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# Sex Stratification, Technology and Organizational Change: A Longitudinal Case Study of AT&T

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**Abstract**

Recent technological displacement in AT&T affected workers differentially by sex. I address several questions: the tendency of organizational research to ignore the critical variable, sex, in the study of change; questions of sex, race and class in technological displacement; and the role of women as a reserve labor army. Method: longitudinal analysis of changes in AT&T's occupational structure during a period of significant technological change; interviews; participant observation; technical reports; and corporate publications. Conclusions: 1) Technological displacement affected both management and nonmanagement women. Most seriously affected were white women's employment and those occupations traditionally considered as appropriate to minority women. The best 1972 predictor of occupational decline by 1976 was not a management/worker classification but the number of minority women formerly employed at that level. Further, affirmative action placed more men in traditionally women's work than the reverse. 2) Some research suggests that a transformation from mass- to process-production technologies raises the skill level and reduces alienation among workers. In the case of AT&T, higher skill level among workers reflected the displacement of women's work. 3) Women did appear to serve as a reserve labor army during this period of technological change. 4) Technology is best conceptualized as an intervening rather than an independent variable. Here, management rationally selected its technology, with sex and race stratification in the labor force facilitating rapid technological change. 5) Observations of sex stratification in families and unions suggest that analysis of the linkages between home and work roles is crucial in understanding problems of a divided labor force.

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