THE SATURNS RINGS PHENOMENON:

MICRO-INEQUITIES AND UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY

IN THE AMERICAN ECONOMY

Mary P. Rowe

The examples of discrimination recounted in this study are all real incidents occurring during the years 1973-1976. This paper is a sequel to an earlier analysis called "The Saturn's Rings Phenomenon," (1973), and other 1975 articles on the minutiae of racism, inverse sexism, and sexism.

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This paper describes some of the minutiae of racism and sexism in the American economy and schools. These minutiae are usually not (practically speaking) actionable; most are such petty incidents that they may not even be identified, much less protested. They are however important, like the dust and ice in Saturn's rings, because, taken together, they constitute formidable barriers. As Saturn is partially obscured by its rings, so are good jobs partially obscured for minorities and women, by "grains of sand": the minutiae of discrimination. This paper asks the question--Why look at "petty" incidents? It then briefly analyzes some "petty incidents" and raises hypotheses as to why and how such incidents may do damage.

I write today about micro-inequities and unequal opportunity for minorities and women at work and in school.[1]

What are micro-inequities? It will become obvious, from the definition that comes next, that each person is his or her own expert on what constitutes a micro-inequity in the individual instance. In the aggregate, I define discriminatory micro-inequities as destructive, but practially-speaking non-actionable, aspects of an environment. They are the instances which reasonable people would agree are unjust toward individuals, by virtue of an individual's being irrationally treated in a certain way only because of sex, race, religion, age, or country of origin. In studies of racism Dr. Chester Pierce calls many of these micro-inequities "micro-aggressions."[2] Jean-Paul Sartre has written about these phenomena as the expectations of anti-Semites about what it means to be a Jew.[3] Micro-inequities are of a fiendish efficiency in maintaining unequal opportunity, because they are the air we breathe, the books we read, and because we cannot change the personal characteristic which leads to the inequity. Micro-inequities are woven into all the threads of our work life and of American education. They are "micro," not at all in the sense of trivial, but in the sense of micro-economics, (which looks at the process and effect of decision-making at the level of individuals and firms).

The Extent of Inherited Unequal Opportunity

On what basis does one believe unequal opportunity persists? I allege unequal opportunity on the basis of grossly unequal representations of women and men, minorities and non-minorities, in the various areas of paid and unpaid employment, on the basis of wage gaps, and finally, on the basis of great differences in status between men and women, minorities and non-minorities, of a nature which cannot scientifically be explained by biological differences.

Consider for example, the statistics of unequal occupational opportunity. The proportions of minorities and women with advanced degrees in engineering, management, labor unions and national politics, is extremely small, less than 5%. Spokesmen of many disciplines will tell you "There are no competent women or minorities in my field." As we know, blacks and women in the paid labor force are generally found in only a few occupations: e.g. unskilled labor, nursing, clerical work, teaching, domestic work. Some may say these unequal distributions have occurred in part because of the different skills and interests of the different groups. Of course in part this is perfectly true, especially with respect to gender. Cross-culturally speaking, we generally find systematic occupational differences between men and women. On the other hand these systematic differences vary and are even reversed, from one society to another. Moreover, with respect to gender, the recent work of Eleanor Maccoby and Carol Jacklin[4] and James Harrison[5] make it seem extremely unlikely that innate psychological differences could conceivably explain the systematic differences in how men

and women spend their time. Indeed Harrison's recent study argues strongly that the old masculinity-feminity paradigm has, scientifically speaking, caused confusion and damage, without any useful results for our scholarly understanding of these matters. The work of John Money[6] and Richard Green[7] again make clear how socialization patterns can "swamp" or over-rule genetic differences between men and women. I therefore believe that in an ideal "equal opportunity" world we would find men and women, randomly distributed by occupation, (paid and unpaid), and this premise will be found to underlie the paper.

With respect to race, it is also inappropriate to explain different occupational distributions solely in terms of biological differences. While a major social science battle rages about I.Q. differences between races, many distinguished researchers believe the argument for differences is based on questionable scientific grounds. Moreover, the relationship between I.Q. and career success is in any case very weak. Finally, as with occupational differences on the basis of gender, we find occupational differences by race to vary, very widely, from one society to another. One may thus hypothesize that in an "equal opportunity" world we would find people much more randomly distributed among occupations, by race, as well as sex.

