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10 Connections between Masculinity, Work, and Career Reproduce Gender Inequality

Abstract: Gender has been meaningfully tied to relations of production throughout history and across cultural contexts. What this exactly looks like and how it shapes the lived realities of people across time and place, however, has also been and will continue to be subject to great change. This chapter examines four contemporary dimensions of the relationship between masculinity, work, and career as well as how this relationship is connected with systems of gender inequality. We summarise scholarship on (1) the persistence of occupational sex segregation, (2) the effects of the “breadwinner” ideal, (3) the cultural devaluation of femininity, and (4) emergent scholarship on “masculinity contest cultures” at work. Here, we argue that it is through the interconnections between these dimensions that the relationship between masculinity, work, and career contributes to the durability of gender inequality.

Introduction

In 1958, the sociologist Everett C. Hughes published *Men and Their Work* – a collection of essays and papers examining the gendered division of labour, centering on the experiences of men. In the preface, he justified the project by writing, “A man’s work is as good a clue as any to the course of his life and to his social being and identity” (1958, 7). He goes on to suggest that the very “ordering of society” is centrally connected to “man’s relation to the world of work” (1958, 11). Hughes is correct that masculinity is integrally intertwined with work and career. But he does not address the ways that this relationship is a powerful mechanism through which gender inequalities are preserved and reproduced over time. This is our goal in this chapter.

One of the principle ways gender is reproduced as a meaningful concept in social life is through the organisation of labour around gender. Women and men, as groups, perform different types of labour in virtually every society. This social organisation is a central element of the structure and reproduction of relations of gender difference (Rhode 1997; West and Fenstermaker 1995). That is, the relationship between masculinity, work, and career is a primary

mechanism through which understandings of – and ideological commitments to – gender difference are formed and sustained.

Scholars interested in examining this relationship in more recent history might also note the prevalence of women in many occupational domains formerly defined, in part, by women's exclusion. And yet, even under such circumstances of progression towards gender equality, the division of labour is capable of retaining gendered meanings and consequences that offer powerful illustrations of the durability and elasticity of gender inequality (Bridges and Pascoe 2018; Ridgeway 2011).

In this chapter, first we summarise some of the feminist sociological theory assessing the relationship between gender, work and career and how this relationship gives rise to inequality. Subsequently, we highlight feminist and social scientific research that illustrates the relationship between masculinity, work, and career. We address four interrelated issues that shape the relationship between masculinity, work, and career, and how this relationship is integral to understanding gender inequality. We address research on: (1) workplace and occupational gender segregation, (2) the origin and persistence of the “breadwinner” model of masculinity, (3) the social and cultural devaluation of femininity, and (4) the organisational structure of “masculinity contest cultures” at work and how they perpetuate inequality. Dividing our analysis between these components of the relationship connecting masculinity, work, and career allows for an understanding of both continuity and change in inequality. In the conclusion, we discuss ways that these components overlap and intersect to cause the relationships between masculinity, work, and career to be durable and to reproduce inequality even as they have transformed over time.

Theorising the Relationship between Masculinity, Work, and Career

The relationship between gender and the division of labour was among the first structures of gender relations to be recognised in the social sciences (Connell 2002, 2004) and in many disciplines, the gendered division of labour remains central to discussion of gender inequality (e.g. history, economics, anthropology). In most societies, most of the time and across social contexts, some work has been performed principally by women and other work has been performed principally by men (Connell 1987, 2002; Geist and Cohen 2011). However, it is not the case that all societies have defined the *same* work as men's work or women's work. Specific tasks and labour practices might be understood as

masculine in some societies, social contexts, or periods of history and feminine in others. As such, it is the gendered division of labour itself that is nearly universal, not the actual ways labour is divided (Mitchell 1974; Rubin 1975; Blumberg 1978, 1984; Hartmann 1979; Connell 1987; Hearn 1987; Acker 1989, 1990; Walby 1990; Reskin 1993).

Capitalism and industrialisation created a specific instantiation of this process by introducing the idea of “separate spheres”: “the doctrine that men and women have innately different natures and occupy separate spheres of life” (Coontz 2005, 176). The industrial revolution and the economic system of capitalism were key historical moments in establishing paid work as masculine and casting unpaid labour in the home as feminine and as offering what historian Christopher Lasch (1977) referred to as a “haven in a heartless world”.¹ Indeed, Holter (2005) suggests that the separation of women’s and men’s “spheres” of life is among the most important factors in shaping the structure of gender relations in contemporary Western societies. As Holter (2005), Coontz (1992, 2005) and Cowan (1983) all argue, the structural segregation of paid work as masculine and unpaid labour practiced in the home as feminine shapes radically different experiences, opportunities, and constraints of women and men. This structural segregation also shapes our notions of what are thought to be the different natures of women and men.

