

# **TOO FEW WOMEN AT THE TOP**

The Persistence of Inequality  
in Japan

**Kumiko Nemoto**

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## **SEX SEGREGATION IN JAPANESE BUSINESS**

The question of why Japan has only a small number of women with power and authority—and of how Japan might catch up with the United States and other Western countries in terms of social and economic status for employed women—is long overdue to be answered in the eyes of many feminist researchers and Japanese studies scholars.

Although the number of educated women in Japan has rapidly increased in the last few decades, there has been little change in women's economic status; this may further exacerbate the problems of the country's already declining birthrate and labor shortage, which may eventually lead to its economic decline. Foreign media have long reported on the plight of employed women in Japan and have often underscored the nation's need to modernize gender norms. Japan does appear to be progressing with the idea that the inclusion of women is vital for Japan's economic growth. Prime Minister Shinzō Abe stated in 2014 that women's social and economic advancement is necessary for the nation's future economic growth, as he urged the business and public sectors to increase the ratio of women managers and leaders to 30 percent by 2020. The Japanese business federation Keidanren, comprising over thirteen hundred companies, responded to the government by proclaiming that each firm should make voluntary efforts toward improving women's status to assure sustainable development of the Japanese economy.<sup>1</sup> Yet actual progress on overhauling sex-segregated employment and traditional workplace customs in Japan is slow. Why are there so few women in positions of authority and leadership in Japan? What prevents women from reaching the top?

Sex segregation is the major indicator of gender inequality in employment and work. Vertical segregation means that women are concentrated at the lower end of the employment hierarchy, and horizontal segregation refers to women's concentration in traditionally female jobs.<sup>2</sup> Mary Brinton has pointed out that Japan has higher levels of vertical sex segregation and slightly less occupational, or horizontal, sex segregation than the United States.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Japan has high vertical sex segregation in professional and managerial jobs, which is strongly shaped by an age hierarchy, a major characteristic of Japanese management.<sup>4</sup> Maria Charles and David Grusky agree that Japan's high level of vertical segregation is striking and that it is strongly correlated with age, yet they suggest that Japan may eventually catch up with the rest of the industrialized world in gender equality.<sup>5</sup> These scholars' studies also indicate that Japan's vertical sex segregation could be the result of Japanese companies' customs of lifelong employment, age-based promotions and pay, and related organizational and labor customs. Yet little systematic empirical research has been done on exactly how sex segregation in Japanese companies continues to be shaped by this set of employment customs.

In theory, modernization, democratization, and globalization have led to a gender equality imperative in most advanced countries, which have adopted egalitarian policies that promote the participation of women in the labor force in order to reconcile work and family life; the goal is to modify the male-breadwinner model and move closer to an egalitarian dual-earner model.<sup>6</sup> Thus, vertical sex segregation in most advanced countries is seen as having lost its legitimacy. Sex segregation has declined primarily because of (1) attitudinal changes toward gender roles, (2) an increase in female labor force participation, and (3) a decrease in the gender gap in educational attainment.<sup>7</sup> Legislation against explicit discrimination and more family-friendly policies have also contributed to the lessening of blatant discrimination. Charles and Grusky report that the idea that men are more competent or better suited than women to traditionally male jobs, such as professional management,<sup>8</sup> has increasingly withered in advanced countries.<sup>9</sup>

In general, the growth of women's education means a corresponding rise in women's value as human capital, career prospects, and earnings potential, thus pointing to an overall increase in women's economic autonomy and contribution to household earnings within a country.<sup>10</sup> Women with education are more likely to be better employed than those with less education in high- and middle-income countries.<sup>11</sup> Education (as a form of human capital) also makes women more attractive in the labor market and promotes their aspirations for economic independence. Paula England, Janet Gornick, and Emily F. Shafer write that "education inculcates gender-egalitarian attitudes; thus, highly educated women are expected to have higher employment levels for this ideological

reason as well.”<sup>12</sup> When the increased number of educated women promotes a corresponding increase in the skilled-labor supply and in egalitarian attitudes, it leads to decreased sex segregation.

Charles also points out that even though vertical sex segregation and blatant forms of sex discrimination have diminished in most advanced countries, and access to education and labor markets are more equalized in these countries, sex segregation in certain countries continues to be seen as legitimate.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, regardless of its modern institutions and the rise of women’s education, gender inequality and vertical sex segregation have changed little in Japan. Japan has been the second-largest economy in the world for a long time, following the United States, but it remains one of the most gender-unequal countries. In 2013, Japan ranked 105th of 136 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report, in which the top countries are Scandinavian (Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden). The United Kingdom ranked 18th and the United States, 23rd.<sup>14</sup> Japan’s low ranking is attributable to its extremely small number of female lawmakers and business executives, evidence of high sex segregation in Japanese politics and in its economy.<sup>15</sup> Vertical sex segregation in the workplace, where few women hold positions of authority and most are concentrated on the lower rungs of the corporate ladder, remains the major characteristic of gender inequality in Japan. Only 10 percent of Japan’s managers are women, far behind the United States and the United Kingdom, where women make up, respectively, 43 percent and 35 percent of managers.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of education, women’s college enrollment rate in Japan soared from 12 percent in 1980 to 32 percent in 2000, and further to 46 percent in 2012.<sup>17</sup> However, the rate of women middle managers (*buchō*) has only increased from 1 percent in 1989 to 5 percent in 2011, while the rate of women managers at the lower level (*kakaricho*) increased from 5 percent in 1989 to only 15 percent in 2011. Because there has been relatively little increase in the number of women managers in Japanese companies despite the rapid increase in women’s education, it is likely that further growth in women’s education in Japan will not greatly affect the number of women managers.

The fact that there are few women in positions of authority—high vertical sex segregation—in Japan has often been explained as being a result of the country’s institutional and ideological embrace of traditional gender norms. Belief in the male-breadwinner model continues to dominate the mindset of ordinary Japanese people, and family formation and government tax and pension policies have reinforced it. The typical Japanese family’s welfare has long relied on its close connection with Japanese companies. A company’s lifelong-employment system and its guarantee of economic security for a man, with the assumption that women will care for the family, have saved the government considerable

welfare expenditure and propelled economic development in postwar Japan.<sup>18</sup> Past research on Japan has indicated that the ideology of gendered separate spheres has long provided justification for the corporate relegation of women to assistant positions in the workplace with limited opportunities; women have been expected to quit their jobs when they marry and thus were given mostly easy tasks and biased evaluations.<sup>19</sup> Others have pointed out that the workplace customs of lifelong employment and seniority pay and promotion in Japanese companies work against women, since the point of lifelong employment is that those who work longest are rewarded the most.<sup>20</sup> Business scholars have also pointed out Japanese management's exclusion of women and normalization of women's low status.<sup>21</sup> However, systematic studies have not yet been done on how each custom under the lifelong-employment system—including seniority pay and promotion, gender-based hiring, long working hours, and gender biases—hampers women's work prospects and, most important, leads to the high level of vertical sex segregation in Japan.