Are opportunities getting better? In some fields the statistics are changing beyond the token level, for instance in law. But consider our slow national progress in college and university faculties during the so-called "affirmative action" years, 1968-1975. In 1968 some 19% of American faculty members were women. In 1975, fewer than 25% were women. The proportion of minorities has risen from about 2% to only about 4%. Few people believe that women or minorities have gained really significant ground in occupational desegregation in such areas as construction, national politics, or union management.

The wage statistics are for many people the worst indexes of unequal opportunity. White men working full time, year around were paid a median $9700 in 1971, black men $6700. White women were paid $5600, black women $5000. These wage gaps have been very persistent in the American economy even when labor force participation rates were changing fast; indeed recently the gaps have widened. Can these gaps be satisfactorily explained by educational differences? Some gaps still obtain, although not so grossly, when you control for education and years of experience. Many studies show that there are gaps left to be explained, even when all obvious factors have been taken into account.

Moreover just "accounting for" gaps is not the same as demonstrating no discrimination. For example some of the wage gap can be explained by occupational segregation: women and blacks usually take, or have to take, lower paying jobs. But it has also been recently demonstrated that some of the lower pay received by women is because certain jobs are designated for women and not because of lesser responsibility and productivity. That is, jobs sex-stereotyped for women are characterized by low incomes for both men and women in those jobs, relative to years of education and levels of responsibility. Secretarial work is a prime example of this phenomenon. In general the pay-off, to women, of a year of additional education, is about 2/3 that for men, (controlling for hours worked). Moreover, white females generally do not gain the occupational status of comparable white men. And a recent study[8] indicates that even with comparable parents and with comparable education, black females do not attain the occupational status of white females; black males do not attain the status of white males.

classified incidents according to a judgment of the understanding and motivations of the perpetrators of inequities. One may deal differently with unconscious put-downs, exploitation and poor service. These latter problems in turn shade into more pathological inequities, many of which are sexist and racist manifestations of emotional illness. I think therefore, of micro-inequities existing along a continuum characterized by degrees of sensitivity of those responsible.

Unconscious Slights and Invisibility Problems

A minority woman came to see me for advice. She is a clerical worker, in a work-area where there are no other minority people and very few women. Her work has been progressing satisfactorily, in fact she thinks it is going well. But she is unhappy with her job--she's very lonely. In discussions about her unhappiness one day she said to me, "no one talks to me." I have heard many such stories, so I asked her, as I have asked many others before, to keep a one-week record. During that week no one from her area spoke to her at all. Other minority people from elsewhere in the university dropped in twice. None of her supervisors (who talked with each other a lot), met her eyes that she could recall. None of the men who came chatting past her desk addressed her by name, in the brief notes about work that were dropped on her desk. No one has thanked her for work done. Like many women she feels invisible. This particular saga is among the most frequent stories to come to our office. I recall a minority carpenter, a telephone company manager, a factory forewoman, a supermarket management trainee, and many professors and students who feel a surrealistic sense of being invisible on traditionally white male turf.

Women and minorities may become aware of their invisibility only slowly, because it happens only now and then and it is so difficult to identify. In the story of the clerical worker, this woman came to see me wondering what was wrong--she did not know why she was so uncomfortable and unhappy. We may come to believe we are invisible when our names are left off a list. Only one person is not invited to the supervisor's party--the only black. One person's vacations do not appear on the vacation list--those of the only woman in the office. One person's lunch hours are forgetfully not allowed for in a busy office--the woman's. It happens to people in all kinds of jobs. From three universities in this area come at least twenty 1973-76 stories of blacks and women whose names were left off faculty lists and who, therefore, were not invited to various faculty functions last year or who were not given credit in major announcements.

There is a distinguished visitor for whom a last minute special lunch is given; only the black research associate is not invited. There is another lunch; everyone is introduced around in the circle; only the woman, out of a list of distinguished guests, is not introduced. This year many female Boston students have come to see me. They say, "all the men in my department have been suggested for certain jobs," or fellowships, or post docs...only the solo woman was not counselled, approached or put up for jobs. Two of these women have said they inquired and complained. "We thought you'd be going with your fiance so we didn't put your name up for jobs 'til we knew where he was going" ...they were told.

We feel invisible sometimes with respect to the procedures which govern our lives. All over the country minorities and women ask to be named to the committees that govern their work lives, just as we ask to be better represented on the industrial and government bodies which affect and govern us--but

Why Does Unequal Opportunity Persist?

