

gendered labor

we've been looking at intersections between the so-called public/private spheres — social reproduction happens in these intersections — as does the formation of gender as a mode of social reproduction

working class masculinity/femininity  $\neq$  professional class masculinity/femininity  
racial-ethnic gender formations are overlaid, too, by class

structural reasons — *history* of discriminatory hiring practices, unequal pay scales, uneven quality of public education in communities that differ widely in terms of income

but **also**, more subtle means of socialization, ongoing gender acquisition into adulthood

women and men *become* gendered — take on “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics — in part through segregated labor practices (including mothering and unpaid domestic work)

this, in part, is why what “femininity” and “masculinity” means will vary for women and men who are structurally divided by class, race, ethnicity.

TODAY we're looking at the OTHER side of the equation:

**How might we think differently about paid labor market when we look at it as being systemically connected to households?**

Kath Weston (147): “Occupational settings, no less than households and families, are loci for the production and reproduction of gender in the United States.” — again, class-specific notions of gender that are deeply connected to notions of race

GOVERNMENT LABOR STATS (overheads)

In 2002, women's labor force participation rate was 59.6 percent. In other words, 59.6 percent of women age 16 and over were working or actively looking for work. Women comprised 47 percent of the total labor force (male and female) in 2002. = not too many self-identified “housewives” or “homemakers” out there

what jobs were they doing?

most in “pink-collar” jobs — #1 is retail service (full-time; not including temps)

NOTE: government recently announced it was going to stop collecting gender-related occupational data

Many of you have a grasp of the *history* behind this: women's employment has tended to be looked upon as either “desperate” – immigrant labor — or “supplemental” to a head of

household's breadwinner's wages — *justifying*, not explaining, low wages

this is what calls for “**comparable worth**” – equal pay for equal work— meant to redress but did you catch **Glenn's critique** (end of article) of “comparable worth”?  
buys into myth of meritocracy:

assumes jobs have objective worth based on measurable skills, education, productivity

but what about *emotional* skills of nurses, caregivers — not formally “skilled”?

racial divide often at skilled/unskilled divide — comp worth doesn't address this

comp worth also neglects to consider structural obstacles to entry into skilled jobs/professions — “pink collar work” where aren't comp men's wages

Glenn says if we support comp worth, need to do it alongside support for “living wage” — better pay for ALL less valued jobs — social security taxes for domestics

readings for today go even deeper — address cultural assumptions that make “merit based” pronouncements *seem* fair — that make today's wage differentials/gendered career paths seem rational — a matter of personal “choice” rather than bias

BUT choice ≠ desire, what people would want ideally; often settling for something, “choice” is often a pragmatic compromise

just because career paths today tend to be “chosen” rather than “forced,” doesn't mean things are equitable, fair; that we've solved the problems

what Rosalind Williams calls “gender bias” in occupational tracking far more subtle than “gender discrimination” — and is more enduring, since can't be legislated against

similarly, Kath Weston recognizes that notion of “discrimination” glosses rather than explains how committed men in the trades are to the idea that it's a man's job — and their genuine surprise to see women be good welders or auto mechanics

Let's turn to

Kath Weston — anthropologist, director of women's studies at Harvard, author of first research-based book on gay families (*Families We Choose*, 1991)

she argues that **ideologies of gender, and work ability**, still do help keep women out of the better paying, unionized skilled trades — even after gender discrimination in hiring made federal offence.

HOW? What's her argument?

“Our society describes people in general and job applicants in particular as possessors of inherent ‘traits’ of character and competence—traits that incorporate cultural notions of gender, race, class, age, and what it means to be ‘able-bodied’.”

what **working-class gendered assumptions** are made about job-related traits? (141)

women have “manual dexterity”, “patience”  
men have “physical strength,” “mechanical aptitude,” “aggressiveness”

JOBS, in turn, are described as having “requirements” intrinsic to the work itself

“heavy” v. “light-duty” work in trades  
microelectronics as delicate, requiring small hands

matching of “the right person for the job” *appears to be objective* — when subjective preconceptions are embedded in depictions of both applicant and job

BUT in “heavy” work, do men actually lift engines?  
is welding sheet metal (“delicate”) less hazardous than other trade work?  
and don't men dominate surgery? (even with electron microscopes?)

At the same time, that women/men *do* particular kinds of work reinforces certain stereotypes. Makes the connection between women/being a woman and nursing (care giving), doing piecework sewing or stationary microscope work (to manufacture computer chips and small electronics) *seem* self-evident.

Weston: “gender permeates not only the bodies and identities of workers, but production itself” (139) but this is *metaphoric*, cultural — *not* essential, inherent to the job itself

Weston importantly argues:

“Persons do not *possess* gender-typed qualities so much as they *use symbols* to fashion presentations of self that incorporate gender.”

i.e., there's a lot of work that goes into the appearance of difference b/w heavy/light labor exaggerated acting the part — carrying tires instead of rolling them; unnecessary safety risk

being extra ‘macho’ in ways that make doing the work of a tradesman seem antithetical to “being” a woman.

Conceptually, not unlike sense that men “are taller” than women b/c straight couples tend to pair up that way.

And women who *do* make it into the trades? How do they get in? How are they coached?

“blue collar dress-for-success program” (142-43)

these are *signs* of the ability to do the job, recognition of what job entails; not evidence of actual skill (degree, experience)

meaningful gender differences aren't essential; they're learned, adopted, adapted, elicited

“The conceptual links between gendered traits and job requirements are so powerful that they can influence what men on the job see when they watch a woman work” (142)

Weston concludes: “Fighting occupational sex segregation begins by disentangling gendered *displays* and notions of gendered *capacity* from labor performed” (148)

### **what if we apply this to white collar work like banking (London) (McDowell)?**

women blocked from upper end of banking positions not only through infrastructural obstacles (“glass ceiling”) but because the *jobs themselves are gendered masculine* in subtle ways that make women's presence incongruous, unthinkable, if not destabilizing

examples from McDowell?

it's also *masculinity*, too, that's a performance

compulsory heterosexuality limits masculinity

and while some women “masquerade” as men (but only incompletely), others flaunt stereotypical aspects of femininity

p. 198 – you can “manipulate things” by “being more or less female”  
what do you make of this?

### **what if we apply Weston's insights to the sciences like physics, professions like engineering?**

how is gender enacted in MIT culture, pedagogy?

excerpt from Rosalind Williams's *Retooling* — prof in STS and former Dean of Students

not merely intellectual capacity, but *STYLE* of thinking, reasoning

“one sometimes hears the complaint that women students ‘just’ get good grades, without necessarily being creative and entrepreneurial” (201)

women faculty do a disproportionate amount of uncompensated “service work” — asked to serve on committees — either because ‘better’ committee members, or as token representatives — as soon as their hired; doesn’t count in tenure decisions

hard/soft sciences? (heavy/light labor)

**how does occupational gender discrimination work today, when anti-discrimination laws are in place?**

not through direct exclusion, but

1) by perpetuating conditions that retain assumption that ideal worker has a wife (reproductive labor) — so women “choose” not to accept faculty positions at research universities if they’re interested in having kids

work/family issues are huge  
on MIT engineering faculty: 1/2 women faculty have kids; 4/5 men have kids

2) being underappreciated — not having your achievements recognized (as in trades)

3) Susan Hockfield: “the tyranny of low expectations” — letters of evaluation reflecting expectations, stereotypes, rather than reality — always described as a ‘*woman* scientist’

next time: gender and agency — important theoretical pieces that may offer tools in revising your papers