A telling example is offered by Ruth Schwartz Cowan’s (1983) historical analysis of the emergence of household technology at the turn of the 20th century in the United States. This emergence appeared alongside men’s exodus from American households to newly emerging opportunities for paid work outside of the home. And, opportunities for career simultaneously pulled men out of their homes while pushing women back in. Prior to this transformation, both women and men (as well as children) were all responsible for the various types of labour that went into managing a pre-industrial household. With the advent of industrialisation, however, middle-class men were expected to work outside the home and middle-class women were compelled to care for the home alone

¹ Importantly, more recent scholarship challenges the historical emergence of separate spheres. While this has become a historical narrative structuring a great deal of scholarship, we also know that it is largely a middle-class narrative as working-class women and children also joined men in working outside the home. Indeed, Vickery (1993) argues that the “separation of spheres” discourse regarding industrialisation and shifts in gender relations relates explicitly to the middle-class. And while Vickery (2009) challenges the extent to which women’s lives were “domesticated” during this period, Tosh (2007) challenges claims that men’s lives were not uncovering the many contradictions structuring hetero-romantic gender relations leading up to and following industrialisation.

and in historically new ways. New household technologies were also invented and introduced into American homes over the first half of the twentieth century – everything from cabinets, to vacuum cleaners, to microwaves, to refrigerators, and more. All of these varying devices were marketed as “labour-saving” tools for saving time. Cowan shows, however, that they simultaneously ushered in new sets of demands and standards of cleanliness at precisely the historical moment when fewer people than ever before were responsible for the management of the home. Thus, these technological “advances”, according to Cowan (1983), had the ironic effect of producing “more work for mother”.

Women’s unpaid labour during historical transformations like these was not incidental to these gendered historical shifts; their labour actually made these shifts possible. The separation of spheres became necessary as capitalist enterprises sought to squeeze every ounce of labour they could out of paid employees – a task made more possible by the unpaid labour of women managing “havens” in the newly minted “heartless world.” And yet, this is a very middle- and upper-class narrative about this transformation as, for everyone else, the world remained as “heartless” as it ever was. Thus, these discourses of gendered responsibility were also classed from the very start, helping to usher in emergent gendered forms of class distinction.

One of the chief accomplishments of research and theory on work and gender has been to empirically and theoretically demonstrate the ways that careers and work shape social behaviours, roles, and identities that came to be recognised as gendered. Structures do not arise, in other words, from innate differences between men and women. Rather, the presumption that such differences exist in the first place arises, in part, out of gendered social structures. That is, this work articulated a feminist social theory that connected the gendered structure of societies with gendered personalities and behaviours. The notion that women and men are “naturally suited” to different sorts of work is, then, a *social* accomplishment arising from a gendered division of labour (Goffman 1977; Connell 1987; West and Zimmerman 1987; Holter 2005; Acker 1990, 2006; Rhode 1997; Risman 1998). Understanding the theory and history that addresses the connections between the gendered division of labour and gender inequality is necessary to explore the relationship between masculinity, work, and career, as we do next.

Components of the Relationship between Masculinity, Work, and Career

Women's participation in the paid labour force in societies around the world increased steadily over the course of the second half of the twentieth century. Consider the United States. In 1950, slightly more than one third of US women were working in the paid labour force; but in 2018, three quarters of women in the US were (see Figure 1). Indeed, dramatic shifts like this were mirrored in many countries around the world (Charles, and Grusky 2004).

Figure 1: Men's and Women's Labor Force Participation in the United States, 25–54 years old: 1950–2018.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Progress toward equal proportions of women and men in the labour force stalled in the US and many other nations around the world around the 1990s. Nevertheless, rates of participation have increased substantially, and all this over a brief portion of history. And yet, gender inequality at work has endured, and this is in no small part due to the enduring relationship between masculinity, work, and career.