Instead of belaboring the point let me assume you are convinced that at least some unequal opportunity exists. How does all of this continue over time? Why don't civil rights acts and affirmative action take care of the problem? I believe that unequal opportunity persists in part because of early socialization patterns; for instance, many individual women are ambivalent about success (in ways that have been carefully studied).

Unequal opportunity also persists in part because of actionable discrimination that has not yet been acted on; one would expect, for example, to see many more Title IX and civil rights suits in public school systems in the next few years. I submit that unequal opportunity also persists in part because of the grains of sand in the system, the micro-inequities which cannot easily be taken to court. These grains of sand foul the processes of education and employment. It is hard to deal with micro-inequities because each one by itself, appears trivial. Because the victim finds it hard to be sure what happened. Because we are all so used to it, we don't notice. Because victims who are female and/or black are also socialized not to make a fuss, lest they get sacked or isolated or put down or called sick. I believe that the "tilt" in the atmosphere helps to explain some of the occupational segregation and wage and status differences referred to above.

In the past four years working on these questions I have seen or talked to or heard from at least 50 people a week--say 2500 problems a year. Of these 2500 problems and inquiries, probably 1000-1500 arise in some way out of discrimination. Lest you feel that in my saying this I believe that my own institution is relatively speaking in bad shape, I do <u>not</u> so believe. On the contrary (even bearing in mind my lack of objectivity since I care very much for the place), I find mine to be the least bad of large organizations I know of, which is a point perhaps to bear in mind as one reads the stories to come.

It also happens that I see and hear from hundreds of people outside my own organization; I include in this discussion examples of sexism and racism from such correspondents. I would like to emphasize that the incidents described below are from 1973-1976, and that all are true.

Micro-Inequities

Micro-inequities can be categorized in many different ways: ambiguous and non-ambiguous; spoken, written and non-verbal; repeated micro-inequities vs single incidents; problems with strangers, acquaintances, friends; problems with supervisors and other more powerful people vs those from peers and others; inequities met by people in traditional situations vs those met by people who are doing something unconventional.

Ralph Ellison used fiction to illuminate the minutiae of racism in every day living.[9] Chester Pierce, Margaret Campbell and Jean-Paul Sartre, have discussed micro-aggressions in terms of the media and institutions in which they appear, Martha Kent[10] in terms of certain common styles of inequity, Margaret Campbell also in terms of overt and subtle discrimination of various specific styles.[11] Rona Fields humorously categorized species of chauvinists.[12] Stephen Potter wrote extensively about intentional put-downs which have the purpose of self-aggrandizement; he categorized by degrees of hostility and type of situation.[13]

The incidents discussed in this paper are mainly those faced by minorities and women in paid employment and in training. My own concern is primarily how to deal with micro-inequities within large organizations. I have therefore

we are often invisible once on the committees. Two colleagues, in different large corporations have told me recently, "I was the only woman on the large committee that determines maternity benefits and they never asked me to speak." In another organization, a study group is set up on family policy; yet another on child-raising in cities--neither has any black or female members. A major study is launched on inner city education--with no blacks.

Invisibility affects success at work and salary equity very directly. A woman staff person says "It's harder for me to keep up; mine is the only office to which the book salesman does not come." A large office in Boston had several minority women working in it--one of whom has a fine work record, a BA and five years experience. When a supervisor was needed in this office, a much younger white male with no experience in the area, was brought in as supervisor. Doing research on a particular salary problem, I found a recent article on "Black-White Wage Gaps." The article dealt only with men; minority and non-minority women were not mentioned. Major, meticulous, staff-classification studies (which look at job responsibility) regularly find that most of those deserving salary adjustments are female, and this will occur even when all salaries were previously carefully reviewed by men of good will. We find the invisibility phenomena in speech. We use the phrase "blacks or women." ("We hope we will find a black or a woman for this job"), without thinking that that leaves out black women. We find the same phenomenon often, in the way things are designed. Convention name tags are often designed to hang from a man's pocket; buildings are designed without locker rooms for women.

