





## *An Argument for Using Affirmative Action for Men in Female-Dominated Professions*

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### **Abstract**

Affirmative action's focus is to introduce people into professions and other areas in which, as a group, they are under-represented. Generally, in the United States of America, affirmative action is used to integrate women into male dominated and minority races into white dominated professions, respectively. There are a number of arguments used to justify such action, including equality, justice, the need for role models and the pursuit of social goals or goods.

What receives far less attention in the literature is affirmative action for men in female-dominated fields, especially those that require the employee to be subordinate to another employee. I contend that ignoring this side of affirmative action makes it far more difficult for women to succeed in integrating male-dominated fields and the arguments for affirmative action for women work equally well for men. A pragmatic argument will be made for why it is necessary to integrate men into female-dominated fields to help eliminate unconscious sexism in all fields of endeavor. Moreover, what is said here applies to other areas in which affirmative action is employed.

**Keywords:** *Affirmative action, sex discrimination, pragmatic ethics, psychology.*

### **Introduction**

Discussions of affirmative action, sometimes called reverse discrimination, are overwhelmingly focused upon women and improving their presence and competitiveness in male-dominated fields.<sup>1</sup> If we look at the number of women in certain professions, such as science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM),<sup>2</sup> or in upper management in business, we find them underrepresented in comparison to their availability in the relevant population pools. For example, women hold only 5% and 21% of full engineering and science U.S. professorships, respectively, whilst receiving approximately 50% of science and engineering doctorates. (National Science Foundation 2012) According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, women make up 27.9% of chief executives and 72.2% of office and administrative support occupations, with 94.5% being secretaries and administrative assistants; 34.5% lawyers and 85.4% of paralegals and legal assistants; 37.9% of physicians and surgeons and 72.6% physician assistants, 90.8 percent nurse practitioners, and 89.4% registered nurses; and 9.4% pilots and flight engineers and 74.9% flight attendants (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016). So there is, at the very least, a

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<sup>1</sup> The argument focusses on the United States, but issues raised here will have relevance for those want to do business in the USA or who have similar circumstances confronting them. In addition, affirmative action refers to the practice, and not necessarily what is legally required, especially since the legal focus is on women and minorities.

<sup>2</sup> I focus on STEM for several reasons: higher education is a business, and based on their reasoning processes, those involved in STEM should be ideal candidates for integrating their disciplines, yet they still seem to struggle to do so after years of affirmative action. If a plausible hypothesis can be found for this lack of adequate progress, then it can be applied to all businesses.

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*prima facie* problem to be solved, in part, through applying the proper attention and resources in recruitment, hiring, and retention of women in male-dominated fields, as well as integrating those fields predominately occupied by women.

Rarely, if ever, is affirmative action mentioned when it comes to non-minority males because a general assumption appears to be that they do not need such assistance when pursuing career goals. Over a considerable number of years, this has been correct in many cases, but the view is rather myopic. In female-dominated positions, as will be shown below, men have a very difficult time finding a job even when their credentials merit serious consideration and employment.

After arguing for consistency in the standard reasoning for affirmative action, which expands its scope, I will develop my pragmatic justification for using affirmative action for men and women. The idea is that if women continue to dominate professions that are thought of as being subordinate and substandard to those in male-dominated professions, such as STEM, then women will continue to have difficulty achieving adequate representation in those areas in which they desire to increase their numbers.<sup>3,4</sup> Having too many women in positions thought inferior reinforces unconscious sexist stereotypes about power, which in turn affects how women are thought about in male-dominated fields. If we want women to be accepted in STEM and the business world's upper echelons, as well as treating men as we ought, we need to stop providing subtle evidence that women's "proper place" is serving others, especially males in charge.

## **Stipulations**

Before arguing that affirmative action should be used for males in female-dominated fields to the very same degree it is employed for women in male-dominated professions, three stipulations need to be made.<sup>5</sup> First, generally, no person should be discriminated against merely because of a morally irrelevant feature nor should that characteristic figure into decisions about employment in any of its aspects (Cohen and Sterba 2003, p. 23).<sup>6</sup> Justice:

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<sup>3</sup> This view is shared by Dominique Gomez.

<sup>4</sup> Madeline Heilman argues that affirmative action programs and practices might actually be harming women by contributing to stereotyping. (Heilman 1997, p. 877).

<sup>5</sup> I use "sex" and "gender" interchangeably, although there are essential differences between the two. "Sex" more closely captures the difference between groups I want to address, but the literature generally uses "gender" when referring to men and women.

