Still a Man's World

Men Who Do "Women's Work"

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Gendered Jobs and Gendered Workers

A 1959 article in *Library Journal* entitled "The Male Librarian—An Anomaly?" begins this way:

> My friends keep trying to get me out of the library.
> . . . Library work is fine, they agree, but they smile
> and shake their heads benevolently and charitably,
> as if it were unnecessary to add that it is one of the
> dullest, most poorly paid, unrewarding, off-beat ac-
> tivities any man could be consigned to. If you have
> a heart condition, if you're physically handicapped
> in other ways, well, such a job is a blessing. And for
> women there's no question library work is fine; there
> are some wonderful women in libraries and we all
> ought to be thankful to them. But let's face it, no
> healthy man of normal intelligence should go into
> it.[1]

Male librarians still face this treatment today, as do other men who work in predominantly female occupations. In 1990, my local newspaper featured a story entitled "Men Still Avoiding Women's Work" that described my research

on men in nursing, librarianship, teaching, and social work. Soon afterwards, a humor columnist for the same paper wrote a spoof on the story that he titled, "Most Men Avoid Women's Work because It Is Usually So Boring."[2] The columnist poked fun at hairdressing, librarianship, nursing, and babysitting—in his view, all "lousy" jobs requiring low intelligence and a high tolerance for boredom. Evidently people still wonder why any "healthy man of normal intelligence" would willingly work in a "woman's occupation."

In fact, not very many men do work in these fields, although their numbers are growing. In 1990, over 500,000 men were employed in these four occupations, constituting approximately 6 percent of all registered nurses, 15 percent of all elementary school teachers, 17 percent of all librarians, and 32 percent of all social workers. These percentages have fluctuated in recent years: As table 1 indicates, librarianship and social work have undergone slight declines in the proportions of men since 1975; teaching has remained somewhat stable; while nursing has experienced noticeable gains. The number of men in nursing actually doubled between 1980 and 1990; however, their overall proportional representation remains very low.

Very little is known about these men who "cross over" into these nontraditional occupations. While numerous books have been written about women entering male-dominated occupations, few have asked why men are underrepresented in traditionally female jobs.[3] The underlying assumption in most research on gender and work is that, given a free choice, both men and women would work in predominantly male occupations, as they are generally better paying and more prestigious than predominantly female occupations. The few men who will-

Table 1
Men in the "Women's Professions":
Number (in thousands) and Distribution of Men
Employed in the Occupations, Selected Years

Profession	1975	1980	1990
Registered Nurses			
Number of men	28	46	92
% men	3.0	3.5	5.5
Elementary Teachers*			
Number of men	194	225	223
% men	14.6	16.3	14.8
Librarians			
Number of men	34	27	32
% men	18.9	14.8	16.7
Social Workers			
Number of men	116	134	179
% men	39.2	35.0	31.8

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings* 38, no. 1 (January 1991), table 22 (employed civilians by detailed occupation), p. 185; vol. 28, no. 1 (January 1981), table 23 (employed persons by detailed occupation), p. 180; vol. 22, no. 7 (January 1976), table 2 (employed persons by detailed occupation), p. 11.

*Excludes kindergarten teachers.

ingly "cross over" must be, as the 1959 article suggests, "anomalies."

Popular culture reinforces the belief that these men are "anomalies." Men are rarely portrayed working in these occupations, and when they are, they are represented in extremely stereotypical ways. For example, in the 1990 movie *Kindergarten Cop*, muscle-man Arnold Schwarzenegger played a detective forced to work undercover as a kindergarten teacher; the otherwise competent Schwarzenegger was completely overwhelmed by the five-year-old children in his class. A television series in the early

1990s about a male elementary school teacher (*Drexell's Class*) stars a lead character who *hates children*. The implication of these popular shows is that any "real man" would have nothing to do with this kind of job; indeed, a "real man" would be incapable of working in a "woman's profession."

This book challenges these stereotypes about men who do "women's work" through case studies of men in four predominantly female occupations: nursing, elementary school teaching, librarianship, and social work. I show that men maintain their masculinity in these occupations, despite the popular stereotypes. Moreover, male power and privilege is preserved and reproduced in these occupations through a complex interplay between gendered expectations embedded in organizations, and the gendered interests workers bring with them to their jobs. Each of these occupations is "still a man's world" even though mostly women work in them.

I selected these four professions as case studies of men who do "women's work" for a variety of reasons. First, because they are so strongly associated with women and femininity in our popular culture, these professions highlight and perhaps even exaggerate the barriers and advantages men face when entering predominantly female environments. Second, they each require extended periods of educational training and apprenticeship, requiring individuals in these occupations to be at least somewhat committed to their work (unlike those employed in, say, clerical or domestic work). Therefore I thought they would be reflective about their decisions to join these "nontraditional" occupations, making them "acute observers" and, hence, ideal informants about the sort of

social and psychological processes I am interested in describing.[4] Third, these occupations vary a great deal in the proportion of men working in them. Although my aim was not to engage in between-group comparisons, I believed that the proportions of men in a work setting would strongly influence the degree to which they felt accepted and satisfied with their jobs.[5]

I traveled across the United States conducting in-depth interviews with seventy-six men and twenty-three women who work in nursing, teaching, librarianship, and social work. Like the people employed in these professions generally, those in my sample were predominantly white (90 percent). Their ages ranged from twenty to sixty-six, and the average age was thirty-eight. I interviewed women as well as men to gauge their feelings and reactions to men's entry into "their" professions. Respondents were intentionally selected to represent a wide range of specialties and levels of education and experience. I interviewed students in professional schools, "front line" practitioners, administrators, and retirees, asking them about their motivations to enter these professions, their on-the-job experiences, and their opinions about men's status and prospects in these fields.[6]

The link between masculinity and work has only recently become a topic for sociological investigation. Although many books have been written about male workers, most contain no analysis of gender. They may tell us a great deal about the meanings, purposes, and aspirations that characterize men's working lives, but not how masculinity relates to these general concerns. On the other hand, most of the research that does address gender and work has focused on women and on their struggles

to achieve economic equality with men. Women currently constitute 45 percent of the paid labor force, but they continue to lag behind men in earnings and organizational power.[7] Several books and articles now document this economic disparity and explain it in terms of the different meanings, purposes, and aspirations that women *qua women* experience in the labor force. In other words, in the sociology of work, gender seems to be something that affects only women, and affects them only negatively.

To explain how and why a woman's gender impedes her economic success, two general theoretical approaches have been developed. On the one hand, conventional theories—such as human capital or status attainment theory—attribute women's lesser achievement in the workplace to the gender characteristics that women bring with them to work. According to this perspective, women cannot compete as successfully as men for the best jobs either because they were not properly socialized to acquire highly valued worker characteristics (such as aggressiveness and ambition), or because they have competing household responsibilities. If men are more successful, this argument goes, that is because they have superior skills or they have made better organizational choices.[8]

Feminist researchers have generally rejected this perspective, claiming instead that women's lesser achievement is due to gender discrimination and sexual harassment, not to women's supposed deficiencies compared to men.[9] In fact, several studies have demonstrated that women and men are not treated equally at work, even if they possess the same qualifications and are hired to perform the same job. In nearly every occupation, women encounter barriers when they try to enter the most lucra-

tive and prestigious specialties. A "glass ceiling" prevents them from reaching the top positions.[10] From this perspective, the organizational dynamics—and not the "feminine" attributes of women—result in women's lesser pay and status in the work world.

One of the most important studies documenting this organizational inequality is Rosabeth Moss Kanter's *Men and Women of the Corporation.* In this book, Kanter argues that the barriers women face in predominantly male occupations can be attributed to their *numerical* minority in organizations. Although men and women may have similar qualifications, the organizational structure nevertheless promotes gender differentiation through the mechanism of tokenism. She maintains that because all tokens "stand out" from the dominant group and receive more than their fair share of attention, they are therefore subjected to stereotyping, role entrapment, and various other forms of marginalization.

Kanter based her theory of tokenism on a study of women in a major U.S. corporation, but she argued that the harassment and discrimination women encountered there would affect a member of *any* token minority group. This is a problematic assumption, but her exclusive focus on women precluded a systematic analysis of this claim. However, Kanter did provide two individual examples of tokens who were male to illustrate her point; rather fortuitously, one of these was the case of a male nurse:

One male nursing student whom I interviewed reported that he thought he would enjoy being the only man in a group of women. Then he found that he engendered a great deal of hostility and that he was teased every time he failed to live up to a manly image—e.g., if he was vague or subjective in speech.

The *content* of interaction when men are tokens may appear to give them an elevated position, but the process is still one of role encapsulation and treating tokens as symbols. Deference can be a patronizing reminder of difference, too.[11]

Token dynamics clearly do affect the men who do "women's work." Like Kanter, I found that when men enter nursing and other predominantly female professions, they are treated differently from women: They tend to receive preferential consideration in hiring; they are channeled into certain male-identified specialties; and they are pressured to perform specific job tasks that are identified as "manly." But unlike women tokens, men apparently *benefit* from this special treatment: As Kanter herself points out, men are "elevated" by their token status. They make more money than women (on average) in each of these occupations, and they are greatly over-represented in administrative positions. The theory of tokenism, developed to explain discrimination against women in nontraditional occupations, ironically does not account for the very different consequences of minority status for men and women.

