Doing "Women's Work"
Men in Nontraditional Occupations

Edited by Christine L. Williams

SAGE Publications
International Educational and Professional Publisher
Newbury Park London New Delhi

1993

4
Men in Female-Dominated Fields
Trends and Turnover

JERRY A. JACOBS

The occupational structure of the United States, along with that of other industrialized countries, remains highly segregated by sex. In 1986 nearly 6 in 10 employed women would have had to switch occupations to be fully integrated with their male counterparts (Jacobs, 1989a, 1989b). A complementary description is equally true: 6 in 10 men would have had to change occupations to be distributed in the same manner as women. Segregation declined slowly but steadily during the 1970s and 1980s.

Most studies of occupational segregation have focused on women's exclusion from male-dominated fields, for a number of good reasons. First, jobs in male-dominated occupations offer more pay, fringe benefits, authority, and autonomy than jobs in female-dominated fields (Adelman, 1991; Bergmann, 1986; England & McCreary, 1987; Jacobs & Steinberg, 1990; Reskin, 1984; Reskin & Roos, 1990). Access to male-dominated fields seems essential for women's economic and social advancement. Second, many more fields are male-dominated than are female-dominated (Jacobs, 1989a; see also Table 4.1).[1] Consequently, the constraints imposed by sex segregation are more restrictive for women than for men. Finally, it is assumed that men would have little reason to choose female-dominated jobs when more financially rewarding alternatives are available. A simple economic explanation might seem sufficient. Thus, the processes that reduce the number of women in male-dominated fields appear to beg for explanation more urgently than the complementary limitations on men in female-dominated fields.

Nonetheless, an examination of the processes that divert men from pursuing female-dominated fields may well be instructive. Some evidence suggests that men employed in female-dominated occupations suffer a "prestige penalty," which parallels a similar pattern observed for women in male-dominated fields (Jacobs & Powell, 1984). This evidence suggests that male avoidance of female-dominated occupations may not simply reflect pecuniary considerations but powerful social pressures as well.

Second, it should be noted that the sex segregation of occupations does impose costs on some men, albeit far fewer than on women. An unemployed man would be better off financially if he were employed in a female-dominated occupation, yet the sex-segregated occupational structure makes this unlikely. During periods of high unemployment, gender boundaries persist, and unemployed men do not readily displace employed women in the labor market. Indeed, labor force statistics indicate that men and women have similar unemployment rates during both tight and slack labor markets (Rubery, 1988). This pattern is consistent with the existence of social barriers to men's entrance to female-dominated fields which lead them to forego the short-term economic benefits of such employment.

This chapter examines the career aspirations and occupational experiences of young men. It explores whether the revolving door pattern of mobility that has characterized women's entry into sex-atypical jobs also pertains to men's experiences in female-dominated fields. This chapter draws on extensive longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses conducted by the author (Jacobs, 1989a). I describe recent trends in men's employment before turning to data on the timing of entries and exits by men into female-dominated fields. I begin by discussing the lifelong social control processes responsible for maintaining a sex-segregated work force.

Sex Segregation and Women's Careers

A comprehensive theory of inequality must account for the way structures of inequality are reproduced. One way to address this question is to study how the sex segregation of occupations interfaces with the careers of individual women and men. Do the vast majority of women who start out working in female-dominated occupations remain employed in such settings? If so, this behavior might be due to socialization, the learned preference for such behavior. Or it might be due to rational calculations of women who intend to maximize their lifelong incomes by choosing occupations that start out with high pay and have the smallest costs associated with career interruptions. Or it might be due to discrimination from employers, which makes movement into male-dominated occupations exceptionally difficult.

Advocates of each of these theories generally assume that few women or men move between male-dominated and female-dominated fields. In other words, social psychological, human capital, and labor market discrimination theories generally assume that most women spend their entire working lives in female-dominated fields. The few women who work in male-dominated occupations are assumed to be the exceptions, different as a result of values, investments, or luck.