<sup>6</sup> Although gender is extraneous to most legitimate work requirements, sometimes it is relevant to the job. For example, if we want someone to portray Marie Curie in a film, then we would hire a female actor for the part rather than a male. I am assuming that there could be a legitimate reason to use sex as a criterion for employment, etc., although it is not clear when that reason would obtain in the STEM and business management professions. However, if the position is not gender specific, then anyone who is able to do the job should be considered fairly. For competitiveness' sake and the importance of the job, such as surgeon and business executive, those who fall into the group of best fit to perform the job should be hired.

certainly entails at least this: It is wrong, always and everywhere, to give special advantage to any group simply on the basis of physical characteristics that have no relevance to the award given or the burden imposed (Ibid., p. 25).<sup>7, 8</sup>

After all, no one gets to select his or her gender, and gender is morally irrelevant to doing a job in the vast majority of cases, therefore normally, it cannot be used as a merit criterion when it comes to hiring, promotions, and job related rewards.

Second, although justice is important, at times, special permission for affirmative action's discrimination can be morally justified using plausible reasoning.<sup>9</sup> Based on the standard role models and achieving social goals arguments,<sup>10</sup> I will stipulate - non-controversially, I hope - that affirmative action is a morally legitimate method to achieve desired outcomes.

Third, I will also assume that women want to enter male-dominated fields and that men want to enter female-dominated fields in sufficient numbers to justify affirmative action programs of some type. The reason I make this an assumption rather than taking it as an accepted fact is recent research showing that women have greater choice in careers, which might better explain why there are fewer women in STEM professions than discrimination does (Wang, et. Al. 2013, pp. 1 and 5). Those women who score high in both math and verbal abilities possess more career opportunities than men who tend to score lower in verbal ability but higher in mathematical ability. The former have opportunities in both non-STEM and STEM careers, whereas the latter, based in part on gender stereotyping, generally must seek STEM professions. Making the case for gender-based affirmative action more difficult is the finding that the pursuit of math-science careers is more heavily influenced by individual differences than group membership, *viz.* gender. (Lubinski and Benbow 2006) If real, then this fact would make solutions concerning affirmative action based on gender much more difficult to achieve because one's gender will no longer provide an easy marker as to who should receive affirmative action benefits.

### **The role model argument**

The role model argument incorporates the need for exemplars to combat unconscious sexism as its central premise. Women in power as role models are required so that other females can identify with them. With a sufficient number of role models, it becomes reasonable to aspire to and try for managerial, executive, STEM and other

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<sup>7</sup> Lisa Newton's argument against reverse discrimination is based on Aristotle's conception of justice is convincing: One cannot violate justice in order to uphold justice.

<sup>8</sup>Some claim that equality is so important: "Quotas, as contested as they are, are another way to counter the under-representation of women scientists in decision-making positions in research organizations." (Muhlenbruch and Jochimsen 2013, p. 42)

<sup>9</sup>Sissela Bok (1999) argues that lying or deception requires special permission when telling the truth does not. I am modifying her argument to fit my argument.

<sup>10</sup> Compensation arguments seem the weakest support for affirmative action, and will prove even more so when it comes to males seeking positions in female-dominated professions.

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influential positions, since becoming one of these is a practical possibility.<sup>11</sup> Without affirmative action, there will be too few women in the desirable professions to create the normalization effect of women and girls seeing women in those areas as part of the given.<sup>12</sup> That is, familiarity does not breed contempt in these circumstances, but it does show women that it is a natural thing, defined as being common and accepted, for them to be in powerful positions in male-dominated professions. It can be who they are.

The idea here is to alter personal identity in a positive way so that men and women have equal motivation to pursue more powerful careers. Eccles argues that motivation is tied to identities, which are comprised by at least three components:

1. A value component that captures the salience, centrality, and valence a person attaches to specific individual characteristics and collective groups of which one is a member;
2. A content component that includes all of the beliefs the person has about which tasks, behaviors, mannerism, activities and so on, are associated with the successful enactment of various personal and collective identities; and
3. An efficacy or expectancy component that includes the individual's beliefs about his or her ability to enact these various behaviors. (Eccles 2009, p. 88)

Making the value, content, and efficacy components similar enough between men and women in practice allows us to increase career choices for both, as well as to avoid wasting resources. (Hill, et al. 2010, chapter 10) More specifically, men already have the support network in place to realize their ends, and automatically believe that they have opportunities in those powerful professions. We want to have the same sort of belief, decisions procedures, and beneficial structures existing for women so that we do not have to make a special effort to accomplish what is already successfully being done with the male's fully developed and implemented process. After all, once it becomes commonly accepted for women to be in currently male-dominated fields, affirmative action will no longer be needed.<sup>13</sup>

Men seeking jobs in female-dominated professions need the same efforts applied as well, and for the same reasons. Although these less independent and less powerful jobs have no inherent degradation to them, many men taking "female" jobs hurt their social and self-image. Too often people feel that such men cannot be *real* men because they cannot compete in masculine dominated fields or they have too many traits associated with being female, which makes them too feminine. The American Assembly for Men in Nursing, for example, reported that the top three obstacles for recruiting men into nursing are

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<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Raymond argues that it is not enough to have role models. Unconscious gender bias is also transmitted through the overall culture. However, "[b]y enabling more women to succeed, despite the existence of unconscious bias, this will gradually eliminate the stereotype of the successful scientist as male, which is the root of gender bias." (Raymond 2013, p. 34)

<sup>12</sup> When thinking about jobs in certain professions, such as secondary teacher and engineers, White and White found that there was bias in regard to which gender filled those positions. (White and White 2006, p. 259).