Kanter's study is a good example of how the exclusive focus on women in the research on gender and work has resulted in an incomplete theoretical picture of how the work world discriminates against women. To fully understand the source of women's disadvantages in the workplace, it is essential to examine the source of men's advantages. Shifting the focus to men therefore is not intended to abandon the concerns of women, but rather to implicate men in the overall pattern of discrimination against women. However, including men's experiences in the analysis of gender and work does substantially alter the research questions: Instead of asking, "What are the

deficiencies of women?" or "What are the barriers to women?" the questions now become, "Why is gender a liability for women but an asset for men?" and "What are the mechanisms that propel men to more successful careers?"

To address these questions, I rely on a theory of "gendered organizations."[12] According to this perspective, cultural beliefs about masculinity and femininity are built into the very structure of the work world. Organizational hierarchies, job descriptions, and informal workplace practices all contain deeply embedded assumptions about the gender and gendered characteristics of workers. These beliefs about gender—which are often unstated and unacknowledged—limit women's opportunities while enhancing men's occupational success. In other words, work organizations contain built-in advantages for men that are often unnoticed; indeed, they seem like natural or inevitable characteristics of all organizations.

On the most basic level, work organizations are gendered in that employers prefer to hire workers with few if any nonwork distractions. This is not a gender-neutral preference: Men fit this description far more easily than women, because of the unequal division of household labor in most families. Joan Acker writes,

> The closest the disembodied worker doing the abstract job comes to a real worker is the male worker whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children.[13]

Women's careers often suffer because work organizations typically do not accommodate their additional household responsibilities.[14]

This organizational preference for men exists even in

the "women's professions." An Arizona nursing director who is in charge of hiring the staff of the emergency room explained why men in his hospital are overrepresented in the best positions:

> I've sometimes stopped to wonder whether there is a little bias there. I'm not sure. . . . The men sometimes tend to be a little more stable than the women. A lot of the men who work in the ER [emergency room] have really been here for quite a while. They're married; most have kids. When it's time to have a baby, they're not the ones who take off. It's the same problem, it's really not a lot different than a lot of other professions.

Although organizations that employ nurses and members of the other "women's professions" often permit leaves-of-absence to tend to family responsibilities, no one is actually rewarded for taking this time off. Instead, those who demonstrate unconditional devotion to their work receive the best jobs, giving men an unfair advantage over women even in these "female" occupations.

There is a second, even more profound way that organizations are deeply gendered, and that is through the hierarchical division of labor. Gender segregation exists in nearly every organization and every occupation, with men occupying the best paying and most prestigious jobs, and the highest positions of organizational power.[15] In the United States, more than half of all men or women would have to change major job categories to equalize the proportions of men and women in all occupations. This overall degree of segregation has changed remarkably little over the past hundred years, despite radical transformations in the U.S. job market.[16] Technological

developments and management directives have created millions of new jobs and eliminated others, but the basic structure of the gendered division of labor has remained intact. Largely because of this division of labor, women earn far less than men: On average, women still receive less than seventy-five cents for every dollar earned by a man.[17]

According to the theory of gendered organizations, the division of labor by gender favors men because organizations value men and qualities associated with masculinity more highly than they value women. Organizational hierarchies reify the male standard, rewarding only those who possess putatively masculine characteristics with promotion to the best positions. This preference for masculinity seems to happen regardless of the proportional representation of men in an occupation.

In fact, the higher value placed on men and masculinity is especially evident in traditionally female professions, where men are the tokens. Men have been overrepresented in the top positions in these occupations ever since the nineteenth century, when women were first actively recruited into them. At that time, employers deliberately set aside jobs in administration and management for men because they believed that these positions required the job holder to be level-headed, impartial, technically proficient, and even aggressive.[18] All of these qualities were associated with white, middle-class masculinity. Black men and newly arriving immigrant men typically were not believed to possess these highly touted traits; they were definitely not among those recruited for the top positions. The middle-class white men who did enter these jobs were rewarded for their "masculine" qualities with higher salaries than women received. Also, men were

paid more because employers assumed that unlike women, these men needed extra money to support a dependent spouse and children.

Men still are overrepresented in the most prestigious and best-paying specialties in these occupations. Today, male nurses tend to specialize in certain "high tech" areas (such as intensive care and emergency room nursing) or in areas that demand a high degree of physical strength (such as psychiatric and orthopedic nursing), and they are overrepresented in administration. Men in elementary school teaching typically teach the upper grades (fourth through sixth), and they often supplement their teaching with coaching or administrative work. Male librarians concentrate in the high technology computer information specialties and administration, and they are more likely than female librarians to work in major academic and public libraries. And male social workers tend to work in corrections and in administration. Men are drawn to specialties associated with stereotypical masculine qualities, such as strength, technical proficiency and managerial ability. Indeed, in some organizations, these specialties have become all-male enclaves.

Many men entering these professions today anticipate working in these masculine enclaves. But others find themselves pressured into these specialties despite their inclinations otherwise. That is, some men who prefer to work in the more "feminine" specialties—such as pediatric nursing or children's librarianship—encounter inexorable pressures to "move up," a phenomenon I refer to as the "glass escalator effect." Like being on an invisible "up" escalator, men must struggle to remain in the lower (i.e., "feminine") levels of their professions.

Some organizations mandate this gender segregation through policies that prevent men from working in the

most female-identified specialties. For example, some hospitals bar male nurses from working in obstetrics and gynecology wards, and some school districts prohibit the hiring of men as kindergarten teachers.[19] These prohibitions are motivated in part by fears of men's sexuality: The assumption is that only men who are child molesters or sexual perverts would be drawn to these specialties. In these instances, gender is an overt part of the job description.

But often the pressures that move men into the more "masculine" specialties are more subtle than this, embedded in informal interactions that take place between men and their supervisors, co-workers, and clients. For instance, physicians occasionally ask male nurses their opinions on medical issues (practically unheard of among female nurses), and this can contribute to the promotion of the male nurses to supervisory positions.[20] Male supervisors sometimes share an interest in sports or other hobbies with their male employees which can lead to male bonding and camaraderie in the workplace, thereby enhancing men's chances for successful careers. Because most of the organizations that train and employ nurses, librarians, teachers, and social workers are "male-dominated," men are often in positions to make decisions that favor other men.

In addition to supervisors, women colleagues and clients often have highly gendered expectations of the men working in these professions that can contribute to men's advancement. For example, some men told me they were pushed into leadership positions by female colleagues, who believed men to be better able to represent their interests to male management. Even the negative stereotypes held by the public can sometimes escalate men into higher positions: A librarian working in the children's col-

lection of a public library made some parents uncomfortable (according to his supervisors), so he was transferred to the adult reference division—resulting in a promotion and an increase in pay. While some men may be uncomfortable with these expectations—and some probably leave these professions because of them—those who remain and conform to them are often rewarded with the higher status and pay this special treatment can bring.

Women who work in these professions are also constrained by beliefs about gender, but for women, others' beliefs about femininity and female sexuality tend to limit instead of enhance their professional opportunities. Women who work in these professions are expected to possess such feminine attributes as care-giving, service orientation, and sexual availability and attractiveness—all qualities associated with women's traditional domestic functions. These attributes are often emphasized in popular media portrayals of women in these occupations: Female nurses, librarians, social workers, and school teachers are typically represented as pseudo-wives, mothers, or unmarried daughters of their male bosses or supervisors, and they are often sexually fetishized in these roles. The perennially popular movie *It's a Wonderful Life* contrasts Donna Reed as happily married wife and mother with an image of her as a dowdy, spinster librarian, complete with tight bun, glasses, and nervous, repressed sexuality. Card shops and video stores contain myriad examples of women nurses portrayed as sexy nymphomaniacs or castrating battle-axes. These cultural representations filter into the actual practice of these jobs: Because many of the women in these occupations work under the direct control and supervision of heterosexual men, they are often subjected to sexual flirtations,

bosses' requests for nonwork favors, and outright sexual harassment.[21]

This is not to claim, however, that there is any necessary or inevitable connection between these jobs and femininity. Prior to the nineteenth century, when most teachers, nurses, and librarians were men, these occupations did not connote femininity and female sexuality as they do today. Moreover, many working in these jobs perform administrative or highly technical tasks that do not involve any so-called "feminine" qualities. Nevertheless, once gendered expectations are embedded in jobs, workers are assumed to possess the appropriate gendered attributes; they may even be evaluated on how well they conform to these expectations.[22] But because feminine qualities are devalued, by conforming to gendered expectations, a woman does not usually enhance her economic prospects within organizations. Engaging in heterosexual flirtations and affairs has been shown to be especially damaging to women's careers, even when women are willing participants.[23]

Organizations thus treat men and women very differently regardless of their proportional representation in an occupation. The workplace is not gender-neutral; it is a central site for the creation and reproduction of gender differences and gender inequality. Both men and women are constrained to act in certain ways by organizational hierarchies, job descriptions, and informal workplace practices that are based on deeply embedded assumptions about masculinity and femininity, but this social construction of gender favors men by rewarding them for the "masculine" qualities they are presumed to bring with them to the workplace.