Unconscious slights are many. Women are frequently addressed by their first names by men who don't know them, or gently or roughly "herded" or patted by men who put an arm paternalistically around them; we are called "dearie" and "sweetheart." Here again, unconscious slights may affect salaries, promotion, job choice. We are hearing many cases like that of an able, female assistant professor, who asked for an average raise. She was told, "You don't need it; you're married. There's budget crunch and we have to save for people who need it. You do understand?" A black professor was roughed up by students. The university administration said "It's their word against yours; we can't prove anything." Later this man heard he was considered "contentious," although this was the only fracas he had ever been in. He felt unconscious slights were being added to the criminal attack upon him. I remember also several cases where black faculty and administrators with doctorate degrees were presumed to be still at work on a thesis and therefore not yet promotable.

Then there was the ad hoc committee at a New England university, which solicited letters in support of tenure for Jane Doe, a famous archeologist. Jane Doe came to see me, having received, from one of her referees, a xerox copy of his reference. It read, in part, "Dr. Jane Doe is probably the outstanding woman archeologist in the world." Jane Doe was deeply offended. I advised her to call the referee. He read her a sentence from the letter of solicitation, which said, "Would you tell us how this woman ranks among women archeologists?" It turned out that the standard solicitation letter had been sent out, simply changing the word "man" for "woman," in such a way as to ask for, and receive, nonsense recommendations.

Conscious Slights, Harrassment, Poor Service and Exploitation

Conscious slights can strongly affect motivation and job choice. I remember black students in a science course, for instance, who were called by humiliating nicknames and who simply left the course. Recently I met a woman student

whose husband lived elsewhere while she finished her degree; she was very discouraged about some of the gossip: "Is she doing badly in that course because her husband is not with her? She ought to be home doing what women do best!" Another woman was asked to leave a class on the first day "because she cramped the professor's style." In many arenas there is a problem also of over-visibility where minorities and women feel they cannot be just average, or have an off-day without inviting hostile teasing. Some of us are afraid of put downs for being dumb in school or training courses, so we don't ask questions...and we don't learn enough. A union apprentice came recently to ask me what she should do; everytime she asked a question the men present would guffaw, in a deliberate attempt to humiliate her.

Other union women have described many instances where men would block their cars, "mislay" their tools, endlessly tie up showers, deliberately try to make work conversations derogatory, hostile and frightening to women. Several have described union stewards who will simply ignore their concerns or belittle them. Black and Spanish-speaking union men describe slashed tires, colleagues turning their backs, and many instances where co-workers have refused to help them on the job.

As I think of harassment, I remember a professor's lengthy shouting at a clerical worker. He was making the bland assumption that a minority secretary wasn't telling the truth about how some data got lost, when in fact the woman had been on vacation the week the data got lost. Women bring in a variety of incidents of tempers and shouting. We hear stories of the belongings of a black graduate student being moved without persmission, of supervisors going through a woman's desk or a union woman's locker without permission, of bosses' interrupting secretaries on the telephone. There are several instances where minorities and women feel they may have been deliberately put down by colleagues in a position to influence Federal contracts.

Many slights are explicitly oriented toward sex or race. There was the matron at a nearby school who was told her yeast infection was, "a venereal disease--who had she been sleeping with?" Another woman who was angrily warned not to "ask to get raped" by being out at night at a better job, and a third who was asked whether she was going to get pregnant soon, when she discussed her plan to go to Medical School. This last woman was also told she was a "bitch with no right to quit, who could have a great career as a technician if she 'really' was tired of typing for the lab." I remember the black who was told that his Southern schooling was inferior and he'd never make it up, and many instances of minority people being called names.

Some incidents are hard to identify from the point of view of the "consciousness" of the aggressors. A woman in a training course worked on a technical problem for a long time and finally went for help and learned how to deal with the problem. Later she met two men from her course, struggling with the same dilemma. She offered to help, with the method she'd been taught. They ignored her for a deeply frustrating hour while she watched, baffled and angry. Finally a fourth trainee appeared--a man. He also offered help--with the same method as the woman. His help was gratefully accepted; the woman was still ignored. I am not clear just how much the men understood of what was going on. I have heard, in fact, many incidents which seem very obvious but where the men do not seem to hear what they have said. There was the vice-president of a large firm whom I asked about the appointment of an able woman to be an operations manager. "I couldn't do that; she's black and a woman. She's not even pretty," he said off-handedly, but serious. I heard another man congratulate a distinguished day care expert on her forth-coming trip, "You must be enjoy-

ing the honor of going with Messrs, X, Y and Z," he said, naming her peers and co-workers.