<sup>13</sup> This task will be made harder based on cultural biases. Pamela Frome, et al. have found that "concerns for balancing career and family, together with lower value for science-related domains, continue to steer young women away from occupations in traditionally male-dominated fields, where their abilities and ambitions may lie." (Frome, et al. 2006, p. 359)

gender/gender stereotypes, the field being traditionally female, and other professions being seen as more male appropriate: 73%, 59%, and 53%, respectively. (AAMN 2005, p. 18)<sup>14</sup>

We could plausibly extend these results to males in other female-dominated professions. Levinson argues that the very action of men seeking positions in female-dominated professions makes them more undesirable as potential employees than women trying to enter a male-dominated field because the former is thought to be settling for “women’s work” rather than living up to his masculine potential. Women in similar circumstances, on the other hand, are credited with more courage. (Levinson 1975, p. 540) In fact, men in female-dominated professions are too often ridiculed or ostracized in public, and they frequently have to justify the decision they made, whilst few would question a woman working in a female-dominated field.

Making matters more difficult is how a number of men in the female-dominated jobs view themselves. They try to change their professional labels in order to make their positions more masculine and to improve how those jobs are perceived by themselves and society. (Simpson 2004) For example, male secretaries often want to be called “administrative assistant” rather than “secretary.” Male nurses are sometimes termed “nurses” instead of merely being labeled as nurses. Other female-dominated professions encounter the same rebranding attempts.

It should be obvious, however, that masculinizing the terminology is as irrational as women being called “female managers” or “female scientists.” If one has a profession, in general, then one’s gender is irrelevant to profession’s identification. It adds nothing to the story about a groups’ competence to have their gender added to their job titles, just as it contributes nothing to the job's description. Except as a way to distance men from being thought of as more feminine merely because they are working in a female-dominated field. To draw attention to the individual's gender entails that the person doing the verbal alteration thinks that the true label is degrading or illegitimate in some way. But a job position is a job position. Therefore, rationally, if a woman is a nanny, then a man is a nanny because they do the same job.

Given the social stigma that certain female dominated jobs possess for males, it would be important to increase the number of men working in those fields so that other men and boys will grow up thinking that these jobs are legitimate options for them and their gender identity. Both males and females should believe that a job well done is not something that relies upon one's gender, but rather on how skillfully the person performing the job’s features fulfills the role, and that there is nothing wrong or shameful in a man being in a female-dominated profession. With a sufficient number of role models, men in currently female-dominated jobs would alter some cultural beliefs both so that women and men have greater opportunity and unethical stereotypes are eliminated.

### **The social goal or goods argument**

The social goal for moving women into positions of power is to enable the group to improve its lot in life, unleash more competition and innovation in a dynamic

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<sup>14</sup> This perception might help explain the small number of men pursuing nursing careers. Men have increased their numbers as RNs from 7.7% in 2000 to 9.1% in 2010, but still remain a small minority in the field. (NRSA 2013, p. 24). The trend is almost the same for LPNs. (Ibid., p. 25) Moreover, in American nursing schools, men in practice-focused, baccalaureate, master’s nursing programs are 9.4%, 11.4% ,and 9.9%, respectively. (AACN 2012, p.3)

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marketplace, and to make a better society. (Shen 2013, p. 2)<sup>15</sup> There are those who argue that women have unique insights into issues which are lost if they are blocked from certain professions. Blockage skews how the profession functions by having only men define it rather than creating a more inclusive meaning that would be more useful in maneuvering in the real world. A diverse workforce would start a far more competitive marketplace of ideas as each person brings both her unique and general experiences to the table. An integrated, more dynamic marketplace will make society and its constituent groups far better off than those hampered by sexism and inefficiency.

There is also a positive dynamism created by having more people compete for positions. If women's commitment to the labor force increased – that is they adopted the same value, content, and efficacy components men have - then the number of women professionals would rise and women in menial occupations would decrease. (Polachek 1981, p. 68). Instead of choosing from an unnecessarily limited candidate pool, employers can select from a larger one, which should have more competition to improve merit. Given that each person wants the job in which she is interested, then there will be additional incentive to improve her skills so that she can be successful. As a result, greater competition leads to better work and innovation, which in turn raises the requirements for future individuals to be successful. If the acceptable standard is set high for this generation, then the next must build upon it to progress even further. Hence, there will be a constant cycle of innovation and improvement with diversity.

