

INTRODUCTION: WOMEN, GENDER AND WORK (Part II)

Important as work is for income, production and status, people are not defined solely by their work, nor is it possible to ignore the effects of factors outside the workplace on a person's status at work. To seek equality at work without seeking equality in the larger society — and at home — is illusory. Thus an examination of the issues surrounding women, gender and work must be holistic. This means considering the role of productive work in life as a whole and the distribution of unpaid work as well as the myriad questions relating to employment.

Though the basis has not yet been laid for general celebration, the gains made this century in gender equity have been enormous, and that in a period of unprecedented improvement for men and women together. The world's population has increased some fourfold this century, life expectancy has roughly doubled, and the present 6 billion people on earth do on average enjoy the highest standard of living of any time in history. That is notwithstanding the fact that there are more people than ever living in deep poverty and deprivation. But sexual stereotypes and mutual incomprehension persist, and they still constrain progress toward achieving gender equality, which is ultimately necessary for the progress of mankind overall.

They say *mine* to all those things whose patience does not fail. ... That's how they talk: "My life," they say, "My wife," "My dog," "My child," although they know that life and wife and dog and child are all alike remote configurations on which they strike with outstretched hands in blind obscurity. True, only great men know this certainly, and long for eyes. The rest refuse to hear that all their wretched wandering career is with no single thing in harmony, and that, rejected by their property, owners disowned, they no more have the power to own a woman than to own a flower, which leads a life that's foreign to us all.¹

¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, "You mustn't be afraid, God", from "The book of hours" (1905), in *Possibility of being: A selection of poems*, translated by J. B. Leishman, New York, New Directions Publishing Corp., 1974.

Through much of world history² women have been considered and treated as property. It was seldom complete, however. Most women have had some sense of their economic value, even as rights to them were traded. By the end of the twentieth century the law does most everywhere allow human beings to “disown their owners”, even if stopping well short of equality. And the proverbial patience of women to which Rilke referred is shown to have its limits.

The underlying premise of this double special issue of the *International Labour Review* on “women, gender and work” is that using a gender perspective contributes to better policy and better outcomes for both men and women. It reflects an intellectual investment in constructive, inclusive economic and social progress and a key means of countering regression.

The exploration of all the major issues that affect the level, quality and distribution of employment from a gender perspective continues with this second part of the special issue. The first part (1999/3) already took up a number of critical dimensions — the formulation of a comprehensive objective,³ the role of affirmative action,⁴ lacunae in labour statistics,⁵ the valuation of unpaid work,⁶ and gender norms for care giving.⁷ This second part (1999/4) now turns to assessing the extent of equality of opportunity, the use of supranational law to achieve it, the changing nature of the family in a context of globalization, differences between men’s and women’s management styles, and what international labour statistics reveal about gender inequality. Taken together, all these articles serve to enrich our understanding of the value of a gender perspective and to move policy debates forward. The issue concludes with book reviews and an index of the 1999 volume (in chronological order, by author and by subject).

Equal opportunity

Good data, well used, are essential to good policy. Such use is seldom as well demonstrated as it is by *Janneke Plantenga and Johan Hansen*, who examine the extent of equal opportunity in “Assessing equal opportunities in the

² Most — but not all. In distant history, some women were powerful, as reflected in the stories of the day. “In the beginning, Eurynome, the Goddess of All Things, rose naked from Chaos, but [she found] nothing substantial for her feet to rest upon, and therefore divided the sea from the sky, dancing lonely upon its waves.” (Robert Graves, *The Greek myths*, New York, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 27.) Fundamental myths — collective perceptions — evolve, and it behoves us to examine why; and how.

³ Martha Nussbaum, “Women and equality: The capabilities approach”.

⁴ Jane Hodges-Aeberhard, “Affirmative action in employment: Recent court approaches to a difficult concept”.

⁵ Adriana Mata Greenwood, “Gender issues in labour statistics”.

⁶ Lourdes Benería, “The enduring debate over unpaid labour”.

⁷ M. V. Lee Badgett and Nancy Folbre, “Assigning care: Gender norms and economic outcomes”.

European Union”. In this remarkable empirical study, one finds as relevant an operational definition of equal opportunity in employment as one is likely to find. They first select a limited number of indicators: of the gender gap (such as the relative employment rates and wages of men and women and the distribution of unpaid work); and of the absolute situation of women in the labour market (such as women’s employment and unemployment rates and their representation in higher positions). Those indicators are then estimated for the 15 Member States of the European Union. The results may be surprising. There are too many industrialized countries where opportunities are now even less equal than they were a decade ago. But the authors do not end their study with the diagnosis: they go on to analyse overall country performance on equality in relation to the basic determinants of equal opportunity — economic growth, the structure of the tax system, attitudes to women’s employment, working time arrangements, and the availability of childcare facilities and parental leave. In other words, they break the question of equal opportunity down into its constituent elements and then use available data to address the larger policy issues, all in an unusually integrated fashion. This preliminary study already indicates some clear policy priorities for those who are serious about achieving equal opportunity, and it should be an incitement to further examination of the empirical evidence and refinement of the method.