Workers are not passive players in this social reproduction of gender in organizations. The theory of gendered organizations recognizes that workers themselves are gendered: Men and women bring different and often competing interests and desires to work, and they actively struggle to remake organizational structure to reflect these interests. But unlike human capital theory, this perspective maintains that gender attributes are not given and uniform, nor are they necessarily rational. The gendered interests brought to work by individuals are constantly being negotiated in a dialectical process with the gendered structure of organizations. As Cynthia Cockburn writes: "People have a gender, and their gender rubs off on the jobs they do. The jobs in turn have a gender character which rubs off on the people who do them."[24] When workers act on the basis of their perceived collective interests as men or women, they contribute to the "gendering" of organizations.

American labor history is full of examples of men organizing collectively in the workplace to promote and protect their perceived gender interests. For many men, their sense of themselves as masculine is closely associated with the technical skills, male bonding, and the breadwinner ethic of the workplace; success at work often constitutes *proof* of their masculinity. Working alongside women can be deeply threatening to men's sense of pride and self-esteem, so many have vigorously defended gender segregation by establishing barriers to women and treating the few who cross over with scorn and derision.[25]

In addition to asserting their masculinity, men have also used the workplace to consolidate their power over women and their privileges in society. Men have occasionally organized to resist the entry of women into

"their" occupations as a means to protect their higher wages and exclusive access to the best jobs, couching their demands in terms of their duties and rights as men in society.[26]

Women have also at times used gendered discourses to defend *their* rights to work.[27] But overall, women have been much more active than men in challenging the gendered division of labor by crossing over into nontraditional occupations, and accepting the few token men who enter "their" occupations.[28] Part of the reason for this difference is that unlike men, women stand to benefit economically from crossing over. But also, occupational integration does not seem to threaten women's gender identity in the same fundamental psychological way as it threatens men's sense of themselves as masculine. While many women may enjoy the "feminine" aspects of their work, their femininity is not contingent on proving themselves competent in "gender-appropriate" work, which is often how masculinity is experienced by men.[29]

However, when men enter predominantly female professions, they do not abandon their gender identity (despite the stereotypes about them), nor do they lose their interest in sustaining male privilege in society. Some men eagerly pursue administration and other "masculine" specialties for the higher pay and status, and for the opportunity these positions offer to consolidate and affirm their gender identity. Even those who work alongside women in the same specialty often will play up their masculinity, emphasizing their difference from women. Men creatively appropriate tasks or even aspects of tasks that can be labeled "masculine" to legitimize their presence in these fields. For example, some male nurses claim they bring special insight and experience to the care of male patients, especially in performing tasks like catheteriza-

tion. A male reference librarian at an urban public library believes that men are needed to control angry and potentially violent patrons. A male kindergarten teacher brings his banjo to class; another uses his class to test market the children's books that he writes. And social workers in children's protective services talk about being masculine role models for the male children. The various strategies men employ to emphasize their masculinity and distance themselves from their female colleagues help to quell concerns that they are effeminate—while adding to their prospects for further advancement in these fields.

Of course, not all men are equally committed to maintaining an image of themselves as suitably "masculine." Among those I interviewed were feminist men and gay men, some of whom chose their occupations precisely because they rejected conventional expectations about masculinity. Some racial/ethnic minority men also articulated alternative motives for participating in these occupations, such as the desire to engage in community activism. Nevertheless, those who do not conform to the socially sanctioned ideal of masculinity often are faced with considerable dilemmas: In some cases, their refusal to conform resulted in career sanctions, such as being passed over for promotion or even being fired. Gay men are particularly vulnerable to such job actions, leading some to publicly display the appropriately "masculine" characteristics while privately disavowing them.

Thus, workers are gendered, but men do not necessarily share identical gender interests. Moreover, the meaning and importance of masculinity is not fixed: It is continually reconstructed and renegotiated at work. As David Morgan writes,

> Gender does not in any straightforward way arise out of the workplace, nor is it a set of characteristics

which are brought, like lunch boxes, into the workplace by employees. Rather, there is an interaction between employees and workplace . . . and gender becomes one of the ways, very often one of the most important ways through which individuals make sense of or structure their daily environment. . . . Men and women introduce some degree of fixity and control over what is often a dynamic, changing, and sometimes threatening situation. [This] is also a way in which men exercise some degree of control, formally and informally, over other men and women.[30]

There is a complex interplay between the gendered expectations embedded in organizations, and the needs and desires brought to the workplace by individual men. This book explores this dialectic for men in predominantly female professions.[31] Their efforts and experiences highlight, and perhaps even exaggerate the ways that gender differences and male domination are reproduced in organizations.

The next chapter describes how expectations about gender became embedded in these occupations. Teaching, nursing, librarianship, and social work were first defined as "women's work" in the nineteenth century. Due to large-scale economic and demographic changes following the U.S. Civil War, women were tapped for jobs that previously employed only men. Cultural beliefs about women's nature and their proper place in society were used to justify women's employment in these areas. Women were among those active in defining these as appropriate occupations for women.

In the twentieth century, concerns about their occupations' low status and pay prompted the leaders in nurs-

ing, teaching, librarianship, and social work to reassess the gendered assumptions about their work. The predominantly female composition of these fields was increasingly seen as a barrier to "professionalization," and concerted efforts were undertaken to recruit more men to solve this problem. The work was gradually redefined again—but this time as appropriate for career-oriented men, who, it was hoped, would flock to these beleaguered occupations and bring with them higher salaries and prestige. These strategies have achieved only limited success, but clearly they enhanced the opportunities available to the few men willing to "cross over"—and they continue to have this effect today.

The book then turns to the current status of men in these occupations. Chapter 3 discusses the reasons men enter these fields and examines the reactions of their friends and families to their decision to do "women's work." Because of the unique circumstances of their recruitment, several men in this study did not view their occupational choices as inconsistent with masculinity, nor did they see themselves as "trailblazers" into nontraditional jobs. The men in my sample are not "anomalies": In many ways they are "typical" men who for various reasons ended up doing "untypical" work.

Chapter 4 then examines their experiences in professional schools, where many men were "tokens" for the first time in their lives. I explore the consequences of being a token when men are the minority group. Since the theory of tokenism is based on case studies of women in men's occupations, I argue that it has only limited applicability to the case of men. Discrimination is not a simple by-product of numbers: The social organization of work tends to benefit certain groups of workers over others, regardless of their proportional representation in an oc-

cupation. Consequently some groups (like women) suffer because of their minority status; other groups (like men) do not.

Chapter 5 looks at how well men are accepted by their colleagues, supervisors, and clients in the workplace, analyzing both the advantages and the disadvantages men encounter because of their gender. This chapter focuses on the occupational structure and workplace culture of these professions, showing how the "glass escalator" enhances men's careers *despite* their individual motivations.

Chapter 6, in contrast, focuses on individual motives. Using a feminist psychoanalytic approach, I explore the psychological conflicts faced by men doing "women's work" and their personal efforts to assert and maintain their masculinity. For the men in these professions, masculinity is contested terrain: The outside world considers them failures as men, while inside their professions they are rewarded because they are men. I examine the ways they negotiate the meanings of their masculinity, and actively constitute and manage their identity as men. Men in these traditionally female professions experience conflicts over the reproduction of masculinity in particularly heightened form, providing an excellent context for examining the psychological issues at stake in the reproduction of gender differences in organizations.

Chapter 7 considers the possibilities for ending occupational segregation and achieving economic equity between men and women. I argue that the policies designed to improve women's economic status in the labor force could have unintended consequences of furthering men's privileged status within the "women's professions." Achieving proportional balance of men and women in these fields could exacerbate gender hierarchy instead of eliminating it. Male privilege will survive workplace in-

tegration—unless radical changes are made *both* in the structural arrangement of workplace organizations *and* in the interests of men that underpin occupational segregation. The experiences of "men who do women's work" indicate just how entrenched these interests are, and how far we have yet to go before men and women achieve true economic equality.

Still a Man's World

Men Who Do "Women's Work"

Christine L. Williams

6

Masculinity in "Feminine" Occupations

Masculinity is an extremely elusive concept (as is femininity for that matter). A new subdiscipline called "men's studies" is fast developing in academia, dedicated to analyzing this peculiar feature of men's identity. Meanwhile, a popular "men's movement" offers seminars, literature, and "wildman" retreats to help men get in touch with their masculinity. But despite this outpouring of interest—perhaps even because of it—masculinity has become an increasingly confusing and obscure notion.