Tracing how this relationship endures alongside the dramatic shifts in women's relative participation in the paid labour force requires understanding four intersecting issues. (1) Despite this shift, sex segregation still structures modern workplaces and careers. (2) Though the "breadwinner ideal"² is not attainable for all but a very small number of households, it continues to exert powerful pressure in the cultural imaginary. (3) Femininity is devalued socially and culturally, and this is expressed in work and careers. And (4) masculinity contest cultures shape workplaces in ways that perpetuate inequality in modern work and careers. All four of these issues are intertwined with the power of masculinity to shape gendered outcomes – especially as they relate to work, occupations, and careers. In the following sections, we summarise and explain each of these interrelated issues that operate to reinforce the historically emergent relationship between masculinity and work.

Sex Segregation of Work and Occupations

Although women's paid labour force participation has increased dramatically over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, our ideas about what type of work is appropriate for men versus women are remain gendered. One way this is especially visible is that occupations are highly sex segregated worldwide (Charles and Grusky 2004). That is, men and women work in very different occupations (Cohen 2013). For example, in order to "undo all sex segregation by reallocating women to less segregated occupations, a full 52 percent of employed women in the United States would have to be shifted out of their current occupational category" (Charles and Grusky 2004, 4). In addition, women are concentrated in a smaller number of occupations than men, something Charles, and Grusky (2004) call "occupational ghettos" (Padavic and Reskin 2002; Charles and Grusky 2004). For example, as of 2000 in the US, 3 in 10 women in the workforce could be accounted for by only 10 of 503 detailed occupational categories (Padavic and Reskin 2002, 65). As of 2018, almost 40 percent of all women employed in the US work in occupations in

² "Breadwinner" is a concept used to refer to the member in a couple who contributes the majority of income to the relationship. It be measured by examining discrepancies in relative proportions of income earned by each member of the couple. But so too is "breadwinner" an ideological issue as women's and men's earnings are made sense of interactionally within the couple as a unit. As such, the status of "breadwinner" is not only achieved in terms of income alone, but it is discursively constructed as couples interactionally discuss and understand the meanings associated with the income each of them bring to the table (Bridges 2013).

which at least 75 percent of those employed are also women (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). While this way of characterising occupational segregation focusses on women, it is important to note that the issue is not only that women are segregated to a narrow band of occupations, but that men are both less segregated in general and also more segregated into occupations with high pay, status, and workplace benefits, relative to women's occupations. Charles and Grusky (2004, 7) call this “vertical” segregation, i.e. the fact that men dominate more “desirable” occupations. Further, despite women moving into the paid labour force at higher rates since the 1950s, the degree of occupational sex segregation in the US has barely declined since 1970 (Charles and Grusky 2004). In addition, there is some evidence occupational gender segregation has increased post industrialisation (Charles and Bradley 2009; Charles and Grusky 2004).³

One consequence of this high level of occupational sex-segregation is economic inequality by gender. For instance, most of the pay gap between women and men occurs because men, on average, are more likely to work in higher paying occupations than are women (Boraas and Rodgers III 2003; Wade, and Ferree 2018). In addition, occupations with higher proportions of men tend to offer better benefits, higher social status, more flexibility, more job advancement opportunities, and higher levels of authority than occupations with higher proportions of women (Kallberg 2011; Tausig 2013; Cohen and Huffman 2003; Dewar 2000; Kilbourne et al. 1994; Padavic and Reskin 2002).

A second consequence is that occupational segregation is a primary mechanism through which occupations are gendered and masculinity is upheld and reproduced. That is, although it is now considered normative in many societies for women to engage in paid work, the type of paid work that is socially constructed as appropriate for men and women is gendered. Wade and Ferree (2018, 327), for example, write, “[c]ollectively, we understand certain jobs as somehow *for* women (like nursing and teaching) and others as *for* men (construction work and computer programming)”. Indeed, the most masculine typed jobs and careers are still largely inaccessible to women. For example, in the United States 91 percent of mechanical engineers, 94 percent of airline pilots, and 97 percent of construction laborers are men (Wade and Ferree 2018). What types of jobs are reserved for men, however, varies by culture. In the United States, for instance, construction work is among the occupations most dominated by men. In India, however, the construction industry is slightly over

³ The proportion of the economy comprising service sector occupations, which are gender-typed as feminine and are dominated by women, has increased in post-industrial economies (Charles and Grusky 2004).

half women, partially because of the idea that women are responsible for the home (Wade and Ferree 2018; WIEGO 2019). We highlight this example to illustrate the fact that women are participating in manual labour in the construction industry in India which in the US would be considered masculine labour. The gendered division of labour in India, however, remains. Nevertheless, the specific occupations and labour constructed as masculine or feminine differ between India and the US, and most other nations. This contrast between the US and India underscores the ways work and occupations are mobilised to socially construct what is masculine and what is not masculine.

