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Print Date: July 15, 2011

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Journal Title: Journal of applied social psychology.

Vol: 16 **No:** 9, 1986

Pages: 757- *770*

Article Author:

Article Title: Sex biases in comparable worth analyses.

ISSN: 0021-9029

Rapid# -4581499



Ariel: 129.64.16.3



Odyssey: 129.64.100.109



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Sex Biases in Comparable Worth Analyses

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Remunerating jobs according to their comparable worth has been suggested as one way to reduce sex inequities in wages. To implement such a policy, it is necessary to obtain unbiased ratings of a job's worth. The present study investigated whether such ratings would be biased by the incumbent's sex, the sex composition of the occupation, or the job analyst's sex. A second purpose was to ascertain what job characteristics are viewed as worthy of financial compensation. Business school undergraduates viewed videotapes of a male enacting a low prestige, anchor job and either males or females enacting a moderate and a high prestige job. Ratings of the moderate and high prestige jobs relative to the anchor revealed that both male and female analysts perceived the jobs as higher in responsibility, in persuasive ability requirements, and in monetary worth when enacted by males than by females. The occupation's sex composition had no effect on any job ratings, a finding attributed to subjects' failure to recall the sex composition information provided. Regression analyses revealed that the only significant predictors of a job's monetary worth relative to the anchor were its perceived salary, its desirability, the training it required, and the gender of the incumbent. It was concluded that sex biases in comparable worth analyses may yield an underestimation of the wages that women's work is worth.

In 1981, women working full time earned an average of 59 cents for every dollar paid to men (U.S. Department of Labor, 1982). This gender gap in wages represents virtually no improvement in the pay differential that existed before the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, both of which allowed women to take legal action against unequal pay for equal work. The weakness of these laws is that they address only the most obvious forms of discrimination—paying a man and a woman different salaries for the same job. Unfortunately, they cannot be applied to redress the majority of pay differentials between men and women—those which result from job segregation.

A policy of remunerating jobs according to their comparable worth has been suggested as one way to reduce sex inequities in wages that derive from a sex-segregated labor market. Under such a policy, jobs within an organization that are of equal worth would be equally compensated whether or not they are equal in the specific tasks performed. The pros and cons of remunerating jobs

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according to their comparable worth have been hotly debated. Most of the arguments in this debate have been economic ones (e.g., Bergmann, 1985; Hildebrand, 1980; Northrup, 1980). An issue that has received less attention, but that is equally problematic, are the problems one encounters when attempting to generate accurate job evaluations.

Two difficult and inherently subjective sets of judgments must be made in determining the comparable worth of jobs. First, one must choose the set of compensable factors that contribute to the value of jobs as well as the weight that should be accorded to each factor. Most job analysis procedures have employed a relatively small set of compensable factors—skill, experience, responsibility, effort, and poor working conditions. However, it needs to be determined whether there is in fact any broad consensus regarding what job factors should be compensated and whether the designation of compensable factors will be constant across a variety of jobs, since variations in compensable factors would seriously undermine a comparable worth analysis. One purpose of the present study was to determine what elements in a job description predict analysts' ratings of the job's monetary worth, and to ascertain whether the job elements that predict worth vary as a function of the gender of the worker.

A second task in determining the comparable worth of jobs is to describe them. Although generating job descriptions would seem to be the most objective step in a comparable worth analysis, there is considerable reason to believe that biases may arise even at this stage (McArthur, 1985). In particular, attitudes toward males and females may influence descriptions of male and female jobs inasmuch as there are widespread stereotypes concerning ability and personality differences between men and women (e.g., Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972). Such sex stereotypes, which are shared by men and women alike, may create assumptions regarding what abilities or personality traits are needed for women's work as opposed to men's work, and job descriptions may reflect these culturally shared assumptions rather than reflecting the true requirements of the job. If so, then job descriptions will vary as a function of the worker's sex, and this will hold true regardless of the analyst's sex. However, one study which investigated the impact of worker's sex on job descriptions found no effects (Arvey, Passino, & Lounsbury, 1977). Since the design of that study may limit the generalizability of its results, the present research sought to determine whether or not the job descriptions of both male and female analysts would vary with the worker's sex when Arvey et al.'s (1977) design limitations are addressed.

