Gender Inequality in Workplace Autonomy and Authority*

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This study examines the determinants of workplace stratification as reflected in levels of autonomy and supervisory and decision-making authority. The analysis investigates the role of human capital factors, gender status, and the status and sex composition of occupation in predicting variations in autonomy and authority. The results indicate that sex differences in autonomy and authority persist after taking into account human capital variables, though a significant part of the sex difference is due to the sex composition of female occupations.

Studies of social stratification increasingly emphasize the role of organizational hierarchies and workplace social relations as mechanisms producing and reproducing inequality (Baron, 1984; Wright, 1979; Spaeth, 1985). In attempting to explain gender inequality it is now fairly clear that sex differences in income are largely the result of the occupational and hierarchical segregation of women into organizational positions with significantly lower rates of remuneration (Treiman and Hartmann, 1981; Blau and Ferber, 1985). It is also likely that these positions fall toward the bottom of the workplace stratification hierarchy with respect to the exercise of authority and autonomy. The present research builds on the earlier work of Wolf and Fligstein (1979a, 1979b) by examining the determinants of workplace authority and autonomy for men and women using data that contain an expanded set of items gauging workplace activities. Three forms of workplace differentiation are examined: conceptual autonomy, decision-making authority, and supervisory authority.

The empirical portion of the paper addresses two basic questions. First, are women less likely than men to possess authority and autonomy and, if so, can these differences be accounted for by human capital factors? Where sex differences cannot be accounted for by job-relevant individual characteristics, the evidence for some form of sex discrimination is strengthened. Second, does the sex composition of one's occupation affect the level of workplace authority and autonomy? It has been found that occupational sex segregation

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is one of the leading sources of male-female earnings differences. Accordingly, it is also worth asking whether one's location in a female-dominated job reduces the likelihood of exercising authority and autonomy.

Previous Research and Theory

Investigating the allocation of men and women into stratified positions of organizational power serves to illuminate the intervening mechanisms that are responsible for the relationship between gender status and work compensation. Compensation can include both material and subjective job rewards. Most studies of workplace social relations and activities examine the effect of organizational position on income and earnings. Wright's (1979) research on social class location and income determination investigated the way in which social relations at work, in the form of autonomy and authority, determine class positions that are translated into unequal levels of income remuneration. Spaeth (1985) examined the impact of continuous measures of organizational power and resource control which are found also to exert a significant influence on earnings. Spaeth's (1985:611) data further indicated substantial sex differences on a battery of work stratification variables, with men possessing significantly higher levels of authority and resource control than women. These sex differences in job power and resource control are a significant source of gender income inequality (Roos, 1981; Robinson and Kelly, 1978). Each of these studies suggested that in order to understand gender differences in material rewards it is necessary to examine the factors allocating men and women into hierarchical positions of authority.

Measures of job autonomy, on the other hand, have been found to be consistently associated with psychological involvement and commitment to work, as well as the general level of work effort (Kohn and Schooler, 1983; Lorence, 1987; Bielby and Bielby, 1988). If women tend to be allocated into nonautonomous occupational positions, this may explain their lower levels of attachment to work and the labor market. Using data from the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles*, McLaughlin (1978) reported that the cognitive skill requirements (training level, intelligence aptitude, verbal and numerical skill) of female-dominated jobs are significantly lower than for mixed and male-dominated jobs. These cognitive skill differences between male and female jobs remained after taking into account differences in occupational prestige. They in turn affect job attachment, commitment, and earnings.

These various studies indicate that workplace authority and autonomy have significant effects on material rewards and the psychological attachment to work. The aim of this paper is to examine the determinants of and gender differences in authority and autonomy. Previous empirical investigations of this issue have assessed the extent to which sex differences in organizational power persist after controlling for other relevant attributes. This question guided the earlier work of Wolf and Fligstein (1979a, 1979b), who ques-

tioned the ability of standard indicators of occupational status, such as Duncan's socioeconomic index (SEI), to effectively measure actual labor market disparities between men and women. They offered, as an alternative dimension, "power in the work setting," defined as the authority to hire and fire, set rates of pay, and supervise the work of others. Wolf and Fligstein (1979b) reported that women are significantly less likely than men to hold positions of authority even after controlling for occupational status and education. This supported their more general argument that previous studies of attainment, using exclusively measures of occupational status, fail to capture a potentially more important source of inequality—job power in the work setting. In a second parallel study, Wolf and Fligstein (1979a), using an expanded number of explanatory variables, further concluded that sex differences in authority are less the product of variations in qualifications than the result of the behavior and actions of employers.