Let us consider the social psychological perspective in a bit more detail. I critically assessed this approach by following the occupational aspirations and subsequent labor market experiences of a group of young women. It is well documented that young men and women do aspire to different occupations: The degree of sex segregation among career goals in 1970 roughly mirrored that found in the labor force, although segregation has since declined much more rapidly in men's and women's aspirations than in the labor market itself. However, there is enormous change over time in the sex-type of occupational goals: Eighty percent of the young women surveyed changed their goals, and for this group there was virtually no relationship between the sex-type of initial goal and the sex-type of subsequent goal. Similarly, few women actually entered the occupation to which they aspired; and among those who deviated from their stated intentions, there was no relationship between the sex-type of intended occupation and the sex-type of first job. Furthermore, while I expected to find clearly demarcated barriers to women's occupational mobility, I repeatedly found a surprising amount of movement among male-dominated, sex-neutral, and female-dominated occupations. In fact, career destinations appeared to be essentially independent of the sex-type of occupational origins.

Sex segregation is reproduced at each of a number of different career stages. The structure of sex segregation remained roughly constant, but within this structure men and women moved back and forth with remarkable frequency. Women, and to a lesser extent men, played a game of musical chairs within a fixed set of sex-typed occupations. I decided to call this a "revolving door" pattern of mobility to underscore the observation that women's movement into men's occupations was

Table 4.1 Occupational Sex Composition, 1970 and 1980*

	1970	*1980*	*1980+*
		Men	
		Pct. in Labor Force	
		(N of Occupations)	
male-dominated occupations 0%-29.9% female	81.21 (308)	71.24 (266)	79.98 (308)
sex-neutral occupations 30%-69.9% female	13.05 (98)	22.48 (142)	14.75 (98)
female-dominated occupations (70%-100% female)	5.74 (77)	6.28 (75)	6.27 (77)
	1970	*1980*	*1980+*
		Women	
		Pct. in Labor Force	
		(N of Occupations)	
male-dominated occupations 0%-29.9% female	14.44 (308)	14.03 (266)	20.88 (308)
sex-neutral occupations 30%-69.9% female	20.63 (98)	27.93 (142)	22.11 (98)
female-dominated occupations (70%-100% female)	64.93 (77)	58.04 (75)	57.01 (77)

* The 1980 Census Occupational Classifications are employed for both years. (1970 data are based on a special tabulation that was coded for 1980 codes.)
+ Holds classification of occupations into sex-type categories constant at 1970 levels.

figures while maintaining the 1970 alignment of occupations. This analysis reveals that women's entrance into previously male-dominated occupations climbed to nearly 1 employed woman in 5, while only 1 employed man in 15 was employed in a previously female-dominated field.

Comparing the first and third columns indicates that the occupations shifted, not the men. When the occupations are kept in their initial slots, the distribution of men across these categories hardly changed at all. The shift evident in the second column indicates that nearly 10% of men

worked in occupations that tipped over from less than 30% female to more than 30% female. As far as the women are concerned, there would have been a 6% increase in the proportion of women working in male-dominated fields, had the occupations themselves not shifted due to an increase in women's labor force participation. The result of this change was that the increase appears in the sex-neutral category rather than in the male-dominated category.

Stability and Change in Men's Aspirations and Occupations

Let us now turn to a more detailed examination of these trends in the lives of a cohort of young men and women who entered the labor force during the late 1960s and early 1970s. A group of more than 10,000 young men and women has been surveyed repeatedly since that time, providing us a unique window on changes in preferences as well as in behavior. These data were culled from the National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) initiated by Herbert Parnes (see Jacobs, 1989a, for more details).

Career aspirations have changed more for women than for men when change is measured in terms of the sex-type of desired occupation. The proportion of young men aspiring to female-dominated fields did not rise, while during the same period the proportion of women aspiring to male-dominated fields increased substantially. The data on Table 4.2 indicate that by the end of the 1970s, women aspired to substantially more male-dominated fields than they had 10 or 12 years earlier. In contrast, men's aspirations, measured in terms of their sex composition, remained relatively constant.[3, 4] One would like more recent data on aspirations to further explore this issue; unfortunately, the panel surveys currently in progress do not include sufficiently detailed aspiration questions to allow for comparable analyses.

