology and head of the social psychology area at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Crosby is the founder of the Nag's Heart Conferences. In 1991–1992 she had the extraordinary privilege to serve as President of SPSSI. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including an honorary doctorate from Ball State University. Crosby has published widely on the present topic and many others. Her current focus is on affirmative action.

JOAN C. WILLIAMS, Professor of Law at American University, Washington College of Law, is the Director of the Program on WorkLife Law, and Co-Director

of the Project on Attorney Retention. She is also author of *Unbending Gender: Why Work and Family Conflict and What To Do About It* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

MONICA BIERNAT is Professor of Psychology at the University of Kansas. She earned her PhD in psychology (social) at the University of Michigan in 1989. Her research examines the processes of stereotyping and prejudice, and focuses specifically on how stereotypes guide judgments of individual members of stereotyped groups. She is currently associate editor of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and was the 1998/1999 winner of the American Psychological Association Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contribution to Psychology in the area of Social Psychology.

Copyright of Journal of Social Issues is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.