The Arvey study examined descriptions of only one job, a procedure which is problematic for two reasons. First, it has been argued that since job evaluation systems are used to estimate job hierarchies, the absolute evaluation assigned to a particular job is not so much at issue as how that job's

evaluation locates it in a distribution of evaluations (Gram & Schwab, 1983). Second, the Administrative Assistant job depicted in Arvey's study was relatively high in prestige, and it is possible that descriptions of a lower prestige job would reveal more bias against female incumbents. The present study has addressed both of these shortcomings by examining job descriptions for three different occupations—one high in prestige, one moderate, and one low.

A third shortcoming of the Arvey study was that it did not supply subjects with information regarding the sex composition of the occupation. Since some research suggests that the more men there are in an occupation, the higher its prestige and desirability (Touhey, 1974a, 1974b), it is possible that subjects assumed that the majority of Administrative Assistants were men and that they gave correspondingly high ratings to the job regardless of the incumbent's sex. To address this issue, the present study systematically varied the sex composition of the jobs.

A fourth shortcoming of the Arvey study was that the job was depicted through a verbal narrative and color slide stimulus format. This procedure lacks ecological validity, and it is possible that depicting the job in a manner more similar to that which obtains during job analyses in the real world would reveal sex biases that Arvey's procedure obscured. The present study has addressed this shortcoming by presenting each worker speaking about his or her job on videotape.

Like the Arvey study, the present investigation assessed sex biases in job descriptions with items derived from the Position Analysis Questionnaire (PAQ), a widely used job analysis instrument that was developed by McCormick, Jeanneret, and Mecham (1969). In addition to the PAQ items, analysts' perceptions of the desirability of the jobs and their monetary worth were also assessed. The following hypotheses were tested:

1. As the percentage of female workers in a job increases, the job will be rated by both male and female analysts as requiring decreasing responsibility, skill, education, and effort, and it will be viewed as having a lower monetary worth.
2. Jobs enacted by male incumbents will be rated by both male and female analysts as requiring more responsibility, skill, education, and effort, and as having a higher monetary worth than the very same jobs enacted by female incumbents.
3. The tendency to rate a job higher when it is enacted by a male incumbent than when it is enacted by a female will increase as the prestige of the job decreases.
4. The job elements that predict a job's rated monetary worth will vary with the worker's gender.

Method

Subjects

Subjects who participated in the experiment were 141 Boston College undergraduate business school students, enrolled in four Organizational Theory classes taught by two different instructors. One of each of the two instructor's classes was randomly assigned to the female worker condition, and one was randomly assigned to the male worker condition. One class assigned to the female worker condition saw female actor A enact a moderate prestige job and female actor B enact a high prestige job, while the actors depicting each job were reversed for the other class assigned to the female worker condition. Similar counterbalancing was employed for the two classes assigned to the male worker condition. Within each class, subjects were randomly assigned to one of the three sex composition manipulations. The data from 21 of these participants were discarded at random in order to equalize the number of male and female subjects in each of the experimental conditions.

Independent Variables

Job prestige. Three jobs were enacted on videotape: a "Public Relations Person" (high prestige), a "Purchasing Agent" (moderate prestige), and a "Stockroom Clerk" (low prestige). Both high and moderate prestige jobs were employed to determine whether sex biases generalize across jobs. The low prestige job served as an anchor from which to compute the relative rather than the absolute worth of the two experimental jobs. The prestige of each job was manipulated by the job title, the content of the videotape job descriptions, and the worker's average salary.²

Worker gender. In each videotape the actors introduced themselves, using a name that could either be a woman's or a man's. Two different male and two different female incumbents enacted both the high and the moderate prestige jobs so that effects of incumbent sex would not be confounded with other characteristics unique to a particular actor. Only one videotape was prepared of the anchor job, and the actor was male.

Job sex composition. Subjects were given information regarding the number of men and women employed by the company in each of the three occupations. For both the high and the moderate prestige occupations, sub-

²Treiman's (1977) prestige scale and Sommer's (1974) salary scale were used to determine job prestige, while the Boston Globe Career and Educational Planning Guide (October, 1983) was used to determine job salaries. The scripts for each occupation were based on information from the Dictionary of Occupational Titles.

jects were told either that two men and eight women, five men and five women, or eight men and two women were employed by the company. The sex composition for the anchor occupation was always nine men and one woman. The sex composition information was provided on the top of the questionnaires on which subjects rated each job, and it was embedded in other demographic information about the job to minimize experimental demand characteristics.