This chapter reviews theories of masculinity, and then explores what it means to the men in nursing, elementary school teaching, librarianship, and social work to be masculine. As we have seen, these men are often confronted with the charge that they are *not* masculine because of the kind of work they do. Reflecting on the reasons for men's underrepresentation in elementary education, a kindergarten teacher said,

> It's just not a traditional man's job, and I think a lot of men think of that. You know, when you go into

college, if you say you're in elementary ed, that's just not a real cool thing to be in. . . . It's definitely not a thing that you would do if you felt a need to have a macho image.

Paradoxically, however, many of the men I interviewed *did* feel "a need to have a macho image." But convincing themselves and others that they are appropriately masculine is not a simple task. Granted the negative stereotypes about them and their occupations, they must actively constitute and manage their identity as men. This chapter explores the various strategies men use to assert and maintain their masculinity.

Precisely because their masculinity is challenged, these men may be more aware than other men of the steps they take to sustain their masculinity, making them an excellent case study to explore the general dynamics of "doing gender."[1] This is a term coined by sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman to describe how beliefs about gender differences are created and sustained in daily, ritualized interactions. By engaging in certain behaviors, and assiduously avoiding others, men in these occupations can convey to their supervisors, clients, and co-workers that they are unlike their female peers, thereby preserving a sense of themselves as masculine. Exactly how these men "do gender" is perhaps more obvious and apparent than how men "do gender" in contexts where masculinity is not contested. In a sense they represent exaggerated cases of gender performance—analytically very similar to transsexuals who feel they must constantly prove to others their "true" gender identity. But, as David Morgan argues, precisely because they are "anomalies," the experiences of these men in nontraditional occupations "can be treated as mini-dramas through which we

can begin to explore the tensions and complexities of gender identities and the gender order."[2]

Thus the focus of this chapter is *how* men in "feminine" occupations reproduce their masculinity. But before beginning this discussion, we must first settle on a definition of masculinity.

The Meaning of Masculinity

The concept of gender as a socially constructed identity is of relatively recent historical origin. While the terms "masculinity" and "femininity" have been in usage for centuries, they generally signified biological characteristics or traits (when applied to people). Being born a man or a woman was believed to have inevitable consequences for how people thought, felt, and behaved. In the more modern formulation, popular only since the 1970s, gender is perceived as socially and culturally mediated and variable: It is the social meaning given to biological differences, internalized by individuals, that constitutes gender identity.[3]

But aside from agreeing that gender is a social construction, and not a biological necessity, there is very little consensus among social scientists about what it means to be masculine or feminine. If biological markers should no longer be used, how do we know that someone is masculine? What does it mean to have a masculine identity?

One of the early efforts to define masculinity focused on the traits or personality characteristics of individuals. Psychologists catalogued traits as "masculine," "feminine," or "neutral," and then asked individuals to gauge how well they matched each trait. Everyone selecting a majority of the masculine traits was defined as mascu-

line. Using these methods, researchers "discovered" that some women have "masculine" personalities, and some men have "feminine" personalities, thus demonstrating the difference between masculinity and anatomical maleness.

This kind of personality testing has been used repeatedly to assess whether men in predominantly female occupations are more "feminine" than "regular" men.[4] A recent example is a study by Michael Galbraith, who administered the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), one of the most popular of the masculinity-femininity scales, to male nurses, elementary school teachers, and engineers to discern which group was more "masculine." The BSRI "measures" masculinity and femininity by asking respondents on a seven-point scale how closely they conform to thirty personality traits, such as "aggressive" (a masculine trait), "yielding" (a feminine trait), and "friendly" (a neutral trait). "Masculine" individuals score high on only the masculine traits (those who score high on both masculine and feminine traits are labeled "androgynous"). Galbraith found that a higher percentage of the engineers scored in the pure masculine range—30.9 percent (versus 23.4 percent of the nurses and 16.7 percent of the teachers). The highest percentage of teachers and nurses were categorized "androgynous," meaning that they scored high on *both* masculine and feminine traits. However, Galbraith pointed out that the nurses and teachers had higher average masculinity scores than the engineers. He concluded that "men in nontraditional work retain traditional components of their masculinity."[5]

This research is useful for discrediting the most egregious stereotypes about men who work in female occupations. Galbraith's study challenges the widespread belief that these men are "anomalies" by showing that male

nurses and teachers are really not that different from male engineers. But several questions are not addressed by this type of research. Most importantly, it does not question why certain attributes are considered masculine, or how and why these stereotypes develop. In fact, this research tends to reify the very gendered categories it seeks to undermine, a problem that Sandra Bem, the inventor of the BSRI, now acknowledges:

> In the early 1970s, I focused almost exclusively on the concept of androgyny (from the Greek terms andro, meaning male, and gyne, meaning female) because that concept seemed to challenge the traditional categories of masculine and feminine as nothing before had ever done. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, I had begun to see that the concept of androgyny inevitably focuses so much more attention on the individual's being both masculine and feminine than on the culture's having created the concepts of masculinity and femininity in the first place that it can legitimately be said to reproduce precisely the gender polarization that it seeks to undercut.[6]

Research using the masculinity-femininity scales confirms that few people measure up to gender stereotypes—which is an important finding—but it does not tell us very much about the reproduction of masculinity in society, or the meaning of masculinity in men's lives.[7]

A second approach that has been used to define masculinity (and femininity) focuses on roles, or patterned sets of behaviors. This approach, which has been the dominant one among U.S. sociologists since the 1950s, maintains that men are socialized to be masculine by their work and family roles. According to sex role theory, men take on characteristics required of them by their jobs

and by their role as father in the family; they are molded by society to conform to expectations embedded in these positions. Men are instrumental, logical, nonemotional, disciplinarians—personality traits required of them to fulfill their roles in society.[8]

Sex role theory is very compelling to sociologists because it emphasizes that society (not the individual) produces masculinity. Individuals are conceived as "tabula rasa," ready to be molded by the demands of the social structure. To change an individual's disposition, one simply has to change the individual's social role.

This perspective could be applied to men's experiences in female occupations. As I argue in chapter 5, many of the men employed in these occupations work in specialties where they are expected to demonstrate traditionally masculine characteristics—as administrators, technical specialists, and even disciplinarians of young children. Those men who attempt to reject these roles nevertheless face myriad pressures to conform, demonstrating that to some extent, men are shaped by their social settings.

But men also participate in the shaping of their roles; they are not entirely passive in the process of producing masculinity. Men in these occupations struggle (often in very creative ways) to carve out a niche for themselves they can label as "masculine." Why men might want to do this is left unexplained by traditional sex role theory.

There are other limitations to role theory besides ignoring individual agency. The theory does not explain why sex roles are divided (except to say that society requires it), nor does it account for the higher value placed on male roles. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, a contemporary proponent of role theory, acknowledges these limitations. She maintains that gender role distinctions are invidious and "deceptive" and marshals considerable evidence to

show that men's roles are more highly regarded than women's, yet she dismisses any attempt to explain the causes of gender differentiation and male privilege: "How does this happen?" she asks. "We shall never know."[9]

Other perspectives are better equipped than role theory to address these questions. In particular, I have found feminist psychoanalytic theory a useful framework for explaining both gender differentiation and female subordination. Psychoanalytic theory is a highly contested perspective in sociology for a variety of reasons, but combined with a feminist analysis of men's power and advantage in society, I believe it can illuminate the meaning of masculinity for men in female occupations.

Psychoanalytic theorists never exactly specify the contents of masculinity, except to argue that males typically define masculinity negatively, as whatever is not feminine. This definition stems from the experience of being "mothered" as a child: Most children in western societies are reared almost exclusively by women (usually their mothers), especially during the earliest years of life, resulting in a "feminine identification." This means that the child first develops a sense of his or her selfhood in a close, one-on-one relationship with the mother, and qualities possessed by the mother are internalized by the infant to form the beginnings of the child's personality. If adult women exhibit emotional expressiveness and nurturance in their relationships with their newborns, these qualities will form the core of the infant's identity.[10]

Males and females follow similar patterns of identity and personality formation until around age three. At that age, boys are typically encouraged (often by their fathers) to replace their identification with their mothers in favor of a "masculine" identification. This is usually a traumatic experience for the boy because, essentially, he is required

to "give up" the attachment that means the most to him, and he is threatened (usually by the father) if he refuses. Furthermore, achieving a masculine identity is problematic since adult men are typically absent during most of the young child's waking hours. They are simply not as available as mothers (and other adult women) for the kind of intimate bonding and interaction that produces in boys their original feminine identification. The only positive associations with masculinity sons typically learn from their "absent" fathers are work and heterosexuality—reflecting the traditional role of fathers in nuclear families. But these roles are very abstract to most children; their relationships with their fathers (or other adult men, for that matter) lack the concreteness and intimacy of their relationships with their mothers (and adult women in general). Boys therefore come to define masculinity negatively, as whatever is not feminine. They will often invent "masculinity rituals" to fill out the shape and contents of their new identities, typically condemning anything associated with femininity as inferior in the process. Psychoanalytic theorists view this disparagement of femininity as a kind of compensation for the boys' loss of their original, fulfilling attachment to and identification with their mothers.[11]

