The Context of Workplace Sex Discrimination: Sex Composition, Workplace Culture and Relative Power

Kevin Stainback, Purdue University
Thomas N. Ratliff, Virginia Tech
Vincent J. Roscigno, Ohio State University

Building on prior work surrounding negative workplace experiences, such as bullying and sexual harassment, we examine the extent to which organizational context is meaningful for the subjective experience of sex discrimination. Data draw on the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce, which provides a key indicator of individuals’ sex discrimination experiences as well as arguably influential dimensions of organizational context—i.e., sex composition, workplace culture and relative power—suggested by prior research. Results indicate that the experience of sex discrimination is reduced for both women and men when they are part of the numerical majority of their work group. Although supportive workplace cultures mitigate the likelihood of sex discrimination, relative power in the workplace seems to matter little. We conclude by revisiting these results relative to perspectives surrounding hierarchy maintenance, group competition and internal cultural dynamics.

Organizations, and workplaces in particular, are fundamental to the allocation of societal rewards and stratification among social groups. The pioneering work of Baron and Bielby (1980) made this point explicitly, laying the foundation for contemporary scholars interested in how organizational context influences inequality. Classical theoretical formulations are likewise informative, offering predictions regarding group composition, threat dynamics and their likely implications for discrimination and inequality (e.g., Kanter 1977; Blalock 1967). Drawing from this work, researchers have analyzed sex-specific inequalities including segregation (Huffman, Cohen and Pearlman 2010; Kmec 2005), earnings disparities (Castilla 2008; Huffman and Velasco 1997), and access to authority positions (Elliott and Smith 2004; Gorman and Kmec 2009; Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2009) while usually inferring discrimination as a core mechanism.

The purpose of this study is to examine subjective experiences of sex discrimination specifically and their potential organizational foundations. Discrimination usually occurs when actions of an employer, supervisor or coworkers “deny to individuals or groups of people equality of treatment which they may wish.” (Allport 1954:54) Understanding the organizational roots of such experiences—our core goal in what follows—has clear cut implications for sociological perspectives on the organization of work, policy interventions surrounding equity and conflict, and workers’ well-being.

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On this last point, the adverse effects of verified or perceived discrimination on both mental health and work-specific attitudes and behaviors have been widely documented (Ensher, Grant-Vallone and Donaldson 2001; Feagin and McKinney 2003; Palvalko et al. 2003; Roscigno 2007). Moreover, and whether verified or not, subjective evaluations of discrimination are of core importance to more general processes of inequality and legal rights mobilization (Hirsh and Kornrich 2008; Nielson and Nelson 2005). Indeed, such “naming” of discriminatory acts is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition prior to claiming legal rights (Felstiner, Abel and Sarat 1981; Hirsh and Lyons 2010).

Although little research grapples with the experiences of sex discrimination and potential organizational forces, there is informative work regarding the organizational foundations of workplace bullying and sexual harassment from which we draw (e.g., Chamberlain, Crowley, Tope and Hodson 2008; De Coster, Estes and Mueller 1999; Hodson, Roscigno and Lopez 2006; Mueller, De Coster and Estes 2001; Uggen and Blackstone 2004). These literatures point to three key aspects of organizations important for determining vulnerability—namely, sex composition, workplace culture and relative power. Our analyses draw on the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce and employ logistic regression techniques to model sex discrimination experiences. Implications are discussed relative to conceptions of gender inequality in employment, status vulnerability and its consequences, and the capacity of organizations to alleviate or exacerbate the patterns we describe.

Sex Discrimination, Subjective Experience and Organizational Context

The process of social categorization involves taking information perceived in a particular social setting and constructing cognitive schema for application in future experience (Howard and Renfrow 2003; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Schemas provide “cognitive shortcuts,” something that is especially relevant in moments requiring quick decisions in the face of incomplete information (DiMaggio 1997; Ridgeway 1997). These schemas become part of one’s cultural toolkit—strategies for action that people use to function in everyday life (Swidler 1986). Problems inevitably arise, however, and with implications for ascriptive inequality, because schemas often contain inaccurate or biased information (Bielby 2000; DiMaggio 1997; Reskin 2000). Hence, the qualities of characteristics exhibited by individuals may become triggers for thought and action. More ominous than these ostensibly unconscious bases of discrimination are the more deliberate and targeted attacks based on prejudicial reference frames. Whether intentional or not, both automatic and deliberative cognitions are conditioned and given meaning by the culture within which they emerge.

Important for our research, social actors categorize themselves and others within a wide range of characteristics. Highly visible characteristics, such as sex, are amplified and are thus more likely to trigger status categorizations (Howard and Renfrow 2003; Ridgeway 1997). Because schemas are fundamentally grounded in culture, with its patriarchal biases, those biases are reinforced via institutions, interactions and gendered patterns of socialization (Ridgeway and Correll 2004). As Baron and Pfeffer (1994)
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contend, organizational arrangements both influence and reflect social categorization, social comparisons and intergroup relations. By implication, then, organizations are the proximate contextual arenas within which sex categorizations, differential treatment and the recognition of differential treatment may manifest (Bielby 2000; Reskin 2000).

Building on prior work (especially see Chamberlain et al. 2008), we focus on three key dimensions of organizations implicated in sex discrimination. These dimensions—compositional dynamics, workplace culture and relative power—have been incorporated, more or less, into a wide body of workplace stratification scholarship but especially research on sexual harassment and more general forms of relational incivility (De Coster et al. 1999; Hodson et al. 2006; Roscigno et al. 2009; Uggen and Blackstone 2004)—research to which we now turn.