Dependent Measures

A questionnaire was prepared to elicit descriptions of the responsibility (decision making, amount of job structure, job criticality, and overall responsibility), the skill (writing ability, mathematical ability, reasoning ability, and persuasive ability), the education, training, and effort (updating of job knowledge) perceived as necessary to perform each job. These job description measures were derived from the Position Analyses Questionnaire (McCormick et al., 1969), which is the most widely used structured job analysis procedure (Treiman, 1979). The general format for each measure was to ask "How much _____ does this job require?" and to provide six response options: (a) none or very limited; (b) limited; (c) intermediate; (d) substantial; (e) very substantial; and (f) extremely substantial.

In addition to the foregoing measures, subjects were asked to rate the overall worth of each job on 9-point scales with endpoints labeled "should be given the lowest salary in the company's wage scale" and "should be given the highest salary in the company's wage scale." Subjects also rated on 9-point scales the overall desirability of each job, ignoring salary. In order to check the effectiveness of the sex composition and prestige manipulations, subjects were asked to indicate the percentage of women in each occupation, and the annual salary of each occupation. Finally, subjects were asked to judge the age and attractiveness of the workers they had seen in order to evaluate worker age and attractiveness differences as alternative explanations for the predicted worker gender effects.

Procedure

Subjects were told that the researchers wanted to determine the amount of agreement among people who evaluate jobs on their rating scales, and that they would be asked to evaluate three different jobs depicted on videotapes. Subjects were informed that the actors in the videotapes were not actual employees, but that the job descriptions were those used by the company for employment purposes. Before seeing the videotapes, subjects read some background information about the company. All subjects saw the low prestige,

anchor occupation first, while the order of the high and moderate prestige occupations was counterbalanced. Half of the subjects saw a male worker enact both the moderate and the high prestige jobs, and half saw a female enact both jobs. Sex composition of the job, like worker gender, was a between subjects variable. Subjects rated each job on the 11 measures adapted from the PAQ immediately after seeing its videotape. The remaining questionnaire measures were completed after all three videotapes had been seen.

Results

Overview of the Data Analyses

Each subject's ratings of the anchor occupation were subtracted from the corresponding rating of the moderate and high prestige occupations to create measures of the experimental jobs' relative responsibility, skill requirements, etc. These relative job ratings were employed in subsequent analyses rather than the absolute ratings for two reasons, one conceptual and one empirical. The conceptual reason for employing relative rather than absolute job ratings has been articulated by Gram and Schwab (1983), who argued that since job evaluation systems are used to estimate job hierarchies, the absolute evaluation assigned to a particular job is not so much at issue as how that job's evaluation locates it in a distribution of evaluations. The empirical reason for employing relative ratings was provided by preliminary analyses of ratings of the anchor occupation which revealed significant differences in the ratings of the groups that had been randomly assigned to view actors of different genders enacting the experimental occupations. That is, although all subjects were rating the very same job enacted by the same actor, those who would subsequently rate jobs enacted by male workers sometimes rated the job significantly differently from those who would subsequently rate the same jobs enacted by female workers. These baseline differences, which could result in artifactual gender effects in the analyses of the moderate and high prestige jobs, were controlled by calculating subjects' ratings of each job relative to their rating of the anchor job.

A Skill Composite rating for the moderate and high prestige jobs was constructed by summing subjects' ratings of the persuasive ability, writing ability, reasoning ability, and mathematical ability required to perform each job relative to the anchor. A Responsibility Composite rating was constructed by summing subjects' ratings of the degree of decision making, criticality, structure,³ and responsibility that each job involved relative to the anchor.

³The relative degree of job structure was weighted negatively in computing the Responsibility Composite inasmuch as more structure (i.e., more predetermination of the worker's activities) means less responsibility.

These two Composites as well as the individual questionnaire items were subjected to 2 (Analyst Sex) \times 2 (Worker Gender) \times 3 (Job Sex Composition) \times 2 (Job Prestige) analyses of variance in which analyst sex, worker gender, and job sex composition were between groups variables and job prestige was a within groups variable. In addition to the analyses of variance, multiple regression analyses were carried out to determine which job description measures predicted subjects' ratings of the relative monetary worth of each job.

