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Does the Market for Women's Labor Need Fixing?

Barbara R. Bergmann

The difference in pay between men and women workers in the American economy is currently averaging 30 to 35 percent, depending on the measure used. Underlying these large pay differences are the continuing segregation of work by sex, a sparsity of promotions for women, and differences in the respect accorded men and women. Low wages for women workers mean a low standard of living for the large and growing fraction of women who do not share the income of a husband, and for the children who live with them. Because of their lack of access to all jobs on an equal basis, women have a disproportionately small share of the interesting jobs, of the jobs that allow a person to grow and to advance. Gains for working women are occurring, but even assuming the continuation of the current rate of change, the substantial equality of women and men in the labor market is decades away. This article concerns the appropriate policy response to this situation.

Some economists imply that the appropriate response is none at all. They view the inferior labor market position of women as something women have freely chosen, as a normal and generally benign adaptation to "their responsibilities" for housework and child rearing. Low-wage work is seen as appropriate for people who behave as they do. The laws against discrimination and the apparatus designed to enforce them are, in this view, superfluous or of minor value. After all, the discipline of the competitive marketplace has kept things fair and always will.

There is, however, considerable evidence for the alternative view that widespread, severe, ongoing discrimination by employers and fellow workers continues to hamper women. If this is true, systematic government action to interfere in the marketplace can be justified on grounds of equity and efficiency. The question then arises as to the

■ *Barbara R. Bergmann is Distinguished Professor of Economics, American University, Washington, D.C.*

methods the government can use to hasten equality of opportunity for women workers, and whether the proposed methods have benefits that exceed their costs.

I will start by reviewing the evidence that discrimination against women is currently serious and has important consequences for their pay and status. Some of this evidence is of a variety that economists do not commonly examine or take account of. On the assumption that at least some readers will agree that some remedies might be called for, I go on to look at the virtues and defects of the remedies most commonly proposed—affirmative action and administered wage realignment under the rubric of "pay equity" or "comparable worth."

How Much of the Sex Gap Can Human Capital Explain?

If differences in qualifications and behavior could be shown to account for the wage gap between women and men workers, there would be nothing left to explain by the sex of the worker, and the hypothesis of discrimination could be rejected. Treiman and Hartmann (1981) conducted a review of studies of worker pay and qualifications by sex. In all of them, the measured effect on earnings of being female turned out to be significant and substantial, after accounting for measured worker characteristics apart from sex.

The estimate of the net reduction in one's pay attributable to being a woman ranged in these studies from 15 percent to 46 percent of men's pay. Variables whose effects were measured included breaks in labor market participation, part-time work, absenteeism, long-term career plans, as well as education, hours of work, and experience. Even those researchers least inclined to accord discrimination any importance at all have found that large differences in men's and women's salaries remain after their best attempts at accounting for the effects on salaries of worker quality and behavior. Mincer and Polachek's oft-referenced attempt (1974) to account for the deterioration in women's human capital during breaks between jobs found a sex effect equal to 39 percent of a man's wage.

In one important respect, these regression studies tend to underestimate discrimination's effects on women's pay. Some variables which are interpreted as measuring a worker's value may be affected by employers' discriminatory behavior. When such variables are included in the regression, they reduce the measured sex effect, and make it look as though discrimination is less important than it is.

Men average more tenure in their current job than women, and this is often used in regression studies as an innocent explanation of part of the pay gap. However, lower pay and lower promotion opportunities for women lessen their incentives for staying with any particular firm. Studies by Viscusi (1980), Blau and Kahn (1981), and by Haber, Lamas and Green (1983) demonstrate that women's higher turnover derives from their low wages. Women and men with similar wages were found by all these researchers to have similar quit rates.

Differences in unionization are also sometimes cited as a "non-discriminatory" reason for part of the pay gap. But women may have a hard time being hired in unionized shops as bus drivers, truck drivers, carpenters, and in other construction crafts occupations.[1]

Women have less than half as much on-the-job training as men do, and this difference is sometimes cited as a sizeable component of the part of the wage gap that is "nondiscriminatory." On-the-job training is sometimes referred to in the economic literature as part of "a worker's investment in himself." Yet in most establishments it is employers, not workers, who control the opportunity to enroll in such training.

The failure of employers to accord training to women is sometimes justified by economists on the grounds that women are more likely than men to leave. As noted above, research has shown that women's rate of turnover is not greater than that of men earning similar pay. Whatever the actual state of employer beliefs in this matter, or the rational reaction of a profit-maximizer to such beliefs, the fact remains that using a person's sex to disqualify her from a benefit is plainly discriminatory. Rationality and discrimination are not mutually exclusive.