The sex-type of career aspirations remained quite constant for men during their teens and twenties, while for women during the same period, there was a distinct shift toward more male-dominated fields. Table 4.3 presents a more detailed breakdown of the sex-type of occupations to which young men aspired. The data indicate the remarkably small proportion of men who aspired to fields with 70% or more women. Whereas the majority of women aspired to such occupations in 1970 (more than 40% continued to designate these fields by 1980), only 2% to 4% of men aspired to such employment. In contrast, approximately 80% of men aspired to be employed in male-dominated occupations (those with less than 30%

Table 4.2 Comparison of Average Percent Female of Aspirations and Average Percent Female in Occupations, NLS Young Women and Young Men in the Labor Force

A. Women

	Aspirations Average Percent Female	*Occupations Average Percent Female*	N *of Cases*
1968	68.6	71.3	689
1969	70.8	70.8	1107
1970	68.2	72.0	1234
1971	67.2	69.8	1320
1972	66.7	70.6	1389
1973	65.8	69.4	1413
1975	64.2	67.5	1654
1977	59.0	63.8	1605
1978	58.5	63.5	1674
1980	58.0	62.6	1511

B. Men

	Aspirations Average Percent Female	*Occupations Average Percent Female*	N *of Cases*
1966	17.5	23.6	2866
1967	18.0	23.6	3390
1968	18.2	22.9	2946
1969	18.8	22.7	2875
1970	19.2	22.2	2871
1971	18.6	21.0	3061
1973	18.4	20.5	2402
1975	18.7	20.3	2402

women). These figures show no marked age trend; the small year-to-year fluctuations dwarf any age shifts in these data.

More young men are employed in female-dominated occupations than aspired to such jobs. While many individuals are not employed in the field of their choice, it is notable that in the aggregate, men's employment in sex-atypical jobs consistently exceeds the comparable

aspiration measures. Overall, men move to slightly more male-dominated fields during the early stages of their careers. Some of this change is due to young men working in stopgap jobs with significant proportions of women employed before they settle into a career (Oppenheimer, 1990). By age 30 there is a closer aggregate correspondence between choices and employment.[5] In the aggregate, the sex-type of men's employment remained more constant by age than that of women.

The issue of continuity and change among individual experiences is considered in Table 4.4. The first panel of Table 4.4 presents correlations between the sex-type of career choices and outcomes at 5-year intervals for the NLS young men ages 14 to 24 in 1966. The first column reports the correlation on the durability of aspirations. The second indicates the connection between aspirations and occupational outcomes 5 years later, while the third column indicates the relationship between occupational pursuits over a 5-year period. The measure of stability is a *serial sex-type correlation,* that is, the extent to which the sex-composition (of a career aspiration or occupation) at one point in time is related to the same measure at a subsequent point in time. The second portion of Table 4.4 rearranges the same data, this time presenting the correlations in terms of specific ages. Thus, the relationship between the sex-type of choices at age 15 and age 20 is presented to indicate how well preferences at age 15 predict preferences at age 20. Similarly, the connections between ages 20 and 25 and 24 and 29 are presented.

Despite the aggregate stability just described in Table 4.3, the sex-type aspiration correlations for men presented in Table 4.4 were very low, but were slightly higher than for women. Overall, young men's aspirations at one point in time are only weak predictors of their aspirations 5 years later. Among the overwhelming majority who change their aspirations at one point or another (the row labeled "occupational changers" in Table 4.4), the sex-type correlation is only slightly positive. In other words, there is little evidence that young men's preferences for male-dominated or female-dominated occupations are firmly fixed early in life. Those who aspired to a female-dominated occupation were not much more likely than chance to prefer the same type of occupation 9 years later.

Despite the aggregate stability of sex-type of men's occupations—over time and throughout their early careers—the temporal stability of such behavior for individual men is remarkably low. In other words, men frequently change the sex-type of their jobs, despite the persistence of a highly sex-segregated occupational structure. The evidence in Table 4.4 indicates the correlation between previous and subsequent

Table 4.3 Sex-Type of Aspirations and Occupations, by Age, NLS Young Men in the Labor Force, 1966-1975

A. Aspirations

Age	Average Percent Female	Female-Dominated Occupations (70%-100% Female)	Sex-Neutral Occupations (30%-69.9% Female)	Male-Dominated Occupations (0%-29.9%Female)	N of Cases
15	15.3	1.6	19.0	79.4	1013
16	15.9	2.6	18.4	79.0	1593
17	17.6	3.3	19.5	77.2	1994
18	19.7	3.7	22.2	74.1	2211
19	20.3	3.5	22.0	74.5	2219
20	19.3	2.9	20.7	76.4	1887
21	19.9	2.8	21.1	76.1	2154
22	19.6	3.4	20.0	76.6	2027
23	18.5	2.7	19.3	78.0	2438
24	18.3	3.0	17.8	79.2	2336
25	18.2	2.3	19.1	78.6	2020
26	17.1	2.3	17.0	80.7	1697
27	17.4	2.6	16.5	80.9	1371
28	17.1	2.1	16.1	81.8	1000
29	16.8	1.8	17.5	80.7	491