Women's marginal employment status has been the default in postwar Japan and has been at the nexus of Japan's institutional relations among the state, business and labor market, and family; thus, changing those things that have inhibited women's status will require changes in all of these other realms. When I argue that the low status of women has operated economically and ideologically as part of the Japanese protection-based employment system, I mean not only that part-time employed women and temporary women workers have enabled companies to save on labor costs,<sup>22</sup> but also that the logic of corporate cost saving has been inherent in the customs of hiring, pay, and promotion and has reinforced workplace stereotypes, which, therefore, continue to block women's chances to draw even with men. Reducing vertical sex segregation in Japanese companies will be difficult without changing this traditional logic by revitalizing the labor market, making rigorous use of performance-based pay and promotion over simple age-based seniority, and instituting affirmative action-type policies and gender-equality training. Without these changes, women in Japanese companies will likely continue to be relegated to low-paying jobs or simply expected to follow the patriarchal work pattern and face discrimination.

Gender inequality in Japan reminds us of Herbert J. Gans's popular sociological argument that poverty in America serves a latent function.<sup>23</sup> Gans argued that poverty does not wane because it serves the purposes of the affluent. He even provides a list of thirteen benefits to poverty in America. For example, the existence of poverty generates a labor pool that is willing to perform the dirty work that members of the affluent groups refuse to do. The poor also need assistance from psychiatrists, social workers, and police officers; thus, their presence generates a large number of jobs for these professionals.

They even consume expired food when it becomes available at cheaper prices. In an ideological sense, the poor also allow those in the middle class and the fortunate to feel better about themselves by reminding them of their Protestant work ethic and belief in individual achievement. Thus, they will remain where they are, at the bottom of society. According to Gans, poverty persists not just because it fulfills a number of functions but also because many of the alternatives to poverty would create dysfunction for the affluent and powerful members of society:

Many of the functions served by the poor could be replaced if poverty were eliminated, but almost always at higher costs to others, particularly more affluent others. Consequently, a functional analysis must conclude that poverty persists not only because it fulfills a number of positive functions but also because many of the functional alternatives to poverty would be quite dysfunctional for the affluent members of society . . . social phenomena like poverty can be eliminated only when they become dysfunctional for the affluent or powerful, or when the powerless can obtain enough power to change society.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, having women available as cheap labor at the bottom of the workplace heap has been functional not only for Japanese business, which can then save on labor costs, but also to the Japanese state, because having a caretaker at home has saved on welfare costs, secured men's employment, and contributed to Japan's economic development. There is little incentive to change women's status, similar to that of the poor in the United States, as long as the alternatives are expensive and dysfunctional to business management. The logic of the function of vertical sex segregation itself is nothing new. But just as the poor in the United States have been blamed for their status and their lack of power has been legitimized, women's low status has been tactfully legitimized in Japan. In this book I examine not so much how women's concentration at the bottom has been functional to the Japanese system but how Japanese companies' hiring, salary, and promotion practices and culture of misogyny have locked so many women out and allowed only a very small number of women, in the guise of honorary men, to go up the ladder.

Japan's corporate governance and management systems have also been driven and legitimized by the nation's determination to not only survive but thrive economically and its unstated goal of catching up with the West. Japan has long normalized the values of individual sacrifice, economic development and material wealth, and conformity to the state-led business system, and it has protected the economic security of men over that of women. It is not surprising, then, that Japan's business-state system (the core of Japanese capitalism) has normalized



the dismissal of improvements to civil life in Japan, including the achievement of gender equality and family-work balance for its citizens.

In Japanese companies, gender bias is deeply embedded in the organizational customs associated with the system of lifelong employment—such as hiring, seniority pay and promotion, long working hours, and stereotyping—and correction of gender imbalance in these customs would require significant changes to employment and labor market practices in Japan. The case of Japanese companies shows that spontaneous desegregation of the employment systems in advanced countries, even when women are highly educated and some legal protections are included, is unlikely to occur. Even with the introduction of government-led interventions and the emulation of Western policies aimed at achieving gender equality, certain Japanese management customs are likely to continue to block egalitarian reforms in Japan. In my view changes to gender inequality must occur not just through understanding the institutionalized gender biases in traditional Japanese companies but also through active efforts to desegregate through employment and labor market reforms.

## **Japan's Protection-Based Management and Coordinated Capitalism**

The Japanese business system is characterized by its intimate institutional ties with the state. Japan's business-state ties have promoted the male-breadwinner regime. The ideology of the traditional division between the genders has permeated the culture and has been normalized in the realms of work, family, labor markets, and politics.

Japan's business system prioritizes the lifelong employment of male workers in order to sustain the family that is based on having a male breadwinner and to keep industrial relations stable and management insider oriented. Firms value individual workers' development of "in-firm" skills over skills that are not firm related, and there is little mobility and competition in the labor market. The term "Japanese management" usually refers to a set of customs, including lifelong employment and seniority-based pay and promotion policies, that guarantee an employee job security and family benefits. Workers do not change employers or companies but may change jobs inside a firm; this is what is referred to as the "internal labor market." An employee's long-term economic security is enabled by his company's intimate ties with and dependence on a large bank. The employer's reliance on bank financing enables the company to focus on long-term profits rather than short-term profits and competition. Under the lifelong-employment system, employers do not or cannot lay off workers even to save money, yet they

may resort to offering early retirement to workers or terminating new hires, as well as hiring temporary staff. Lifelong employment is associated with the traditional male-breadwinner type of family, with the assumption of the man's lifelong devotion to the company and the woman's full responsibility for the family. Tax and pension policies in Japan have also explicitly favored male-breadwinner households. In contrast, US corporate governance and business management are based on competition and short-term profits, and their cost-saving strategies mostly rely on laying off employees. In addition, the custom of changing jobs and employers makes the US labor market diverse and competitive.