Workplace Sex Composition

Sex composition can influence the likely experience of sex discrimination in two important ways: (1. by inducing a sense of threat and competition between status groups once a particular compositional threshold is reached, or (2. by creating visible tokens in a given workplace that are easily targeted for abuse and hostilities. Both possibilities—competitive threat and tokenism—are highlighted in the seminal work of Blalock (1967) and Kanter (1977), which established the relevance of numerical thresholds in the workplace for minority groups and women, respectively. The continued importance of sex composition is evidenced by recent qualitative and quantitative work examining discrimination charges (Hirsh and Kornrich 2008) and case filings (Roscigno 2007). Yet, disagreement remains on whether competitive thresholds or non-symmetry via isolation is more meaningful.

Studies of demographic composition and its impact on group power and threat have largely dealt with organizational size and minority employment (Pfeffer 1977; Bielby and Baron 1986), and minority composition and dominant group response (Tienda and Lii 1987; Blalock 1982; Frisbie and Niedert 1977). Importantly for our project, Blalock (1967) contended that as a minority group’s numerical size approaches a majority group’s numerical threshold, the majority group feels increasingly threatened and often acts accordingly to protect advantages. Correspondingly, individuals may be the most likely to experience discrimination in more integrated job environments—environments where they are the numerical minority and minority proportional representation reaches a particular threat threshold.

Although the competition dynamic may be equally relevant for sex composition, some have suggested that in the case of gender, isolation and tokenism will be more meaningful and debilitating. Blau (1977), for example, argued that workplace discrimination was related to greater asymmetry between the sizes of different groups. Likewise, Kanter (1977) argued that numerical minorities are more “visible,” thereby increasing the probability of stereotyping. As “minorities” become numerical majorities within a demographic context, however, their chances of being stereotyped are reduced (Kanter 1977). Thus, some scholars have argued that having a dominant
social status (e.g., being a man) does not automatically translate into power when the socially dominant group is the numerical minority in work groups (Blau 1977; Kanter 1977). This assertion, however, seems to fly in the face of a gendered theory of organizations (Acker 1990) and raises an important and contentious issue regarding the role numerical composition plays.

_Hypothesis 1a:_ Subjective experiences of sex discrimination will be more likely where numerical minorities approach majority thresholds (25-49.99% same-sex coworkers).

_Hypothesis 1b:_ Subjective experiences of sex discrimination will be more likely in token positions (0-24.99% same-sex coworkers).

Importantly, these predictions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, sex discrimination may manifest in both token and competitive contexts, although the pertinent processes may vary (see Roscigno 2007). Our data and analyses allow us to test for both possibilities.

Another facet relating to workplace sex composition surrounds the sex of the manager or supervisor. Most work regarding the sex of a supervisor or manager has examined sex disparities in promotions and positions of authority (Gorman and Kmec 2009; Williams 1992), representation and work rewards (Huffman and Velasco 1997), and the maintenance of power hierarchies through targeted harassment (Padavic and Orcutt 1997; Schmidt and Roscigno 2007). While this prior work has centered on structural and monetary concerns bearing especially on relational power, it is unclear what this means relative to discrimination experiences. Having a same-sex supervisor offers visible representation of one’s status group in a position of power, and because power is crucial for the advent of discrimination—i.e., one must have the _power_ to influence another’s life chances—managers seem likely actors to exacerbate or mitigate subjective experiences of discrimination.

_Hypothesis 2:_ Having a same-sex manager will reduce the subjective experience sex discrimination.

**Workplace Culture**

Research centering on the labor process, usually ethnographic, historical or case comparative, has been relatively clear that the internal dynamics of workplace functioning and inequality will vary depending on history, personnel and emergent norms (e.g., Vallas 2006). Accordingly, stratification analyses have merged, via proxy measures, workplace social support/solidarity and work structure under the rubric of workplace culture (e.g., Chamberlain et al. 2008; De Coster et al. 1999; Mueller et al. 2001). Such proxy measures make sense because they are linked to the development and maintenance of workplace culture, particular strategies for action, ways of behaving, and meaning systems developed by work groups.
Attention to workplace culture confers importance to workplace relational and normative dynamics—dynamics with implications for conduct in a particular establishment including that among coworkers and between workers their supervisors (Blau 1964; Young 1990). Behavioral meanings emerging during social interactions must be consonant with the norms and values of particular groups. On the positive end, and if effective, feelings of solidarity and positive attitudes will resonate. Moreover, support for others in one’s workplace is an acknowledgement of approval, acceptance and more importantly, dignity and respect (Hodson 2001). Dissonant actions relative to workplace culture and normative expectations, in contrast, arguably result in tension—tension between coworkers and/or with supervisors.

Work environments with supportive cultures and histories are likely to reduce the likelihood that workers will interpret work-related experiences and tensions as sex discrimination. Consistent with this possibility, studies have shown that greater coworker social support reduces reports of workplace sexual harassment (De Coster et al. 1999; Mueller et al. 2001; but see Chamberlain et al. 2008). Moreover, ascriptive forms of inequality seem to be reduced when heterogeneous and cooperative team models are proscribed and carried out in the routine of everyday work (Kalev 2009). In addition, when supervisors work to construct a supportive environment, individuals are less likely to report experiencing sexual harassment (De Coster et al. 1999).