There are other goods identified in the social goal argument. It is clear that not only should competition be increased in the fields to benefit markets, there is also a gap in many female-dominated professions that does not appear capable of being filled by the way things work now. For example, there is a pressing need for more nurses that cannot be met by women alone. Instead of trying to fix the problem by recruiting additional women - especially since they now have greater choices available to them to go elsewhere - then why not double the number of available candidates by making nursing in its various forms a viable career choice for men? Other female-dominated professions might not be in such difficulty, but they could benefit from having a more diverse, larger, qualified work force.

In fact, there is another social goal argument that can weakly support affirmative action for men. In the United States, in many professional fields, women are paid considerably less on average than their male counterparts, even though both genders are performing the same tasks. (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016) Introducing more men into the field might help women achieve greater power to remove part of this gender gap. For example, women comprise 90.3% of registered nurses (WeNews 2011, p.1) yet salaries for male registered nurses unfairly average more salary than female registered nurses. (United States Bureau for Labor Statistics 2016)<sup>16</sup>

Although rather cynical, having more men in a field might lead to greater prestige and reward than it does with women predominately. That is, it might be a good idea to use unconscious sexism to pursue equality for all. Men in female-dominated fields often tend

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas Nagel (1973) has one of the most forceful arguments on affirmative action as a social good.

<sup>16</sup> A nursing trainer and consultant informed me that most male nurses move to management as soon as they are able, or are in emergency rooms, operating rooms, and intensive care units in which there is less care nursing that requires multi-tasking. This is not surprising. Women in general are better at multi-tasking than men. Men may be better able to “exhibit a single-minded devotion to one particular goal, especially their occupational goal.” (Eccles 2009, p. 86)

to make more money on average than the women in that field. Whatever is causing the income discrepancy, if women used it to argue for justice in compensation packages based on precedence, then they might be able to receive equal remuneration. Aristotle's justice principle states that likes should be treated alike; therefore, nurses in the same field, such as the operating room, should receive the same wages for the same activities. Other specializations and professions could use the argument in the same way.

It is obvious that there is some overlap between the social goals and the role model arguments because both claim to lead to better social conditions. The more role models we have, the more likely it becomes that many more females will grow up with the view that being professionals in this area is something they can readily do. With too few paradigms, others will find careers in these fields something abnormal, which in turn, makes it less likely that they will pursue those career avenues. Most people do not want to be trailblazers for others because there is unreasonable risk to them associated with the career move, especially if being an innovator requires fighting cultural norms and questioning one's gender identity. Instead, as a result of herd mentality and self-esteem, as discussed below, they will go for the safer, more comfortable standard which they know will work for them and will not place them into the unenviable position of being different. Hence, affirmative action will help society by making currently unattractive professions to women into real contenders for their future education and career paths.

The social goal thinking can also apply to men in female-dominated professions, such as nursing. The same sorts of overall benefits accrue from identical sources. These have already been sketched out above, so I will not reiterate that argument here.

There is an even more interesting practical argument, however, behind the social goal position which receives considerably less attention than it deserves. By integrating men into professions heavily dominated by women, women will have to compete more for the available jobs. Given that men will be taking a significant number of these positions as a result of affirmative action, then other career paths would become more attractive to women from sheer necessity. The "safe"<sup>17</sup> jobs that women can get will become scarcer for them, which entails that as reasonable agents, women will have to begin considering competing in other areas that might be better suited to their interests and abilities. Women who would have been in a less powerful position, for example, might begin considering becoming STEM or business professionals because they know that there is no guaranteed place for them in the formerly female-dominated fields. Hence, the beneficial effects desired for affirmative action programs for women would get a much needed boost to achieve equality's final end by making it less likely for women to be able to dominate certain fields, just as affirmative action tries to eliminate men dominating other career areas.

In addition, building on Wang, et al.'s findings, opportunities for men would increase with this type of affirmative action. Not only would more jobs become viable for them, in order to be able to function well in these positions, men could acquire more of the characteristics associated with caring or subordinate professions, such as nursing. The result is not emasculating, but liberating as the traditional male-female stereotype roles are broken down in pursuit of useful equality and justice for society.

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<sup>17</sup> Not safe in the sense that these jobs pose no risks, but safe on the grounds that they do not challenge social stereotypes and favor hiring women over men.



## **A pragmatic argument**

Each affirmative action program's effectiveness is reduced by not integrating women dominated professions with males to the degree that affirmative action works to integrate women into male-dominated areas. It leaves in place a source for the subtle reinforcement of unconscious sexism. At the moment, women in certain professions receive far greater attention than men do in order to recruit, train, and keep the former in those professions. This is a good thing, but it often causes us to become blind to other illicit discrimination and its results, and how to alleviate both. The result is that the value, content, and efficacy components needing change remain in place rather than being altered in a way that is conducive to individual and social flourishing.