One component of occupational sex-segregation is the gendering of jobs and occupations that occurs through a process of cultural reproduction of a “masculine” work force for certain jobs. For example, Rivera’s “cultural matching” (2012) is a practice in which employers look for candidates that share cultural similarities and “fit” to maintain a specific kind of environment within the workplace – one that resists diversity of all kinds, including gender diversity (Rivera 2012).

Women being kept out of occupations dominated by men is one way that occupational segregation reinforces masculinity through work and professions. But, occupations dominated by women, such as nursing and librarians, are also part of the gendering of work and occupations. Men in these occupations are gender policed by others in ways that both advantage and disadvantage men, but consistently devalue femininity (Williams 1995). Williams (1995) interviewed men who worked in occupations culturally understood as “feminine” and they reported that while they were welcomed in their occupations by their women co-workers, they were held accountable for not being masculine enough by those outside of their occupation. Another way in which the men are policed in “feminine” occupations is that they are encouraged in patterned ways to pursue higher-level positions, a phenomenon Williams (1995) called “the glass escalator.” This advantages men in that they have more access to promotions than the women they work alongside, while simultaneously devaluing feminine work. One of Williams’ (1995) respondents, a man elementary school teacher said:

[My father’s] first reaction was, “Well, that’s a good start, and eventually, you know, you’ll be able to be a principal, maybe start your own school . . . And every time I talked to him his comments were always, “You still like it? [laughs] “You still doing it?” . . . He would probably like it better if I was the head of the school”. (Williams 1995, 63)

In the context of the United States, this gendered process is racialised in that Williams’ (1995) “glass escalator” is largely available to white men in occupations dominated by women (Wingfield 2009). In this way, Black masculinity in

the US is constructed as not appropriate for leadership positions in fields gendered feminine, while white masculinity is.

The degree of occupational and educational sex segregation varies by country (Charles and Grusky 2004). And cross-cultural research provides evidence that occupational sex segregation is linked to gender essentialist ideologies, ideologies which have proved especially resistant to change over time (Charles and Grusky 2004; Charles and Bradley 2009). For example, Charles and Grusky (2004) show that gender essentialist ideologies can explain high levels of occupational sex segregation in some countries with otherwise high levels of gender equality and economic development. This interplay between gender essentialism and occupations underscores and reinforces the way that occupations both remain gendered and reinforce gender.

In addition to occupations, fields of college study are very segregated by sex, across many countries (Charles and Bradley 2009). And, as in the case of work and occupations, the segregation of field of study is tightly linked to ideologies of what work and areas of study are appropriate for women and for men. Women show a patterned overrepresentation in “expressive and human-centered fields” and men show the same pattern in “technical and math-intensive fields” (Charles and Bradley 2009, 940). This is evidence of the gendered nature of professional training and another way that masculinity is reproduced in work and careers. For example, in a study of 44 societies, Charles and Bradley (2009) discuss how college graduates in the most affluent societies have the luxury of expressing their “gendered selves” by choosing more sex-typed fields than their counterparts in less economically developed countries. Charles and Bradley (2009) argue that it is gender essentialist ideologies that drive the choice to segregate into sex-typed fields of study among these college graduates from more affluent societies. This in turn, is a force for reproduction of occupational sex-segregation.

The Breadwinner Norm and Breadwinning as Ideology

The breadwinner norm is a fundamental part of contemporary masculinity in industrialised and post industrialised societies (Thébaud 2010). Though many aspects of masculine norms have changed and reorganised over time, the idea that men need to be breadwinners is especially sticky (Ehrenreich 1983; Townsend 2002). The ideal of the breadwinner norm remains very powerful, despite the fact that the dominance of the man as breadwinner household (i.e., man in the paid workforce, women doing unpaid homemaking and childrearing labour, and children not working for pay) was quite short lived, and even at its height, primarily

was available to white, upper- and middle-class families (Coontz 2005). For example, many people around the world believe that men have more of a “right to a job” than do women when “jobs are scarce” (see Figure 2). This perception of the “right to a job” is connected with the relationship between masculinity, work, and career as well as the gendered ideology of breadwinning. One reason the breadwinner norm is powerful is because it combines men’s accountability to each other with powerful economic and status incentives for men. That is, men both feel enormous social pressure to enact masculinity as breadwinners and upholding the breadwinner norm garners men economic advantages, social status, and power.

