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0521323657 - Pathways in the Workplace: The Effects of Gender and Race on Access to Organizational Resources

Jon Miller

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Rationalistic theories of the workplace and the claims typically made by organizations stress that an individual's access to the resources and advantages of an organization are determined by his or her qualifications and contributions to the collective enterprise, and that the payoffs for effort are essentially the same for all those doing similar work. However, as Jon Miller shows in this book, negotiating for workplace rewards is actually far more complicated than this model allows, and he demonstrates that access to networks of organizational communication is in fact fundamentally influenced by race and gender.

Drawing on his study of American public service organizations, Professor Miller compares patterns of access to informal colleague networks and relations to the decision-making apparatus for white and nonwhite men and women. He shows that although no group monopolized the advantages of the workplace, and none was disadvantaged on all dimensions of work, no two race-gender groups faced the same set of reward allocation rules. Only white males experienced a fairly close correspondence between their bureaucratic "investments" and their workplace rewards, whereas for others more particularistic factors, such as age and ties to the external community, came to the fore.

This revealing demonstration of the systematic and potentially divisive variations that exist in the ways in which qualifications and accomplishments are linked to the rewards enjoyed by individuals within the workplace will appeal to sociologists and other social scientists interested in formal organizations, as well as in the study of gender and race. It will also be of interest to readers concerned with organizational psychology and management studies.

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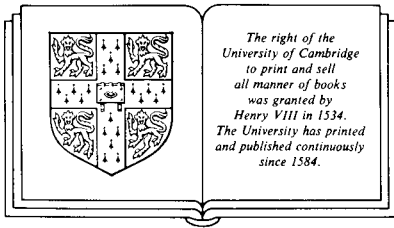
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# Pathways in the workplace

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**Jon Miller**

*University of Southern California*



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*Cambridge*

*London New York New Rochelle*

*Melbourne Sydney*

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521323659](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521323659)

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First published 1986

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Miller, Jon, 1940–

Pathways in the workplace.

(The Arnold and Caroline Rose monography series of the American Sociological Association)

Bibliography; p.

Includes index.

1. Discrimination in employment – United States
  2. Sex discrimination in employment – United States.
  3. Race discrimination – United States. I. Title.
- II. Series.

HD4903.5.U58M58 1986 331.13'3'0973 85–19550

ISBN-13 978-0-521-32365-9 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-32365-7 hardback

Transferred to digital printing 2006

Cambridge University Press

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*For*

Bob Hagedorn,

Dick Ogles,

*and, of course,*

Sandy Labovitz

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## Preface

My ambition in this work has been to give some preliminary but suggestive answers to the problem of internal organizational stratification. The questions that I have raised about race and gender differentiation and the tentative answers that I have offered should ramify in interesting directions; obviously, however, no single study can claim to resolve such a complex problem.

In the analysis, I have concentrated most of my attention on the statistically detectable traces of organizational stratification. The measurement decisions that I have made, if not always optimal, are fairly straightforward; as a consequence, the results should be easily replicated. At the same time, I am very much aware that what people do with, to, and in spite of each other in organizations and how all of this relates to ascribed status differences must at some point be examined interpretively in order to place it in the context of a system of emergent intersubjective meaning. My hope is that the findings that I offer, and especially the gaps and uncertainties in the findings, will point to the kinds of questions that need to be asked in more fine-grained, qualitative studies in the future.

On a more macro level, I have also been attentive to the community ties of the organizations and respondents in the study, and I have taken into account the broader features of the external labor market. In fact, such considerations provide the theoretical leverage for some of the interpretations that I have advanced. However, I have not directly addressed in any comprehensive way either the origins of human service organizations or the functions they serve for the larger structures in which they are embedded. Again, my hope is that what the findings show as well as what they are unable to show will provide some direction for other investigators. What is clearly needed is to connect the dynamics of internal stratification more systematically than I have been able to do to the larger political-economic realities in which organizations are embedded.

In short, because of its objectives and its particular focus, this study should be seen as one that, more than anything else, calls for comparison, correc-

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tion, and extension, both downward to the level of intersubjectivity and upward and outward to larger institutional structures.

Two comments that reveal my personal biases are also in order in these opening remarks. First, I am concerned with the practical message, if any, that is taken from the results of this study. One important finding that I report is that access to a variety of interpersonal, informal network resources was roughly equal for white men, white women, nonwhite men, and nonwhite women, but that quite distinct pathways provided this access. It involves a judgment call that goes beyond what the data directly show, but my assessment is that such findings, and the explanations of them that I offer, reveal some of the things that traditionally excluded groups are able to do, or must do, in order to deal with the institutional obstacles they face in the world of work. The message is *not* that informal organizational mechanisms compensate for or neutralize these institutional limitations. Rather, I take the data as indicating that every category of organizational participants has a range of strategic options, including the use they make of their external attachments, with which to confront the internal system of reward and resource allocation. How rationally or equitably the *organization* behaves is in large part determined by where the *organizational member* is located in the larger ascribed social system outside the organization. Put simply, the more favorably the individual is placed externally, the stronger is his or her internal claim to rational or equitable treatment.

Second, because of the topic I chose to address in this monograph, I have said next to nothing substantive about the clients who were “served” or “processed” or “treated” (the agency term is “deinstitutionalized”) by the human service organizations in the survey. I am, in fact, acutely aware that many middle-class professionals – sometimes including social researchers – owe their employment and a large part of their occupational privileges to what society elects to do with various stigmatized groups. To me it is axiomatic that what happens to the people in people-processing organizations is of first importance, and this research should not be seen as elevating the problems of human service practitioners to a status above the problems of clients.

*Los Angeles*

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## Acknowledgments

James Lincoln and Jon Olson joined me in a very productive scholarly partnership in the early stages of this project, and they deserve a share of the credit for whatever I have accomplished here. The project has grown and changed enough since we worked together that they also deserve exemption from any problems or oversights that have survived the long process of review and revision. Peter Blau, Kurt Tausky, and several anonymous referees read earlier versions of the manuscript and offered a number of comments that have helped to shape and improve this final version. Malcolm Klein, Solomon Kobrin, and Elaine Corry provided the initial opportunity, the facilities, and the material resources to conduct the survey, and I am grateful to my research assistants, Margo Gordon, Larry Heck, and Sonya Miller, for their cheerful submission to that form of exploitation that we are fond of calling “learning from experience.” Financial support for the analysis presented here was supplied by the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, grants 78NIAX-0135 and 80IJCX-0089, awarded to the Laboratory for Organizational Research, Department of Sociology, University of Southern California. The ideas and opinions expressed by me are entirely my own and in no way reflect or represent the official position or policies of that agency.

Now I claim the pleasant privilege of expressing gratitude to my colleagues Herman Turk, Parvin Kassaie, Edward Ransford, Jennifer Glass, Robert W. Hodge and Barbara Laslett for being around, reading drafts, listening to arguments, or offering invaluable technical and conceptual advice (or all of these) throughout the evolution of the monograph.

J. M.