Analyses of Variance

Job sex composition. Contrary to prediction, job sex composition had no significant effect on any of the job ratings, all $ps > .10$. Furthermore, responses to the question requiring subjects to indicate the percentage of women who occupy the occupation revealed that the manipulation of Job Sex Composition was not effective. The mean percentages given were 37.3 for subjects in the 20% female condition, 45.5 for subjects in the 50% female condition, and 44.0 for subjects in the 80% female condition.

Worker gender. The mean ratings relative to the anchor for jobs enacted by male and female incumbents are presented in Table 1 together with significant F and p values. As predicted, when jobs were enacted by a male incumbent they were rated relatively higher on the Responsibility Composite than when they were enacted by a female incumbent. This overall effect held true for the individual ratings of responsibility, job criticality, and job structure, but not for the degree of decision making that the job entailed. Contrary to prediction, worker gender had no significant effect on the Skill Composite ratings or the individual ratings of reasoning, writing, and mathematical ability required by the job. However, the jobs were perceived as requiring relatively more persuasive ability when they were enacted by a male incumbent than when they were enacted by a female. Finally, as predicted, the jobs were rated as relatively higher in overall monetary worth when they were enacted by a male incumbent than when they were enacted by a female.

The interaction between worker gender and job prestige was not significant for any of the dependent measures. Thus, contrary to expectation, the effect of worker gender held equally true for both the moderate and the high prestige jobs rather than being more pronounced for moderate prestige jobs.⁴

Subjects' ratings of the attractiveness, age, and salary of the incumbents were examined in order to determine whether the significant worker gender

⁴In evaluating this nonsignificant interaction, it should be noted that the Job Prestige manipulation was effective: The high prestige job was rated relatively higher than the moderate prestige job on the Responsibility Composite and the Skill Composite as well as in desirability and overall monetary worth, all $ps < .001$.

Table 1

Mean Ratings Relative to the Anchor of Jobs Enacted by Male Versus Female Incumbents

Rating scale	Gender of incumbent		<i>F</i> (1,108)	<i>p</i>
	Male	Female		
Amount of responsibility	.67	.25	5.93	.02
Amount of decision making	2.37	2.09		
Amount of job structure	-1.78	-0.97	13.39	.001
Criticality to assets/operations	.48	.14	3.47	.06
Persuasive ability required	2.72	2.28	4.94	.05
Reasoning ability required	1.76	1.51		
Writing ability required	1.55	1.40		
Mathematical ability required	.49	.43		
Education required	1.83	1.65		
Training required	1.57	1.49		
Need to update knowledge	2.30	2.12		
Desirability, ignoring salary	3.44	3.07		
Worth on company wage scale	3.47	2.89	6.93	.01
Responsibility composite	5.30	3.45	14.69	.001
Skill composite	6.52	5.63		

Note. *N* = 60 for each mean.

effects on job ratings could be due to systematic differences in these variables. The results revealed that male and female workers were not perceived to differ significantly on any of these measures.

Analyst sex. Interactions between Analyst Sex and Worker Gender were examined to test the hypothesis that the tendency to give higher ratings to jobs enacted by males would hold true regardless of the analyst's sex. The results revealed a significant interaction for only one of the measures that had shown significant worker gender main effects, the amount of structure that the jobs provided, $F(1,108) = 4.37, p < .05$. Male analysts rated jobs enacted by males as being relatively less structured than those enacted by females, $t(58) = 4.06$,

$p < .01$, while female analysts' ratings showed only a nonsignificant trend in the same direction, $t < 1$. While this rating dimension revealed a bias favoring male workers on the part of male, but not female analysts, two other dimensions that had shown no overall worker gender effects revealed a bias favoring male workers among female, but not male, analysts. These were ratings of the decision making the job required, $F(1,108) = 5.98, p < .05$, and the education it required, $F(1,108) = 4.69, p < .05$. While male analysts' ratings on these dimensions did not vary significantly as a function of the worker's gender, female analysts rated the jobs as requiring more decision making when they were enacted by males than when they were enacted by females, $t(58) = 2.73, p < .01$, and as requiring marginally more education when they were enacted by males than when they were enacted by females, $t(58) = 1.87, p < .10$.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analyses were performed separately on ratings of the moderate and high prestige jobs relative to the anchor job with their relative monetary worth serving as the dependent variable. The predictor variables included the gender of the worker in the videotape, the 11 job description measures adapted from the PAQ, ratings of the desirability of the job, its annual salary, the percentage of women workers, the average age of workers, and the attractiveness of the worker viewed in the videotape.