Those unhappy with the unanimous verdict of the regression studies—that the effect on wages of being female is large and significant—pin their hopes on getting more and better information about workers. If only the right variables could be added to the equation, the full extent of women's lower quality as employees relative to men would be revealed, and the measured sex effect on wages reduced to insignificant levels, they say.

There is seldom a call, however, for some of the missing data that would show men's qualifications and behavior in a bad light relative to women's. Data demonstrating men's greater tendency to alcohol abuse, drug abuse, smoking, bad driving, resort to violence, criminal records, bankruptcies, back problems, history of heart attacks, are entirely missing from such studies. Including such data would increase still further the estimate of discrimination against women.

It is hard to know whether the addition of a lot more data would shift the estimate of the net effect of being female on wages up or down. However, the major conclusion that emerges from these studies—that sex discrimination is likely to have a substantial effect on women's pay—would probably stand up.

Studies of Men and Women in Firms

Other types of evidence not often cited by economists come from studies of the personnel practices of firms. Sociologists Bielby and Barron (1984) studied 373 work establishments. They found that in 60 percent of them men and women were perfectly segregated by job title—there was not a single job type in these establishments to which the employer assigned workers of both sexes. Most of the remaining establishments had substantial segregation. One of the few firms in the sample that looked on

[1]Hill (1984) discussed union resistance to hiring black males in the unionized skilled blue collar trades, particularly construction. The resistance of these unions to the entry of females is probably as strong. Bergmann (1986) gives a first-hand account from a female union carpenter of the exclusion and harassment of women by union stewards.

paper to be well integrated by sex recruited both men and women to work as apartment house managers. But the firm's 149 managers worked in 149 different buildings, a classic case of the exception that proves the rule. The rule these firms seemed to follow was to avoid assigning men and women to jobs where they would have to work together in close proximity as colleagues of equal status.

A study by Francine Blau (1977) based on extensive wage surveys by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics also showed segregation in white collar job titles within firms, despite the availability of both women and men for each title. Firms that hired men in a particular job title hired no women for that title and vice versa. Blau's study also illuminated the wage angle. The pay of workers in a particular title in a particular firm was relatively high if the firm had decided to hire men for that title and low if they had decided to hire women.

Blau's study testifies to the unreality of the idea that firms hire the best worker who applies for an opening regardless of sex. Rather, they decide on the sex of the worker they wish to attract to a particular opening, and that in turn determines the level of pay they offer. If they have set their sights on hiring a man for a particular title, they have to offer a man's standard pay, or they won't get one. If they are willing to settle for a woman, they don't have to set the pay so high, and generally will set it much lower.

Occupational Wage Data By Sex

Data for weekly earnings in finely detailed occupations collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest that the earmarking by sex that Blau found for white collar occupations holds in many other types of job as well. Table 1 lists customary weekly wage by sex in 20 occupations in which women get lower pay than female secretaries, but men get more.

It is interesting to look at the dramatic male-female differences in the pay scales for the same occupation reported in Table 1, and to see whether they are consistent with the explanations that have been given of women's low pay by those who reject the hypothesis of discrimination. In some occupations the men make 60–70 percent more than the women.

The most frequently cited explanation is that women's human capital is inferior. The occupations listed in Table 1 are quite narrowly defined. For this reason, we can be fairly sure that the male workers in them have jobs that have similar duties to the jobs that the female workers have, and require similar human capital.

Perhaps the men have more experience than the women. They probably do, on average. But, most regression studies, such as that of Corcoran and Duncan (1979), have shown that differences in length of experience account for very little of the pay gap between men and women. In any case, with a few exceptions, we would not expect workers in the occupations listed in Table 1 to become more productive with prolonged experience. After a month or so on the job, a hotel clerk will be as

Table 1
Average weekly wages for women and men in selected narrowly defined occupations, 1985

Occupation	*Women*	*Men*
secretaries	$278	$365
stock and inventory clerks	265	326
bookkeepers, accounting and auditing clerks	263	341
expediters	257	413
machinists	257	408
bus drivers	257	404
general office clerks	255	323
cost and rate clerks	254	483
sales workers, furniture and home furnishings	252	307
grinding, abrading, buffing machine ops	251	330
production inspectors, checkers, examiners	249	406
traffic, shipping and receiving clerks	247	305
electrical and electronic equipment assemblers	243	284
packaging and filling machine operators	234	286
printing machine operators	225	363
molding and casting machine operators	222	347
painting and paint spraying machine operators	218	313
solderers and brazers	216	287
photographic process machine operators	208	297
butchers and meat cutters	204	326
bakers	202	301
truck drivers, light	200	281
slicing and cutting machine operators	192	303
hotel clerks	191	279
sales workers, apparel	168	281