Halaby (1979) reported similar results and identified a process of "rank segregation." He concluded that, for female workers, "the major part of their economic disadvantage is due not to unequal pay per se, but to unequal access to higher paying positions in the job class. Stated differently, women lose and men gain not so much from the way pay is allocated, but rather from the way promotions are distributed" (1979:123). More recently, the work of Bielby and Baron (1986) on sex segregation within a diverse set of establishments has further confirmed the way in which men and women are assigned different job titles within the same occupation, with men more likely to occupy positions of authority and technical skill.

A more widely cited form of segregation is occupational sex segregation. An enormous amount of research has been carried out on this central mechanism promoting gender inequality (Reskin, 1984; Reskin and Hartmann, 1986). The accumulated research clearly indicates that women are disproportionately overrepresented in the lowest paying occupations (England and McLaughlin, 1979) and that the female sex composition of occupations is negatively related to median earnings (Treiman and Hartmann, 1981; Rosenbaum, 1985). It is likely that female-dominated occupations are also characterized by lower levels of workplace authority and autonomy. This research examines whether the female sex composition of one's occupation is a significant determinant of workplace stratification. This question was examined by Wolf and Fligstein (1979a) using dummy variables that represented male-labeled, female-labeled, and unlabeled jobs. They found that those in male-labeled jobs were more likely to exercise authority in the areas of hiring-firing and setting the rate of pay, while it had no influence on supervisory tasks.

A statistically significant association between occupational sex composition and autonomy-authority would uncover an additional mechanism fostering gender income inequality. This would indicate that females who are placed in and/or who select female-dominated occupations are less likely to exercise forms of autonomy and authority. Even in fully integrated (mixed)

occupations, however, there is evidence to indicate that women are less likely than men to hold or be promoted to positions of authority and rank (Bielby and Baron, 1986). Therefore sex differences in job authority and autonomy are likely to remain even when sex composition is taken into account. It is also likely that female sex composition will have a greater negative effect on female than male levels of authority and autonomy. This is due to the fact that men and women in the same occupational category are typically *organizationally* segregated such that men are able to gain access to greater job rewards than women (Bielby and Baron, 1986). Furthermore, a number of studies suggest that males in female-dominated professions, in contrast to the female tokenism effects reported by Kanter (1977), experience more rapid rates of hierarchical advancement (Gans, 1983) and are generally more influential (Ridgeway and Jacobson, 1977) than their female counterparts. These different outcomes for males and females are a product of the external status advantages enjoyed by males that are imported into work groups and organizations (Feinman, 1984). For both these reasons men may be less negatively affected by female occupational sex composition.

In addition to examining the effects of gender and occupational sex composition on autonomy and authority, the analysis will consider a number of alternative explanations. One of the most important models designed to explain gender inequalities is human capital theory. Human capital theorists account for unequal labor market returns by examining the amount of education, training, and job experience of employees (Becker, 1964). Male-female differences in job power are, in this view, a function of differential allocations of time and investments in productive skills and labor market experience. Household commitments and responsibilities are also taken into account in these models as they may affect both the ability to invest in human capital skills as well as the supply of labor for particular positions. Human capital theorists assume that female sex segregation and lower earnings are the product of choices by women to engage in family and household labor, and not to invest in and accumulate the human capital stock required for certain occupational positions and income (Zellner, 1975; Polachek, 1975, 1981). These arguments would imply that the different organizational positions of male and female workers are largely a function of educational training, job experience, and household commitments. Given the unequal sexual division of household labor (Geerken and Gove, 1983), it is likely that the household commitment factors emphasized by the human capital theorists—marital status and the presence of children—will have their greatest negative impact on the labor market outcomes of women rather than men.