Scholars of the varieties of capitalism confirm that Japan's version differs dramatically from that of the United States. Japanese corporate governance practices are known as "coordinated market economies,"<sup>25</sup> or "coordinated capitalism,"<sup>26</sup> while those nations following the Anglo-Saxon model, such as the United States, are called "liberal market economies." Peter Hall and David Soskice divide developed countries into two groups depending on the countries' industrial relations, type of corporate governance, interfirm relations, employment relations, and the role of training and education in the labor market. They place Japan among the coordinated market economies along with countries such as Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.<sup>27</sup> Like these other coordinated market economies, Japan has a highly protective employment structure, a closed labor market, and close ties between business and the state. Japanese capitalism differs from that found in the United States and other liberal market countries in the high levels of complementarities in its business systems, especially firms' close ties with large banks that, through financial support, stabilize the firms' management and relations with other firms. This also enables lifelong employment for the employees of a firm, who, in return, are expected to show their gratitude in the form of devotion and loyalty to the company. Although in the United States and other liberal market economies shareholders pressure corporations to generate short-term profits, stakeholders such as financial institutions in Japan presumably focus on long-term goals, and this stakeholder protection enables firms to avoid market competition and pressures. In short, the close relationship in Japan among the state, the business sector, and the welfare system are different from such relationships in the United States. In the postwar decades, by providing economic security to employees and their families, Japanese firms have served as the central welfare agent and reduced the state's burden of welfare costs.

Workers in large Japanese companies rarely change employers because of the lifelong-employment system, so there is little mobility in the labor market. The lifelong-employment system serves to strengthen long-term group consciousness, as it rewards trustful relations among workers, insider-oriented decision

making, and age-based promotions.<sup>28</sup> Bringing outsiders into a company would be considered a disruption to the hierarchy of the firm.<sup>29</sup> Lifelong employment saves the government from having to pay for unemployment insurance for laid-off workers; the government, in turn, offers the firms some advantages, including reduced competition.<sup>30</sup> But this system, while ensuring the economic security of male workers and their families, has been costly to firms because they cannot fire workers and must therefore seek other forms of corporate cost savings, such as paying low salaries to young workers and women, requesting that employees take early retirement, relocating workers, and mandating long work hours. Some argue that the lifelong-employment system should be abolished or limited to a smaller number of workers because of its inefficiency.

Lifelong employment is a complementary protective system (based on close corporate-government ties) that can enable firms to avoid economic risks and uncertainties in the market and maintain stable corporate and industrial relations.<sup>31</sup> However, the system's emphasis on insider networks, workers' minimal mobility in the labor market, and the lack of individual competition for promotions and pay increases, which are solely based on workers' ages, lower worker motivation and reduce business and organizational innovation while keeping authority and control on the side of management.<sup>32</sup> Japan's coordinated system has been criticized as having hampered economic growth as well as business innovation and individual creativity.<sup>33</sup> Despite these claims, however, the relationships that business has with the government and banks—and those between business and labor—have changed little. Regardless of criticism of their methods, Japan's system of business management and the Japanese labor market have undertaken few changes, simply because substantial transformations would be costly and would potentially destabilize the close relations among businesses, the state, industry, and employees. Steven Vogel explains that the major actors in Japanese capitalism, including the firms, banks, and unions, rely on such institutions and traditions as lifetime employment, main bank relations, and interfirm networks to reduce their transaction costs, and firms will not abandon their customary relations with the other actors under a system of coordinated capitalism unless they can count on obtaining greater efficiencies that outweigh the costs of sacrificing the current benefits.<sup>34</sup> It can be difficult to change only one part of the system without disturbing the equilibrium of the entire system. Masahiko Aoki writes:

The presence of institutional complementarities certainly means that it is difficult to change only one piece of a coherent arrangement. But if shifts . . . become significant enough to cause substantial strategic adaptations by the agents in some domain, then overall institutional

arrangements may become subject to a test because of complementary relationships across the domains. . . . Institutional complementarities thus never imply that existing institutional arrangements are frozen nor remain inertial. It implies that the process of change is initially conditioned by existing complementary relationships and cannot be arbitrarily designed and enforced by law.<sup>35</sup>

Even though Aoki indicates that the system of Japanese business customs as a critical part of the Japanese business-state complementary system is not likely to change rapidly, he also adds that some companies are modifying traditional management customs and that institutional equilibrium among corporations, labor, and the state has also been slowly shifting and rebalancing. Yet it is likely that desegregation, or reducing the gender imbalance that exists under Japanese management, will be difficult precisely because sex segregation has been functional as a cost saver to business and the government in Japan.

The question asked by many business scholars who research Japanese companies is whether Japanese coordinated capitalism is ever likely to evolve into US-type liberal market capitalism. Vogel writes that "Japan has not adopted the US liberal market model because the Japanese did not want to adopt it," and the overall benefits of Japan's current reforms have been unclear.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, Japanese companies remain reluctant to lay off workers, but those companies with high foreign ownership are likely to try downsizing.<sup>37</sup> George Olcott's study of several Japanese firms' organizational changes shows the persistence of traditional Japanese management in Japanese companies, even under the strong influence of foreign shareholders.<sup>38</sup> Although foreign ownership of Japanese companies is increasing, foreign firms in Japan may find it difficult to fully put into practice their home country's management model since managers and shareholders must adapt themselves to the local context.<sup>39</sup> Scholars who produced earlier studies have shared the view that even though some Japanese firms may increasingly incorporate hybrid elements of Western management Japan is unlikely ever to approximate the type of liberal market-based corporate management and employment system seen in the United States.<sup>40</sup> Some critics point out that Japan's brand of capitalism has veered off the evolutionary path and is not adaptive to global changes.<sup>41</sup> Yet most current researchers agree that Japan's institutional complementarities and the equilibrium among Japanese employees, corporate management, the state, the labor market, and the family will continue to be sustained by several factors. These include vested interests (including existing lifelong-employed corporate and government workers);<sup>42</sup> an entrenched business culture that

values trust, loyalty, and consensual decision making;<sup>43</sup> an aversion to the US-type market-driven economy and concern about social inequality;<sup>44</sup> and the traditional value placed on conformity over individual freedom and creativity.<sup>45</sup> What these business scholars have not adequately addressed is that such a model of protection-based corporate governance and codependent capitalism also makes women's low status in Japanese companies very slow to change.

## **The Latent Function of Gender Inequality in Japanese Business**

Takeshi Inagami and D. Hugh Whittaker describe Japanese firms as "community firms," with a culture based on employees' strong "we-consciousness" and an exchange of loyalty for security, and point out that gender discrimination and male dominance are central to this culture, with women in Japanese firms mostly treated as "quasi-members . . . or non members."<sup>46</sup> In a comparison of Japan's business-state system with those of Sweden and the United States, Sven Steinmo argues that the pervasiveness of gender discrimination in Japanese business will eventually harm the Japanese economy by making the labor market still more rigid, causing reductions to Japan's labor force and further lessening women's incentive for reproduction.<sup>47</sup> But there remains the question of how exactly the exclusion of and discrimination against women in Japanese companies operates in Japanese management customs. Why is vertical sex segregation inevitable under these customs? What is the logic of gender in each custom that is particularly disadvantageous to women?