Investment in a breadwinning ideology is patterned by the gender of the worker. Gerson (2010) discovered that young heterosexual women and men are interested in finding egalitarian partnerships that prioritise both partners’ abilities to find meaningful work. She also found, however, that women’s and men’s backup plans differed by gender: women were more likely to say they would rather remain outside a relationship if they could not achieve an egalitarian relationship, while men’s backup plans were to serve as primary breadwinners in their relationships. These gendered sentiments and investments in work and family arrangements are structured by national policies associated with work and family leave. As Castro-García and Pazos-Moran (2016) argue, gender equity at work and home is not possible without equal, non-transferable, well-paid leave options for both women and men. And different nations have different work cultures and workplace expectations, creating different social and cultural environments in which decisions about work and career are made (e.g. Kaufman and Almqvist 2017; Collins 2019).

Like many aspects of masculinity, such as norms of heterosexual prowess (Pascoe 2007), the breadwinner norm is often upheld through interactions with other men. Research in the US shows that many men feel intense pressure to conform to the breadwinner ideal, particularly in the eyes of other men. This can be the case regardless of their own beliefs about the importance of the breadwinner norm (Thébaud and Pedulla 2016) partially because of gendered biases, and sometimes harassment, from others surrounding men’s preferences for shorter work hours or more flexibility (e.g. Berdahl and Moon 2013; Rudman and Mescher 2013; Vandello et al. 2013). For instance, Thébaud and Pedulla (2016) find that young, unmarried men’s views about whether they prefer a relationship in which they are the primary breadwinner versus a more egalitarian relationship, under conditions of having access to supportive work-family friendly policies, are predicted by their beliefs about what other young men want, rather than by their own preferences. This is evidence that the breadwinner ideal is important and that men feel accountable to other men to uphold this norm.

Figure 2: Percentage of Respondents Who “Agree” with the Statement: “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”.

World Values Survey, 2010–2014

Data Source: World Values Survey, 2010–2014. Available at: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp>.

Research underscores the importance of breadwinning by demonstrating that men who are constrained from being breadwinners will sometimes compensate by doing less housework. For example, Brines (1994) shows that, especially among white families in the US, men reduce their contribution to housework when their breadwinning status is diminished through economic dependency on their wife. Similarly, Schneider (2012) showed that men who work in fields dominated by women in the US do more hours of household tasks coded as “masculine” than men in more mixed-sex occupations.

Thébaud (2010) shows that the relationship between breadwinning and men’s contribution to housework varies cross culturally. In countries where paid work is more highly valued, men who are economically dependent on their wives are less likely to do housework than men who are equally economically dependent on their wives in countries where paid work is least highly valued. That is, in counties in which the breadwinner norm is strong, men are more likely to overcompensate if they are not breadwinners – underscoring the importance of breadwinner norms of masculinity and how they vary cross culturally.

In addition to the work that shows that men compensate for loss of breadwinner status by doing less housework, Munsch (2015, 2018) shows that economically dependent men are more likely to engage in infidelity than other men, and found evidence that this effect is stronger for economically dependent men than for economically dependent women. This work provides further evidence that breadwinning is central to the masculine identity in that men who cannot achieve breadwinner status will overcompensate in other ways.

Interestingly, despite all of this evidence that breadwinning is central to masculine identity, it is not clear that men actually prefer breadwinning to be a dominant source of their identity (Gerson 2010; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). Pedulla and Thébaud (2015) show that, at least among young adults in the US, all else being equal, when people feel that they have access to family-friendly work policies men and women are equally likely to prefer a relationship in which women and men have equal caregiving responsibilities. However, understanding the importance of the breadwinner ideal to masculinity is more complicated than men’s face value preferences for egalitarian relationships. Men are also advantaged by the breadwinner norm in that it garners them economic power through increased earnings, social status, and relative power in their romantic relationships (Crittenden 2001; Gerson 2010). For this reason, as well as to adhere to norms of masculinity, men are more inclined to ascribe to the breadwinner norm than women when work-family conflict forces people to choose (Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). In this way, economic incentives, power incentives in relationships, and “accountability” to “do masculinity”, especially from other men, collide and create powerful forces to reproduce and

underscore the breadwinner norm as a key part of the masculine ideal (West and Zimmerman 1987).