B. Occupations

Age	Average Percent Female	Female-Dominated Occupations (70%-100% Female)	Sex-Neutral Occupations (30%-69.9% Female)	Male-Dominated Occupations (0%-29.9%Female)	N of Cases
15	23.7	6.5	25.2	68.2	1021
16	24.2	6.2	28.5	65.3	1761
17	25.1	6.5	32.4	61.2	2315
18	24.6	6.0	39.2	60.7	2595
19	24.6	6.1	32.4	61.5	2641
20	24.2	6.1	31.6	62.3	2215
21	23.4	5.4	30.6	64.0	2534
22	23.4	5.1	30.9	64.0	2392
23	21.5	4.2	27.8	68.0	2499
24	21.6	4.3	27.3	68.4	2037
25	20.3	3.5	26.2	70.3	1697
26	19.9	3.5	24.6	71.9	1293
27	20.3	3.1	24.1	72.8	924
28	18.9	2.8	21.6	75.6	533
29	19.3	3.0	21.8	75.2	512

Table 4.4 Serial Correlation of the Sex Composition of Aspirations and Occupations, NLS Young Men

A. Period Analysis						
	1970 Aspiration, 1975 Aspiration		1970 Aspiration, 1975 Occupation		1970 Occupation, 1975 Occupation	
All Employed	1975		1975		1975	
	r =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =
1970	.33**	1237	.34**	2380	.37**	2784
Occupation	1975		1975		1975	
Changers	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =
1970	.12**	902	.14**	1749	.12*	1870
B. Age Analysis						
	Aspiration Age 15, Aspiration Age 20		Aspiration Age 15, Occupation Age 20		Occupation Age 15, Occupation Age 20	
Entire Sample	Age 20		Age 20		Age 20	
	r =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =
Age 15	.30**	287	.17**	347	.02*	333
Aspiration	Age 20		Age 20		Age 20	
Changers	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =
Age 15	.13**	234	.15**	333	-.02	311
	Aspiration Age 20, Aspiration Age 25		Aspiration Age 20, Occupation Age 25		Occupation Age 20, Occupation Age 25	
Entire Sample	Age 25		Age 25		Age 25	
	r =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =
Age 20	.35**	677	.25**	775	.26*	901
Aspiration	Age 25		Age 25		Age 25	
Changers	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =
Age 20	.15**	496	.09*	631	.09*	725
	Aspiration Age 24, Aspiration Age 29		Aspiration Age 24, Occupation Age 29		Occupation Age 24, Occupation Age 29	
Entire Sample	Age 29		Age 29		Age 29	
	r =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =
Age 24	.49**	592	.38**	654	.41*	749
Aspiration	Age 29		Age 29		Age 29	
Changers	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n* =	*r* =	*n*=
Age 24	.21**	375	.16**	464	.24*	587

*$p < .05$
**$p < .01$

sex-type of occupation is quite low, and is especially weak for the great majority of young men who change occupations at some point during the early stages of their careers. The same conclusion is reached when the data are arranged in terms of age or in terms of period. Indeed, the sex-type correlation increases only slightly as young men enter their late twenties.

Conclusions

The evidence presented here indicates both similarities and differences in recent experiences of men and women. The principal similarity between men's and women's experiences of sex segregation is that for both groups there appears to be a lifelong system of social control that continues to put social pressure to conform to gender-appropriate behavioral norms. The evidence reveals only a weak relationship between early preferences and behavior and later preferences and behavior. In other words, for men, the choice of a female-dominated field is quite uncommon and rarely endures for long; employment in female-dominated fields for men is similarly unusual and often brief.

One should keep in mind that a fundamental difference between men and women is the type of destination one enters when leaving a sex-atypical occupation. Women who leave male-dominated fields are much more likely to experience downward social mobility than are men who leave female-dominated fields. Thus, there is an important asymmetry in these patterns despite the surface-level similarity. Consequently, it may be that women are more likely to be *pushed* out of male-dominated fields while men are more likely to be *pulled* out of female-dominated fields.