Seniority pay and promotions coupled with provision of household benefits—the system that exists under the current Japanese management structure—generates a gender gap that in turn acts against women workers' long-term upward mobility in their careers. Under the current system, workers must stay with a company for many years to receive promotion to management, which usually does not occur until the employee is in his or her late thirties. This system of waiting until the late thirties or later for promotion makes it difficult for many women workers to incorporate reproduction and family life into their plans. Thus, young women are incentivized to choose the caretaker path over that of career advancement. The lack of mobility in the labor market also restricts women's ability to go up the career ladder.

Some companies continue to use career-track hiring, in which women are explicitly relegated to assistant-level jobs with low pay and little chance of promotion. Even when companies do not use career-track hiring, they still hire

far more men than women and simultaneously hire a large number of educated women as temporary workers for assistant positions. As long as Japanese companies retain lifelong-employment spots exclusively for men and simultaneously protect middle management and senior men with age-based salary increases, they have an incentive to cut costs by continuing these gender-biased hiring practices.

By committing to lifelong employment, Japanese companies have provided a social safety net to families in lieu of having it provided by the Japanese state.<sup>48</sup> Because companies do not fire workers, they have to search elsewhere for cost reductions, and their options are limited. Under the lifelong-employment system, firms can use traditional workforce reduction strategies such as *shukko* (secondment, or temporary transfer to a related firm) and *tenseki* (permanent transfer to a related firm),<sup>49</sup> or they can force early retirement on some senior workers. But Japanese companies lay off far fewer workers than US companies such as IBM or AT&T.<sup>50</sup> Japanese firms introduced some liberalization reforms in the 1990s and started hiring young male and female temporary workers in order to save labor costs. But the firms' reforms resulted in a dichotomization of the labor force between young workers (often women) with no economic security and senior workers with economic security and generous benefits.<sup>51</sup> This division of workers continued to be a popular cost-saving method for many Japanese firms in the 2000s.<sup>52</sup> This partial liberalization is not adequate, however, to cover the cost of having lifelong workers, especially when a company's revenues are falling. Mari Miura points out that Japanese companies' strong employment protection has been maintained through this use of a large number of cheap part-time and temporary female workers.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, the custom of long working hours, which is another central cost-saving method of Japanese management, reifies the male work norm and bolsters sex segregation by rewarding only those women who emulate this style. The culture of long working hours can incorporate women only as long as they successfully follow the pattern of prioritizing their work over their personal and family lives. Thus, the overwork norm reinforces the dilemma facing women workers, who often conclude they have only two options in their careers: they either emulate the male work norm or opt out.

Finally, it will be many years before the number of women managers in Japanese companies reaches parity with that of men, as there is so little mobility in the labor market under lifelong employment and opportunity is mostly based on seniority. Women workers' absence in high-level management in Japanese companies reinforces traditional gender stereotypes and makes it difficult to reduce gender essentialism and misogyny in the workplace.

## Gendered Management Customs in Japan

Past studies have revealed that women's low status is embedded in the organizational customs of Japanese companies. A few scholars have pointed out the link between Japan's employment system and gender-discriminatory practices. For example, Brinton and others have pointed out that lifelong employment and seniority pay are disadvantageous to women workers who might wish to start families;<sup>54</sup> they preferentially reward men who work for long years without interruption.<sup>55</sup> The same customs reinforce gender stereotypes that depict women as being incapable of lifelong devotion and sacrifice for their companies,<sup>56</sup> even though these same companies offer them only assistant-level jobs because of the likelihood that they will quit when they marry and have children.

A few ethnographic studies of Japanese companies have revealed the nexus between the employment system and marginalization of women workers. For example, Yuko Ogasawara's ethnographic study of a large bank in the 1980s and Karen Shire's interviews with employees of financial and automobile manufacturing firms in the 1990s demonstrated that the hiring track for women relegates them to marginal positions with lower pay and few promotion chances and that women have traditionally been expected to quit their jobs when they marry.<sup>57</sup> Shire found that women workers "were evaluated on their grooming and temperament, while men were evaluated on decision making and analytical style, and how they expressed opinions."<sup>58</sup> Ogasawara's work illustrated Japanese women's unique combination of resistance to and conformity with male authority. The women workers in her study served their Japanese companies as "cheap and docile labor" while simultaneously resisting the corporate hierarchy by explicitly taking authority lightly and "hid[ing] critical, observant eyes underneath their demure attitudes and feminine smiles."<sup>59</sup>

Kimiko Kimoto's study of general merchandise supermarkets and department stores disclosed how the Japanese management system negatively affects women's ambition.<sup>60</sup> She observed that many women workers are given "boredom-inducing jobs" or assistant-level work and express low ambition to climb the managerial ladder, especially if it requires extremely long work-hour commitment. Alice Lam's book about a large department store demonstrates that the gender division, wherein the women sell and the men manage, is embedded in both male and female mentalities and normalized in organizational culture.<sup>61</sup> Lam points out that the uniqueness of Japanese management lies in its normalization, justification, and maintenance of sex discrimination in ordinary customs.<sup>62</sup> Heidi Gottfried's study of temporary-help agencies found that the companies' hiring of women temporary workers included screening based on gendered traits such as age, appearance, tone of voice, and posture, especially

because “women’s ornamental appearance becomes an important qualification for attracting the male gaze.”<sup>63</sup> In her article, she reported that women were mostly relegated to being men’s assistants and judged according to traditional male views of attractiveness. She found that the relationship between regular full-time male workers and temporary female workers represented a typical gender regime. She concluded that “organizations select workers on the basis of an aesthetic code that predisposes the preference for female embodiment of temporary work and privilege attributes linked to masculinity and the heterosexual family man.”<sup>64</sup> Japanese managers apparently have long subscribed to gender essentialism, heteronormative behaviors, and have normalized sex segregation in given tasks, responsibilities, and opportunities. These organizationally embedded and normalized gender biases and discriminatory customs have been legitimized by the male-protection-based employment system in Japan’s coordinated capitalist society.

Strong employment protection in a business may even exacerbate employers’ gender biases and workplace vertical segregation. Margarita Estevez-Abe argues that the degree of sex segregation in capitalist countries is shaped by their different corporate skill regimes: countries with coordinated market economies, which institutionally support firm-specific skills and emphasize workers’ long-term economic security, have higher levels of organizational vertical segregation than countries with liberal market economies, where credential-based skills, such as those obtained through education, are more highly valued.<sup>65</sup> She argues that in countries with coordinated market economies employers’ long-term commitment to their workers along with strong job protections and the high costs associated with hiring and firing workers institutionally legitimizes a negative bias against female workers, given that women are likely to interrupt their careers for childbearing, while liberal market countries carry fewer biases because they rely heavily on gender-neutral characteristics in hiring, such as educational diplomas and vocational certifications. According to Estevez-Abe, a reduction in vertical segregation in coordinated market countries may require a reduction in workers’ overall employment protections.<sup>66</sup>

I shall revisit the above arguments and examine the direct and causal links between the business and management practices of Japanese companies and the consequences of vertical sex segregation. In the 1980s, and even in the early 1990s, there were very few women managers or working mothers in Japanese companies. Only 15 percent of women attended four-year colleges, and 20 percent of women attended two-year colleges in the late 1980s. But the gender gap in education has been rapidly narrowing. Furthermore, because of decreasing pressure to marry at a young age, there are increasingly high numbers of educated employed women in various positions and at a variety of levels in large Japanese



firms. Also, because of the government's promotion of married women's continuing presence in the workplace and lenient parental leave, working mothers are increasingly visible in the workplace. However, corporate customs and culture continue to shape a high level of vertical sex segregation and constrain women's upward mobility.