The Devaluation of Femininity in Work and Careers

An important component of the project of masculinity and masculine privilege is the devaluation of femininity. Research across the disciplines has shown that femininity is culturally devalued in many societies. That is, femininity is often valued in ways that structurally situate women in lower status positions in society than men. In fact, masculinity is so valuable that people are rewarded for “doing masculinity” regardless of their gender (Wade and Ferree 2018, 133).⁴ This devaluation is characterised by men and masculinity being seen not only as *different*⁵ from women and femininity but as inherently more valuable. Connell (1987, 1995) refers to the advantages accrued by the devaluation of femininity as the “patriarchal dividend”: structured advantages that accrue to men collectively as a result of the maintenance of gender inequality, and to some men more than others. As such, cultural devaluation of femininity is one of the ways that gender inequality is perpetuated.

Cultural devaluation of femininity can be seen in the devaluation of work that is associated with women and femininity, such as care work and service work (Kilbourne et al. 1994). Feminist work in economics and sociology provides

⁴ The rewards women receive for “doing masculinity” at work, however, are complicated by the fact that women are also sanctioned for engaging in what are perceived to be “masculine” behaviors in the workplace. For example, Heilman, et al. (2004) show that women who succeed at tasks coded as “masculine” (such as a leadership position in a “masculine” occupation) are more personally disliked than men who succeed at the same task and than women who do not succeed. Furthermore, this personal dislike resulting from the backlash to their success in work tasks understood as “masculine” was linked to important outcomes such as evaluation of their job performance and recommendations for a raise or promotion. Similarly, Rudman (1998) found that while self-promotion is an important factor in performing competence in the workplace, women suffer social reprisals for self-promoting because it violates gendered prescriptions for women to exhibit modesty. As such, women experience a “double bind”: that is, “doing masculinity” by pursuing workplace success comes at the cost of being seen as less likable, which in turn has its own negative consequences in terms of garnering workplace rewards such as increased pay and access to promotions. While, overall then women can be rewarded for enacting masculinity in the workplace, such rewards are also tempered with gendered costs associated with enacting masculinity by women when compared with men.

⁵ In fact, there is more evidence of similarities between women and men than of differences (Hyde 2005), but firmly held beliefs like ideological investments in gender differences as “real” are not always toppled with disconfirming evidence (e.g. Neihart and Reifler 2010).

evidence that gendered understandings of work are better predictors of the value assigned to work than the work's inherent value (England 1992a). For instance, when occupations require skills that are culturally associated with women (e.g. nurturance, care taking), the wages are lower than in otherwise comparable occupations (England and Folbre 2005; Kilbourne et al. 1994; Levanon et al. 2009). Also, occupations with higher percentages of women pay less to *both* women and men workers, even when controlling a variety of other factors than might account for this discrepancy, such as level of education and job skills (Kilbourne et al. 1994; Levanon, England and Alison 2009). For instance, in some cases, secretaries earn less than workers in jobs dominated by men requiring no more than an 8th grade education (England 1992a). Furthermore, there are many examples where work culturally coded feminine that requires higher qualifications is less well compensated than work understood as masculine that requires lower qualifications, and virtually no examples to the contrary (i.e., where “masculine” work that requires higher levels of skill and/or education is less well compensated than “feminine” work that requires lower levels of skill and/or education) (England 1992a). Longitudinal research in this area has demonstrated that when the sex composition of an occupation becomes more dominated by women at one point in time, the pay of that occupation decreases at a later point in time (Levanon, England and Alison 2009). This body of research shows that work is devalued, and underpaid, if it is associated with women and femininity and this devaluation is part of the patriarchal dividend afforded to men and masculinity.

Along these lines, Reskin and Roos (1990) delineated two processes accompanying women's entry into occupations formerly dominated by men: (1) resegregation (where an occupation shifts from being dominated by men to women, or vice versa), and (2) ghettoisation (a process in which women are concentrated in the lower status and lower paying specialties). Both of these processes result from the social and cultural devaluation of femininity. And this devaluation of femininity is one reason why men leave occupations as larger numbers of women enter them – a phenomenon sometimes referred to as “male flight” (Reskin and Roos 1994; Wright and Jacobs 1994; Lincoln 2010). Historical scholarship on work and careers also demonstrates resegregation processes through which the gender typing of jobs has changed over time. For example, clerical and secretarial work used to be a job dominated by men in the early twentieth century. Today women dominate these jobs. In addition, the original flight attendants were almost exclusively men, but by the late 1950s, this had reversed, and flight attendants were almost all women (Wade and Ferree 2018). This kind of resegregation and ghettoisation is part of the process by which femininity is devalued in work settings and masculinity is rewarded.