Note: These figures are estimates of medians of usual weekly earnings of employed wage and salary workers who usually work full-time. They are based on data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but the medians have been computed on a basis that differs slightly from the method used to produce the official BLS estimates. Moreover, BLS does not officially issue figures on wages for groups of less than 50,000, while some of the wages quoted in the table are for groups of size 19,000–50,000. Wage estimates included in the table have a standard error of estimate less than 10 percent.

productive as one who has been on the job for 5 or 10 years. Thus we would not expect workers in those occupations to differ much in pay as a result of differences in productivity. (Much of the positive correlation of experience with earnings in the data for individuals must be due to the fact that some of those with experience have been promoted to other jobs. But they would then no longer be in the occupations listed in Table 1.)

Solomon Polachek (1981) conjectures that the sex gap in wages is due to women's deliberate choice of certain jobs that are easy to leave and reenter. The jobs they choose which meet their criteria happen to be low-paying. But that conjecture does not help us much in explaining the differences in pay between men and women in the same occupations reported in Table 1. A job as a hotel clerk is probably easy to drop out of and return to. Very little human capital is likely to rust during the break in service. But it is hard to believe that women coming back to work after having a baby deliberately choose the hotel clerk jobs that pay \$191 rather than the ones that pay \$279 that the men seem to find.[2]

Gary S. Becker (1985) has given up on human capital differences between the sexes as a major cause of pay differences between women and men. He now thinks them mostly due to differences in the amount of housework men and women workers do. Men spend their off-the-job hours in rest and recreation. That is true even for those with wives who work full time. Becker says that men come to the job with more energy, and that explains their higher pay.

That explanation does not work very well here either. It seems unlikely that women operating slicing and cutting machines make \$192 and males operating such machines make \$303 because the men, being less tired, do a better job of slicing and cutting. Anybody who holds a job operating such a machine had better do it right, regardless of sex. It also seems unlikely, without evidence to the contrary, that the quality of men's hotel clerking justifies a wage 46 percent higher than women's. In any case, Becker's idea is no more than a conjecture; he presents no evidence at all that women are less energetic in their work than men.

As he argues in this issue, Victor Fuchs is also one of those who believes unfairness in the labor market has only a minor effect on wages. Rather, wage differentials between the sexes derive almost entirely from women's child care activities, which require them to take different kinds of jobs than men, and to do more part-time work. Again, this does not explain the wage comparisons reported in Table 1, where the men and women are all full-time workers, and have the same kinds of jobs.

Fuchs rests much of his case on a chart showing that the more children women have, the lower are their hourly earnings on average. Women with 4 children make only about 65 percent of what women with no children make. But the effect of this chart's facts on the wage differential between the sexes is less than might be thought. The average woman has a burden of 0.5 children under 18, and some of those are teenagers. Moreover, women with no children still earn much less than men of equivalent education and experience. If the wages of all women with children were raised to the level of wages earned by women with no children, 94 percent of the male-female gap would remain.

Fuchs conjectures, with no evidence offered, that the cause of the low pay for childless women is employers' anticipations of the babies they might have in the future. He thus comes around to affirming what he elsewhere denies, that the major source of women's disadvantage in the labor market is the behavior of employers who,

[2]England (1982) has demonstrated that a person planning intermittant labor market activity would not gain an advantage by choosing a traditional female occupation. In such occupations intermittancy is not penalized, but the wage level is so low that low lifetime earnings can be foreseen.

against the dictates of the law, take account of their sex in deciding what jobs and pay to offer them.

Labor Markets Segmented By Sex

An alternative explanation of why men get more pay than women, even when they have similar human capital, even when they have very similar jobs, is that men and women are not competing in the same market. Many jobs are earmarked for one sex or the other. Thus, men and women are selling themselves and their human capital in segregated markets, a separate market for each sex. Men sell their labor in the market where jobs earmarked for men are filled, and women are not allowed to compete with them in that market. Supply and demand in the men's market decrees one set of wages. Supply and demand in the women's market decrees a whole different set of wages, very much lower.

The segregation of markets is, of course, less than perfect, and it is diminishing, especially in the lower level managerial and professional jobs. However, segregation of the sexes remains the dominant mode in many establishments.