Workplace cultures supportive of work-family relations have been found to reduce work-family conflict, particularly for women, whereas company policies do not (Mennino, Rubin and Brayfield 2005). Such cultures may likewise have implications for sex discrimination and women’s perception of it. Although work-family conflict and sex discrimination are different experiential outcomes, to be sure, there is significant sex-based discrimination linked explicitly to parenting, motherhood, and how such obligations are perceived by employers. The result, even in the contemporary era, is persistent discrimination in hiring or firing in the case of pregnancy, and non-promotion and lower wages in the case of mothers (Correll, Benard and Paik 2007; Ortiz and Roscigno 2009). In effect, it is largely about employers’ perceptions of what makes a good employee and stereotypical assumptions of “dependability.” Women are likely aware of such vulnerability to employer perceptions and action, especially where workplace culture is less tolerant to work-family balance. Workplaces with supportive work-family environments, in contrast, are likely to be interpreted as embracing equal opportunity and therefore reduce workers’ perceptions of sex discrimination, especially among women.

Although workplaces are the proximate context in which interactional and experiential inequalities manifest, workplace cultures may also vary by sector. Scholars have long regarded the public sector as having a more egalitarian culture than the private sector. Moreover, recent research conducted by Llorens and colleagues demonstrates that sex linked inequalities are lower in the public sector compared to the private sector (Llorens 2008; Llorens et al. 2008). Because sex inequalities are lower in the public sector and the culture is seen as more equitable, individuals are less likely to report an experience of sex discrimination.
Perceptions of advancing within an organization emerge from the supportive behaviors exhibited by supervisors when affirming worker performance. Workers’ belief in their ability to advance in an organization arises from the normal promontional habits associated with these supported performances. When certain types of work performance by certain types of people are supported via the mechanism of advancement (e.g., promotion), this bolsters a common belief regarding how to get ahead and which role performances are supported and rewarded within a given culture. Indeed, perceived advancement opportunities represent an individual’s internalization of the stories and beliefs about getting ahead at work, thus offering an indicator of the types of people and performances supported for promotions.

_Hypothesis 3: More supportive workplace environments should reduce the likelihood of experiencing sex discrimination compared to less supportive environments._

Both solidarity and support are tied to work structure, which often determines how closely workers are supervised, thereby influencing routine activities and unique adaptations for ways of behaving in particular work groups or units. Some scholars have argued that highly populated job locations increase the likelihood for sexual harassment because: (1. there is a larger pool of potential offenders; and, (2. highly populated jobs generate a perceived sense of anonymity that leads to harassment victimization because would-be perpetrators may believe their actions are less visible (see De Coster et al. 1999). Conversely, larger organizations, because of bureaucratic structures of formality and accountability, often provide mechanisms of protection against the most severe forms of gender based ascription and harassment (Chamberlain et al. 2008; Dobbin and Kelly 2007; Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly 2006).

Although, organizational size can be theorized to either increase the prevalence of sex discrimination by creating greater levels of perpetrator anonymity, or decrease the likelihood of sex discrimination via bureaucratic rules and thus perpetrator constraint, we suspect that the former is more likely. Beyond providing some anonymity to perpetrators through sheer numbers, larger organizations are also more likely to have equal employment opportunity offices and provide employee and managerial diversity training programs. According to recent research, the existence of such protective structures and diversity training programs actually increases formal discrimination complaints. This effect is presumably a function of raised legal consciousness or potential backlash (Hirsh and Kmec 2009; Kalev et al. 2006). Moreover, workplace ethnographic studies and neo-institutional theorizing make quite apparent that there is often a disjuncture between official organizational mandates and what actually occurs in concrete work settings (e.g., Burawoy 1979; Padavic 1991).

_Hypothesis 4: Subjective experiences of sex discrimination will be more pronounced in larger compared to smaller workplaces._
Relative Power

Workplaces are hotbeds of political struggle over who gets what in organizations. One central determinant is the balance of power between interest groups. Less power means greater vulnerability to supervisory mistreatment for general and targeted discrimination (Roscigno, Lopez and Hodson 2009). Key dimensions of a worker’s relative power that can protect or make one vulnerable include human capital, workplace authority, job security and grievance procedures. Individuals with greater education and job tenure occupying positions of managerial authority will likely be less susceptible to workplace discrimination because (1. they are less easily replaceable, (2. they wield some organizational power, and (3. they are more likely to both know and invoke their rights concerning equitable treatment either through organizational mechanisms or, if need be, legal routes.