First is the problem of social resentment built by assumed injustice. We are still part of a culture that falsely believes that women with power lack merit because they did not compete fairly for what they have. For example, even though affirmative action requires women to be qualified for a job and have the ability to perform the position's tasks well, especially if the position can endanger others if not performed by a highly competent individual, it is wrongly assumed that female professionals are incompetents appointed to meet some arbitrary quota.

In addition, too many incorrectly think that whilst women are entering professions dominated by men, there is nothing being done in order to open avenues for men to move into fields dominated by women. This false belief is supported in part by the lack of publicity showing the use of affirmative action to benefit men in female dominated positions, if common place experience is any indication. Therefore, it is believed that there are fewer jobs available to men and no committed affirmative action program to help them, even though they may be struggling with the same sexist stereotypes women face in entering STEM and the upper levels of business. At the very least, because of affirmative action for women, there are fewer jobs and more competition in areas that men dominate or used to dominate. The market tightness places greater stress on men competing for the positions when, during a previous time, they had far greater opportunity of being successful. So we are changing the employment market whilst no ensuring equal chance for success.

The misperceptions and realities of markets introduce an apparent inherent unfairness to the system, which in turn, causes a great deal of resentment by a significant number of men who assume that their lack of a job or success in their field is the result of affirmative action's side-effects. There are even women who feel the same way about the system.

Affirmative action, hence, becomes a convenient way to explain away a failure to procure a job because it is easier to blame a system one thinks is unfair rather than accept a defect on one's part as the true cause. As a result, there is a psychologically appealing incentive for many men and women to be against affirmative action. At the same time, there is little psychological incentive for these same individuals to think that affirmative action is good because they appear to be the agents bearing the burdens of it, whilst women get all the fruits of its labors.

However, if both sexes had equal affirmative action to help them, then there would be no division between men and women in regards to who is benefitted or harmed. Men would see that the process works equally well for them, therefore they are not the only ones paying affirmative action's costs. Hence, there will be less reason for resenting affirmative

action, and a motivation for thinking that women are somehow defective in those professions currently dominated by men will be eliminated.

### **Psychological causes for stereotypes inhibiting free flow of human capital**

Not integrating men into professions dominated by women helps keep conscious and unconscious sexism strong through the subconscious messages being sent. (Berkelaar, et al. 2008, p.106)<sup>18</sup> We already know that unconscious sexism is alive and well when it comes to science faculty members' perceptions of male and female graduate students. For example, one study found that two fictional students with identical resumes applying for a job as a laboratory manager would be treated differently even though there was no morally relevant merit distinction between them. In addition to the female student receiving \$3,730 less a year than the male student, faculty members, including women, indicated more willingness to mentor the male than they did for the female. (Moss-Racusin, et al., 2012)

The above results are not outliers. Constantly perceiving women in subordinate professions might foster the belief that women are naturally inferior to men in positions of power in business and STEM, as well as in life in general. Powerful positive words such as "bold," "mighty," and "power" are associated by both men and women with men, whereas weak positive words are associated with women by both groups. (Rudman, et al. 2001, p. 1164) Moreover, negative identifiers are often linked to women by men, although women tended not to make that connection. (Ibid.) Other gender stereotypes favor men, as well. For example, fictional male names are more readily associated with achievement than fictional female names by male and female study participants, even though there was no rational justification for them to do so. (Banaji and Greenwald 1995, p. 197). As a result of these and other individual and cultural stereotypes, men have an advantage over women when it comes to being hired for positions with power because there is already an unconscious bias in place that men by being men have the abilities to succeed in those positions, whereas women do not.<sup>19</sup>

But we need to be careful here. Unconscious sexism can benefit men, but it can also harm them. In a study showing sexism against men, two fake applications – different genders with the same qualifications - were submitted for 400 job postings in four different fields. Although women were half as likely to get an interview for an engineering position, men were nearly four times less likely to receive an interview for secretarial or administrative assistant jobs. (Riach and Rich 2006, p. 7).<sup>20</sup> There was also significant bias against men in accountancy and computer analyst jobs that are already far more integrated.

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<sup>18</sup> Cynthia Lloyd's *Gender, Discrimination, and the Division of Labor* remains an excellent resource on male chauvinism in the workplace.

<sup>19</sup> At one time, many of the now female-dominated professions were actually dominated by men. Flight stewards were male because it was thought that air travel in its first 18 years was too dangerous for women, as well as being based on maritime tradition. Men were also secretaries. They took these positions, often, as a training ground for advancing in business and politics.