While earmarking jobs by sex causes a wage gap, the existence of the wage gap strengthens the desire of a firm to keep groups of employees who do the same work all-male or all-female. Firms balk at paying women a man's wage when they know that they can get them for less. Yet paying women lower wages than men doing the same work in the same establishment is likely to cause discontent and foment lawsuits. Occupational segregation by sex within each firm avoids such problems.[3]

We can conjecture that earmarking of paid jobs by sex has its origin in social systems that decree that women are and should be inferior in status to men, and in ideas about differences in aptitude and abilities between the sexes. Women and their work are undervalued. Experiments reported by Goldberg (1968) and Fidell (1975) in which men's and women's names were attached to identical resumes or identical essays or identical works of art have shown that attributing something to a woman evokes less favorable evaluations. Given the prevalence of such habits and ideas, requiring men and women to interact with each other as equals on the job (or assigning a woman to be the superior of a man) may lead to productivity-diminishing squabbles in the workplace, so employers have tried to avoid it. Behavior of this kind by employers for such reasons is, of course, illegal under the Civil Rights Act.

For many economists, disbelief in the existence of substantial discrimination is based, not on empirical evidence, but on a theory due to Becker (1957), that if a firm discriminated it would fail. If an employer were to exclude women or blacks from any job, and if these cheap substitutes were as productive as white men, Becker argues,

[3]See Bergmann (1986) for the description of a case in which a woman and a man were working at identical tasks but the man, who had less experience, was receiving far higher pay. The woman's perception of this led to her request for higher pay, her harrassment by management, and a lawsuit.

some nondiscriminating firm would arise to take advantage of the missed profit opportunity. The two firms would compete, and the discriminating firm would be driven into the ground.

The applicability of this theory to a real situation (as opposed to its validity as a piece of deductive logic) depends on three assumptions that may or may not be true in any particular time or place: (1) that there are large numbers of people who are willing and able to openly violate social customs, which they themselves support and enjoy, for purposes of making money, (2) that violating customs does not entail costs that cancel out the advantage of cheap wages, and (3) that competition is intense enough to put out of business those who refrain from violating customs.

The popularity of Becker's theory exemplifies an observation of John Stuart Mill (1848, Bk. II, Ch. 4):

> Political economists... exaggerate the effect of competition and ... take little account [of custom]... They are apt to express themselves as if they thought that competition actually does, in all cases, whatever it can be shown to be the tendency of competition to do. This is partly intelligible, if we consider that only through the principle of competition has political economy any pretension to the character of a science... But it would be a great misconception of the actual course of human affairs, to suppose that competition exercises in fact this unlimited sway.

In India, the intensity of competition has never been strong enough to get rid of the caste system of earmarking jobs, nor was it strong enough in the American South prior to the 1960s to eliminate a social and economic system very much like a caste system. So we know that Becker's theory isn't applicable to human societies at all times and places.

As to the current applicability in the United States of Becker's theory that discrimination brings extinction, recent empirical research reviewed by Krueger and Summers (1987) casts considerable doubt. They draw our attention to large and persistent wage differentials between industries and between firms within industries that appear not to be due to differences in worker or job characteristics, and that competition does not eliminate. Krueger and Summers, reluctantly but firmly throwing the competitive model of wage-setting overboard, suggest that employers may share rents with workers, and that wages may be set with reference to notions of fairness.

These developments in economists' thinking about wages are obviously pertinent to wage differentials by sex. If people think it appropriate for men to be paid more than women, think that husbands should make more than wives, that men are disgraced if they get less, then competitive forces may not be sufficient to prevent higher wages for men, and the restriction of certain jobs to men. As we have seen, higher wages reduce costly turnover, so that profits may be little affected by paying men a premium.

A Case Study

Case studies, while of limited use in deriving general principles or in measuring the prevalence of any phenomenon, are invaluable in subjecting abstractions such as Becker's theory of the dying discriminator to a confrontation with reality. Economists have a habit of dismissing case studies as "anecdotal evidence," having no value at all in forming our thoughts about an issue. It is remarkable that those so willing to embrace theories that are spun out of made-up stories will balk at giving any weight to true stories.

Many interesting cases with a wealth of factual material are written up as the result of lawsuits under the anti-discrimination statutes. The record in a suit against the Hertz Corporation (Morgan v. Hertz, 1981) gives us a look at a corporate culture hostile to women's advancement.

The lawsuit was filed by two women who had worked as automobile rental agents, dealing directly with customers at the company's counters. They had applied for promotion to station manager on four occasions when vacancies had to be filled. They were turned down four times, and the vacancies given to men, some of whom had less experience. The women complained that they had been discriminated against in promotion on account of their sex. The women also complained that male supervisors persistently harassed female agents with questions about their sexual activity and preferences, and that this behavior amounted to a form of sex discrimination.[4]

Most of the Hertz car rental agents are women. Although experience as a rental agent qualified a person to become station manager, very few women had been promoted at Hertz. Those few had been forced to struggle or to file charges to get promotions. Hertz's city manager in Memphis, where the suit originated, had said that a woman should not be station manager because a woman could not go away for training, because a woman could not follow irate male customers into the restroom, and because a woman's place was in the kitchen. Clearly, this manager had earmarked the station manager jobs for men.