The regression equations for both the Moderate and the High Prestige Job were significant, $F_s(17,102) = 2.95$ and 5.18 , both $p_s < .001$. Both the desirability of the jobs and the salary attributed to the jobs relative to the anchor were significantly related to ratings of their relative worth, $p_s < .05$. For the high prestige job, the amount of training required relative to the anchor and the gender of the worker also predicted ratings of relative worth, $p_s < .01$.⁵

A second set of multiple regression analyses was performed to determine whether the variables predicting job worth varied as a function of the worker's gender. The predictor variables in these analyses were those employed in the first set of regression analyses with the exception of worker gender. The results revealed a significant regression equation for the male workers in the Moderate and in the High Prestige jobs, $F_s(16,43) = 2.33$ and 5.38 , both $p_s < .01$. As in the regression performed on ratings for workers of both genders, the

⁵A second set of multiple regression analyses was performed in which the Composite Responsibility measure and the Composite Skill measure were entered as predictors in lieu of the individual measures to determine whether the Composites would have greater predictive value. The measures that had predicted ratings of worth in the initial regression analyses continued as significant predictors in these analyses, and neither the Skill Composite nor the Responsibility Composite was significantly related to ratings of either job's worth.

relative desirability of the job and the relative training required emerged as predictors of relative worth in these equations. However, relative salary was not a significant predictor of job worth for male workers alone, and the reasoning ability required relative to the anchor job was a significant predictor of worth for males in the High Prestige job, $p = .02$. For female workers in both the Moderate and the High Prestige jobs, the regression equations were not significant, $F_s(16,43) = 1.23$ and 1.65 , both $p_s > .10$, and none of the job ratings was significantly related to relative worth.

Discussion

The present findings reveal that job descriptions can be influenced by the gender of the incumbent. In particular, when jobs were enacted by males, analysts rated them as being relatively more critical to the company's assets and operations, as requiring more decision making, as involving relatively more responsibility, and as having relatively less structure (i.e., fewer pre-determined activities) than the same jobs enacted by females. As expected, the tendency to give higher "responsibility ratings" to male occupied jobs did not vary systematically with the sex of the analyst. On two dimensions, both male and female analysts rated male occupied jobs higher; on one dimension (decision making), only female analysts rated male occupied jobs higher; and on another dimension (structure), only male analysts rated male occupied jobs higher (i.e., less structured). The higher responsibility ratings for male occupied jobs are consistent with sex-role stereotypes that paint the typical male as more skilled in business, more of a leader, more able to make decisions, and more independent than the typical female. And, the findings that the same sex bias was shown by male and female analysts is consistent with evidence that sex stereotypes are held by men and women alike.

Ratings of the skills required to perform the jobs provided less evidence of sex bias than did ratings of responsibility. While jobs enacted by males were perceived as requiring relatively more persuasive ability than those enacted by females—a finding consistent with the stereotype that males are more dominant than females—jobs enacted by males were not perceived to require more writing ability, more reasoning ability, or more mathematical ability, thus providing no evidence for biasing effects of the stereotypes that men are more logical and mathematically inclined than women.

There are at least two possible explanations for the finding that sex bias was more pronounced in ratings of the responsibility that the jobs entailed than in ratings of the skills they required. One is that evaluating the skills required of a job may be a more objective task than evaluating its responsibilities, and thus less subject to sex bias. It certainly seems easier to clearly convey the degree of mathematical skill that a job requires than to clearly convey its criticality

to the company's operations or its degree of structure. This is not to say that such information cannot be conveyed at all. Indeed, the greater responsibility of the high than the moderate prestige job was perceived by subjects in the present study. Rather, it may be that information about a job's responsibility can be more readily distorted in the direction of one's expectations. Another possible explanation for the absence of sex bias in most skill ratings is that people may be more sensitized to sexism in judging people's ability than in judging their responsibility, and subjects may have deliberately avoided the allocation of low skill ratings to female incumbents. Whatever the explanation for greater sex bias in responsibility than skill ratings, the fact remains that responsibility has traditionally been a very important factor in job evaluations (Treiman, 1979). Thus, the lesser responsibility ascribed to jobs depicted by female workers in the present study can have significant consequences for comparable worth analyses.