<sup>20</sup> In a 2010 study of gender bias, Booth and Leigh observed "substantial discrimination" against males trying to enter female-dominated jobs. "[A]n average male candidate would have had to submit 28 percent more applications in order to receive the same number of callbacks" as women applying for the same jobs (Booth and Leigh 2010, p. 5).

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(Ibid., pp. 3 and 7)<sup>21</sup> The unconscious sexism against men seeking employment in female-dominated fields ultimately stems from false cultural beliefs about men's natural and social identities. A man cannot be an authentic man if he is performing women's work, which provides strong incentive for him not doing it. Thus, an unconscious prejudice advantages women at times.

I believe that an effective long-term policy to undermine unconscious sexism is to integrate all professions with all genders if one is going to do it for any one gender.<sup>22</sup> The arguments for affirmative action for women in male-dominated professions need no further explication; so, I will develop only my proposed solution's second part. It is necessary to integrate men into female-dominated professions because if we do not then women will continue to be seen as subordinate and men as degraded by taking female-dominated jobs. Without the fully integrated approach, we will continue to have the value, content, and efficacy components supporting unconscious sexism remaining in force.

There are at least four causes why people have unconscious sexist stereotypes in employment. Firstly, consider the subordinate professions that women currently dominate and the characteristics of these jobs. These positions are thought weaker because those holding them inherently have less power than their supervisors. They must obey the commands of others in order for the former to perform their jobs well. For instance, secretaries lack the power of supervisors. Anyone who has been in an office knows that the office could not function without the secretarial staff. But even though secretaries are necessary, they are often treated as lesser beings rather than as equals to those who can give them orders that must be obeyed.

Secondly, the power differentials and how subordinates and supervisors interact with the other reinforces the notion that one is more powerful than the other, which can lead to an illicit overvaluing of a superior's worth. If we see someone obeying us, then it is confirmed that we have power over them. Although this is not inherently a bad thing – in fact, it is necessary for businesses to function – it can lead to the impermissible. With the view that one has power, sometimes comes the idea of superiority in other areas – such as value as a person – because of that clout. In too many cases, those with power begin to believe that they are morally superior people to their subordinates because of the fact that the former have authority over the latter in their workplace roles. They might, for example, believe that they deserve such sway and those who are their subordinates deserve to be their subordinates.

Third, we should not underestimate the effectiveness of herd or bandwagon mentality. Herd mentality heavily influences how people behave: “the probability of any individual adopting it [increases] with the proportion who have already done so.” (Colman 2003, p. 77) Therefore, if enough people act in a certain manner, then those coming into the situation are far more likely to perform similarly in order to fit in with the social structure and mores. This phenomenon was identified as significant in a study of “negative

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<sup>21</sup> These results support Richard Levinson's findings that men were discriminated against 44% of the time when applying for secretarial positions in Atlanta. (Levinson 1975, p. 533) Similar results were achieved when Richardson had mixed gender pair make job inquiries for male and female-dominated jobs. (Levinson 1976, p. 192)

<sup>22</sup> Becker and Swim contend that there is very little known “about how to reduce the endorsement of subtle sexist beliefs.” (2011, p. 239).

duration dependence” on potential employer hiring behavior. (Kroft, et al. 2013, p. 1123)<sup>23</sup> Negative duration dependence states that the greater the length of time a person is unemployed, the less likely she will receive an employer callback in a tight labor market in comparison to someone with equivalent skills who has been unemployed for a shorter period of time. (Ibid.) The relevant part for herd mentality and sexism is that employers “jumped on the bandwagon” when they thought that others were not interested in the candidate, even though there was no rational evidence that supported the belief that a person unemployed for a greater length of time has less merit than one unemployed for a shorter duration. As a result, businesses on the bandwagon were acting irrationally by treating likes as significantly different based on nothing more than bias.

Fourth, having power offers enormous benefits to us. By seeing that we have supremacy over others, we build our self-esteem and positive self-concept or identity. Consistent with the three components of identity, self-esteem:

[I]s the attitude which we have toward ourselves to interact effectively with our social environment, to achieve the goals which we set for ourselves. Respectively, our self-esteem is positive or negative if we have a reasonably favorable or unfavorable attitude toward ourselves in this regard. (Thomas 1980, p. 246)

We desire to be powerful agents, and want not only to maintain that status, but to make sure that others recognize it as well because that recognition of our value feeds our self-esteem. The way to make others appreciate our power is to exercise it frequently enough<sup>24</sup> so that they identify it, and then reflect that recognition back to us by deferring, obeying, or exhibiting other behavior that signifies our dominance. In turn, the acknowledgments of our power build greater self-esteem based on now enhanced self-perceptions of our power and its effects. Unfortunately, for some people, the disparity in perceptions of worth based on influence make them begin to think they are so superior that subordinates can be treated permissibly as a servile worker rather than as subordinates deserving equal respect as people.<sup>25</sup>

Even if this extreme degradation is not reached, there is still a constant reinforcement of the idea that women are naturally less powerful than men because the former obey men in many work situations that those with power in STEM and business encounter. That is, a work environment in which women are almost always the subordinates makes people automatically think that women in general deserve to be subordinates, regardless of their actual role. Since they usually occupy subordinate rather than dominate roles, then it is conjectured that there has to be something about women that keeps causing them to merit less power than men.