Job security reflects an additional dimension of worker power with implications for whether or not one is likely to be victimized. Indeed, those with less job security have few protections relative to being fired and thus a relative lack of power vis-à-vis coworkers and managers. Prior research largely confirms the relationship between relational power and both experiences of sexual harassment (Mueller et al. 2001) and vulnerability to workplace bullying (Hodson et al. 2006). Such power and vulnerability dynamics likely hold similar implications for sex discrimination and its likely occurrence. Conversely, one might speculate that women with greater “power” may be seen as a threat to male coworkers for organizational resources (De Coster et al. 1999) and thus more directly targeted. Some studies of sexual harassment concur in this regard, showing that women with greater authority, education and job tenure are more likely to experience sexual harassment (Chamberlain et al. 2008; De Coster et al. 1999; Uggen and Blackstone 2004). Qualitative evidence suggests that men in professions dominated by women ride a “glass escalator” to the top due to “invisible pressures” promoting their professional development, while women in professions comprised primarily of men experience blocked career promotions—the “glass ceiling.” (Williams 1992) Baxter and Wright (2000) challenged this notion, showing that while there is strong quantitative evidence supporting a gender-based gap in holding positions of authority, there is no support for a systemic “glass ceiling” because disadvantages women face in promotion are at the lower rather than higher levels of organizational hierarchies. Recent research has provided alternative evidence in this regard, suggesting that gender inequality increases for women as they move up in an organizational hierarchy (Gorman and Kmec 2009). These studies suggest that the importance of relative power for curtailing the experience of sex discrimination may be gendered.

Finally, worker power and protections may be proscribed by organizational mandates or collective protections. Clearly defined grievance procedures can provide susceptible workers with an organizational mechanism should they be discriminatorily targeted. Such procedures also arguably serve to constrain potential discriminators by making them accountable to grievance committees and those higher in the organization (Chamberlain et al. 2008; Mueller et al. 2001; Roscigno et al. 2009). Alternatively, other research suggests that formal grievance channels and related diversity programs
may actually increase individuals’ ability to recognize discriminatory acts, amplify the salience of identities, increase perceived experiences of sex discrimination (Hirsh and Kmec 2009), or potentially create a backlash among superordinate workers (Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly 2006). While our data prevent us from observing or measuring specific workplace policies and procedures, we do have information on union presence—presence typically corresponding quite highly with more formal workplace protections and organizational grievance outlets (see Choi, Leiter and Tomaskovic-Devey 2008). Given the findings in these literatures, we offer the following hypothesis:

_Hypothesis 5: Having more relative power in the workplace—more years in education and job tenure, more job security, and being in a unionized job—should reduce the likelihood of having a subjective experience of sex discrimination._

**Data, Method and Measures**

This study uses data from the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce. The data were collected through phone interviews conducted with a random probability sampling design using random-digit dialing. Respondents were non-institutional workers at paid jobs or income-producing businesses, over the age of 18, in the civilian labor force and residing in the continental United States. Of the telephone numbers called, 3,578 represented eligible households with residential numbers, generating 3,504 complete interviews. Of the 3,504 completed interviews, 2,810 respondents were deemed wage or salaried workers.

We employ multiple imputation techniques to handle missing data (Allison 2001). Using the MI procedure in SAS statistical software (PROC MI), five data imputations were created, each with a random error component for the missing values based all covariates found in our full statistical models. The procedure generates five different datasets with observed values and imputations of plausible values for each missing datum (see Allison 2001). Following recent statistical developments we deleted cases with imputed dependent variables prior to analyses and do not round imputed values for categorical independent variables because doing so may generate estimation bias (Horton, Lipsitz and Parzen 2003). In addition, values are not imputed for respondents who are systematically missing. For example, workers who are not part of a work group and those who do not have a direct supervisor cannot report the sex of one’s coworkers or supervisor. These cases were deleted prior to the MI procedure (255 cases). A total of 384 cases, deemed to have data missing at random, were included in the imputation process resulting in a sample size of 2,555.

**Dependent Variable**

The NSCW asked respondents, “Do you feel in any way discriminated against on your job because you are a man/woman?” The sex discrimination variable is coded as 1 for respondents who perceived sex discrimination and 0 for those who have not.
Independent Variables

Sex Composition
We capture the sex composition of one’s work group and the sex of one’s immediate supervisor with a series of dummy variables. For the sex composition of one’s coworkers we construct four indicator variables from the following question, “About what percent of your coworkers are people of your sex?” The six possible response categories include: 0 percent, 0 > 24.99 percent, 25 to 49.99 percent, 50 to 74.99 percent, 75 to 99.99 percent, and 100 percent. Because only 24 respondents reported working with zero percent same-sex coworkers, we combined the 0 percent and 0-24.99 percent same-sex categories. The reference category is 0 to 24.99 percent same-sex coworkers. If respondents reported working for a supervisor of the same sex we coded same-sex manager 1, otherwise 0.

Self-reports of sex composition have been shown to be both reliable and valid (Elliott 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). With regards to reliability, sex composition is measured with a question asking about the sex of one’s coworkers, something directly observable by the respondent. Our confidence in the reliability of the measure is also strengthened because respondents were asked to report sex composition categorically rather than as an exact percentage. Tomaskovic-Devey (1993) evaluated the reliability of a similar self-reported measure by comparing it with Current Population Survey occupational estimates. He demonstrates that there is no systematic bias in self-reports of sex job composition and that in larger work groups, where one would expect the difficulty of reporting accurately to increase, there is no decrease in reliability. In terms of validity self-reports of coworker sex composition is clearly superior to using aggregate occupational data from the census or national surveys. Such occupation-based data cannot capture the concrete settings in which workers interact, relational politics emerge and experiences are generated.

Workplace Culture
Five measures of workplace culture are included—coworker support, supervisor support, employer work-family support, advancement opportunities and anonymity. The coworker social support index is based on an average of the following three items: “I feel I am really a part of the group of people I work with,” “I have the support from coworkers that I need to do a good job,” and “I have support from coworkers that helps me to manage my work and personal or family life” (alpha = .77). The Likert response items include “strongly agree” (1), “somewhat agree” (2), “somewhat disagree” (3), and “strongly disagree” (4). Items were reverse coded so that higher values indicate greater coworker social support.