Sometimes a formerly white-male environment or tradition means that minority and female students and employees get poor service in one way or another. Blacks and women may be so few in a given company that they cannot find enough contact with other blacks and women to make up for the casual scientific or technical chit-chat they are left out of, when it occurs in white male social groups. This can be very serious, as studies regularly show that informal teaching is very important, for instance in telephone company crafts jobs, or in teaching situations like the "scrubbing" before and after an operation, where women medical students may scrub with the nurses, and miss out on the informal teaching of a male surgeon. Poor service in recruitment frequently occurs; for example there have been several recent incidents around Boston of minorities and women answering Assistant Professor ads who were offered Lecturer and Research Assistant jobs with no explanation. Others have gone to give colloquia where no senior faculty appeared. I remember the recent case of a Spanish speaking mathematician who was asked to do all the programming for his team when he had been hired as a senior researcher.

There are many stories of exploitation - unpaid lunches, unrecognized research work, unpaid overtime. I just heard again from a research associate at a Massachusetts college who is paid $11,000 when her job should have been rated at $18,000; her salary will be raised but it has been a long fight. I recently met an apprentice electrician who worked overtime, unpaid, every night for weeks, finishing her bosses' projects. There is also the endless media exploitation of sex: medical school pornographic slides; the advertisement of an astrophysics book called The Black Hole which shows a slatternly minority women as a come-on.

Emotional Difficulties with Sexist and Racist Manifestations

I remember the black graduate student who came back from a lab in tears--she'd been told by her teaching assistant, when she came in with a bad cold, "Chick, what you need is a hot, deep protein infusion!" In that very large lab have been several women who will not take evening jobs for fear of rape--that quintessentially male disease which afflicts mainly women, and especially minority women.

Then there was the scientist who wrote me from a nearby university, "Despite the fact that women may be even more qualified, I believe we should curtail the admissions of women; they will deter men from doing their best creative work." There was a black student who was "hilariously" called by the last name of her advisor, for whom she was working; thus Susie Smith was "jokingly" called Susie Jenkins, because she worked for Professor Jenkins and "therefore belonged to him." She repeatedly asked the harasser to stop this but he persisted in thinking the situation was "funny," and continued. I was recently consulted in a case where a black researcher was let go for "ineffective work." It turned out that a woman had been blindfolded and raped and the one black in the building was presumed to have done it, but was not told this was the reason for firing him.

I remember the written reference given for a woman scientist, which I found in the files, "You can hire this woman for your lab if you want to, but I'd rather have her body than her mind." Casting couch stories abound still, in firms all over Boston, and appear to be if anything more frequent, as job insecurity grows. Many women recall very explicit threats: "Well, you know, I

·Micro-inequities cause damage in part because they often lead to yet worse behavior. Thus overlooking or "seeing through" blacks and women is a habit which may lead to overlooking one who might be the best qualified person for promotion. It may also lead to underpaying minorities and women.

·Micro-inequities cause damage in part because they are a kind of pain which cannot be predicted very well in any functional sense. That is, by and large, they occur in the context of merit, and of striving for excellence, but do not have anything predictably to do with excellence or merit; that is, of course, by definition what makes them "inequities." As an intermittent, unpredictable reinforcement, however, they have peculiar power as a negative learning tool (unpredictable, intermittent reinforcement being among the more powerful types of reinforcement). Moreover because the provocation for negative reinforcement--one's race and gender--cannot be changed, one inevitably feels some helplessness.

·Micro-inequities cause damage in part because they take up time. Sorting out what is happening to one, and dealing with one's pain and anger takes time. Extra time is demanded also from many minorities and women to help deal with the pain caused by micro-inequities suffered by other minorities and women.

·Some micro-inequities cause damage in addition to the direct pain inflicted, because as they occur they prevent better behavior from occurring. If a secretary or graduate student is unreasonably overloaded with routine or personal work for a supervisor, the overloaded person may suffer a loss of self-esteem and may also be prevented from doing the kind of excellent work that prepares one for promotion.

·Micro-inequities cause damage in part because they contribute to barriers between men and women, minorities and non-minorities, which mean that each group fails to understand what the other faces. The forms of racism and sexism are so specific that each group is isolated from the other's experience. Cross-group communications are always slower and more difficult; cross-group judgements are harder to make well. Thus women and men may make errors about each other ranging from paranoia to an inability to hear any criticism against individuals of a different sex. So also with minorities and non-minorities.