While human capital theory emphasizes the supply side of the labor market, demand-side explanations focus on the discriminatory actions of employers as the source of gender inequality (Blau, 1984). In this view employers prefer to allocate males to positions of authority and autonomy because of their own biases, the biases of their employees, and/or the assumed statistical associa-

tion between sex and other job-relevant behaviors. In each case an observable ascribed criterion (sex) is used as the basis for allocating organizational positions. This study cannot directly determine the validity of the discrimination thesis. However, the discrimination argument is strengthened to the extent that sex differences in authority and autonomy cannot be accounted for by human capital variables and are related to occupational sex composition.

More specifically, the empirical analysis will examine (1) the extent to which gender inequalities in authority and autonomy persist after taking into account relevant human capital factors; (2) the impact of the female occupational composition on the level of authority and autonomy; and (3) whether the effects of the various factors explaining authority and autonomy differ for men and women.

Data and Measures

The analysis is based on data collected by Wright and his colleagues as part of the project on "Class Structure and Class Consciousness" (see Wright et al., 1982).[1] These data contain an extensive number of items on job activities and content, workplace social relations, organizational power, and employment history. Analysis is confined to the United States sample, excluding establishment owners and the self-employed, who report working at least thirty hours a week at the time of the interview, conducted in 1980.[2]

Dependent Variable Measures of Workplace Stratification. Measures of workplace authority and autonomy are based on employee responses to questions about their workplace activities. Three dependent variable measures are examined. The specific items used to construct these measures are presented in Table 1. First is *supervisory authority*, a seven-item scale based on the number of areas in which the respondent claims to exercise authority over subordinates. Second, *decision-making authority*, also a seven-item scale, gauges the level of employee involvement in a variety of distinct policymaking areas. The third measure of job power is labeled *conceptual autonomy*. This variable reflects the extent to which employees are able to design and direct their own work and operate outside the formal supervisory structure.[3] It is included in

[1]This machine-readable data file was made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). Neither the Consortium nor the principal investigators bear any responsibility for the analysis or interpretations presented here. See Wright et al. (1982) for further details concerning these data.

[2]The data are based on telephone interviews using a two-stage cluster sample of telephone numbers in the contiguous United States. The response rate was 78 percent yielding a total sample of 1,760 adults. Removing owners, self-employed, non–labor force participants, and those working less than thirty hours a week leaves 1,109 complete cases for the purpose of analysis.

[3]Those respondents who claimed they design their own work were then probed for concrete examples and specific details to determine the true extent of self-direction. The responses were then coded by the degree to which they reflected low, probably moderate, moderate, probably high, and high degrees of autonomy (see Wright et al., 1982).

the data set in coded and computed form. The variable ranges from a value of 1, for those exercising no autonomy, to 6, for those who are highly autonomous. Together these three variables reflect significant dimensions of workplace stratification and allow an assessment of those organizational positions that are most closely related to gender status.

TABLE 1

Description of Workplace Variables

A. *Supervisory Authority*. The index is based on the summation of affirmative responses ("yes" coded 1; "no" coded 0) to the following questions:

"The first thing is deciding the specific tasks or work assignments performed by your subordinates. Is this one of your responsibilities?"

"The next issue is deciding what procedures, tools, or materials your subordinates use in doing their work. Are you responsible for this?"

"What about deciding how fast they work, how long they work, or how much work they have to get done? Are you responsible for this?"

"We would like to know if, as part of your job, you can influence the pay, promotion, or discipline of the people you supervise. . . . The first item is granting a pay raise or promotion to a subordinate. Do you have any influence on this?"

"How about preventing a subordinate from getting a pay raise or promotion because of poor work or misbehavior. Do you have any influence on this?"

"Firing or temporarily suspending a subordinate. Do you have any influence on this?"

"Issuing a formal warning to a subordinate. Do you have any influence on this?"

(Alpha reliability coefficient = .932.)

B. *Decision-Making Authority*. The index is based on the summation of affirmation responses to the following questions:

"I will ask you about decisions which might affect your workplace. For each, tell me if you are personally involved in that decision, including providing advice on it. First, are you personally involved in decision to increase or decrease the total number of people employed in the place where you work?"

"How about policy decisions to significantly change the products, programs, or services delivered by the organizations for which you work?"