Supervisor support measure is based on an average of nine Likert-scale items (alpha = .90). Response items include “strongly agree” (1), “somewhat agree” (2), “somewhat disagree” (3), and “strongly disagree” (4). These items include questions such as, “my supervisor or manager: keeps me informed of the things I need to know to do my job well, has expectations of my performance on the job that are realistic, and recognizes
when I do a good job.” Items were reverse coded so that higher values signify greater supervisor social support. A list of all nine items can be found in the appendix.

Work-family supportiveness measure is based on four items. “There is an unwritten rule at my place of employment that you can’t take care of family needs on company time.” “At my place of employment, employees who put their family or personal needs ahead of their jobs are not looked on favorably.” “If you have a problem managing your work and family responsibilities, the attitude at my place of employment is: “You made your bed, now lie in it!”” “At my place of employment, employees have to choose between advancing in their jobs or devoting attention to their family or personal lives.” The Likert response items include “strongly agree” (1), “somewhat agree” (2), “somewhat disagree” (3), and “strongly disagree” (4) (alpha = .72). Higher values indicate greater work-family support.

Sector is included in our models with a dummy variable for public sector and non-profit sector. Private sector is the reference category. Perception of advancement within the workplace is measured by the question, “How would you rate your own chance to advance in your organization? Is it excellent, good, fair, or poor?” We reverse coded this variable so that higher values indicate greater advancement opportunities. Finally, consistent with the previous literature, we use the natural logarithm of employment size to capture anonymity (Chamberlain et al. 2008; De Coster et al. 1999; Mueller et al. 2001).

Relative Power
We include five measures of relative power in our final models. First, we include respondents’ educational attainment measured in years. Second, we include a measure of job tenure, measured as the number of years a respondent has been at his or her current job. Third, we constructed a dummy variable indicating whether or not respondents are in a managerial position, where we coded managers as 1, else 0. Fourth, we constructed a measure of job security from the following question, “How likely is it that during the next couple of years you will lose your present job and have to look for a job with another employer—very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not at all likely?” We reverse coded this variable so that higher values signify greater job security. Finally, we constructed a dummy variable indicating whether or not respondents are in a unionized job, where we coded unionized workplaces as 1, else 0.

Controls
In the models that follow we control for respondents’ age, race and parental status. Age is measured in years. Race is based on respondents’ self-categorization. The variable “White” served as the reference group for three dummy variables—Black, Hispanic and Other Race. Our parental status variable is constructed from the following question, “Are you the parent or guardian of any child of any age? Please include your own children, stepchildren, adopted children, foster children, grandchildren or others for whom you act as a parent.” If respondents answered “yes” parental status was coded 1 else 0. Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analyses that follow are reported in Table 1.
Analysis and Results

We employ the use of logistic regression in the analyses that follow. The analyses proceed in two steps. We first examine whether organizational context shapes subjective experiences of sex discrimination. To address this central question, we first estimate a baseline model with respondent’s sex and controls (Model 1, Table 2). We then estimate three additional nested models adding sex composition (Model 2), workplace culture (Model 3), and finally relative power (Model 4).

The second component to our analyses disaggregates the prior findings by sex (Table 3). One can reasonably expect that patterns pertaining to sex composition, culture and power may be sex-specific, and these models allow us to see the extent to which that is indeed the case.

Organizational Context and the Experiences of Sex Discrimination

Table 2 reports estimates surrounding experiences of sex discrimination for the entire sample. The baseline model (Model 1) indicates that women are more than twice as likely to report experiencing sex discrimination relative to men, net of controls for age and race.
Model 2 reports the influence of compositional thresholds (hypotheses 1a and 1b) and having a same-sex manager (Hypothesis 2) on the likelihood of experiencing sex discrimination. Consistent with expectations, respondents are less likely to experience sex discrimination after a majority threshold is eclipsed. Thus, relative to respondents in token jobs (0-24.99% same-sex coworkers), respondents in jobs with 50-74.99 percent same-sex coworkers are 63 percent less likely to report experiencing sex discrimination.

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<td>(.14)</td>
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<td>(.20)</td>
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<td>Non-profit sector</td>
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<td>1.05</td>
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<td>-.37***</td>
<td>.69</td>
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<td>(.04)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relative Power</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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in the workplace. The drop becomes even more precipitous as sex homogeneity increases. For example, compared to working in a token job, individuals working with 75-99.9 percent and 100 percent same-sex coworkers are 77 percent and 92 percent less likely to experience sex discrimination, respectively. The influence of having a same-sex manager on experiences of sex discrimination is also consistent with our theoretical expectations, though the effect is admittedly only marginally significant (p < .10).

In Model 3 we add measures of workplace culture to test the third and fourth sets of expectations outlined earlier. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, coworker, supervisor and work-family support, as well advancement opportunities each decrease the likelihood of experiencing workplace sex discrimination. However, perceived sex discrimination is not associated with sector. We also find support for the effects of anonymity on the subjective experience of sex discrimination (Hypothesis 4). This suggests something about the context of larger workplaces that bolsters experiences of sex discrimination. As discussed at the outset, in such workplaces and given the sheer larger numbers, there may simply be more potential perpetrators—perpetrators who, in the face of larger numbers of employees, may feel shielded by anonymity and from direct, ongoing supervision. Additionally, recent research also suggests that larger workplaces may have organizational human resource structures (e.g., employee diversity training programs) that may raise legal consciousness therefore increasing the likelihood that workers will name a negative experience sex discrimination (Hirsh and Kmec 2009).