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<sup>23</sup> “Although we emphasize that we do not rule out a role for human capital depreciation, our results are most consistent with employer screening playing an important role in generating duration dependence.” (Kroft, et al. 2013, pp. 39-40)

<sup>24</sup> But not so frequently that it makes people less likely to admire or be guided by it.

<sup>25</sup> For example, one secretary I work with has regularly been abused by his faculty members by being told to shut up, not to forget that he is merely a secretary and that the person telling him to act in a certain way is a faculty member, yelled at, ordered to violate policy and state law, and so on. He has been informed by a middle manager and the head of human resources that if he is being abused or told to act illegally by a faculty member, he is not allowed to object to it then and there. Instead he must smile, be polite, and then inform the abuser that the secretary must take the matter to his supervisor to be handled.

Given the benefits of conforming with herd mentality and self-esteem building, the belief that women are suited to subordinate positions will have greater force on people's beliefs and behavior overall than the belief that women should have positions of power in business or STEM. As a result, the negative reinforcement of sexist and classist beliefs by common working conditions in which women continue to dominate certain subordinate professions will likely have greater power on cultural and social beliefs than any well-meaning desire to see women in male-dominated professions.

### **A practical solution to overcoming powerful stereotypes**

Overcoming self-esteem based on illicit stereotypes and herd thinking will be difficult because both their mentality and behaviors are natural tendencies.<sup>26</sup> First, in regard to herd mentality, our desire to imitate others, especially if they are successful is very strong. (Bikhchandani, et al. 1998, p. 152). Herd mentality can be so robust that individual rationality can be subverted by it. (Ibid., p. 168). That is, some people are willing to reject what their reason tells them (Asch 1956, p. 3) – e.g., sexism is wrong and should not be fostered – so that they can be or remain a herd member. If we add in the desire-for-power component of human interaction and personality – that is self-esteem built on dominance – as fellow employees see that the more powerful workers treat those in female-dominated professions as servile or lesser beings, the former become more likely to act similarly so that they also exhibit power behavior that the powerful have. In other words, the bandwagon effect is fed, in part, by the desire for enhancing self-esteem through acquiring power for oneself.

Herd behavior and its underlying psychological conditions can be unconscious, which makes it much harder for individuals under its sway to identify and correct it. For instance, a great deal of sexism is “unseen.” (Becker and Swim 2011, p. 227) Not only do men not realize they are being sexist, especially if they are involved in Benevolent Sexism: Sexism in which men protect and provide for women while assuming that women are too weak and powerless to take care of themselves. In addition some “women endorse sexist beliefs because they lack recognition of subtle forms of sexism, discount sexist incidents, and do not notice the aggregate amount of sexism in their daily lives.” (Ibid., p. 239) Since being sexist and acting accordingly is standard behavioral practice, then no one perceives what is happening as wrong and in need of being addressed. Moreover, this unconscious sexism is difficult to eliminate because it is part of many powerful people's, especially men's, self-esteem and self-concept.

[T]hose activities which we believe will enhance our self-esteem have a natural attraction for us. So we are disinclined to give up those activities the successful pursuit of which enhances our self-esteem unless we have reason to believe that we can maintain our self-esteem by engaging in other activities. (Thomas 1980, p. 246)

In other words, we cannot eliminate sexism merely by showing it is irrational to be sexist because sexism holds such a powerful appeal to the sexist's emotions and psychological

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<sup>26</sup> See Asch 1951, 1955, 1956.

core of being. In some cases, men think that they deserve their power status based on their merit, regardless of the fact that what they have is undeserved. (Jost and Kay 2005) There are also men who want to continue to hold their higher status instead of jeopardizing it through strenuous efforts to eliminate gender inequality. (Schmitt, et al. 2003) These and other motivations show that having power over female subordinates feeds the powerful person's ego. Hence, in the work world, it is difficult to break the cycle of sexism in which women are generally thought of as weaker because it plays a central role to the self-esteem in men's identity, and that of women if they also make being powerful in this manner part of their positive self-image.

An important point about affirmative action and why men should be integrated into female-dominated professions can now be made. Unconscious belief that women should automatically be in subordinate roles has far greater psychological power than does the conscious belief that women should be in positions of power. Hence, the former will defeat the latter when the two are in conflict. As a result, affirmative action's effectiveness against unconscious sexism is reduced if it is limited to making women successful in male-dominated fields.