Until the early 1990s, the age norm played an important role in women's decision to marry, with both families and employers pressuring women to marry by their late twenties, and many women quitting their jobs when they married.<sup>67</sup> But marital age has become highly variable in Japan because of the "younger generation's departure from adherence to the strong age-at-marriage norm of their parents' generation."<sup>68</sup> The decline of the marital age norm and the marital norm itself, combined with the rapid rise in women's education and employment and a deregulated labor market that is increasing the number and types of positions women workers are hired into, have changed the way that many women are conducting their working lives. Thus, it is critical to question Japan's structural and institutional sex segregation, especially its slowness to change as it relates to organizational and management customs. I believe that what it will take to implement desegregation is more than just increasing the number of women employers and women managers, who may simply be seen as ornaments by other workers. Japanese companies need women with power and authority, but this will require some serious structural and organizational changes accompanied by changes in beliefs and practices common to Japanese corporate governance and capitalism. Incorporating women workers into the current Japanese management system as equals with men will also be costly unless Japan transforms the lifelong-employment system and related customs. Taking gender equality seriously in Japanese firms will require increased awareness of the responsibility of traditional Japanese management for the low status of women in Japan.

## Democratic Values in Japan

It has been assumed by many that gender equality would progress along with Japan's modernization. However, because gender inequality has been a critical part of institutional equilibrium in Japan, addressing it requires great changes to the Japanese system. In addition, Japan's slow pace in the reduction of sex segregation and gender inequality may be partly due to Japanese capitalism's strong adherence to nondemocratic "survival" values, driven by the business community and the state, rather than by more rational and individualistic values.

Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel argue that gender egalitarianism is a critical component of democracy and human advancement and an emancipatory

force in modern nations that shapes the development of the autonomous self.<sup>69</sup> If the rise of gender egalitarianism is connected to the rise of values relating to democracy and individual autonomy, can we explain Japan's slow progress in terms of the absence of these values? According to Inglehart, Pippa Norris, and Welzel, a country's economic development leads to an increase in democratic values and thus to greater gender equality.<sup>70</sup> Measuring societies' values on two dimensions—traditional values vs. secular-rational values and survival values vs. self-expression values—they explain that societies with the strongest traditional values strongly emphasize the importance of parent-child ties, deference to authority, family values, and nationalism, while societies leaning toward secular-rational values have preferences centered on individual difference, independence, and freedom. Societies that are all about survival also place the highest value on materialism and hard work while having little tolerance for difference and diversity. Inglehart, Norris, and Welzel argue that as economic development progresses there should be a shift from survival values toward self-expression values and that this should also lead the society to adopt gender equality, since daily work in modern knowledge-based societies requires individual judgment and innovation rather than following routines dictated from above, and thus an individual's self-expression becomes indispensable.<sup>71</sup> Democratization is a complex process that a society's religious heritage, work structure, and level of economic development all influence.<sup>72</sup> Japan is economically developed, but traditional Japanese values emphasize family and group conformity and a catch-up-with-the-West type of survival imperative, which enforces homogeneity, a hierarchy-dominated corporate culture, and a business-state coordinated system.

According to this theory of democracy and gender equality, the rise of such an economy leads to increasing emphasis on self-expressive values and then to the development of democracy (not the other way around). The rise of material, intellectual, and social autonomy leads to people's aversion to hierarchy and authority and their preference for freedom and equality.<sup>73</sup> The rise of liberal democracy is a key to the progress of gender equality in a country, and the rise of liberal democracy occurs when there are shifts in traditional values and the development of a public consciousness opposed to traditional authority, collectivism, and conformity. The continuing dominance in Japan of rigid hierarchical systems and conformity in business management suggests that Japan is much closer to authoritarian countries than to Western democratic countries. If Japan's capitalism revolves around traditional nondemocratic values, it is not surprising that gender inequality, which is also a critical element of Japanese capitalism, has not been reduced substantially.

Japan's system of capitalism is understood as being entirely different from the liberal, individualistic capitalism of the United States. Some argue that Japan's

social values—especially the values of conformity and the hierarchy based on age, gender, and education—inhibit the evolution of Japanese society, individual creativity, and innovation.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, some scholars argue that the values of conformity and hierarchy in Japan are simply characteristic of a different democratic style and that Japan is a solidly democratic country that just happens to be different from Western democracies.<sup>75</sup>

Gøsta Esping-Andersen famously described three state regime types: (1) the social democratic model, exemplified by the Scandinavian countries with their strong emphasis on the role of the state in guaranteeing gender equality, social rights, and household welfare; (2) the conservative welfare model, in which families rely on the male breadwinner and men's long-term employment; and (3) the liberal state, with its strong emphasis on individualism and the market.<sup>76</sup> Japan belongs to the second type, in which women's job status is low and their equality is also suppressed by traditional family values and roles. Andersen argues that Japan's welfare system is shaped by the dominance of these old-fashioned values, which reflect the country's Confucianism-oriented, age-based hierarchical system. In Andersen's model, Confucianism in Japan is like Catholicism in Europe, which has blocked gender equality and women's independence in countries such as Italy and Spain.<sup>77</sup> Mary Alice Haddad likewise points out that Confucianism values group orientation and the social order.<sup>78</sup> Regardless of such different bases of democracy, Haddad explains, Japan's younger generation has been becoming more democratic than previous generations, and political institutions have also become more democratic than before.

Others disagree with the claim that Japan's emphasis on group values and hierarchy derive from Confucianism, especially considering that Asian countries are characterized by diverse cultural values and beliefs (even though all are influenced by Confucianism).<sup>79</sup> Thomas Rohlen is one of these; he posits that parenting and socialization are the major factors contributing to Japanese acceptance of order and hierarchical authority.<sup>80</sup> Others argue that group conformity might stem largely from Japan's modernization and industrialization after World War II.<sup>81</sup> Group conformity was indeed the driving force behind the development of Japanese companies and thus the country's economic growth after the war.