The judge started his opinion by saying that the case presented "a disgusting saga in employer-employee reactions." He went on to say (p. 125) that Hertz has a long history of discriminating against women, and that "a cadre of male management preferred men in management positions at Hertz and disfavored the promotions of women." The judge's conclusions about Hertz should be of particular interest to the economists heretofore pursuaded by Becker's argument that firms that discriminate flirt with corporate death. As is well known, Hertz has long been and remains number one in its industry.

[4]MacKinnon (1979) argues that sexual harrassment on the job is one of the means by which (some) men express and maintain dominance over women workers. One of its functions is to express lack of the respect for a woman that a man would feel for a male fellow worker. This lack of respect affects the kinds of jobs and promotions for which women workers are considered.

In the Hertz case, as in many others, we may speculate whether the "cadre of male management" well and truly represents the firm, or are acting as freebooters on their own, against basic company policy. In this connection, we can note that high officials of the firm had induced an employee to sign a false statement denying that the city manager had made any statements against women. They also induced one of the previously promoted women managers to sign a statement condemning the women plaintiffs' abilities, when in fact she thought they were both able and qualified for promotion. These false statements were recanted under oath. Those incidents certainly suggest that the resources of the firm were mobilized to back up managers it knew to be discriminatory, rather than to treat women employees fairly.

Affirmative Action

If the major mode of discrimination is the earmarking of jobs for one sex or the other, then the obvious remedy is to get firms to cease doing this. The Civil Rights Act passed in 1964 makes such conduct illegal. The Act is supposed to be enforced by lawsuits against discriminators. While lawsuits have brought some notable victories, and established the boundaries of what is legal and illegal, little progress has been made in extirpating the practice of earmarking by sex many jobs in many sectors.

Lawsuits are expensive and difficult to bring. Women excluded from entry-level male-earmarked jobs are rarely in a position to make complaints, or even know that they have been discriminated against. Women who apply to a firm are steered to and accommodated in jobs earmarked for females. If they wish to get and keep those female jobs, they are precluded from complaining about their assignment. Those women who insist on male-typical assignments are unlikely to be hired at all, and thus will not be in a position to combine with others to mount a successful legal challenge to their exclusion.[5] They are not in a position to know whether the men who got the jobs were better qualified than they.

Once women work for a firm, especially in a clerical capacity, they find that the middle and upper levels of the job hierarchy are earmarked for men, and that the jobs they hold are not on "job ladders" that lead higher. For example, in most cases it is extremely difficult to be promoted out of a secretary's job, despite the fact that many secretaries are intelligent, capable, dependable people, highly devoted to their jobs, and many are knowledgeable concerning the firm's business.

It is interesting to contrast the situation of secretaries with that of the car rental agents who sued Hertz. The female rental agents felt that they were eligible for promotion to station manager because they knew of men who had served time as

[5] Women are in a somewhat different situation than blacks in this regard. There were many establishments that, at the time of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and afterward, hired no blacks at all. It was obvious to blacks and whites in the establishment's community that race discrimination by exclusion was being practiced. It was thus possible to organize a protest by a local black organization and to file a lawsuit. By contrast, there are few establishments that hire no women. Women's organizations have been unable to make the segregation of jobs by sex within a firm an issue in the community.

agents and who had been promoted. Female secretaries see no one promoted out of the secretarial staff, and are made to feel ineligible for managerial jobs. Firms could not require men to serve time as secretaries as a prerequisite to promotion to management, because men do not have the requisite human capital. Here is a case where the high human capital requirements of the secretarial job facilitate its maintenance as a dead end for women. Men steer clear of acquiring that human capital because they know they can do better without it.

The difficulty in fighting exclusion through lawsuits based on the complaints of the excluded, and the difficulty managements have in ending exclusionary practices, even where they wish to do so, has given rise to the affirmative action plan. Under an Executive Order, such plans have been required of firms selling to the federal government. Affirmative action plans go beyond vague statements that everyone is entitled to fair consideration for every job, which are essentially useless. They generally specify numerical goals and timetables for hiring and sometimes for promotion.