The law has the potential to be a major instrument for achieving and maintaining equality of opportunity and treatment. Here *Ingeborg Heide* examines the development of European law on that issue in “Supranational action against sex discrimination: Equal pay and equal treatment in the European Union”. This up-to-date and timely review of European law is placed in its larger historical and social context. As such it constitutes an unusual reference work on the development of European institutions and the emergence of supranational law in general. She goes on to illustrate that development with highlights from case law of the European Court of Justice in respect of equal pay and equal treatment, and shows how the concept of non-discrimination has evolved. This article is a most useful source of information on equality legislation and current case law in the European Union.

The new family

In “The family, flexible work and social cohesion at risk”, *Martin Carnoy* points out that “globalization and the intensified economic competition it engenders are profoundly altering the way we live and relate to each other”. The particular strains imposed on the family by that competition, and the flexibility it demands, are the focus of his article. The family — which is, along with the workplace, the principal means by which people are socially integrated — is called upon to play an even greater sustaining role than in the past because of the increased individualization and differentiation at work. Yet the family itself is undergoing changes, such as slower formation and shorter duration, that tend to undermine its ability to fulfil that role. This raises questions about the vari-

ous options or models of flexible work on offer. Social cohesion is at risk, perhaps as never before. Carnoy thus puts the family at the centre of an integrated view of adjustment to an emerging world order.

Gender differences in management style

A sense of feminine and masculine characteristics across cultures is posited by *Marie-Thérèse Claes* in her article, “Women, men and management styles”. To some extent, women are now increasingly sought as managers for their supposed advantages in communication and teamwork. What are perceived as feminine characteristics, such as cooperation and flexibility, seem to be well suited to a world of uncertainty and stress. She argues that “the masculine culture of large corporations cannot easily adapt to a context of uncertainty and constant evolution.” She in effect reinforces the argument of Carnoy in respect of pressures from globalization. The vision she sets out is one in which “the masculine and feminine models coexist and operate in synergy.” We must incorporate both elements in order to manage businesses — and other organizations — in a way that satisfies both commercial and human needs.

Indicators of differences between men and women in the labour market

Then *Sara Elder and Lawrence Jeffrey Johnson* summarize what the best of current international data reveal on gender differences in the labour market in “Sex-specific labour market indicators: What they show”. They present highlights from research they have carried out for the ILO on indicators of labour force participation, employment (by status and by sector), working time, work in the informal sector, unemployment, and education for women and men. While the results confirm many of the patterns already described in other studies, these findings strengthen the statistical bases for those conclusions and are thus a most welcome addition to the evidence of differences in the labour market experience of men and women.

Books

The *books* section in this issue is again rich in material, both on the theme of this special issue and on other relevant questions, such as corporate social responsibility. Among the subjects taken up are women in the labour market, “masculinity”, the economics of equal opportunity, modern slavery, child labour and transition. And new ILO publications are presented.

Some concluding remarks

It was striking that, though only one author represented here was asked to examine the changing family, most found it central to their examination of

other aspects of *women, gender and work*. Perhaps that should not have been surprising, given that reproductive labour is necessary for employment, and that the historic sexual division of labour has well served the preservation of inequality generally. It is perhaps a sign of how far we have finally come in the debate on equality that it has been possible to examine, dispassionately, the distribution of unpaid work in general and especially household work and care giving. The relative shares of men and women in household work are quite logically a key indicator of equality of opportunity in employment, as is shown in the study by Plantenga and Hansen. The highly unequal distribution of caring work, whether marketed or not, is, according to Badgett and Folbre (1999/3), linked not just to inequality generally but also to marriageability. As Carnoy shows, the family is fraying under the pressures of labour market competition and uncertain gender roles just as the need for its sustaining force grows stronger as individuals confront enormous uncertainty and stress in the wake of globalization. It must of course be remembered that the nuclear family is not the only norm out there (the writings of the psychologist Cigdem Cizacka Kagitcibasi are helpful on that point⁸). But whatever form they take, families across the globe are faced with a series of new challenges that test their ability to provide both the sustaining bonds and the autonomy that are needed of them. This reinforces the importance of focusing attention on the changing roles of men and women if one is to define constructive policies for economic and social development. With increased labour force participation, women's life choices have expanded. Both law and public policy have helped narrow the inequalities between men and women, in the process unleashing untold human resources. That in turn expands life options for men as well as women.

This special issue cannot of course constitute the definitive statement on the subject. In compiling a selection of articles to present and analyse *women, gender and work* there were many topics that came to mind. It was not possible to cover all, even in a double special issue. Amongst those that await further examination from a gender perspective are agriculture and land rights, control of mass media, social protection and income security, workers' organizations, and labour standards, to which should be added the specific problems of men and work and men's stake in gender equality. The attention to this theme was undertaken to advance, not conclude the debate. It concerns after all a subject of continuing deep individual and social interest, touching as it does the range of our personal and professional, private and collective interests and capabilities. This special issue is the beginning of what must be a continuing attention to our world, in all its permutations and complexity, through the distinct eyes of men and women, so that we may better understand the whole; and ourselves.

⁸ See, for example, *Family and human development across cultures: A view from the other side*, Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996; and "A critical appraisal of individualism and collectivism: Toward a new formulation" in Ulchol Kim et al. [incl. Cigdem] (eds.): *Individualism and collectivism: Theory, method, and applications*, Cross-cultural research and methodology series, Vol. 18, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, 1994.