In Model 4 we add measures of relative power. Contrary to prior literature—literature that tends to focus on more general forms of workplace abuse such as verbal or emotional bullying—relative power seems to add very little to our understanding of
the organizational context of sex discrimination. The only marginally significant measure of relative power is holding a managerial job \((p < .10)\). Nonetheless, people in managerial jobs are approximately 1.4 times more likely to experience sex discrimination compared to people in non-managerial jobs. Such findings suggest to us that sex, as a status unto itself, may override other forms of workplace status and the relative power they may or may not afford. The fact that those in the managerial ranks are more likely to report having experienced sex discrimination could reflect a backlash toward their garnering of a higher status institutional position, or greater education and thus knowledge of their rights concerning equitable treatment.

Finally, we expected that organizational context measures would reduce the gap between women and men regarding discriminatory experiences at work. Interestingly, the likelihood of women experiencing discrimination relative to men actually increases when we add measures of sex composition (Model 2), workplace culture (Model 3), and relative power (Model 4). Thus, an increasing likelihood for women experiencing sex discrimination relative to men—from 2.14 in the baseline model to 2.64 in the final model—suggests that the apparent effect of sex on the likelihood of experiencing discrimination is exacerbated after workplace context is considered. Our disaggregation helps clarify sex-specific patterns.

**Organizational Context, Sex Discrimination, and Women and Men**

Logistic regression estimates for sex discrimination experiences are reported by sex in Table 3. Among women our sex composition results are similar to those presented earlier. For example, women’s experiences of workplace discrimination are greatest in token jobs (0-24.99% female) and when they begin to encroach upon majority status (25-49.99% female). This finding supports both token status and group threat theoretical expectations. Among men, however, the experience of sex discrimination is most likely when they occupy token positions. Although marginally significant \((p < .10)\), men in jobs that are 25-49.99 percent male are 54 percent less likely to report experiencing sex discrimination in the workplace compared to being in a token job.

Such findings suggest that the social processes shaping workplace experiences are gendered in that women and men appear to experience the competition threat dynamic in unique ways. Indeed, sex differences across the compositional thresholds are striking. Relative to women who are in token jobs (0-24.99 % same-sex coworkers), women in work groups that are 50-74.99 percent, 75-99.99 percent and 100 percent female, are 60 percent, 73 percent and 87 percent less likely to experience sex discrimination, respectively. Compare this to men. When they are in work groups that are 50-74.99 percent, 75-99.99 percent and 100 percent male, they are 80 percent, 92 percent and 97 percent less likely than men in token thresholds to experience sex discrimination, respectively. These differences suggest that while numerical majority status is an important determinant (if not protective buffer) relative to experiencing sex discrimination for women and men alike, thresholds affect men and women in uniquely gendered ways.
Further sex differences emerge when examining the role of workplace culture. While most measures of workplace culture were significant earlier in Table 2, the findings reported in Table 3 suggest, again, differential processes. Among women, coworker support, supervisor support, work-family support and advancement opportunities are all associated with lower experiences of sex discrimination. These effects, for men, while notable, are only marginally significant ($p < .10$).

Finally, the only relative power measure to reach statistical significance, albeit of marginal significance ($p < .10$), in the prior analysis was holding a managerial position. Consistent with our interpretation of that pattern, we find in Table 3 that it is disparately women managers who report greater instances of sex discrimination on their jobs compared to women in non-managerial jobs. Being a manager is notably unassociated with men’s experiences of sex discrimination. This is consistent with the previous literature, which indicates women in positions of authority are likely to be singled out as targets for harassment. It may also be the case that women in managerial positions are more likely to recognize and name discriminatory acts.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Thirty years ago, Baron and Bielby (1980) emphasized the role of workplaces in generating inequality and stratifying social groups. Students of organizations and inequality have followed suit by attempting to isolate organizational contexts within which inequalities are heightened or reduced. The majority of this work has centered on how organizations allocate jobs, and especially the resources attached to them, such as wages, authority and status (see Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2010 for review). We have contributed to these lines of inquiry by examining the organizational contexts that condition the subjective experience of sex discrimination. This is a particularly important topic given: (1. the now well-known relationship between experiences of discrimination and both mental health and work-related attitudes and behaviors (Feagin and McKinney 2003; Pavalko et al. 2003; Roscigno 2007); (2. the importance of subjective experiences/interpretations of discrimination to the process of both informal and formal institutional claims-making (Felstiner, Abel and Sarat 1981: Hirsh and Kornrich 2008; Nielson and Nelson 2005); and (3. the importance of organizational context for the allocation of both formal, easily measurable stratification outcomes (e.g., wages) and less explicit, often hidden and sometimes negative workplace experiences. It is these interactional and experiential inequalities that we wish to encourage stratification scholars to continue to investigate.