"How about decisions to change the policy concerning the routine pace of work performed in your workplace as a whole?"

"How about policy decisions to significantly change the basic methods or procedures of work used in a major part of the workplace?"

"How about decisions concerning the budget at the place where you work?"

"Do you participate in general policy decisions about the distribution of funds within the overall budget of the place where you work?"

"Is there any other kind of decision which you feel is important for the workplace as a whole in which you participate?"

(Alpha reliability coefficient = .866.)

C. *Conceptual Autonomy*. This index was precoded and scaled by the principal investigators based on respondents' description and concrete examples of the way in which they were required to design and direct their own work tasks. The coding of responses is as follows:

1 = nonautonomous employee
2 = no real autonomy
3 = moderate autonomy, ambiguous
4 = moderate autonomy
5 = high autonomy, ambiguous
6 = high autonomy

Human Capital Background Variables. The first part of the analysis combines male and female employees in order to determine the impact of gender on measures of authority and autonomy. A number of variables have been selected that will take into account those factors which, according to human capital theorists, are responsible for gender differences in organizational positions of power. These include education and continuous job experience as well as two indicators that might reflect time not invested in labor-market-enhancing skills—marital status and the presence of children in the household. Education is measured in years. Continuous job experience is also calculated in years and is based on data collected on the length of continuous tenure in the present and two prior jobs held by each respondent. Marital status is represented by a dummy variable coded one if the respondent is married. For the presence of children, a dummy variable is included and coded one if the respondent reports having children presently residing in the household. Two additional sociodemographic variables, race (1 = nonwhite) and age (in years) are also included in the analysis. Sex is a dichotomous variable coded 1 for females and 0 for males.

Occupational Status and Sex Composition. In this study, Duncan's socioeconomic index (SEI) is used as a measure of the hierarchical ranking of respondents' occupation. A second critical characteristic of one's occupation, for the purpose of this study, is its sex composition. Occupational sex composition—the percent female based on national census data—is calculated for the three-digit occupational code of each respondent.[4] Zero-order correlations, means, and standard deviations for all variables used in the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Results

The analysis begins with a simple comparison of the mean levels of autonomy and authority for men and women, presented in the bottom panel of Table 2. As expected, men possess greater levels of autonomy and authority than women and the sex differences are statistically significant in all three cases. It is worth noting that the largest absolute sex gap is in the area of supervisory authority while the smallest difference is observed for conceptual autonomy. The measure of conceptual autonomy taps the extent to which employees exercise self-direction and discretion over the execution of their job tasks. In Wright et al.'s (1982) analysis, conceptual autonomy is associated with the social class location of semi-autonomous employees. These workers tend to be outside the managerial structure and therefore do not exercise power in hierarchical relationships. Supervisory authority, on the other hand, involves

[4]Data used to calculate the female sex composition of each respondent's three-digit occupational code are taken from Beller and Han (1984) and supplemented with U.S. Bureau of the Census (1984) figures. Rather than using dummy variables for sex-typed occupations, the continuous measure of percent female is employed.

TABLE 2

Pearson Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for all Variables ($N = 1{,}109$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Mean	*SD*
1 Autonomy												2.731	2.020
2 Decision	.500											1.101	1.879
3 Supervise	.429	.546										1.998	2.649
4 Sex	−.142	−.187	−.159									.482	0.500
5 SEI	.543	.335	.318	.057								46.114	22.896
6 Education	.537	.329	.236	−.065	.573							13.367	2.404
7 Married	.040	.063	.052	−.088	.061	−.041						.592	0.492
8 Children	.015	.070	.046	−.105	.027	−.020	.687					.406	0.491
9 Experience	.039	.053	.091	−.093	.052	−.087	.202	.083				8.937	8.980
10 Race	−.074	−.112	−.084	.006	−.144	−.088	−.095	−.048	−.089			.157	0.364
11 Age	.032	.044	.069	.043	.086	−.105	.196	.077	.661	−.085		35.815	12.429
12 Sex* comp.	−.137	−.131	−.154	.666	−.101	.073	−.045	−.051	−.062	−.002	.016	45.330	33.934

Mean Differences by Sex[a]

	Males	Females	Difference	*p*
Conceptual autonomy	3.026	2.433	0.593	.001
Decision-making authority	1.419	0.765	0.675	.001
Supervisory authority	2.488	1.515	0.973	.001

[a]Conceptual autonomy ranges from a low of 1 to a high of 6. The two measures of authority range from 0 to 7.

