Gender Inequality: What's Changing? What’s Not?

Paula England

Stanford University
By gender inequality, I mean

• Different roles for men and women
  – E.g. paid work, household work, child care, specific occupations

• Different rewards (e.g. earnings, status) for men and women
Generalization #1:

Substantial progress toward equality, but it leveled off ~1990
The Big Change

• Increased involvement of women in market work, including married women with young children
% of Men and Women Employed, 1962-2005 (age 25-54)

Source: March CPS, women ages 25-54
Women’s Share of Degrees 1950-2000

Women’s Share of MD, Law, and MBA Degrees, 1971-2006

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Occupational Sex Segregation, 1950-2000

Source: IPUMS, 1% and 5%, ages 25-54.
Ratio of Full Time Women’s to Men’s Median Annual Earnings, 1961-2001

Note: Includes men and women ages 25-54 who were employed full-time year-round. Source: March Current Population Surveys. From Cotter et al., 2004.
Generalization #2:  
Asymmetry of Gender Change

• Women have entered male domains more than vice versa. Why?
   
   – Because roles associated with women badly rewarded so little motivation for men to enter them.
Average Hours Per Week Spent in Market Work by Men and Women, 1965 and 1998

Source: Sayer, 2001; using time budget data.
% of All Men and Women Majoring in Selected “Gendered” Fields in College

- Women increase in male fields
- Men don’t increase in female fields (women decrease)
Proportion of All Men and All Women Who Majored in Business

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Proportion of All Men and All Women Who Majored in Accounting

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Proportion of All Men and All Women Who Majored in Marketing

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Proportion of All Men and All Women Who Majored in English

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Proportion of All Men and All Women Who Majored in Elementary Education

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
Socialization of Children

- Girls increasingly encouraged to engage in
  - Sports
  - Math and science

- Less if any increase on encouraging boys to
  - Play with dolls or other girls’ toys
Generalization #3: Gender inequality worse at lower educational/class levels

- Conventional wisdom: Working class and poor women need jobs more because of low husband earnings. Some gender equality flows from this employment.

  **BUT**

- The “opportunity cost” effect encourages employment more for highly educated women.
Labor Force Participation by Education, 2000

Source: 2000 PUMS 5%, ages 25-54

Source: IPUMS, ages 25-54.
Occupational Desegregation

• Desegregation of recent decades mostly coming from college graduates

• Women going into professional and managerial fields faster than women entering blue collar trades. Why?
  – Less educated men fight to keep women out of “their” jobs; lacking class privilege, they cling to gender privilege.
  – Hiring more based on credentials in these jobs.
  – Well educated women have to enter male fields to move up; women with less education can move up to higher level female occupations.
Ratio of U.S. Women’s to Men’s Median Hourly Wage, 1965-2004

Source: CPS, ages 25-54. Includes full and part-time workers.
Recapping Generalization #3:
Gender Inequality Greater at Low Educational Levels

- Gains from employment greater for educated women so more are employed, leading to higher earnings relative to their male partners.
- Men’s identity-based motivation for gender dominance greater when they lack class privilege.
- Well educated women have to move into male fields to increase status/earnings; women with less education can move to higher but still female occupations.
Conclusions

• Equalizing change stalled since 1990.

• Gender change mostly a one-way street. Women enter traditionally male activities, but less movement of men into traditionally female activities. This creates some bottlenecks in change.

• Gender equalization greater among the college educated because of more women’s employment and occupational desegregation.