The arguments against affirmative action are that such plans unfairly exclude the more qualified, and that they harm the intended beneficiaries more than they help them. These complaints are largely based on the unstated assumption that discrimination is absent. Given that current hiring and promotion practices are by no means fair in many cases, the alternative to affirmative action is not perfect fairness, but an automatic and unfair preference for the type of person for whom the job was traditionally earmarked. If there is discrimination and no affirmative action, the candidates excluded for reasons of race or sex may be as well qualified or more so than those hired.[6]

The workings of earmarking and of the affirmative action remedy are illustrated by a recent Supreme Court case (Johnson v. Transportation Agency, 1987) concerning a dispatcher's job. Dispatchers sit at a radio transmitter and tell taxis or ambulances or trucks or police cars, most of them driven by men, where to go. That many dispatcher jobs are earmarked for men is suggested by the fact that male dispatchers in 1986 had a median pay of $403, while women had a median of $305. In the Transportation Department of Santa Clara County in California, not a single woman had ever been appointed to such a job, nor to one of the several hundred jobs in its category. A woman with the requisite experience applied. But an interviewing committee, which had never placed a woman in such a job, had rated a man marginally more qualified. Under an affirmative action plan the committee was overruled, and the woman was given the job. The man sued, saying that he had been discriminated against. The Supreme Court said that the affirmative action plan was a valid response to past exclusion, and that the woman could keep the job.

While affirmative action plans are widespread, there has been little governmental monitoring of the extent to which they have been adhered to. The danger of losing a

[6]Certain arguments by some proponents of affirmative action have provided ammunition to those who say affirmative action promotes the hiring of less competent people. One is that affirmative action is designed to produce equality of results by sex and race, rather than to rectify unfair exclusion. Another is that the main purpose of affirmative action is to help those whose qualifications are low due to past discrimination.

federal contract on account of not fulfilling an affirmative action plan has been nil. At most, these plans may have made some differences in employer and worker attitudes. It is difficult to know how much of the climb during the 1980s in the female-to-male wage ratio is due to affirmative action plans, how much to changed ideas about sex roles, and how much to a greater rate of entry of women to professional schools. Research on affirmative action which examined changes in occupational distribution would be more useful than studies, such as Leonard's in this issue, which look merely at total employment.

Comparable Worth

If there is widespread earmarking of jobs for males only, then the pay of women in the traditionally female jobs is affected by that discrimination. True, many of the latter may have given little thought to jobs outside the traditional female ghetto. Their pay may be dictated by supply and demand. Nevertheless, the pay they get has been lowered by the presence in their market of an extra supply of less traditional women who would rather have male-type jobs but cannot get them.[7] As a result, a female's human capital is compensated at a far lower rate than a male's. The women in the traditional women's occupations are asking for timely redress, in the form of "pay equity" or "comparable worth."

Many of the women in the female occupations are not in a position to change to the jobs previously reserved for males, even if these were to open up to women through better-enforced affirmative action. Given time, affirmative action might benefit them indirectly, by raising the total demand for women's labor, reducing the labor pool available for the female occupations, and thus raising their wages. However, this is a distant hope at this time.

The comparable worth movement arose because women in these traditional female jobs want rapid and direct action to raise their pay relative to that of men. The movement asks that employers realign occupational pay scales. Originally, the rhetoric focused on the rather vague criterion, "worth of the job to the employer." More recently, the demand is for pay based on systematic job evaluations, in which all jobs in an employer's establishment, regardless of their sex-identification, are rated on a uniform basis on a variety of skill factors.

The realignments called for might be ordered by courts as a result of lawsuits, if the Supreme Court buys the argument that Title VII forbids paying women's human capital at a lower rate than men's. Such realignments are already being mandated by state and local legislative bodies around the country for public employees. They can

[7]There are considerable numbers of women who do want traditionally male jobs, and the good pay that goes with them. A demonstration of this fact was given at the end of World War II. A survey by the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor (1946) showed that 75 percent of the wartime women workers expected to remain in the labor force, and 86 percent wanted to keep the same kind of job. However, those in jobs previously reserved for men were fired at the end of the war (Anderson, 1981). Some of them resisted by picketing, but to no avail.

be negotiated in union-management agreements, or voluntarily engineered by employers. It is not implausible that a U.S. Secretary of Labor might some day issue pay guidelines applicable to businesses that wish to be federal contractors.

The job evaluation systems that are being used for pay equity purposes focus on the duties of the job, and by implication on the qualities the worker must bring to the job to perform those duties successfully. Table 2 gives an example of the way jobs are compared. A firm of professional personnel consultants performed these evaluations for the government of the state of Washington. They rated the jobs of state employees on four "compensable factors": knowledge and skills, mental demands, accountability, and work conditions. The rating for each factor was done by looking at a detailed description of the duties of a job, and then judging which of a series of stock phrases applied best. Each stock phrase implies a particular range of points.