While little research has examined the subjective assessment of sex discrimination, we are able to cull from recent literatures exploring the organizational foundations of workplace experiences, including experiences of sexual harassment and workplace bullying (Chamberlain et al. 2008; De Coster et al. 1999; Hodson et al. 2006; Mueller et al. 2001; Roscigno et al. 2009; Uggen and Blackstone 2004). These literatures direct us toward three important dimensions of workplaces—sex composition, workplace culture and relative power—that likely hold implications for the experience of sex discrimination in the workplace.
Table 3: Logistic Regression Estimates for Subjective Experiences of Workplace Sex Discrimination, by Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex Composition</th>
<th>Women exp^β</th>
<th>Men exp^β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same-Sex Coworkers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49.99%</td>
<td>.15 (.32)</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74.99%</td>
<td>-0.91** (.28)</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-99.99%</td>
<td>-1.32*** (.30)</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-2.02*** (.58)</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same-sex manager</td>
<td>-.53** (.19)</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace Culture</th>
<th>Women exp^β</th>
<th>Men exp^β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coworker support</td>
<td>-.59*** (.16)</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor support</td>
<td>-.36* (.16)</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-family support</td>
<td>-.27* (.13)</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>-.10 (.25)</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit sector</td>
<td>-.10 (.27)</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancement opportunities</td>
<td>-.40*** (.10)</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymity</td>
<td>.07 (.05)</td>
<td>1.07</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relative Power</th>
<th>Women exp^β</th>
<th>Men exp^β</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education (years)</td>
<td>.03 (.05)</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job tenure (years)</td>
<td>.02 (.01)</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial job</td>
<td>.46* (.22)</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>.04 (.10)</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unionized job</td>
<td>-.16 (.26)</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.95** (.91)</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R^2</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>.257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model chi-square</td>
<td>163.37</td>
<td>75.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†p < .10  *p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001
Note: Models also contain controls for respondent’s race, age and parental status.
Source: 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce
Scholars have long debated the importance of workplace sex composition for understanding workplace inequality. Blalock’s (1967) threat perspective, for example, suggests that when minority groups begin to approach the majority group threshold, the majority group will engage in discriminatory behaviors in order to protect privileged status, rewards and resources. Kanter (1977), however, suggested that discrimination is more likely for tokens in an organization—tokens that are vulnerable given their visibility and dominant group perceptions. Our findings indicate that sex discrimination is less likely for both women and men when they are part of the numerical majority of a work group’s sex composition. Among men, perceived sex discrimination is most likely when they are tokens. Among women, however, interesting patterns in support of both Blalock’s and Kanter’s theoretical predictions emerge. Notable in this regard is that women are most likely to experience sex discrimination when occupying both token jobs (defined as less than 25% women) and jobs where women were approaching men’s majority status (25-49.99% women). The likelihood of experiencing sex discrimination did not differ statistically between these two numerical thresholds. Hence, women are equally likely to experience sex discrimination in both competitive and isolated contexts. The social dynamics shaping those experiences are nevertheless markedly different, as the interactional mechanism shifts from visibility and stereotyping to group-based competition and threat.

The finding that men’s experiences of sex discrimination are more systematically linked to token contexts is interesting and also somewhat inconsistent with literature suggesting that men may actually benefit in wages and promotions from being tokens—a process Williams (1992) coined the “glass escalator.” More recent time-series research, such as that by Budig (2002), provides little evidence of a glass escalator, but rather that male advantage exists regardless of occupational sex composition. We would not deny this and, in fact, believe that male tokens may benefit in certain tangible ways (e.g., wages, promotions, administrative authority, etc.) yet still may be more alert to potential sex discrimination owing to the structural, cultural and interactional contexts of the jobs they are holding. First, because of men’s dominant cultural status in society, token positions may be the only job context in which they are aware of their minority status. The amplification of sex as a salient categorical distinction arguably rises in such a scenario, increasing the likelihood that an experience will be labeled discriminatory. Second, men may interpret the actions and behaviors outside of their immediate workgroup as sex discrimination. In occupations that are primarily comprised of women and highly feminized culturally, men are more likely to be on the receiving end of discriminatory treatment because their sex is incongruent with status expectations. This relationship, however, is likely to be contingent on the presence of potential perpetrators—perpetrators who are men in other jobs in the organization, particularly those jobs with pervasive masculine ethos. As a case in point, we know that male nurses and administrative assistants are likely to hear discriminatory remarks from both male and female coworkers (e.g., Henson and Rodgers 2001). The question of sex discrimination and its perception among men generally, or male tokens specifi-
cally, is an interesting one worthy of future investigation, particularly if data becomes available on both the organizational context within which they work, their experiences of discrimination, and the attributes and status of discriminators.

Beyond compositional dynamics, other statuses and organizational factors likewise appear to be influential. In this regard, the presence of a female manager strongly reduces the odds of experiencing workplace sex discrimination for women. The current data and analyses are unable to explicate precisely why, although there are several, potentially interconnected possibilities. Drawing from routine activities theory, De Coster and colleagues (1999) argue that same-sex managers may provide a “guardian” function protecting women from experiences of sexual harassment. Other research suggests that a status-similar supervisor may function to reduce women’s perception of blocked workplace opportunities (Elliott and Smith 2001). It may also be the case, however, that “naming” an experience as sex discrimination may depend on gendered interactional dynamics. For example, a woman may interpret a male supervisor’s actions as sex discrimination whereas a female manager engaging the in the same behavior may be seen as merely rude.