Decision making is also based on group conformity in Japanese organizations, but it has been criticized as the source of organizational inertia in these firms. Group conformity usually is institutionalized along the lines of a gendered and age-based hierarchy. Because such value systems are reinforced by salaries, which are also based on age and gender, the pay system may need to be uncoupled from cultural values before democratization of the decision-making process can occur.

Japan's civil society has been state led to a great degree in its modernization process; the state is considered a worthy object of subordination or sacrifice.<sup>82</sup>

Andrew Barshay cites the regulation scholar Toshio Yamada's words—"One cannot understand postwar Japan without looking at corporations"—and reframes Japan's civil society in terms of Kiyooki Hirata's concept of Japan as "the enterprise state" in which worker relations with both the firm and the state are based on intense conformity and exploitation, characterized by a lack of autonomy or fairness.<sup>83</sup> Referring to Tetsuro Kato and Hirata, Barshay argues that the frequency of workers' deaths by overwork, or *karoshi*, demonstrates their subordination to their firms, and that this brutal exploitation of workers has been an entrenched part of state-led corporate development.<sup>84</sup> Turning to the Japanese thinker Yoshihiko Uchida, Barshay further writes:

In modern times, Japan had gone from "semi-feudal" to "supermodern" through the agency of war, reconstruction, and growth, but without the full realization of civil society. Would Uchida have found in the decadence of the postwar system a chance for a fundamental redefinition of Japan's civil society? Or would he have thought that in the name of globalization, civil society was again being sacrificed to the gods of capital? On the one hand, while severe competition eroded profits, technological innovation also created new possibilities for their realization by reducing "socially necessary labor time." In this situation, some workers could find themselves with less (or shared) work but increased "time sovereignty" and the chance for enhanced participation in civic life as the collective narcissism of the enterprise gave way to a more mature and diversified perspective. Alternatively, in a society that has tended to equate the status of "human being" (*ningen*) with enterprise membership, greater unemployment would surely bring pervasive anomie or worse, while those who retain their identity as corporate employees might find themselves subject to still greater demands for unrewarded labor.<sup>85</sup>

Japan's economic development and modernization did not entail democratic practices and beliefs in the Western sense; instead, Japan, in building its democracy, mandated the subordination of labor to the state and the company. Here, the "survival" of the nation-state was seen as the mission of companies and individual workers alike. This "survival" value also legitimizes the existence of a gender hierarchy and the division of labor. In this context, Japan's survival as a first-rate modern country was seen to require group-led conformity under Japan's system of coordinated capitalism, and the values of equality, diversity, and individualism would have to wait. Japan's deficiency in individual autonomy—and its lack of importance to Japan's democracy—has been pointed out by the political scientist Maruyama Masao, who posits that it was a major cause of wartime fascism in the country.<sup>86</sup>

The dominant concepts of conformity and hierarchy in Japanese management do not incorporate the value of equality. It would require great effort to

replace the virtue of self-sacrifice with the Western notion of “work-life balance” in Japanese companies. The “survival” value of Japanese capitalism has not been reduced or replaced by the “self-expressive,” and management and labor markets continue to operate accordingly. Sex segregation in Japanese companies should be examined in the context of Japan’s adherence to survival- and conformity-based management. Women workers’ aspirations, as well as their opportunities for upward mobility and economic independence, have been suppressed by the dominant state-driven economic-development regime and tailored to fit gendered separate-sphere values. If gender egalitarianism is a critical component of democracy and human advancement,<sup>87</sup> desegregation in Japanese firms will thus require value shifts in existing management. The Japanese government might expect a state-led gender policy copied from the West to bring about gender egalitarianism in Japan, but it is not a matter of one policy; rather, change must reverberate through the entire system of Japanese capitalism. Steinmo points out the problem with Japan’s traditional “survival” or “catch up with the West” attitudes: “Japan is unlikely to successfully adapt if it continues to simply import policies from abroad. Its leaders should instead consider both how to adapt new ideas to the system’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as consider what kind of country they would like to build.”<sup>88</sup> Under enterprise-led economic development, gender egalitarianism, individualism, and a flexible labor market have not been fully developed. The labor market and employment structure in Japan, based on age, gender, and education, must become responsive to and reward individual aspirations.

In the United States, gender egalitarianism has progressed partly as a result of liberal individualism. Paula England explains educated middle-class American women’s aspiring to do traditionally male jobs and a narrowing gender gap in these jobs in terms of America’s valuation of liberal individualism and a belief in self-expressiveness and equal opportunity.<sup>89</sup> American women strive to seek their “true selves” and attain greater upward mobility than was possible for their mothers. For individual belief in self-fulfillment to translate into high-ranking jobs, though, the labor market must guarantee certain levels of equal opportunity. In Japan such envisioning of a “true self” may not be so difficult on an individual level, but navigating personal desire and realizing that true self in the rigid labor market and sex-segregated Japanese companies is very difficult. As long as the labor market and employment structure lack the flexibility to adjust to such developments, gender inequality in Japan is unlikely to change.

Finally, when we compare past changes in women’s status in the United States with those in Japan, the role of effective laws and courts with the authority to reprimand companies for discrimination cannot be ignored. Japanese gender laws are known to be ineffective, with the state lacking the ability to impose sanctions

and penalties on companies that flout the rules. The laws also are biased toward Japanese companies, and the Japanese courts follow a set of highly bureaucratic and conformity-driven norms, making them unwilling to set legal precedents and positioning them as highly conservative as concerns gender equality.<sup>90</sup> Japan has not therefore seen the passage of laws helpful to the emergence of gender egalitarianism, whereas in the United States, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the guidelines of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and various decisions of the Supreme Court—applied within firms by corporate and legal professionals such as attorneys, personnel professionals, human resources specialists, and consultants—have made huge contributions to developing gender-parity measures and grievance procedures.<sup>91</sup> Also, the discourses of capitalism and democracy, in which the values of fairness and efficiency overlap, have pushed the US business and legal climates toward greater gender equality. If a legal system that can push for and materialize democratic values is necessary for desegregation and egalitarianism, Japan may have to take a different approach.

## Organizational Analysis

I base this book about sex segregation in Japanese firms on feminist studies written from the gendered-organizational perspective, which allows more context-specific analysis of gendered customs and practices than other organizational approaches. By using the gendered-organizational perspective, I situate sex segregation and unequal power dynamics in certain customs within the concrete contexts of Japanese firms. Organizational analysis allows us to discover how sex segregation has been reinforced informally through hierarchies, hiring practices, gender biases, and worker relations.