The greater power of the father forms another incentive for the boy's separation from his mother and disparagement of femininity. This power is both real and symbolic: real because men often control the economic resources and major decision making that goes on in the family; and symbolic insofar as the father represents the "phallus," the privileged position in language and other forms of cultural discourse.[12] Thus the boy is encouraged to renounce his feminine identification in order to share in the power and the superior cultural value attached to

the "phallus." Therefore, to be masculine to him usually means to be *different from* and *better than* women. Men raised in a traditional nuclear family setting typically (although by no means always) unconsciously strive to achieve this gender differentiation.[13]

Psychoanalytic theory, especially in its feminist versions, provides a far superior definition of masculinity than the major alternative approaches in sociology. This perspective stresses that gender is a process of differentiation, not two static and inflexible sets of character traits or social roles. According to psychoanalytic theory, the content of masculinity is not given; it is constantly shifting and changing because it is always defined in opposition to women and femininity (which itself is a fluid concept). Furthermore, psychoanalytic theory is better equipped than the alternatives to explain variation in the subjective experience of masculinity. The theory explicitly recognizes that not all men will experience the same needs and desires to differentiate themselves from women. Group differences in the definition of masculinity are even likely: For example, those raised in families where men participate in child rearing will probably not define masculinity as the opposite of nurturing and emotional expressiveness.[14]

Moreover, psychoanalytic theory recognizes that becoming masculine or feminine usually entails conflict and ambivalence, unlike the alternative theories which tend to view men and women as acquiescent and untroubled by their gender socialization. Psychoanalytic theorists, following Freud, define masculinity as a psychic construction achieved at considerable and ongoing cost to the individual. Gender identity is never acquired in a straightforward way: Fantasy, projection, and repression distort experience and threaten to derail the process at

any point. Indeed, childhood traumas are rarely ever resolved; for many men, masculinity is an ongoing struggle that is never completely "accomplished."

Finally, the definition of masculinity offered by psychoanalytic theory acknowledges that many men desire to dominate women. Trait theory and sex role theory either do not acknowledge or do not explain the antagonism toward women that is so prevalent in men. In contrast, Freud and other psychoanalytic theorists contend that masculinity "normally" entails a "triumphant contempt" for women.[15] As Lynne Segal has argued, this is one of the few theories that can explain "the intensities of men's paranoia over masculinity, their endemic violence towards women, and the cultural fear and hatred of women."[16]

But there are limitations to the psychoanalytic approach. The theory does not explain why men are able to force their psychological concerns on others. That is, the theory does not tell us why men's preoccupations with difference and subordination prevail in our culture, nor how they come to be embedded in our social institutions. Also missing from psychoanalytic theory is an explanation of why masculinity assumes particular historical forms. While it does help to explain variation in the subjective experience of gender identity, it does not account for the ascendence of specific configurations of masculinity and femininity in particular social contexts.[17]

To address these problems in psychoanalytic theory, R. W. Connell developed a concept he calls "hegemonic masculinity," the socially dominant form of masculinity in any given historical period. Qualities currently associated with hegemonic masculinity include physical strength and bravado, exclusive heterosexuality, stoicism, authority, and independence. This ideal is "embed-

ded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth."[18] Connell emphasizes that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily represent what "real" men are; in fact, movie stars are typically the only ones who fully embody the ideal:

> The public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers of men are motivated to support. The notion of "hegemony" generally implies a large measure of consent. Few men are Bogarts or Stallones, many collaborate in sustaining those images.[19]

The most powerful groups in society control cultural production so that the most visible and pervasive forms and images of masculinity reaffirm their privilege. For the most part, these groups consist of wealthy white men, but to be successful, the forms they endorse must appeal to a wide range of men, including those who lack institutional power. As Susan Bordo points out, many men who are denied access to power (due to race, class, sexual orientation, or some other social reason), often accept and identify with the position and privileges associated with being male in a patriarchal culture.[20] Masculinity, then, is a cultural ideal that many men support, but do not necessarily embody.

According to Connell, the forms of masculinity change historically, depending on the dominant group's perception of their current material and emotional interests. In eighteenth century colonial America, for example, hegemonic masculinity stressed social usefulness, piety, and religious submission, in stark contrast to the current formulation of what it means to "be a man."[21] Thus, to para-

phrase Marx, the dominant ideas about gender in any historical period are the ideas of the dominant gender—or at least those of the most powerful members of the dominant gender.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity acknowledges that there are competing definitions of masculinity. Indeed, the notion of hegemony always implies resistance. Connell argues that "alternative masculinities" coexist and directly compete with the dominant hegemonic forms. For example, during the 1960s, the dominant form of masculinity, represented by the "mature" male breadwinner with a steady job and a house in the suburbs, was challenged by "alternative" forms endorsed by the Beat subculture and later the hippie movement.[22] Currently, the ideal is contested by some groups of African-American men and gay men, who (for different reasons) do not conform to the breadwinner image still at the heart of hegemonic masculinity.[23] While individual men in these groups define themselves as "masculine," they may associate widely different qualities with this term. In fact, various meanings of masculinity always compete for preeminence. The version that ultimately achieves hegemonic status represents the interests of the most powerful members of our society, but its preeminence is always contested.

Thus, masculinity is an ideal that varies historically and culturally as different groups struggle over its meaning. However, all forms of masculinity have one characteristic in common: the imperative of being different from and superior to femininity. In other words, masculinity is always defined in opposition to femininity, regardless of the particular forms it takes.

This feature of masculinity can be detected cross-culturally in the division of labor by gender. Using the image of the double helix, Margaret Higonnet and Patrice

Higonnet describe a consistent pattern in men's and women's work roles:

> The female strand on the helix is opposed to the male strand, and position on the female strand is subordinate to position on the male strand. The image of the double helix allows us to see that, although the roles of men and women vary greatly from culture to culture, their relationship is in some sense constant. If men gather and women fish, gathering will be thought more important than fishing; in another society where men fish and women gather, fishing will be more prestigious. The actual nature of the social activity is not as critical as the cultural perception of its relative value in a gender-linked structure of subordination.[24]

Regardless of its content—which varies historically and culturally—men's work is generally considered more powerful and prestigious than women's work.

Men typically support the gendered division of labor because they derive economic and social status from it. Moreover, supporting this division may satisfy the need many men currently feel to differentiate from and subordinate women and thus resolve the psychological conflicts identified by psychoanalytic theory.

In my view, this psychoanalytic theory of gender identity, combined with attention to the social and political context of male power, offers the most complete and compelling definition of masculinity available. According to psychoanalytic theory, the process of gender identity formation creates in men the desire to differentiate from and define themselves as superior to women. However, the particular forms of this desire in any historical and cultural setting depends on the interests of the most powerful members of the society, whose values and beliefs

are always contested by other groups. The meaning of masculinity is constantly changing as a result of those struggles for dominance. But a consistent feature of all hegemonic forms is that masculinity is always defined as *different from* and *better than* women and femininity. Many men (but certainly not all men) support these forms for economic, social, *and* psychological reasons.

Feminist psychoanalytic theory, informed by Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, is a very useful tool for analyzing men's experiences in female occupations. These men are perceived as a threat to male differentiation and dominance, because they seem to upset the gendered division of labor (a key component of men's institutionalized power in society). For that reason, they are often represented as "anomalies" in popular culture and are accused of being effeminate and homosexual. Some of the men who work in these occupations may actually see themselves this way: They willingly embrace what Connell has called "alternative masculinities" that threaten the hegemonic form of masculinity.

But for many others, this accusation that they are not masculine makes no sense. They support and identify with hegemonic masculinity. But because their masculinity is not automatically vindicated through their jobs (as it may be for men who work in more traditional lines of work), they engage in various strategies to demarcate and distinguish themselves from their female colleagues. Their interests in doing so are in part economic and social—men are rewarded by the "glass escalator" for proving themselves masculine. But there is an irrational element to men's struggle to assert their difference and superiority, which may stem from the unconscious processes described by psychoanalytic theorists. At any rate, their efforts at "doing gender" often serve to reproduce

the dominant social forms of masculinity, thereby sustaining men's gender privileges within these occupations.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Female Occupations

Waiting for a scheduled interview with a librarian, I had a chance to peruse the various clippings and announcements posted on his office door. In the center was a cartoon drawing of an enormous, brutish, muscular man labeled "Conan the Librarian" (a takeoff on "Conan the Barbarian"). There was to be little doubt that the man behind the door was masculine.

Men use several different strategies to "maintain" hegemonic masculinity in female occupations. Men distinguish themselves from women in the workplace by segregating themselves into certain male-identified specialties, emphasizing the masculine elements of the job, pursuing higher administrative positions, and disassociating from their work altogether. Each of these strategies enables men to maintain a sense of themselves as different from and better than women—thus contributing to the gender system that divides men from women in a way that privileges men.

