

A different take on the causes of inequality

October 25 2018, by Leslie Garisto Pfaff



Nancy DiTomaso, Distinguished Professor in the Department of Management and Global Business at Rutgers Business School, has spent her career examining the ways in which race, gender and culture create or deny job and career opportunities. Credit: Bill Cardoni

Before the Women's Marches and the #MeToo and Time's Up movements made headlines and brought issues of women's rights back to the forefront, Rutgers scholars had been working for decades as ardent advocates through their research, teaching and outreach. Over the next several weeks, Rutgers Today will be highlighting many of the women whose work is making a noticeable impact.

Nancy DiTomaso has spent her career at the intersection of business and inequality, examining the ways in which race, gender, and culture create or deny job and career opportunities. Her highly lauded 2013 book, *The American Non-Dilemma: Racial Inequality Without Racism* (Russell Sage Foundation), addresses the ways in which inequality is reproduced – not, as many of us believe, through discrimination against minorities but through advantages afforded whites, known as "opportunity hoarding."

DiTomaso, a Distinguished Professor in the Department of Management and Global Business at Rutgers Business School-Newark and New Brunswick, has also turned her lens on [inequality](#) in the workforce between men and [women](#) and has come to a similar conclusion: "Discrimination for men, as well as against women," she says, "still plays a role in the availability of job opportunities for women compared to men."

There may be no greater example of the strides women have made than their dramatic rise in the workforce. In 1950, women constituted 34 percent of American workers, compared to 47 percent. But, DiTomaso notes, a gender gap in both wages and job authority remains. On average, for every dollar made by men, women make 80 cents—up from 62 cents in 1979. DiTomaso attributes the gap, at least in part, to the types of jobs that women hold and the industries in which they [work](#)—jobs that are lower paying in general. Women, for example, still predominate in fields like elementary school teaching, occupational and speech therapy, and nursing, while men make up more than 75 percent of the workforce in

industries like construction and engineering. "There is a direct correlation," DiTomaso remarks, "between the extent of job segregation and the gap in wages for women compared to men."

That gap is greater for those in higher skilled jobs than in lower, and it's less for workers at younger ages before their ascent through the corporate hierarchy. It's also greater for white and Asian women, not because black and Hispanic women are receiving higher wages, but because black and Hispanic men tend to have lower-income jobs than white and Asian men. The same holds true for the "authority gap": as men progress, they increasingly hold a greater percentage of [jobs](#) with higher authority.

DiTomaso notes that a major factor in both the wage and authority gaps is the fact that women are more likely than men to work part-time, to work fewer hours per week, to work fewer weeks per year, and to take time off from paid work over the length of their careers because women are still largely responsible for family obligations. And this fact hits women of color particularly hard, because black (and to a lesser extent, Hispanic) women are far more likely than other women to be heads of a household. "With each additional child," DiTomaso says, "women are less likely to work full time, while having additional children has no effect on full-time work for fathers."

For women of color—and for all people of color—a full solution to the problem of workplace inequity may entail a widespread change in thinking about the basis of [racial inequality](#). As DiTomaso outlines in *The American Non-Dilemma*, the white people she spoke with tended to consider it unfair for blacks to be chosen just because they're black (and for women to be chosen just because they're women). Yet, she says, "in the same conversation, they revealed all the special help they had gotten in their own life stories." Many whites, she observes, consider affirmative action a policy where minorities and women are "cutting in

line." DiTomaso adds that she listened to multiple life stories of whites indicating that "friends were essentially saving them a place in line. Somehow, they didn't think of this as unfair. They thought of it simply as someone helping them."

It may also take an attitude adjustment to assure women of all colors an equal place at the corporate table. Government policies like [affirmative action](#) can continue to make a difference, assuming, of course, that we as a society are willing to support them. And corporate policies – encouraging fathers to take paternity leave, stressing results at work over hours spent achieving those results, and training to make managers aware of unconscious bias in the treatment of women versus men – are also likely to help alleviate wage and authority differentials. But for true job parity, we may need to see a deeper cultural change. The policies outlined above, says DiTomaso, "will not be enough if there aren't also changes in how men relate to family responsibilities."

Provided by Rutgers University

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