TABLE 3

Determinants of Autonomy and Authority, Males and Females Combined

Independent Variables	Conceptual Autonomy (1)	Conceptual Autonomy (2)	Decision-Making Authority (3)	Decision-Making Authority (4)	Supervisory Authority (5)	Supervisory Authority (6)
Sex	−.572***	−.122	−.693***	−.527***	−.875***	−.409*
	−.141	−.030	−.184	−.140	−.165	−.077
SEI	.032***	.032***	.018***	.018***	.032***	.032***
	.361	.366	.224	.225	.278	.281
Education	.275***	.284***	.148***	.152***	.078*	.087*
	.327	.338	.190	.194	.071	.079
Married	.120	.123	−.017	−.016	−.043	−.040
	.029	.029	−.004	−.004	−.008	−.007
Children	−.101	−.093	.172	.177	.110	.122
	−.025	−.023	.045	.046	.020	.023
Experience	.003	.004	.001	.001	.014	.015
	.014	.017	.006	.007	.048	.051
Race	.072	.076	−.288	−.287	−.219	−.214
	.013	.014	−.056	−.055	−.030	−.029
Age	.005	.004	.006	.006	.005	.005
	.030	.014	.042	.040	.025	.022
Sex comp.	—	−0.10***	—	−.004	—	−.010***
		−.165		−.066		−.131
(*N*)	(1,109)	(1,109)	(1,109)	(1,109)	(1,109)	(1,109)
Adjusted R^2	.388	.403	.177	.179	.134	.143

NOTE: In each cell the unstandardized coefficient is given in the first row, the beta coefficient in the second row.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

hierarchical relations of power between organizational members and is regarded as a potent form of job power that is translated into significant income returns.

The analysis now turns to the more central questions of (1) whether these mean differences can be explained by human capital factors, and (2) whether female occupational sex composition influences the level of autonomy and authority. Table 3 presents the multiple regression results for the total sample combining men and women. Two equations are estimated for each of the three forms of workplace stratification. The first assesses the net effect of gender while controlling for occupational status, sociodemographic, and human capital variables. The second includes the measure of occupational sex composition in order to determine the mediating role of this structural factor in explaining autonomy and authority. In equation (1), predicting conceptual autonomy, years of education and occupational status exhibit the strongest net effects. This supports the view that labor market rewards such as work autonomy are a function of human capital credentials and occupational status

attainment. However, a statistically significant gender difference remains, and it cannot be accounted for by occupational status and human capital differences.

An examination of equation (2) reveals that the sex difference in autonomy is largely attributable to the sex composition of male and female occupations. The inclusion of occupational sex composition results in the diminution of the sex coefficient to statistical nonsignificance, while it has a significant negative effect on conceptual autonomy. The other human-capital-related variables—continuous job experience, marital status, and children in household—do not exert statistically significant effects; nor are age and race related to autonomy in these data.

Equations (3) and (4) examine a qualitatively different form of workplace power—decision-making authority. The results indicate that women are significantly less likely to possess decision-making authority net of powerful effects for education and occupational status. In contrast to the results for conceptual autonomy, significant sex differences remain after taking into account the occupational sex composition. This suggests that gender inequality in decision-making authority is not reducible to either human capital differences or location in female-dominated occupations. Rather, when these are held constant, women are still less likely than men to occupy positions involving authority over organizational policy decisions.

In the final pair of equations ((5) and (6)), predicting supervisory authority, the pattern is quite similar to that observed for conceptual autonomy. The negative effect of female gender status on supervisory authority is reduced to near statistical nonsignificance when occupational sex composition is introduced into the equation. As with conceptual autonomy, this suggests that much of the gender inequality in supervisory authority is due to the allocation of women into female-dominated occupations that tend to be void of this type of organizational resource.