Sex Segregation

Earlier I described the substantial segregation of men and women within these four professions. Certain specialties contain higher percentages of men than others. For example, it is more common to find male nurses in hospital emergency rooms and psychiatric wards than in obstetrical wards. Men are more likely to teach in the higher grades in elementary schools, whereas 98 percent of kindergarten teachers are women. School librarian-

ship is also an overwhelmingly female specialty (over 95 percent female), but men make up over a third of all academic librarians. And caseworkers in social-work agencies are mostly women, while administrators and managers in those agencies are mostly men.[25]

Several of the men I interviewed claimed that they entered their particular specialties precisely because they contained more men. For example, one man left his job as a school social worker to work in a methadone drug treatment program because "I think there was some macho shit there [in myself], to tell you the truth, because I remember feeling a little uncomfortable there . . . ; it didn't feel right to me." Another social worker told me, "I think one of the reasons personally for me that I moved to corrections—and I think it was real unconscious—was the conflict [over masculinity]. I think corrections . . . is a little more macho than like if I worked in a child guidance clinic like I used to." For both of these men, specializing in "male-identified" areas helped them resolve inner conflicts about masculinity caused by being male in a predominantly female occupation.

The social workers I interviewed seemed much more self-consciously aware of specialization as a strategy for maintaining masculinity than members of the other professional groups (probably as a result of their professional training). Other men in the study were not quite so articulate in describing their psychological needs to differentiate from women, but they often made it clear during the course of the interviews that their specialties were chosen in part because they felt they were more appropriate for men. For instance, a psychiatric nurse chose his specialty "because psych is pretty easy for me. That's what I scored the highest in on the boards. And there's a lot more males, I think, in psych than on the floors. . . ."

And this sixth grade teacher explained his preference for teaching the upper grades:

> I felt I had a little more of an affinity for that age level. I could go down to fifth, but below fifth, they're just a little too cutesy, a little too young, and I get a little tired of explaining things seven or eight times. . . . I did [substitute teaching in] second grade three different times, and after that I said, "No more primaries." I think it was like that movie with Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Kindergarten Cop:* You think you have everything under control and things just fall apart. . . . I think at that age, the kids relate more effectively to a woman, you know, the mother figure. Cause that's more of a significant person in their lives at that age. That's the way I see it. And I think, I assume that that's why you don't see so many men teaching those grades.

It is significant that this teacher identifies with Arnold Schwarzenegger, an emblem of masculinity in our culture. This is how hegemonic masculinity works: It is not necessarily what men are, but a symbolic form that men are motivated to support. Arnold Schwarzenegger is a physically strong, stoic, and unambiguously heterosexual movie star. By identifying with him and his inability to control a kindergarten class, this teacher establishes a sense of himself as powerful and in control since he teaches the *sixth* grade—even though this is also a traditionally female occupation.

As argued in chapter 5, stratification within these professions is due in part to the "glass escalator": Men are channeled into specialties considered more legitimate for men, and many of them are complicit with this process. Internal stratification is due to a combination of organizational pressures and individual motives. This point was

nicely summarized in an interview with a female social worker. When asked if her agency assigned men and women to different jobs, she quipped, "They'd never give some big buck a juvenile job unless he wants it. And if he wants it, he wouldn't say it anyways."

Emphasizing the Masculine

Specializing in male-identified areas is perhaps the most obvious way that men can differentiate themselves from women. However, even those who work in the more "traditional" female specialties can distinguish the work they do from "women's work" by highlighting the masculine aspects of their specialties.[26] School and public librarians, for example, can identify with automating the library catalogue and other computer work that they do. One public librarian specializing in cataloging believes that advanced technology was the key to attracting him as well as other men to the profession:

> After automation became part of the profession, more and more men are coming. I think that men are looking more for prestigious careers, and automation has given that to the profession. Not just organizing books, but applying technology in the process.

Another approach to emphasizing the masculine is to focus on the prestige of one's workplace. A California teacher who described his institution as "the top flight elementary school in the country" said,

> It makes you feel good about your job. It makes you, as a male, feel like it's okay to be a teacher, because this is a highly prestigious institution in the world of private schools.

Other men focused on the power and authority of their particular job specialties. Describing a previous job in Children's Protective Services (a heavily female specialty), this Arizona social worker said,

> Child welfare is an area in social work where you balance a helping role with a social control role. Going out to people's homes, I almost wore two hats: a social worker and an authority figure, someone with some enforcement power. . . . I carried a certain amount of professional and legal authority with me. . . . I literally had the authority to take people's kids out of their homes.

In addition, a few men emphasized the physical aspects of their work. A former teacher at a school for autistic children explained that men were needed for "restraining" the children, some of whom were "very, very violent." And a public librarian specializing in children's collections described a distinctive reading style he observed among the few male storytellers in town:

> I guess you could say, maybe in some sense, we're real physical in our storytimes, you know, the way we interact with the kids. I don't mean . . . I mean, these days, you have to be very careful touching children, of course. . . . I don't mean real touchy-feely, but I mean . . . you just get a real physical sense of the story.

Thus, men can identify with the technical or physical aspects of their jobs, or emphasize the special prestige or power that accrue to them because of their specific institutions. In all of these ways, men can highlight the components of their jobs that are consistent with hegemonic masculinity, thus maintaining a sense of themselves as

"masculine" even though they work in nontraditional occupations.

This particular strategy of "emphasizing the masculine" is used when dealing with individuals outside the workplace. Some men told me that in certain contexts they rename their work to give it a more masculine, and hence more legitimate, connotation. For example, one social worker in private practice calls himself a "psychotherapist." A teacher tells those he meets at parties that he is "in education." A nurse introduces himself to new patients as "a former Vietnam combat nurse."[27] And a librarian told me that he is always selective about the contexts in which he reveals his occupation:

> At a "redneck" bar, I wouldn't sit down and drink a couple of beers and announce to the guy next to me with his gimme cap, "Hello, I'm a school librarian." He wouldn't care and he wouldn't be able to even think about a job like that. So it really depends on the audience. But the people I socialize with are people who are extremely understanding.

For these men, "naming" the occupation to the "wrong" audience could be threatening, so they rename their work, or describe it to "outsiders" in more masculine, and hence, more acceptable language.

The renaming of work is a common strategy in the labor force. In Rosemary Pringle's study of secretaries, she found that when men were employed to do this sort of work, they were usually called by some other name, such as "administrative assistant," "information officer," or "computer operator."[28] Both the bosses and the male workers colluded in this renaming, obscuring the actual similarity in men's and women's work. This practice of renaming no doubt exaggerates the degree of segregation

in certain occupations, but it effectively maintains the perception that men and women have totally different workplace functions and abilities.[29]

This strategy of "emphasizing the masculine" also is employed by some men in their dealings with their female colleagues at work. Some men occasionally set themselves apart from women by refusing to participate in certain "feminine" activities. One teacher, for example, described how the only male teacher she worked with was very selective about his participation in school functions:

> Roland does fix all the projectors and he runs around . . . and sets up science kits and stuff, but he's volunteered for that. There are other things that he claims he can't do as well. . . . He never wants to be on a social committee, for example, or get plants when someone's ill, or collect for cards, for whatever reasons. Even picking up the staff room—he jokes that he has to have a cleaning lady at his house so he certainly doesn't want to be on the cleanup detail at school. So there are things that he doesn't do. But he makes up in other ways, because that's what he's gifted in and good at.

[CW: And the teachers feel fine about that?]

Oh, yeah.

In another example, a social worker who enjoyed socializing with his female colleagues (they even threw him a wedding shower) drew the line at bringing a covered dish to the office "pot luck" parties:

> I told them I wasn't making any. We have pot lucks for our Christmas party, and picnics for the [foster] children. But I informed them that now that I'm married, I had no intention of changing that either.

I bring potato chips or Kool-Aid, something that's very easy and takes no work. The rest of the women make something.

These are subtle ways that men can informally set themselves apart from their female colleagues. By picking and choosing among various informal activities in the workplace, men can carve a "masculine" niche for themselves among their female peers.

A more extreme type of this differentiation is the formation of groups that exclude women. Sometimes this segregation is informal, and conducted in a spirit of joking and camaraderie, as in the case of this public library:

[CW: How would you describe relations between the male and female staff in your department?]

Well, it's hard to say. I don't think it really comes up as a male-female thing. There's a gang of people, and you're one of the gang. We joke once in a while when the situation [arises] when all four of us on the [reference] desk are all male or female. We say, "Well, the macho crew is on tonight. You know, we're going to sit out there in our t-shirts and spit on the floor." It's just in joking. . . .

[CW: So there's not a sense of "we versus they"?]

No. It may break down that way, I guess, when we come up here [to the staff lounge] and eat dinner. You might find females congregate on one table, and talk about things they'll typically talk about, and males may do the same thing. But I think when we're in our back workroom, we talk about whatever library issues, or personal things. . . . I don't see it as segregation.

But there were a few instances of men segregating themselves in a more formal and intentional manner. This

teacher described the formation of a "men's club" at his school:

There are some men teachers who I feel are very insecure. One time a teacher formed a "men's club," a male teacher. It was to do "manly" kinds of things. [laughs]

[CW: Like to change tires or something? (laughs)]

No, it was to get together and preserve the idea that we are men in this profession and there are a lot of women here, and let's just get together and have a drink, or have breakfast. It was sort of tongue-in-cheek in a lot of ways. But sometimes it wasn't. And I would not be a member of the club. I refused to be a member of the club, for that reason, that weirdness. It's hard to articulate it. . . . Some of the things I could joke and go along with, but other things I could not. . . .