The devaluation of work understood to be feminine at the social structural level is coupled with the devaluation of “feminine” work at the level of social interactions and with individual beliefs about women workers. Social psychological work in the US has demonstrated that women are generally perceived to be less competent, and afforded lower social status than men, in workplace contexts (controlling for relevant qualifications, credentials, and other personal characteristics) (Ridgeway 2011; Ridgeway 1993; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway 2011; England 2016). Women are especially less likely to be seen as less competent, and to be afforded lower social status than men, in tasks and in industries understood as masculine (Heilman et al. 2004; Tak, Correll and Soule 2019).

One illustrative example can be found in research by two economists, Claudia Goldin and Cecelia Rouse (2000), who capitalised on a natural experiment that took place in the 1970s and 1980s when the format of auditions for major symphony orchestras changed. Over those decades, many orchestras put up screens when auditioning musicians because of concerns about nepotism and cultural matching in the selection process. Orchestras were concerned musicians were being selected not based on talent alone but also based on their social networks and, therefore, used screens to block the judges’ views of the musician so that the judges could only assess talent based on the sound of the music. But the screens had unanticipated consequences: the rate of women being selected increased sharply, even controlling for other factors like the absolute increase in number of women auditioning over this time period (see Figure 3).

As such, Goldin and Rouse (2000) showed how unconscious biases devaluing the competence of women as elite musicians was a key factor in lower rates of selection of women, as compared to men, as orchestra musicians. That is, they showed how gender biases that produced doubts about women musicians’ ability to play at the same level as men disadvantaged them, even when judges were not aware of their own biases. Goldin and Rouse (2000) found that women’s musical talent was being systematically devalued in the selection process, leading to the sex-segregation of major symphony orchestras. The findings of this study are consistent with decades of experimental, and other social scientific research, confirming that women’s talents are systematically devalued and that, all else being equal, women are thought to be less competent, and are afforded less status, as compared to men in the workplace (Ridgeway 2011).

Figure 3: Proportion of Women in the “Big Five” U.S. Symphony Orchestras, 1939–1996. Source: Goldin, Claudia and Cecelia Rouse. “Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of Blind Auditions on the Sex Composition of Orchestras.” *American Economic Review* 90, 4 (September 2000): 715–741.

Masculinity Contest Cultures

Berdahl, et al. (2018) identify what they refer to as “masculinity contest cultures” in which conspicuous displays of workloads and long schedules are endemic, corners are cut to out-earn or out-perform co-workers, or unreasonable risks are part of the normative experience at work. Which of these elements is stressed, Berdahl et al. (2018) argue, differs by industry, but the role of masculinity contests connects these elements. As they write, “[M]uch of what simply appears to be neutral practices and what it takes to get ahead at work is actually counterproductive behaviour aimed at proving manhood on the job” (2018, 424). Berdahl et al. (2018) argue that this idea helps us look past individual men alone, examining how enactments of masculinity come to constitute organisational culture in ways that harm women and men. In many cases, for instance, masculinity contest cultures operate under the guise of different kinds of “expertise” and “authority” (see also Collinson and Hearn 1994) in which some groups of men with power are structurally positioned in ways that enable them to push workplace agendas over other groups with less workplace power. As such, the relationship between masculinity, work, and career persists through workplace interactions in which masculinity is at stake. Of note, these kinds of masculinity contest cultures exist to varying

degrees in differing industries or occupations and they especially tend to typify workplace cultures in occupations dominated by men.

Consider the following example: on January 28, 1986, NASA launched the Space Shuttle Challenger for the last time. Approximately one minute and thirteen seconds into the flight, the shuttle exploded, scattering the crew and shuttle across the Atlantic. All seven crew members died. It is one of the most horrific disasters in modern astronomical history. A specific technology on board failed during the launch: the part of the shuttle designed to change form under the extreme fluctuations in temperature to seal the shuttle (the O-rings). This resulted in pressurised gas coming into contact with the external fuel tanks and leading to the explosion.

