BOOK REVIEWS

Paycheck Equity

Comparable Worth. Theories and Evidence. PAULA ENGLAND. Aldine de Gruyter, Hawthorne, NY, 1992. xii, 346 pp., illus. $46.95; paper, $22.95. Social Institutions and Social Change.

Women continue, in the 1990s, to earn substantially less than men, and this gender gap in pay continues to contribute to the rising problem of poverty for women and their children. Though the reality of the gap is indisputable, its causes are still debated, as are the possible remedies. In *Comparable Worth: Theories and Evidence*, Paula England thoroughly and intelligently analyzes theories explaining the gap, presents her own empirical evidence on its sources, and examines the comparable-worth approach to achieving pay equity between women and men.

Studies extending over 20 years, summarized by England, show that one-fourth to one-half of the sex wage gap can be explained by human capital factors: men have more on-the-job training and more seniority and employment experience than women. Discrimination probably contributes to this male advantage, as men more often than women are offered on-the-job training. Years of education do not play a part in the explanation because women and men are equal here.

The other significant explanatory factor is the sex segregation of work. Numerous studies have shown that jobs filled mostly by women pay less than jobs filled mostly by men. Why should this be so? All researchers agree that part of the reason is that women work in industries and firms with low wages. But there is disagreement about the remainder of the gap. Comparable-worth advocates contend that jobs gender-typed female have lower wages simply because the workers are women. England defines this as direct discrimination. In addition, types of knowledge and skills, such as nurturant human relations skills, often required in female jobs may be devalued in wage-setting. England calls this indirect discrimination. She tests the importance of these factors with an empirical analysis that is considerably more thorough—that is, she measures more job and industry characteristics—than previous research. She finds that both direct and indirect discrimination contribute to women's low wages. Sex composition of occupations has an effect on pay, even when a large number of job and industry characteristics are held steady. Moreover, doing work that requires nurturance, such as nursing or child care, actually reduces earnings. England's work should bring to a close the debate about whether or not direct and indirect discrimination exist in wage-setting for women's jobs.

Comparable worth is a strategy, undertaken primarily in public-sector organizations, to eliminate that part of the gender wage gap that is caused by these kinds of discrimination. Job evaluation, a well-established management tool for comparing, within a particular organization, the relative value of jobs, is used to assess positions with very different content, such as nurse and engineer, on factors such as skill, knowledge, responsibility, and working conditions. These evaluations produce numerical scores that are used to compare female-dominated and male-dominated jobs to see if women's and men's jobs with the same scores have similar wages. A sex wage gap so identified can then be corrected. As England points out, pay equity studies "have found that female jobs systematically pay less than male jobs with the same total points, usually by 5–20%" (p. 206). This is evidence of direct discrimination.

Indirect discrimination may be hidden within the job evaluation scheme, in the assumptions about what is valuable about a job. The low or negative weight placed on skills of nurturing is one example of this. England discusses some of the difficulties in correcting for this type of discrimination but correctly notes that, even apart from this bias, job evaluation consistently shows that women's jobs are underpaid.

Opposition to comparable worth has come from neoclassical economists and conservative business groups, mostly on the grounds that it interferes with the market. England's discussion of the various positions within neoclassical economics is exemplary. She admits some of the economists' claims, that human capital differences do contribute to some part of the sex pay gap and that the crowding of women into certain female-typed jobs may reduce the pay for those jobs. But she does not see crowding as the primary reason for the low wages paid for women's jobs, as many neoclassical theorists do. In addition, she takes issue with a central belief of most neoclassical theorists, and the grounds for many conservative critics' opposition to comparable worth, that, over time, discrimination will disappear in competitive markets.

Although in the early 1980s almost every state took some action toward pay equity and pay equity wage adjustments were made in 20 states, opposition to comparable worth increased during the decade. The main reason was that the conservative regimes of Reagan and Bush appointed opponents of pay equity to critical agencies such as the Civil Rights Commission and to the federal courts at all levels. As England points out, the courts have consistently been unwilling to consider cases except those in which "an identifiable individual was discriminated against by an identifiable employer with an identifiable action that had a clear discriminatory intent" (p. 249). This effectively rules out cases based on the type of discrimination addressed by comparable worth that involves gender bias in entire wage systems.

In addition, the courts have allowed the employers' defense that they were only following the market wage. But, as England says, "the market" reflects both direct and indirect discrimination. She takes a strong position in opposition to those who contend that the market is the only basis on which pay should be set, arguing that "Public policy should not permit each employer to pay women's jobs discriminatorily low wages simply because most other employers are doing the same thing. Calling such a wage a market wage does not change the fact that it is discriminatory" (p. 288).