This kindergarten teacher felt ambivalent about the "men's club": On the one hand, he felt it important to recognize that men are a numerical minority within the teaching profession, and that they have special interests and concerns as men (such as dealing with the suspicion that they are pedophiles). But he was uncomfortable with the "weirdness" in this club, which he linked to the organizer's insecurity about his masculinity. Those who have studied all-male organizations have also identified a fundamental insecurity about masculinity as their basis.[30] The exclusion of women from "clubs" is usually an attempt to distinguish men from women and establish men's dominance over women. Anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday, who has studied all-male groups in several societies, writes,

Cross-cultural research demonstrates that whenever men build and give allegiance to a mystical, enduring, all-male social group, the disparagement of women is, invariably, an important ingredient of the mystical bond, and sexual aggression the means by which the bond is renewed.[31]

Sanday argues that because we live in a sexist society, all-male groups inevitably perpetuate male differentiation and domination over women—the probable source of the "weirdness" identified by this teacher.

The "men's club" is perhaps an extreme example of men's attempts to differentiate from women. But it is an example of a common strategy to "emphasize the masculine" employed by men in the "women's professions." This general strategy also includes men focusing on certain technical or prestigious elements of their jobs, renaming their work to outsiders, and segregating themselves from their female colleagues. Each of these activities undermines any challenge to hegemonic masculinity represented by men who work in predominantly female jobs.

Administration and Higher Educational Credentials

A third distancing strategy is to define the present occupation as a way station for future jobs that are more lucrative, prestigious, or challenging (and thus more legitimate for men). Men who use this strategy do not identify with their current jobs, but see them as laying the groundwork for future jobs. For instance, a teacher told me that he chose to start his career in elementary school to "learn the basics of human nature," and then move up to junior high, and ultimately high school (where there is a much larger proportion of men). Others saw their professions

as "springboards" to other careers. An Arizona nurse, for example, who saw "nursing as a backup," hoped in the future to work in the biomedical engineering profession.

Aspiring to the top rungs of the profession was an especially common distancing strategy. Men described future plans to become "director of a branch library" (children's librarian), "director of a home for the aged" (floor nurse), or a "principal of a school" (fourth grade teacher). These areas were all explicitly defined as more appropriate for men, and they are also viewed as more prestigious and powerful than rank-and-file jobs.

As is the case in most professions, advancement to these top positions often requires higher educational preparation beyond the entry-level credential. Men are more likely than women to seek postgraduate degrees in these occupations. As table 5 indicates, the higher the educational credential, the higher the proportion of men earning the degree. Indeed, men received nearly half of the doctorates awarded in education and library science in 1988.

This discrepancy in the representation of men and women in postcredential degree programs is due to a number of factors. First, men are often encouraged to "aim high" by mentors simply because they are men (see chapter 5). A Massachusetts nurse was told by his first clinical instructor in his associate degree (ADN) program,

"You've got to go on. You *have* to go on . . . past the ADN," she said. "You have to; you are a man." She said, "You have to get more men into the profession; we need men."

Thus, men may receive more encouragement than women to reach the top of their professions.

A second reason for men's overrepresentation among

Table 5
Number of Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral
Degrees Conferred, and Percentage Received by Men,
by Field of Study, 1987–1988

Field of Study	Bachelor's		Master's		Doctoral	
	Total	% Men	Total	% Men	Total	% Men
Nursing	31,567	5.1	6,400	7.4	283	9.5
Education	91,013	23.1	77,704	24.9	6,544	45.0
Library Science	123	13.8	3,713	21.3	46	47.8
Social Work	8,471	13.8	9,344	18.6	226	39.4

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 1990 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991), table 224, pp. 236–43.

higher degree recipients and administrative officeholders involves men's and women's different family obligations. Women often shoulder the primary responsibility for household care, even when they are employed full-time. This frees up married men to dedicate themselves more exclusively to pursuing higher educational credentials and higher administrative positions.[32] I interviewed three men whose spouses were in the same profession as they, and each had a higher degree than his wife. A doctoral student in library science, who met his wife in the master's degree program, explained why he pursued an advanced degree and she did not:

I realized that I have the responsibility to become the provider at home. . . . . She thought that if she were comfortable, if she found a nice [work] environment, she didn't need to go further [with her education]. She didn't have to push harder. . . . And during the time we were in college, the family was

growing. So the demand for her to stay at home and care for the kids was growing, too.

Overall, women are far more likely than men to drop out of the labor force. Nearly half of all women in the work force drop out for at least one six-month period, compared to 13 percent of all men.[33] And when women do drop out, it is usually for family reasons: In 1990, 62 percent of the women who had left the labor force for an extended period claimed that they were "keeping house"; only 3 percent of the men who dropped out gave the same reason.[34]

The fact that women drop out of the labor force to care for their children is frequently cited as the main reason why men predominate in the upper echelons of these professions. For instance, the nursing director of a hospital emergency room (ER) explained why men are overrepresented in the top positions:

The men sometimes tend to be a little more stable than the women. A lot of the men who work in the ER have really been here for quite a while. They're married. Most have kids. But when it's time to have a baby, they're not the ones who take off. It's the same problem, it's not a lot different than a lot of other professions. . . . All the men [nurses] we've got here who are married to nurses and have children, without exception, it's been their wives that have taken the flex options and the men have stayed working forty hours.

Professions tend to reward those who follow a specific pattern of career development: early training, continuous employment, technical as opposed to interpersonal skill acquisition, few competing family responsibilities. Men conform more easily to this pattern in part because of the

widespread cultural expectation that men should prioritize their career interests over their family roles. As Catharine MacKinnon has argued, professional standards are not "gender neutral," but rather, "[men's] socially designed biographies define workplace expectations and successful career patterns."[35] Of course, this doesn't mean that women are incapable of following this "male" career pattern by, for example, forgoing marriage and family to escape competing obligations. But women are disadvantaged as a group because the criteria for success and promotion even in these predominantly female occupations favor the male model of labor force participation.

Thus, men have more opportunities and receive more encouragement than women to seek the top positions in these occupations. But aside from these two structural reasons, men often have personal motives, linked to their desire to be masculine, to strive for the top. Achieving success is a way they can maintain their masculinity in a female occupation. For example, a social worker employed in the mental health services department of a large urban area, reflected on his move into administration:

> The more I think about it, through our discussion, I'm sure that's a large part of why I wound up in administration. It's okay for a man to do the administration. In fact, I don't know if I fully answered a question that you asked a little while ago about how did being male contribute to my advancing in the field. I was saying it wasn't because I got any special favoritism as a man, but . . . I think . . . because I'm a man, I felt a need to get into this kind of position. I may have worked harder toward it, may have competed harder for it, than most women would do, even women who think about doing administrative work.

For many men, pursuing administrative positions is a way of "distancing" themselves from women, carving a

masculine niche for themselves, and thus establishing more legitimacy for their presence in these female occupations.

Part of what motivates this particular strategy for maintaining masculinity is competition with other men. A clinical social worker at a university hospital described why he decided to pursue a doctorate:

> First of all, even though most of the social workers there were women, most of the people [at the hospital where he worked] were men, especially the psychiatrists and psychologists. . . . Most of my friends were . . . male . . . who were psychology or psychiatry interns or residents. . . . And I think it just got to me, or motivated me, or a sense of competition, or something, but seeing each new cohort move on to getting their degree and moving on to something bigger and better, I just felt that I ought to do the same. . . . I decided to apply either to law school or for a doctorate in social work or psychology.

Those men I interviewed who worked alongside other professional men with better paid and more prestigious credentials felt an enormous amount of pressure to advance their own education. A former LVN who was taken under the wing of a prominent research physician explained why he was motivated to eventually pursue a master's degree in nursing:

> Because I was always working with people with Ph.D.'s, with M.D.'s, or with RN behind their name—BSN, MSN [Bachelor's and Master's of Science in Nursing]—it really served as a catalyst. That was it, I had to get back to school.

This nurse's experience illustrates the combination of organizational pressures and individual desires motivating

many men in these professions. His pursuit of higher degrees was motivated in part by the unusual opportunity he was given to publish and do research as an LVN, and in part by his personal desire to make himself an equal to the other men at work. Greater opportunities for men, combined with their psychological desire to identify with the higher-status males (and disassociate from women) encourage them to strive for advancement instead of remaining, as another director of social work services put it, "just a social worker."

Of course, women also pursue advanced degrees and careers in administration. But the women I interviewed did not pursue advanced degrees as a distancing strategy. This emphasis on competing for prestige was missing from their accounts of their motivations. Indeed, in one case, a respondent entered a doctoral program because she thought that college teaching would be more accommodating to her family obligations:

> If I look back, I think that really the most satisfying times in my career was when I had my master's degree and I supervised in child welfare. . . . I think I saw coming back to get my Ph.D. as a way to teach at the university level and have a different, more flexible schedule when I was raising my child. I really kind of looked at it as the means to have a certain kind of lifestyle.