Among the issues that led to the disaster was what could be seen as a masculinity contest culture at NASA. Messerschmidt's (1995) analysis of the gendered organisational dynamics that led to the disaster is a demonstration of the power of masculinity in the workplace (see also Maier 1993 and Maier and Messerschmidt 1998). NASA is a highly masculinised workplace culture and its workforce is heavily dominated by men. And, as Cockburn (1985) argued, the technical competence central to work at NASA is an element of "manly" work. Furthermore, astronauts can be seen as an example of what Pascoe and Bridges (2016) refer to as "masculinity entrepreneurs," in that they were relied upon to usher in a new understanding of a national culture of masculinity during the Cold War era. During that era, the "space race" between the United States and Russia could itself be understood as a masculinity contest culture. As such, rocket science as an industry, and NASA in particular, are deeply connected to masculinity and the masculine project of nation and nationality (Sage 2009; Llinares 2011).⁶

The connection between ideologies and practices of masculinity and the Challenger explosion cut to some of the core of the relationship between men and their careers. The crux of the issue in this case was a heated debate amongst two groups of workers at NASA who understood masculinity somewhat differently from each other: managers and engineers. The decision to launch Space Shuttle Challenger was made against the advice of the engineers, who collectively agreed that the O-rings were too much of a risk to continue with the launch. According to Messerschmidt (1995) masculinity at work was, for the engineers, tied to a complete understanding of how the shuttle operated, its capacities and – of particular

⁶ Feminist scholarship on nuclear weaponry and national defense has also documented masculinist cultures demonstrating the connection between masculinity and nation. For instance, Cohn's (1987) analysis of a community of "defense intellectuals" and the masculinist discourses used to describe and discuss nuclear weaponry, war, and violence.

relevance here – its limits. Managers at NASA decided to launch against the recommendation of the engineers. Messerschmidt (1995) suggests that, in contrast to the engineers, masculinity among the managers was tied to understanding and taking calculated risks associated with competition in a market economy. That is, risk taking was a characteristic of managerial masculinity at NASA while knowledge, forethought, and risk aversion were characteristic of engineering masculinity. This created a masculinity contest favouring managers because of power and hierarchies in the workplace and putting lives at risk. As such, we can understand the Challenger shuttle disaster as resulting from a clash of two differing of masculinity cultures at work.

As Acker (1990, 2006) argued, jobs themselves are gendered, before the bodies of actual workers take up the work. And the oft-neutral appearing norms and values that shape workplace obligations and metrics of success sometimes mobilise gender practices in ways that promote work environments in which only “real men” are structurally and culturally positioned to thrive. Morgan (1992) argued that work shapes different sorts of “materials” out of which disparate forms of workplace masculinity are constructed. These sorts of “masculinity challenges” (Messerschmidt 2000) or “masculinity contests” give rise to “masculinity contest cultures” (Berdahl et al. 2018). Such masculinity contest cultures then shape incidents from the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion to the much more mundane.

Discussion and Conclusion

The connections between masculinity, work, and career are cross cultural and historically enduring. Hughes (1958) wrote that men’s careers were “as good a clue as any” to men’s social identities. In this chapter, we argue that beyond men’s social identities, the social and cultural relationship between masculinity, work, and careers is a central element of gender *inequality*. We first summarised key scholarship that linked masculinity with issues of work and career. We also argue that feminist scholarship examining this relationship must attend to four critical dimensions: (1) the effects of occupational sex segregation, (2) the social, cultural, and economic power of the breadwinner norm, (3) the social and cultural devaluation of femininity and women in work and occupations, and (4) masculinity contest cultures in the workplace.

In our analyses, we have delineated these four dimensions as somewhat distinct. However, these dimensions also overlap and are interrelated. For instance, masculinity contest cultures emerge, in part, as a result of occupational sex segregation. Furthermore breadwinning norms that encourage careerism

and hyper-masculinity simultaneously work to systematically devalue work associated with women. As such, different dimensions of the relationships we outline here affect and condition one another. Further, the relationship between these dimensions involves reciprocal effects. Analysing these effects as reciprocal helps to elucidate how the relationship between work, masculinity, and gender inequality remains durable. In fact, it is through an intersecting arrangement of these dimensions that the relationship between masculinity, work, and career is implicated in the reproduction of gender inequality. In addition, we may see challenges to, or progress on, some of these dimensions alongside stagnation or regression along others. Understanding the multidimensional nature of such shifts allows us to better appreciate both continuity and change in gender relations and inequality. Overall, masculinity is tied to work and occupations in multiple ways and the relationship between masculinity, work, and career is a key factor in understanding gender inequality.

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