One principal difference between men and women documented here is that men's pursuit of female-dominated fields is even more unusual than women's pursuit of male-dominated fields. Why are sex-atypical choices more common for women than for men? There are at least three explanations of this difference that present themselves. First, it might be that the pressures for sex-role conformity are stronger for men than for women. In short, a man accused of being a sissy may be much more vulnerable than a woman accused of trying to be macho. An alternative explanation, however, would be that men are not drawn to female-dominated occupations because they are relatively unattractive in terms of wages and benefits. A final alternative holds that this result is an artifact of the limited number of female-dominated occupations. This view holds that sex segregation is more restrictive for women because they are confined to a smaller set of occupations. Perhaps the entrance of men into this small set of fields is so unusual because relatively few fields are dominated by women. This present analysis is not able to adjudicate among these three alternatives. Further research should attempt to determine whether men are so scarce in female-dominated fields because these fields are so limited, because of greater gender-role

pressure on men, or because social pressure is combined with unattractive economic prospects in these jobs.

A related point is that women have made much greater inroads into male-dominated occupations than men have into female-dominated occupations. My view is that the women's movement has done much to open up doors for women and to provide a context for wider aspirations for women. No similar social movement has challenged stereotypes for men.

The evidence does seem to suggest that there is strong resistance faced by workers who violate sex-role norms in terms of occupational choices, resulting in a revolving door pattern of mobility for both women and men. This resistance continues throughout life; it is not a simple matter of values internalized at an early age that merely "express themselves" later in life. In this sense, the case of men in female-dominated fields parallels the experience of women working in male-dominated preserves.

Notes

1. The evidence indicates that women are more concentrated in a limited number of fields than men. One interesting change in this pattern, however, is that in recent years male college freshmen's choices of major were more concentrated (principally in business and engineering) than those of their female counterparts.

2. It should be noted, however, that income patterns conform to a cumulative disadvantage pattern: Women fall further and further behind men as cohorts age.

3. Data and methods are discussed in detail in Jacobs, 1989a. The present results include additional tabulations by age, following the procedures employed in Jacobs, Karen, and McClelland, 1991.

4. The period covered by men asks for desired occupation at age 30, for women, desired occupation at age 35. The time period covered for men is somewhat shorter because the questions were not asked after 1976, when a majority of the men in the sample were age 30 or more.

5. These data by themselves do not answer the question of whether young men are actually changing fields, or whether those who start working later, after having attended college, are employed in more male-dominated fields than those who start work at an earlier age. However, other evidence (Jacobs, 1993) indicates that the employment of young men in female-dominated service fields is often temporary, with high rates of exits by men in their twenties and early thirties.

References

Adelman, C. (1991). *Women at thirtysomething: Paradoxes of attainment.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Bergmann, B. (1986). *The economic emergence of women.* New York: Basic Books.

England, P., & McCreary, L. (1987). Gender inequality in paid employment. In B. B. Hess & M. M. Ferree (Eds.), *Analyzing gender: A handbook of social science research* (pp. 286-321). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Jacobs, J. A. (1989a). *Revolving doors: Sex segregation and women's careers.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Jacobs, J. A. (1989b). Long term trends in occupational segregation by sex. *American Journal of Sociology, 95*(1), 160-173.

Jacobs, J. A. (1992). Careers in the U.S. service economy, 1969-1987. In G. Esping-Andersen (Ed.), *A post-industrial proletariat?* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Jacobs, J. A., Karen, D., & McClelland, K. (1991). The dynamics of young men's career aspirations. *Sociological Forum, 6*(4), 609-639.

Jacobs, J. A., & Powell, B. (1984). Gender differences in the evaluation of prestige. *Sociological Quarterly, 25*(2), 173-190.

Jacobs, J. A., & Steinberg, R. (1990). Compensating differentials and the male-female wage gap: Evidence from the New York State pay equity study. *Social Forces, 69*(2), 439-468.

Oppenheimer, V. (1990). *Life-cycle jobs and the transition to adulthood.* Unpublished paper, Department of Sociology, University of California at Los Angeles.

Reskin, B. F. (Ed.). (1984). *Sex segregation in the workplace: Trends, explanations, remedies.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Reskin, B. F., & Roos, P. (Eds.). (1990). *Job queues, gender queues: Explaining women's inroads into male occupations.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Rubery, J. (Ed.). (1988). *Women and recession.* London: Routledge.