The results to this point can be summarized as follows: There are significant sex differences in workplace autonomy and authority, with men exercising greater levels than women. While these levels of autonomy and authority are clearly a function of education and occupational status, these do not account for the sex differences. Female disadvantage persists after controlling for these and a variety of other human-capital-related variables. Further analysis reveals that for conceptual autonomy and supervisory authority sex differences are heavily influenced by the sex composition of the occupation. Occupational sex composition exerts significant explanatory power in both these equations. Because women are more likely than men, by definition, to be located in female-dominated occupations (the zero-order correlation between sex and female sex composition is .666), they are also less likely, in these positions, to exercise work autonomy and supervisory authority. In the case of decision-making authority the results are somewhat different. The effect of gender is not wiped out when sex composition is included. It appears that

women are systematically excluded from decision-making authority regardless of their human capital credentials, occupational status, or the sex composition for their occupation. Finally, the other explanatory variables—marital status, the presence of children, continuous experience, age, and race—all fail to exhibit significant predictive power in the six equations.

We can now turn to the second phase of the analysis, for males and females separately, which allows an assessment of interaction effects—that is, whether the effects of the explanatory variables differ for men and women. In particular, there is reason to expect that household commitment factors will have a greater effect for women; autonomy-authority returns to education and SEI will vary by sex; female sex composition will have a greater negative impact on the autonomy-authority of women. The results displayed in Table 4 permit a consideration of each of these issues. First, there is no support for the argument that lower levels of autonomy and authority are a product of women's household and marital commitments and responsibilities. Neither the presence of children nor being married is a significant explanatory factor for either sex.

Regarding the differential returns to SEI and education, there is a rather consistent pattern. For all three types of workplace stratification, occupational status provides greater returns to men than women. In the case of decision-making authority SEI is not even a significant predictor for women. This provides additional support for the contention that occupational status does not capture workplace forms of gender stratification nor is it an outcome that yields equivalent rewards to men and women. Male-female equivalence on SEI cannot be used to claim gender equality in labor market outcomes.

In contrast to SEI, education plays a more critical role in the attainment of autonomy and supervisory authority for women than men. The greater returns to women can be seen by comparing the unstandardized coefficients for males and females in the autonomy and supervisory authority equations. For decision-making authority, however, there appears to be little difference between the two sexes. The relative importance of SEI and education for the achievement of autonomy and authority for men and women, indicated by comparing the beta weights within each equation, suggests that SEI plays the greatest role for males, while for females it is years of education that is translated into gains in autonomy and decision-making authority. The one deviation from this pattern appears in the equation for supervisory authority where SEI is the stronger predictor for females and where education is, overall, a poor predictor for both sexes.

It is also worth noting that continuous work experience has a significant positive impact on the level of decision-making and supervisory authority for women but not for men. Though the sex differences are not statistically significant, the pattern is somewhat unexpected in light of the supply-side human capital argument that women tend to select occupations with lower rates of wage appreciation, because of anticipated labor market exit, while men tend

TABLE 4

Determinants of Autonomy and Authority by Gender

Independent Variables	Conceptual Autonomy		Decision-Making Authority		Supervisory Authority	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
SEI	.040***	.021***	.027***	.006	.045***	.016**
	.489#	.224#	.311#	.080#	.402#	.134#
Education	.196***	.364***	.145***	.137***	.045	.123*
	.241#	.424#	.169	.214	.040	.116
Married	.166	.169	.015	−.070	.040	−.142
	.039	.019	.003	−.024	.007	−.029
Children	−.085	−.102	.315	.083	.207	.123
	−.021	−.025	.073	.027	.037	.024
Experience	−.004	.006	−.020	.021*	.004	.032*
	−.002	.026	−.088	.120	.001	.112
Race	−.110	.237	−.497*	−.123	−.055	−.415
	−.019	.044	−.084	−.031	−.007	−.063
Age	.006	.003	.019	−.006	.005	.007
	.033	.019	.104	−.051	.022	.003
Sex comp.	−.003	−.014***	.00002	−.007***	−.011*	−.011**
	−.037@	−.197@	.002@	−.140@	−.085	−.132
(*N*)	(575)	(534)	(575)	(534)	(575)	(535)
Adjusted R^2	.438	.359	.214	.085	.172	.068

NOTE: In each cell the unstandardized coefficient is given in the first row, the beta coefficient in the second row.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Differences between men and women are statistically significant at the following levels: @, < .01 level; #, < .001 level.

to select positions that will yield higher returns to employment tenure (Zellner, 1975). Although this theory concerns wage appreciation rather than hierarchical rewards, we might still anticipate that authority returns to experience would be more robust for males than females. In fact, experience has no impact on the job power of men and only a weak effect for women.