For England, and for me, comparable worth is a matter of simple justice. But, absent new decisions by the Supreme Court, it will not be achieved without new legislation. On the other hand, the wage gap between women and men has declined in the last ten years: women earned 60 percent of men's earnings (full-time year-round) in 1980 (the year in which the data analyzed by England were collected) and 70 percent of men's earnings in 1991 (see the briefing paper on the wage gap recently issued by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC). Does this indicate that neoclassical economists are right, that market forces will erode discrimination? Probably not. Although 40 percent of the reduction of the gap was due not to an improvement in women's earnings but to the falling earnings of men, possibly attributable to market forces (see the briefing paper cited above), the

Vignettes: Inside Science

Conscious, unacknowledged, and unscrupulous borrowings are a fact of scientific life. So are situations in which the same idea occurs independently to several people. There are, moreover, a whole range of cases that lie between these two extremes. Ideas only take root in prepared minds, and it is not always easy either for the outsider or the inventor to separate the preparation from the new seed.

—*Joan Lisa Bromberg*, in *The Laser in America, 1950–1970* (MIT Press)

The "doing" of science is, at its best, a gripping and fully absorbing activity—so much so that it is difficult for anyone so engaged to step outside the demands of the particular problems under investigation to reflect on the assumptions underlying that investigation. . . . Keeping track of and following the arguments and data as they unfold, trying always to think ahead, demands total absorption; at the same time, the sense of discovering or even generating a new world yields an intoxication rarely paralleled in other academic fields. The net result is that scientists are probably less reflective of the "tacit assumptions" that guide their reasoning than any other intellectuals of the modern age.

—*Evelyn Fox Keller*, in *Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death: Essays on Language, Gender and Science* (Routledge)

remaining 60 percent may be related to public policy measures favoring equality. For example, some reduction in sex segregation occurred during this time, in part because of equal employment policies, with a proportion of women improving their pay by entering certain men's jobs (see B. F. Reskin and P. A. Roos, *Job Queues, Gender Queues*, Temple University Press, 1990).

Comparable worth itself may be a factor. Although statistical assessments are still under way, there is evidence that comparable worth resulted in pay raises for many women in the public sector. It may also have raised the consciousness of many others about systematic wage bias against women's jobs. Social psychologists have shown that "existing arrangements come to be expected and seen as fair" (p. 90). When existing arrangements begin to change, new standards of fairness become "part of the frame for wage setting." And new notions about what is fair may help to produce new wage outcomes.

But optimists should beware. Historically, the sex wage gap has fluctuated, and the 1980-to-1990 change may be part of such a pattern. In addition, comparable worth has been most successful in large public-sector organizations where employment was stable and protected and where union organization supported change. Now "good" jobs in both public- and private-sector large organizations are being drastically cut, while contingent jobs—part-time, temporary, and contract—are increasing rapidly (*New York Times*, 15 March 1993). These changes in the labor market undermine the possibility of unionization, individualize wage-setting, and erode the sort of stable, long-term jobs that can be evaluated and compared in a comparable-worth process.

If work organizations keep moving toward employing only a core of stable, skilled, and well-paid workers along with a much larger group of contingent employees, new approaches to wage equity may be necessary. Nevertheless, comparable worth has been an important reform movement, and England does an excellent job of presenting the theoretical and empirical arguments about it.

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Human Auxology

Growth, Maturation, and Body Composition. The Fels Longitudinal Study, 1929–1991. ALEX F. ROCHE. Cambridge University Press, New York, 1992. xiv, 282 pp., illus. $64.95. Cambridge Studies in Biological Anthropology.

The number of individuals who dedicate their careers to studying the physical growth and maturation of normal, healthy children and youth is relatively small. Measures of growth and maturation are often used in a clinical setting or to describe the status of a sample, but relatively few individuals study changes in size, body composition, maturation, and so on from infancy into adulthood with the intent to describe, understand, and track the processes as such. There are even fewer research centers that are devoted primarily to the study of growth and maturation of the healthy child. The Fels Research Institute, founded in 1929, is such a center, and this volume is an overview of the development and evolution of the Fels Longitudinal Study. It highlights major research directions since the inception of the study, with a focus on physical growth and maturation, including ongoing studies that continue into adulthood. Contributions of the Fels study regarding cognitive and behavioral development are not considered. Collection of psychological data stopped in 1974, and analysis of the available data has slowed.

The origins of the Fels Research Institute and the longitudinal study, the sample, and the types of measurements are described at the outset of the book. The sample was one of convenience, and participants were enrolled during the pregnancy of the mother. The sample also includes second and third generations, that is, offspring of participants and their offspring. Data were also collected from many other relatives of the participants.

The nature of the data, quality control, derived variables, and analytical strategies are then described. It is in the analysis of longitudinal data that the Fels group has made substantial and unique contributions.

The remainder of the volume focuses on specific analyses and some results, beginning with studies of prenatal growth and functional development in the 1930s and '40s. It is in the context of more or less traditional concerns—somatic growth, biological maturation, and skeletal and dental growth—that Fels studies have contributed significantly. Several examples suffice to illustrate the scope of contributions. The Fels study is unique in that data collection continues into adulthood, which has permitted analyses of late adolescent growth, for example growth in stature and weight after peak height velocity or menarche and the attainment of adult stature. Other contributions relate to secular changes within families and the total Fels sample, fatness as a determinant of growth, cranial growth, and growth of skeletal tissue from childhood into adulthood, and also include a method for the prediction of adult stature. Studies of maturation are likewise comprehensive, beginning with skeletal ossification and epi-