Of the four compensable factors, the first three can readily be seen to be measures of human capital. The compensable factor "knowledge and skills" is highly correlated with length and intensity of education and training. The compensable factor "mental demands" measures the problem-solving abilities required on the job. These may require inborn talent, a form of human capital that the market also pays for, perhaps enhanced by education. Jobs with high "accountability" scores require that workers have the experience and education, but also qualities of mind and character, that fit them to make well-considered independent judgements. The fourth compensable factor, "work conditions," takes account of the possibility that the market awards extra pay for a job that workers would otherwise shun. Designers of job evaluation schemes try to follow the market's weighting of the various compensable factors.

The salaries the state of Washington had set for the two female jobs in Table 2 are obviously way out of line with their scores. The market—and the state of Washington—had paid for women's knowledge, skill, ingenuity, and sufferance of difficult working conditions at a rate lower than it had paid for the same characteristics in men. The job evaluation system provided a diagnosis of that fact, and a guide toward a reform that would produce a pay system in which the pay of a job was in line with its human capital requirements.

The job evaluation techniques used in pay equity are not new. These techniques were invented and developed for business firms, which have used them as an aid to setting pay scales for many decades. A large employer will have a great variety of job titles, many of them unique to that establishment, for which no market information is available. So in practice some method of assigning wages other than by reference to the market must be adopted. For such firms, the only alternative to a systematic internal job evaluation scheme would be a set of wage rates based largely on internal politicking.[8]

[8]There is a crucial difference between pay equity job evaluations and the job evaluation methods currently practiced in most business establishments. The essence of pay equity is that the women's and men's jobs are rated by the same system. Jobs that have the same numerical rating are assigned the same pay, regardless of the sex-identification of the job. By contrast job evaluation systems used by business usually employ various dodges to avoid comparing the male and female jobs directly, for obvious reasons.

Table 2

Evaluations of six job titles from the comparable worth study done for the employees of the State of Washington

	Knowledge and skills	*Mental demands*	*Accountability*	*Work conditions*	*Total points*	*Salary as of 1 / 85*
Delivery Truck Driver	No previous exp. required. Brief on-the-job learning period required. (61)	Standardized work routines. Recall rather than analysis required. (10)	Duties routine, work closely controlled. (13)	Moderate lifting, Some danger. Conditions occasionally undesirable. (13)	97	$382
Auto Mechanic	Mechanical skill required. (106)	Similar procedures and methods, analysis of recurring nature. (26)	Methods clearly defined, work frequently reviewed. (30)	Moderate lifting, some danger. Conditions occasionally undesirable. (13)	175	465
Secretary (Grade III)	Activities require vocational competence and/or adeptness. Capability in dealing with others required. (122)	Similar procedures and methods, analysis of recurring nature. (35)	Methods clearly defined, work frequently reviewed. Actions influence results. (40)	Job at a desk. Little lifting, danger minimal. (0)	197	306
Civil Engineer	Comprehension of complex principles and practices. Capability in dealing with others required. (160)	Varying or complex procedures. Routine analysis. (53)	Activities generally defined, review after the fact. Actions influence results (61)	Moderate lifting, some danger. Conditions occasionally undesirable. (13)	287	513
Registered Nurse	Comprehension of complex principles and practices. Requires capability to persuade and motivate. (184)	Varying or complex procedures. Non-routine analysis. (70)	Activities generally defined, review after the fact. Actions influence results. (70)	Moderate lifting, some danger. Disagreeable conditions much of the time. (17)	341	411
Senior Computer Systems Analyst	Comprehension of complex principles and practices. Capability in dealing with others required. (212)	Varying or complex procedures. Non-routine analysis. (80)	Activities generally defined, review after the fact. Actions influence results. Moderate fiscal impact.	Job at a desk. Little lifting, danger minimal. (0)	372	553

Source: Characterization of job requirements is taken from "State of Washington, Comparable Worth Study, September 1974," prepared by Norman D. Willis in consultation with Ann O. Worcester (Normal D. Willis & Associates, Management Consultants). Salaries and point scores are from an unpublished tabulation made for the author by Helen Remick, Director, Office of Affirmative Action, University of Washington.

Economists, who have long extolled the rationality of business decisions, should not be surprised that business firms, in adopting job evaluation, made implicit use of human capital reasoning before economists invented it. Pay equity adjustments can be seen as bringing the wage structure into the shape it would be in were there no discrimination. In such an economy, the wages of each job would in the long run depend on the human capital the job required. Pay equity realignments can create difficulties where supply or demand shocks push a mostly male occupation's market wages out of line with its human capital requirements. However, there is no reason why such presumably temporary problems could not be dealt with in a constructive way.