Traditionally, sex segregation has been explained from two differing viewpoints: a demand-side perspective that emphasizes such things as employers' statistical discrimination against women workers and a supply-side perspective that sees the gender gap as mostly resulting from women's choices (being less committed to or invested in their jobs as compared to men due to their domestic responsibilities or different socialization paths and preferences).<sup>92</sup> In the labor economy, the human-capital theory emphasizes women's lack of investment in education or their choice of occupations that require fewer skills and less engagement as a result of their spending more time outside of work.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, even with increasing corporate and governmental intervention and the entrance of more educated women into the labor market, sex segregation persists because of unchanging workplace practices. The organizational culture retains gender biases and stereotypes that are embedded in workplace customs. Traditional

explanations of sex segregation, however, do little to help us understand the mechanisms and processes by which sex segregation is reinforced at the organizational level.<sup>94</sup>

## Gendered Organizations

Feminist scholars have argued that the logic of organizations entails gender and that gender equality is unattainable without organizational changes in gendered customs and practices.<sup>95</sup> Studies of gendered organizations shed light on the context-specific analysis of organizations—including the operation of gendered beliefs, ideologies, and dominant patterns of behavior that are unique to certain workplaces and occupations—and their impacts on workers' relationships and identities, aspirations, and career paths. These studies examine the "mechanisms that produce inequality at work" as "inequalities of gender, race, class and sexuality [that] are deeply entrenched in workplace cultures, interactions, and even the identities of workers."<sup>96</sup>

Studies of gendered organizations often examine the ideologies of gender at multiple levels of the organizational structure. Joan Acker suggests that we examine the operation of gender-divisive ideologies in five aspects of organizations: (1) the division of labor, (2) the construction of symbols, (3) interactions among workers, (4) individual identity, and (5) organizational logic and assumptions that often shape the hierarchy of the organization.<sup>97</sup> An organization often legitimizes the ideology of separate spheres by recreating "the gendered divide between paid work and unpaid family reproductive work, consigning the latter, and women, to a subordinated and devalued position as practice and belief put the demands of the work organization first over the demands of the rest of life."<sup>98</sup> By normalizing separate-sphere beliefs, the organization also legitimizes its "nonresponsibility" for "human survival and reproduction," thus marginalizing reproductive and caring activities that are tied mostly to women's work.<sup>99</sup>

Studies of gendered organizations often employ the concept of "masculinity" to illuminate workers' dominant gendered behaviors that have been constructed in the workplace. A variety of masculine customs and practices in the workplace—such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, autocracy, and market- or profit-driven behavior—have been postulated as common factors that deprive women of power,<sup>100</sup> but, importantly, men's and women's beliefs about and practice of masculinities in the workplace differ depending on the structural position of women and their degree of power and authority.<sup>101</sup> It is well known that most Japanese companies have been shaped by the separate-sphere ideology and traditional masculinity and femininity. Also, examining Japanese firms' practices

**and beliefs** illuminates how the organizational structures, customs, and hierarchies that have reinforced sex segregation remain central to Japan's institutional regimes.

Dana Britton offers an important critique of studies of gendered organizations, arguing that "the meaning of labeling an organization, an occupation, a policy, or a practice as gendered is still theoretically and empirically unclear."<sup>102</sup> Britton and Laura Logan, however, write that even though studies of gendered organizations offer few theoretical generalities, their context-specific approach adds "complexities" to the field, and they maintain that such complexities "increase our knowledge of the processes whereby organizations become gendered."<sup>103</sup> Gendered-organizational perspectives are useful for assessing various types of work and professional mechanisms of gender. For example, Christine Williams, Chandra Muller, and Kristine Kilanski write that basic organizational logic has been transformed over the past few decades because, under the so-called new economy, "work is increasingly characterized by job insecurity, teamwork, career maps, and networking," yet the processes by which the work is organized continue to have gendered impacts and consequences.<sup>104</sup>

I employ the gendered-organizations approach in this book because it offers the opportunity for an in-depth and contextualized analysis of the organizational practices and beliefs that have reinforced vertical sex segregation in five Japanese companies. Looking at multiple aspects of organizational customs and structures is effective when internal and external corporate changes occur—such as the rapid rise of educated women in the workforce and the implementation of corporate policies regarding gender equality—yet organizational inertia remains unchanged.

In US research, the gendered-organizational approach also takes into account context-specific diversity and equality programs. Even in the United States, which is far more desegregated than Japan, further progress in uprooting sex segregation has been slow, and many organizations have failed to change or even question gendered customs and beliefs.<sup>105</sup> Robin Ely, Herminia Ibarra, and Deborah Kolb point out that existing organizational remedial programs tend to locate the problem only in women.<sup>106</sup> Ely and Debra Meyerson argue that organizations have employed three types of interventions: (1) the "fix women" approach, (2) the "value femininity" approach, and (3) the "create equal opportunity" approach. In the "fix women" approach, a firm tries to eliminate gender inequality by changing women and training women to perform on a par with men.<sup>107</sup> This approach, which mostly encourages women to assimilate to the existing organizational norm, blames women as the source of the problem and leaves the organization's male standard unchallenged. Whereas the second approach,



“value femininity,” encourages workers to value traditional femininity and gender differences, this does little more than reinforce women’s appropriateness and the gendered power imbalance. The third approach, “create equal opportunity,” aims to remove structural gender barriers primarily through formal policy-based changes such as affirmative action programs, formal mentoring, and work-family programs. Although policy-based interventions have greatly contributed to the decline of some barriers, Ely and Meyerson argue that they are not sufficient because they do not challenge the beliefs and norms that legitimize the gender imbalance. They suggest the necessity of putting in place more context-specific interventions against unequal informal practices in addition to formal policies concerning work rules, labor rules, labor contracts, managerial directives, job descriptions, performance-appraisal systems, and distribution of work responsibilities, including the information people receive regarding advancement in the organization and tacit criteria for competence or fitting in.<sup>108</sup> Corporate culture plays an essential role in the likelihood of firms’ implementing effective organizational strategies and diversity programs.<sup>109</sup> Thus, it is not enough to have some type of formal gender policy in place; in addition, workers’ views of organizational culture and workplace accommodation of formal changes in gender policy need to be examined.

## Gender Bias

Knowledge of gender biases and stereotypes is important in understanding sex segregation. Gender biases, often institutionalized, stem from differing motives on the part of employers and managers. They often derive from organizational inertia or an employer’s reluctance to implement changes in old customs. Barbara Reskin and Debra McBrier argue that organizational inertia maintains employers’ sex-based ascription or gender-essentialist biases because of employers’ aversion to paying the extra selection costs associated with filling jobs with women or even creating new formal structures.<sup>110</sup> To most hiring managers, who prefer to choose persons who resemble themselves, it can feel like a risk to place women over men. Organizational inertia is often “built around cognitive, interactional and institutional processes” that can reinforce the gendered division of labor in the form of recruitment, evaluation, hiring, and retention of employees.<sup>111</sup> At the same time, any rapid or forceful attempts to change old customs may be met with complaints that exhibit gender bias and prejudice. In the Japanese companies I researched for this book, women with power have been historically few, and recent increases in the number of women managers in these companies have been met with mixed emotions by existing workers and viewed through the lens of traditional gender stereotypes.