It is not the case that women in these professions lack ambition, or that they "fear success."[36] Rather, my interviews suggest that many men in these professions are "hyperambitious" in part because of their psychological need to distance themselves from the work of women. Pursuing higher degrees and administrative positions are strategies they use to reproduce masculinity in female occupations.

Disassociation

The final distancing strategy used by the men in this study was disassociation from their work. Some men feel little or no connection to their jobs: They either fell into their professions with little forethought or planning, or they became gravely disaffected by their work once they began their careers.[37] For example, a public librarian explained why he chose his profession:

> I sort of thought that it wouldn't be too stressful, it wouldn't be too hard. You could go anywhere in the country you wanted to and get a job. To a small town or something, which certainly has an appeal. Since there's a lot of women, you could do things like take a year off and come back, and people wouldn't look at your résumé and say, "What is that? What is this year off?" And you wouldn't be required to climb a career ladder.

This man described himself as entirely lacking in ambition and enthusiasm for the librarianship profession, and mocked others who took their jobs more seriously.

Similarly, a teacher told me that he got his teaching certificate in college because "it was always something I figured I could fall back on. Or if I moved, I could always get a teaching position if something else didn't work out." Currently he is working on a second degree to become an exercise physiologist, and he plans to continue teaching "only as long as it takes me to get out of there."

Part of this disassociation strategy is to condemn or deride others who are in the profession—particularly other men. A public librarian described his male co-workers as "a bit old ladyish because they've worked in reference a long time. I don't know if that's because of their personality or working in a job so many years. Just being

sort of nervous." He explained that he has remained in the same position for nineteen years only because he loves living in Cambridge—not because of his job. And a social worker who periodically leaves his profession to pursue other interests (including a yearlong stint as a card dealer in Atlantic City), described his male colleagues in less-than-glowing terms:

> I grew up in the world of work, business, the bottom line. There is not that kind of accountability in social work. My stereotype of men coming into social work is maybe this is easier, they don't want to face the real world where you're going to be held accountable.

By condemning the profession—and the other men in it—men can distance themselves from their work, and preserve a sense of themselves as different and better than those employed in these professions.

Sometimes this disassociation strategy is directed toward gay men in these professions. Some straight men deride their gay colleagues, blaming them for the poor status of their work. In an interview study of male nurses by Joel Heikes, several men expressed extremely homophobic attitudes.[38] I did not find ample evidence of homophobia in my interviews, perhaps because men are less comfortable expressing anti-gay sentiments to a woman interviewer. However, several of the men I interviewed did make it perfectly clear that they were straight, apparently to distinguish themselves from their gay colleagues (and the gay stereotype about men who work in these professions). Since heterosexuality is a key component of hegemonic masculinity, this disassociation strategy allows men to maintain a sense of themselves as

appropriately masculine even though they work in predominantly female jobs.

Thus, men can use several strategies to maintain their masculinity in these female occupations: They can differentiate themselves from women by specializing in certain male-identified areas, by emphasizing masculine components of their jobs, by aspiring to higher administrative positions, and by disassociating from their professions altogether. Each of these strategies entails establishing difference from and superiority over women. Thus, paradoxically, men in nontraditional occupations can and do actually support hegemonic masculinity, and end up posing little threat to the social organization of gender.

Alternative Masculinities

A few of the men in this study do not support hegemonic masculinity. These men reject the dominant society's expectations of what men should be, and they view their careers in nontraditional professions as a manifestation of their "alternative" perspectives. They articulate what Connell calls "alternative masculinities"; that is, their ideas about manhood conflict with the hegemonic ideas that men should be powerful, stoic, economically successful, and heterosexual.

Some of the gay men I interviewed were among those rejecting hegemonic masculinity.[39] For example, a California social worker told me that, as a gay man, his "masculinity and identity are in no way tied in with my having to be in a male-oriented job." In fact, he believed that the social work profession attracted him in part because it could accommodate the perspectives of marginal individuals who were "outsiders" to the dominant society's norms and values. He said,

I spent my whole life working on understanding differences because of my own. And therefore I think I have both been gravitated toward [social work] and have perhaps a capacity to deal with that. . . . I think the people who don't have to deal with differences, whatever that is, end up being perhaps in more stereotypical kinds of roles, be it in a marriage or be it a profession.

Although this respondent did identify certain stereotypically masculine traits within himself (such as competitiveness), he viewed his career choice as a conscious—and to some extent unconscious—rejection of socially sanctioned masculinity.

A few of the heterosexual men I interviewed also considered their occupational choice a rejection of socially prescribed masculinity. A California librarian who described himself as "a hippie artist in San Francisco" before entering the profession, rejected the stereotypical roles of men and women:

I knew the pay [in librarianship] was low. And I didn't give a damn about stuff like that. That's the legacy of the sixties, not a legacy of me being a man or a woman, or anything else. People of my particular generation and outlook were led to believe that satisfying work was what counted. If you were true to yourself, and found satisfying work, all the other things would follow along.

In his case, he does not think of himself as a librarian to this day. In his mind, "I was an artist first. I still am an artist first." Librarianship pays his salary to support his "true" vocation, which he identifies with the artist counterculture, and the rejection of the traditional male breadwinner role.

Very few men in my sample viewed themselves as "gender renegades," however, and those who did often expressed considerable ambivalence. For instance, one Massachusetts teacher claimed that entering elementary education inspired in him "a lot of feelings about being male in a nontraditional role that made me feel good about my job, made me feel that I was a bit of a rebel, that I was breaking the mold. . . . I just felt good about being different." Yet, since entering the profession, he has faced increasing pressure to enter administration, in part because of his own desire to live up to the male provider role in his family. Near the end of the interview he told me,

The rebel side of me still wants to ignore all the rules about success. But, hey, it's hard. I've got a brother-in-law who's going to be earning a six-figure salary soon, and that's my wife's sister who's going to be living in the big, white home in the suburbs, vacationing all over the world. And we're going to be looking forward to our trip to the beach in August. That's hard. It's hard for me. It's not necessarily hard for my wife, but it's really hard for me. . . . When I compare myself to other men in my age cohort now, it's a pretty . . . devastating picture.

Indeed, many of the men in these "nontraditional" occupations described inexorable pressures to conform to hegemonic masculine norms. As I indicated in chapter 5, some of this pressure emanates from the structures of the occupations which encourage men to succeed despite their intentions. But men also experience internal psychological pressures to conform, which are at least as daunting as the "glass escalator."

Conclusion

Men working in traditionally female occupations symbolize a challenge to—if not an outright rejection of—masculinity. Picture a male nurse, librarian, elementary school teacher, or social worker. The image that comes to mind is probably not a hypermasculine Rambo-type of man, but a softer, more effeminate man.

Some of the men in these occupations do consider themselves "gender renegades" who reject society's proscriptions about how men ought to behave. But most of the men in this study work very hard to differentiate themselves from women and femininity. Even men who appear to be living embodiments of a gender revolution often insist that men and women are completely different. For instance, a nursing professor who told me his "nurturing and caring values were higher than most people's"—he devotes his summers to working as a regular floor nurse to hone his caring skills—nevertheless firmly believes that men are more rational than women, and men are more committed than women to career advancement. He said, "The sexes do think differently. There is a genetic component." The belief in dichotomous gender differences can survive occupational integration.

Men who work in nursing, teaching, librarianship, and social work have a lot at stake in maintaining their masculinity. The economic and status advantages men receive in these occupations may be contingent on successfully presenting an image of themselves as both different from and better than women. And for many men, establishing a subjective sense of their masculine identity requires that they distinguish themselves from women.

For the men in these occupations, convincing themselves and others that they are appropriately masculine

is an uphill battle because of the stereotypes that surround men who do "women's work." Men in more traditional "male" occupations probably face a less formidable struggle to demonstrate that they are masculine. Occupational segregation historically has been a guaranteed means used by men to maintain their masculinity. This has been one of the reasons why men have been very reluctant to allow women into their occupations: The prospect of job integration threatens men because it challenges their automatic claims to privilege that they have been socialized to desire, and which many expect as their birthright. Indeed, some social commentators claim that there is a contemporary "crisis of masculinity" due to the large-scale entry of women into the labor force.[40] The enormous growth in popularity of the mythopoetic "men's movement" as spearheaded by Robert Bly attests to many men's desperate search for new ways to distinguish themselves from women. Their desire to "get in touch" with their masculinity probably stems from feeling increasingly undifferentiated from women. The mythopoetic "men's movement" reassures men (with ready-made, male-only rituals) that they can still be "men" in this integrated (and, some fear, female-dominated) society.[41]

The men in these female occupations may be in the vanguard of looking for ways to be "men" in integrated workplaces. Their strategies for doing this vary, but each enables them to maintain an image of themselves as different from women and superior to them. Ironically, they support "hegemonic masculinity" in spite of their nontraditional roles.