Firms that act voluntarily might be able to ease the financial and other strains of pay equity raises for women by phasing them in over a period of a few years. The funds to make the pay equity adjustments could come out of the regular increases in the money compensation for workers which normally occur each year. For example, pay increases totalling 18 percent were spread fairly evenly between male and female workers in the 1982–4 period. Bergmann (1986) has shown that an 18 percent across-the-board increase in money wage rates could have instead financed a 35 percent increase for women and an 11 percent increase for men. That would have kept men's real wages almost unchanged.

An employer who gives the female job titles larger increases than the male job titles, yet seeks to keep its wage bill in line with those of other employers is going to find itself with wages in traditionally male jobs that are lower than those in other establishments. Such employers may experience a loss of labor in traditionally male jobs, and an inability to recruit able men to fill them. While some may see this as a drawback to pay equity, properly regarded it is an advantage. In fact, this is a case of pay equity strengthening the motive for employers to practice affirmative action. Such a situation should push the firm to recruit women as trainees for its traditionally male jobs. The increase in difficulty in landing a traditionally female job should also motivate some women to leave the safe harbor of the female occupations and consider competing for jobs heretofore filled with males.

Progress in opening typically male jobs to women would reduce the disemployment effects of pay equity.[9] But whatever the net disemployment effects of the pay equity adjustments do turn out to be, they must be considered as a tradeoff for the higher wages women would get while employed. Higher unemployment rates for women would translate into longer spells of unemployment for those women who found themselves out of a job. Those employed at higher wages thanks to pay equity adjustments and those banished to the unemployment office for longer stays are not two distinct groups, one gaining and the other losing. In actuality, there is considerable circulation of individuals into and out of jobs.

[9]For discussions of disemployment effects by those who take them seriously, see O'Neill (1984) and Gold (1983).

We can look at the tradeoff of higher pay for higher unemployment in the following way:

There are 260 paid days per year for a person working year-round. At an unemployment rate of u, the average person experiences $260u$ days unemployed, and receives pay for $260(1 - u)$ days.

Suppose an administered pay rise for women raised their wage from w to w' and their unemployment rate from u to u'. If the loss from the increase in unemployment exactly balanced the wage rate gain, we would have

$$260(1 - u')w' = 260(1 - u)w, \tag{1}$$

or

$$u' = 1 - (1 - u)\frac{w}{w'}. \tag{2}$$

Suppose the unemployment rate for women started out at 7 percent, and women's pay in their traditional occupations was administered upward by 20 percent. Using equation (2), we can see that it would take a rise in their unemployment rate from 7 percent to 23 percent to cancel out the gain in yearly income for the average woman over the longer term. In Australia, somewhat larger wage increases were achieved at an apparent cost in unemployment of a one-point rise in the rate, according to Gregory and Duncan (1981). Thus it certainly seems likely that the gains to women from higher pay while employed would swamp the losses due to higher unemployment rates. It suggests, in fact, that the latter would hardly be noticeable.

Opponents of pay equity adjustments enjoy frightening the business community with the nightmare of a large and stupidly run federal agency, which would fix by administrative fiat the wage rate for every job in every business in the country. Such an inclusive approach would be expensive, unwieldy, and unnecessarily intrusive.

However, it would be useful for the federal government to issue a set of well-publicized pay "guidelines," which could be used by women workers to pressure their employers and their unions. The Labor Department might set up minimum wage recommendations for the largest of the typically female occupations—typist, secretary, retail sales clerk, child care worker, teacher, social worker, librarian, nurse. Another approach would be for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or the Labor Department to evaluate a group of common male and female occupations, and recommend wage ratios for them. The observance of such minima or ratios might be required of government contractors, along with currently required affirmative action plans.

These guidelines or minima would at the very least change people's attitudes on what wages were fair. Even without an enforcement mechanism, they might well have an appreciable effect.

Lifting the Biblical Curse

For many years the measured ratio of women's pay to men's in the United States kept fairly steady at around 60 percent. This gave rise among male economists to a half-joking Biblical Theory of Wages. Victor Fuchs (1986) is only the latest to quote the Book of Leviticus (in *Science*, of all places) to the effect that the value of maidservants should be three-fifths the value of menservants. Are such references meant to imply that God has ordained low wages for women on into eternity? Or that in this matter, as in remarkably few others, the human race is conforming to the Divinity's wishes?

The Curse of Leviticus is slowly lifting from American women. Equity and efficiency considerations suggest that policies be strengthened to make it lift faster. If current discrimination is an important factor in today's labor market, as a considerable body of evidence suggests, then affirmative action and pay equity policies can give considerable net benefits to women (and also to blacks[10]), without imposing high and unfair burdens on other parties in the economy.

■ *This paper includes material drawn from my book,* The Economic Emergence of Women *(New York: Basic Books, 1986).*

[10]See Malveaux (1986) for a discussion of the likely effects of pay equity on black women and men.

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