Gender bias also derives from a strong belief in male primacy. Research shows that “there is little direct evidence that men are more productive workers than women,” and it also indicates that it is not clear that men are less stable employees, even though women “as a group” might have more interrupted careers.<sup>112</sup> England argues that employers mistakenly underestimate group average productivity and use gender stereotypes, and she refers to this as “error discrimination.”<sup>113</sup> Donald Tomaskovic-Devey and Sheryl Skaggs argue that the productivity of individual workers is shaped and constrained by their existing roles, which are assigned according to the organization’s division of labor and that the gender gap in productivity is thus more likely to derive from the unequal structure of the gender division than from individual traits.<sup>114</sup> With little reason other than prejudice, employers commonly place higher trust in men than in women. Traditional male domination in upper-level positions intensifies the decision makers’ gender biases.<sup>115</sup> When uncertainty is involved in managerial work, employers and decision makers tend to show gender bias in their inferences about a candidate’s ability to perform at a high level.<sup>116</sup> Previous research provides evidence to refute the common employer bias that women workers are less committed to their jobs than men. In their research in Britain and the United States, Elizabeth Gorman and Julie Kmec found that “women have to try harder than men at work, across a wide variety of jobs,” as “employers impose higher performance standards on women than on men, even when men and women hold the same jobs.”<sup>117</sup> As a result, women may experience greater job stress, exhaustion, and burnout, and this indicates that, even as explicit discrimination becomes less common, the mechanisms of job experiences and rewards remain highly gendered.<sup>118</sup>

In Japanese companies, with their custom of lifelong employment, statistical discrimination has been commonly employed to justify hiring men and women for different positions. Using statistical discrimination, employers have avoided hiring and promoting women because of their perception that they are more likely to resign from their jobs or be more intermittent in terms of job productivity. Male supremacy has been a major assumption of Japanese management because of men’s higher likelihood of lifelong commitment.

Gender bias also promotes in-group preferences, which leads to the exclusion of women from male bonds. It is known that male decision makers are more likely than female decision makers to prefer male candidates for hiring and promotion.<sup>119</sup> Studies have found that powerful groups constantly seek to institutionalize their privileges,<sup>120</sup> so employers tend to place men ahead of women in labor queues for the most desirable jobs.<sup>121</sup> Homophily is often maintained as a result of workers’ and clients’, as well as employers’, in-group preferences. Networking is an outcome of in-group preferences and thus is an aspect of the gender-based reciprocal business system. In a study of one thousand financial

network members, it was demonstrated that even when women break into male circles workers may rank network members along gendered lines.<sup>122</sup>

By the same token, it may work in women's favor when there are a high number of women with authority; they may be motivated to help other women or prefer to interact with others who are similar to them.<sup>123</sup> Purcell, MacArthur, and Samblanet argue that past research has shown that "institutionalizing, and legitimizing, female leadership increases equality (e.g., greater influence and pay for women), and placing men and women in the same positions may lessen inequality over time."<sup>124</sup> In highly male-dominated environments, such as Japanese companies, the recruiting of women or women entering male-only circles may take considerable effort unless top management intentionally generates such paths for women workers or increases the number of women with authority who are powerful enough to change male-only customs in their companies.

## The Importance of Women with Power

The impact of women with power and authority on desegregation is a critical question for organizational theorists. Studies suggest that the presence of more women in managerial positions relates to a reduction in segregation.<sup>125</sup> For example, it is known that women's representation in managerial jobs, especially in high-level leadership positions, reduces the wage gap between women and men.<sup>126</sup> Regarding workplace programs, executives are more likely to adopt diversity programs when they have higher proportions of white women in management who push for these programs.<sup>127</sup>

According to Kevin Stainback and Soyoung Kwon, when women are present in leadership positions, it helps female subordinates in the following three ways: (1) in-group preference in hiring, promotion, and wage-setting decisions; (2) increased access to career-enhancing social networks and mentoring opportunities; and (3) reduced gender stereotypes and increased women's representation in higher level positions.<sup>128</sup> In their empirical study of South Korean organizations, Stainback and Kwon found that organizations with a higher percentage of women in managerial jobs tend to have lower observed levels of sex segregation.<sup>129</sup>

Japanese companies exhibit an extreme form of vertical sex segregation, as they are severely lacking in women leaders. This is not just the case in the business world; the overall society suffers from an absence of women with power and authority. The effect of this absence of women with power on subordinate workers has not been well investigated. Past studies in the United States and Europe, however, have addressed the negative consequences of a lack of women leaders in organizations. One good example is Ely's comparative study of male-dominated

**law firms** and gender-integrated law firms in the United States.<sup>130</sup> She found that **the women** in male-dominated law firms had far more negative views about their **career prospects**, other female workers, and their self-images than the women in **gender-integrated law firms**. Women workers' views of their jobs, their careers, **and themselves** in male-dominated law firms are often shaped by men's views of **what they want** from the women. According to Ely, women in male-dominated firms in which few women with power are present perceive that playing two roles is critical to their success: the masculine role and the seductress/sex object role—"roles defined by men's preferences."<sup>131</sup> She notes that women workers in these firms express stronger gender stereotypes, a sense of less competence and satisfaction, and lower expectations for promotion than women in gender-integrated law firms. Women workers in Japanese firms may be in circumstances similar to those in the male-dominated firms in Ely's study, perhaps subscribing to a high level of gender bias themselves and feeling pessimistic about their advancement and future job prospects. In organizations with few senior women or women with power, those few can turn into "queen bees" and becoming complicit with the privileged group of men, denying the firm's sexism, turning a blind eye to women's disadvantaged position, and maybe even mistreating younger women.<sup>132</sup> Although some authors point out that such an image of senior women can be highly male biased or sexist, the appearance of queen bees is well known as an organizational symptom of male dominance. Because there have been few female managers in most Japanese companies, it is not surprising that tensions among women workers reflect misogyny or competition and hierarchy among women.

Beyond the lack of women leaders, the problems in Japanese companies extend to the way the government and companies have superficially increased the numbers of women rapidly over the last few years without addressing structural and organizational problems. This causes workers and managers to question whether those women are as qualified as the men holding the same positions. Such concerns and criticisms about Japan's government-led desegregation may also increase criticism of new women managers in Japanese companies.

## Overview of the Book

The following chapters investigate the logic of gender and organizational processes in which sex segregation and gender inequality emerge in the customs of hiring, pay, and promotion; the practice of long working hours; workplace gender stereotypes; gendered consequences of overtime work; and sexual harassment.