Workplace culture is also an important predictor of the subjective experience of workplace sex discrimination; however, the effects are more important for understanding women’s experiences than men’s. We find that workplace discrimination is minimized in more supportive workplace environments. We also find that workplace cultures that emphasize advancement opportunities also provide the context for reducing sex discrimination for women, but have no effect on men’s experiences of sex-based discrimination.

Although workers relative power vis-à-vis potential victimizers has been an important factor in explaining workplace bullying and sexual harassment, it seems to offer less predictive leverage when it comes to the experience of sex discrimination at work. In fact, only one of our relative power measures was statistically significant for women, and none of the measures were significant for men. Women in managerial jobs were more likely to report experiencing sex discrimination in the workplace compared to women in non-managerial positions. This finding is consistent with the sexual harassment literature, which suggests that women in positions of authority, but not men, are often the targets of sexual harassment (Chamberlain et al. 2008; De Coster et al. 1999). This may be a function of a female manager’s relative power threat to men, the fact that a female manager likely has more education and knowledge of legal rights pertaining to sex discrimination, or a combination of both.

This article provides important insights into how organizations shape workers’ perception of sex discrimination, and therefore contribute to experiential inequalities. It is important to recognize, however, that much of the variation in sex discrimination remains unexplained in our statistical models. Recent research demonstrates that some human resource management practices may actually increase legal rights mobilization by increasing awareness of sex discrimination, even though such practices (i.e., workforce diversity training) are designed to minimize discrimination (Hirsh and Kmec 2009). The use of formal job postings for internal promotion opportunities is another
organizational characteristic that is likely to reduce workers reported experience of sex discrimination (Roscigno 2007). Our data, however, do not contain measures of human resource management structures that may influence the subjective assessment of sex discrimination. Future research identifying the organizational policies and practices that either heighten or reduce perceived sex discrimination will enhance an organizational approach to the study of experiential inequality and also hold important implications for the organization of work more generally.

Although the focus of this article is the organizational foundations of subjective discriminatory experiences, individual and interactional characteristics are also likely to provide additional layers of explanation. For example, parental status may be an important explanatory factor, especially for women given the mounting evidence of a motherhood penalty (Budig and England 2001; Correll et al. 2007). The statistical estimates in this article control for parental status and though unreported, the variable failed to reach statistical significance in any of our models. We suspect that this may stem from the fact that although empirical evidence demonstrating the presence of a motherhood penalty is conclusive, many mothers may be unaware that they are receiving a wage penalty or being denied employment due to their motherhood status. Hence, they may be less likely to either (1) realize that it is occurring or (2) define the experience as sex discrimination. Researchers should more thoroughly interrogate the relationship between parental status and experiences of workplace discrimination, as well as other individual and interactional factors.

Finally, future research on sex discrimination should also examine more closely, if possible, the specific incidents that women and men experience and report as discriminatory. What qualities of actions, discourse, gestures and general behavioral patterns are experienced as discriminatory, and are these different for women and men? Moreover, what factors account for differences within sex categories? In contrast to the organizational and individual factors, gaining insight into the relevant interactions and the relational nature of such social processes would be incredibly beneficial and are complimentary relative to the sort of statistical modeling we have offered. Padavic’s (1991) qualitative study of gender dynamics in a male dominated workplace, for instance, revealed that not all women experienced sex discrimination in the same manner, but rather men’s treatment of women depended on gender (i.e., the extent to which women were perceived as feminine or masculine). Women who were more masculine were treated with disdain and rarely helped or made to feel a part of the group, leading to isolation. Conversely, women who were perceived as more feminine tended to experience discrimination in terms of both sexual harassment and paternalism. Similarly, men who report experiencing sex discrimination, especially in female-dominated jobs, may not be perceived as fitting traditional standards of heteronormitivity and therefore may experience more discrimination from their coworkers and supervisors (Henson and Rodgers 2001). These studies suggest that sex and gender may interact in unique ways and shape women’s and men’s objective and subjective experiences of sex discrimination.
Clearly, the blending of insights from case, ethnographic and statistical modeling could very well resolve many of the questions that remain. The remaining task for stratification researchers is to recognize and model distinct features of organizations that magnify or ameliorate experiences of discrimination while also incorporating, through a variety of methodological strategies and measurement techniques, potentially relevant individual characteristics and relational and interactional dynamics. Such research will provide important contributions to the work, organizations and stratification literatures, as well as the more general scholarship on rights consciousness and legal mobilization.

Note
1. An anonymous *Social Forces* reviewer suggested that we may wish to include a socio-economic index score in the model. We re-estimated our models with SEI scores. In all of the models, the SEI index failed to reach statistical significance and our substantive conclusions remained unchanged. In order to present a more parsimonious model we do not include this variable in our reported estimates.

References
_____ 1977. *Inequality and Heterogeneity*. Free Press.


Hodson, Randy. *Dignity at Work*. Cambridge University Press.


Appendix. Supervisor Support Scale Items

My supervisor or manager:
(1. keeps me informed of the things I need to know to do my job well.
(2. has expectations of my performance on the job that is realistic.
(3. recognizes when I do a good job.
(4. is supportive when I have a work problem.
(5. is fair and doesn’t show favoritism in responding to employees’ personal or family needs.
(6. accommodates me when I have family or personal business to take care of—for example, medical appointments, meeting with child’s teacher, etc.
(7. understands when I talk about personal or family issues that affect my work.
(8. I feel comfortable bringing up personal or family issues with my supervisor or manager.
(9. really cares about the effects that work demands have on my personal and family life.