The last, and potentially most instructive, finding in Table 4 is the differential impact of occupational sex composition for men and women. Female sex composition has a strong negative effect on the conceptual autonomy and decision-making authority of women while it is a nonsignificant factor for men. In short, men are able to overcome the workplace disadvantages associated with female-dominated occupations. This finding is consistent with prior research reporting the sex-based organizational segregation of occupationally equivalent incumbents (Bielby and Baron, 1986) and the positive tokenism effects for males in female-dominated occupations (Gans, 1983; Ridgeway and Jacobson, 1977). Each of these processes might serve to weaken the negative impact of sex composition for males. In the case of supervisory authority, however, males and females are equally affected. Both men and women are less likely to possess supervisory authority as the female

composition of the occupation increases. On this most critical form of workplace stratification the "femaleness" of the occupation works to the detriment of both men and women.

Conclusion

Previous studies of gender inequality have shown that sex differences in income are not the product of unequal pay for equal jobs but rather are due to the more subtle mechanisms that segregate women into particular occupational and hierarchical positions that are less well rewarded than those occupied by men. One important aspect of this process involves "vertical segregation" where women tend to be excluded from organizational positions of autonomy and authority. A central task of this research has been to assess the degree and determinants of gender inequality in workplace autonomy and authority.

The findings indicate, first, that sex differences in autonomy and authority are significant and that they are not reducible to variations in human capital factors, at least not those human capital factors considered in this study. This is consistent with previous research examining the extent to which variations in human capital account for sex differences in labor market outcomes (England, 1982; Wolf and Fligstein, 1979a). Gender differences in autonomy and supervisory authority are reduced considerably, however, when female occupational sex composition is taken into account. This finding points to the way in which occupational segregation depresses the opportunities for material and psychological job rewards among women. Women are segregated into occupations that minimize the likelihood of exercising autonomy and supervisory authority. In the case of decision-making authority, sex differences are not reduced when including female occupational sex composition, suggesting that women tend to be excluded from this type of authority regardless of the sex composition of their occupation.

The analysis also examined the effects of the explanatory variables for males and females separately. There was no support for the contention that female levels of autonomy and authority are a function of household commitments associated with marriage and the presence of children. Rather, more in line with standard attainment models, years of education are translated into significant gains in autonomy and decision-making authority for women. For males, on the other hand, occupational status (SEI) appears to be a more critical factor than years of education.

One of the most significant findings, both substantively and statistically, is the sex differences in the effects of occupational sex composition on autonomy and decision-making authority. These results indicate that men experience no loss in autonomy and decision-making authority as the female sex composition increases while females suffer substantially by virtue of holding female-dominated occupations. While it is impossible to identify the precise mechanisms responsible for this result, the pattern is consistent with studies

reporting organizational sex segregation, where males in female-dominated occupations are employed in work organizations that allow greater opportunities for mobility into positions of autonomy and authority (Bielby and Baron, 1986). This result also conforms with studies indicating less negative, and in some cases positive, token effects for males in female-dominated occupations who draw upon their external master status as a means of influence and advancement (Ridgeway and Jacobson, 1977; Gans, 1983).

Finally, it should be noted that the equations do not go very far in explaining the total variation in workplace autonomy and authority. The model is most successful in the explanation of autonomy, which is largely a function of education and SEI, and is better able to explain the job power of men than women. While many models of labor market outcomes are based on the experience of males, the household labor factors were included to address the distinctive demands on women. These variables were, essentially, of no explanatory value. It is probably safe to say that further confirmation of the arguments supported by this research will require additional studies that either are establishment-specific or else include a broad range of relevant establishment characteristics. SSQ

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