While the present findings are consistent with research indicating that sex-role stereotypes are strong and pervasive in the business world (e.g., O'Leary, 1974; Schein, 1973, 1975), they differ from those obtained by Arvey et al. (1977) who found no evidence for an influence of sex-role stereotypes on job descriptions generated for male vs. female incumbents. There are a number of possible explanations for the discrepancy in the results of the two studies.

Originally, it has been suggested that the prestige of the job used in Arvey's study may have been too high to yield any sex biases. However, this cannot account for the discrepant results of the two studies, since even the high prestige job in the present research yielded sex-biased descriptions. Another possible explanation suggested for Arvey's failure to obtain sex biased descriptions was the analysis of absolute ratings of a single job rather than relative ratings of a set of jobs in a hierarchy. This may explain the discrepant results of the two studies, since the gender effects obtained in the present research were based on ratings of each job relative to a baseline occupation. Another procedural difference that may explain the discrepant results is the utilization of a videotaped presentation of workers in the present research as opposed to the slide show employed by Arvey et al. (1977).

The most important points to consider when comparing the results of the present study with those obtained by Arvey et al. (1977) are: (1) most job evaluations involve face-to-face interactions between the analyst and the incumbent (Arvey et al., 1977), which is more analogous to the videotapes used in the present study than to the slides used by Arvey; and (2) most job evaluations involve the rating of several jobs to estimate job hierarchies (Gram & Schwab, 1983), which is also more analogous to the present procedure than to Arvey's. For these reasons, the present evidence of sex bias has more ecological validity than the null findings of Arvey et al. (1977).

Whereas the gender of the incumbent had strong effects on job descriptions, the overall sex composition of workers in the occupation had no significant effects at all. Although other researchers have also failed to find reliable effects of sex composition (Gram & Schwab, 1983), the present study does not provide an adequate test of the effects of this variable inasmuch as a manipulation check revealed that subjects could not accurately report the sex-composition information that they had been given.

In addition to providing information regarding possible sex biases in the job descriptions employed in comparable worth analyses, the present findings provide information pertinent to the selection of compensable factors. For one thing, the regression analyses revealed no significant predictors of the monetary worth of jobs enacted by females. This suggests that comparable worth analyses may have to expand the standard set of compensable factors if they are to be perceived as pertinent to women workers. Furthermore, when analyses were performed without regard to worker sex, the only standard compensable factor to emerge as a significant predictor of worth was the amount of training required for the job; the factors of skill, responsibility, education, effort, and poor working conditions did not predict judged worth. Rather, there seemed to be a positive halo effect in people's judgments of a job's monetary worth: perceived higher salaries, more desirable work, or a male incumbent each increased judgments of worth.⁶ Each of these influences on judged worth together with the tendency to see less responsibility in a woman's work than in the identical work by a man would yield lower estimates of the worth of traditionally female jobs than traditionally male jobs.

The results of this study clearly indicate the need for significant modifications in traditional procedures for establishing the worth of jobs if a policy of comparable worth assessment is to achieve the goal of reducing sex inequities in wages. Considerably more research is needed to determine the best means for minimizing sex biases in job descriptions. Research is also needed to determine a means for choosing and weighting compensable factors that will ensure their perceived legitimacy as well as their unbiased treatment of male and female jobs. In the meantime, the present findings suggest that adherents of comparable worth analyses should be cautious in their optimism that such a policy is the best method for reducing the gender gap in wages. When traditional procedures for establishing worth are employed, sex biases may well yield an underestimation of the wages that women's work is worth with the consequence that only a portion of the existing wage discrimination would be

⁶It should be noted that because Gram & Schwab (1983) had documented the impact of salary on judged worth, salary was manipulated in the present study so that worker gender effects would not be confounded with assumed differences in the salaries of men and women. As intended, subjects' estimates of the jobs' annual salaries did not vary with the worker's gender.

redressed. This itself is not so bad. What is more worrisome is the likelihood that any remaining gender gap in wages would be certified as just.

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