When women are integrated into male-dominated professions with the motivation to share power, then there is limited psychological benefit to the self-esteem and identity of those who have power. They might feel as if they are doing a good thing by integrating, but their self-esteem is not necessarily enhanced by the process or result. In fact, their self-esteem and self-concept are actually endangered as they begin to compete and interact with women, and then find that their merit is not as high as they thought it was.

On the other hand, believing that women should be in subordinate positions of employment is much more psychologically appealing. If it is already dictated by herd behavior and cultural beliefs that women generally fill such positions, then those with power are already comfortable dominating women workers. Challenging this state of affairs is actually asking people to reject the herd and do something it would not do. This is a very difficult action to take because it poses the risk of being ostracized, which will cause failure in one's profession and loss of self-esteem. Conforming to the company and social herds is vastly more emotionally attractive.

In addition, individual self-esteem was built, in part, on how well those in power fit their actions to their values and abilities. The better the fit, the greater the person's self-esteem. Those in power have learned that dominating women in subordinate positions enhances the former's self-esteem. And the system as it is now allows the powerful - mostly men - to dominate women in the female-dominated professions.

Furthermore, males in subordinate jobs normally held by women pose a threat of sorts. If males were in the female-dominated positions, then they might not be thought to be so readily dominated based on male behavior stereotypes, and they might behave in a way consistent with those norms. That is, subordinate men would not be expected to be as subordinate as female workers. Therefore, it would strike at the heart of the self-esteem and identity of those in power if they had to challenge themselves by confronting the new workplace order in which they have to be concerned that a man would act more aggressively to a command than would a woman. In fact, there would always be a tension that one might not be obeyed in the same gratifying style merely because of the possible challenge-to-authority concern that would otherwise not exist.

Only by changing the value, content, and efficacy components of identity can we be sufficiently motivated to accept what reason dictates. By integrating female-dominated

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positions with men and male-dominated positions with females, the unconscious sexist cycle will be begin to be starved of one of its strongest supply chains.

Firstly, the currently female-dominated profession's prestige and power as jobs becomes greater as people recognize the jobs' actual worth instead of allowing sexism to degrade them and the people who work in them. By continuously challenging the unconscious bias that these subordinate jobs are suitable only for women, integrated subordinate jobs will break and then avoid the unconscious stigma attached to them - or at least reduce it to mere classism. If enough people desire something, then common thinking becomes that the objects desired are valuable because so many people desire them - everyone jumps on the diversity bandwagon although they might not consciously do so.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, we can allow people to build their self-esteem by having power over subordinates, but delink self-esteem and having power over mostly female subordinates. Every time a person in power interacts with subordinates, he or she will have far more diverse exchanges than if subordinates are always women. Working with female and male subordinates then becomes the norm rather than the exception, and it is no longer a pattern of having power over women but having power over subordinates. Hence, the individual's self-esteem can be developed and nurtured because there is still the pleasing effect of being able to have one's commands obeyed and all the other benefits that come from being in power. In other words, we are replacing a working self-esteem model with one that can give us the same incentive whilst not drifting into reinforcing sexist stereotypes.

Finally, affirmative action for all helps eliminate the constant evidence that women in male-dominated professions are not the standard. Every time a person in power sees that all the subordinate secretarial staff or other workers are female, then his or her unconscious idea of the proper place for women in a less powerful position is reinforced, which helps lead to treating them as weaker in both the male and female-dominated professions. Moreover, we are uncomfortable with males doing jobs in female-dominated fields - because men are perceived as powerful, these jobs involve subordination, and men doing these jobs challenge stereotypes of male identity. However, if we regularly see both men and women in subordinate positions, and this is our standard way of interacting with them, then it becomes normal and comfortable to think of them in this way. As a result, by changing people's value, content, and efficacy components of identity, we help eliminate unconscious sexism that would make us think or act wrongly, which can only benefit everyone.

## **Conclusion**

If we want to be practical, then we need to address all causes of unconscious sexism with our affirmative action program so that we actually get the results we want. We cannot do half the job and expect the real integration we desire and need. We want everyone to be treated for the quality of their character and not a morally irrelevant property they instantiate. We want everyone to have an opportunity at any job for which they are qualified. We also want people to know that they are where they are because of their merit. However, changing the very reasons discrimination exists by integrating all work fields and breaking the constant reinforcement of women as weaker caused by standardly seeing and interacting with them in subordinate, female-dominated positions, then those who do

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<sup>27</sup> Of course the desirable might not be the same thing as the worthy, but the psychological impetus to change is what is of importance here.

make it in the male-dominated fields can never know if they are being treated as equals in reality, or merely being thought of unconsciously as weak. In addition, we rob men of greater choice and fulfillment. Neither is a good outcome for markets or our society.

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