·Micro-inequities are often difficult to detect or be sure about. This means for one thing that these inequities are hard for a victim to turn off. It also means that frequent victims, like blacks and women, may constantly have to range through emotions ranging from legitimate anger (which may or may not have, or appear to have, a constructive outlet) to paranoia. The experience of being uncertain about whether one was insulted or put down inevitably leads to some displaced and misplaced anger which in turn may anger innocent (or guilty) bystanders. It also leads to ignoring real insults in such a way that they persist.

·Micro-inequities are often not intentional in any conscious or even unconscious way even when objective observers would agree that for sure they exist--that an injury really took place. This is another reason they are hard for a victim to respond to. We are all socialized to believe that intent to injure is an important part of injury, and it is certainly critical to our dealing with injuries at the hands of others. Faced with a micro-aggression, the victim may not be certain of the motives of the aggressor and may be unwilling to start a fight where none was meant. Under conditions of uncertainty about motives most victims are again in the position of sometimes not getting angry when they should (which perpetuates the injuries and may weaken the victim's self-image), or protesting sometimes when no injury was consciously intended even though it actually occurred. The latter situation can, actually,

be salutary for all concerned, especially if the aggressor reacts by acknowledging an unconscious intent to injure. But sometimes the aggressor is totally unaware of aggressing, even though observers would agree that injury took place. The aggressor may then respond with anger, feelings of betrayal, bewilderment or worse.

·Micro-aggressions seem petty, in a world where redress by the less powerful may often seem heavy-handed or too clumsy a tool. Unionization, going to court, appeal to the President's office, may seem heavy weapons which themselves have high costs. The perceived lack of appropriate weights of redress help perpetuate micro-aggressions.

·Micro-aggressions and inequities grow in mad and infinite variety. It is hard to stay ahead of the proliferation of types, let alone the number of petty injuries. Thus most victims find themselves occasionally fighting the last war rather than the present one--that is to say, fighting inappropriately against some new variety of harassment.·

·Micro-aggressions of some types may have a negative Pygmalion quality. That is, the expectation of poor performance, or the lack of expectation of good performance, may by itself do damage because students and employees have a strong tendency to do what is expected of them. As Sartre noted throughout his book on anti-Semitism, the anti-Semite creates the Jew.

Do Micro-Aggressions Do More Harm to Minorities and Women than to White Men?

The question is frequently raised whether micro-aggressions do not just "happen to everyone?" Have we not just been describing the general inhumanities of large organizations? Quite frequently I will talk with a powerful white male who opening says, "I harass everybody, Mary. I don't discriminate." Let me raise here hypotheses as to why micro-aggressions might be worse for minorities and women than for the average white male. Some of the hypotheses as to why micro-inequities may do more damage to minorities and women are analogous to the hypotheses as to why they do damage at all.

·The "general" harassment often takes specifically sexist form when applied to women, or racist when applied to blacks. Instead of saying to some average white male, "Your work on this experiment has been inexcusably sloppy; you'll never make it that way!", the remark may come out, "My God, you think no better than my wife; go home and have babies!", or "We will never be able to make up for the generations of Southern schools that produced you!" The harassment of blacks piles up in allusions to race, the harassment of women as allusions to sex roles and sex, instead of being randomly applied, or appropriately focused on work. Like the dripping of water, random drops do little damage; endless drops in one place can have profound effects.

·Many minorities and women are socialized to respond disproportionately swiftly to disapproval. Their parents have carefully taught them to cooperate rather than to compete, especially when they are with white males, and to be very sensitive to anger and criticism from white males. Conversely one can find many white males who were explicitly socialized to expect hard knocks, to compete ferociously and openly even when injured, and to have a very high pain threshold in the first place. It would be hard to prove that either kind of socialization is "right" or "wrong" in absolute terms, but it is easy to see how these two cultural paths run afoul of each other. If a white male supervisor shouts angrily for five minutes at a young woman, she may not wholly "recover" from the attack for weeks or months or years. Later, in a discussion with the supervisor, however, one may hear that he's forgotten his "random grouchiness" or thought it was trivial. Thus, behavior that might be trivial

or survivable for the modal white male may be quite destructive to others, in a manner that has nothing directly to do with the work at hand.

·Micro-inequities often originate with more powerful people against less powerful people. No one yet knows whether they originate more in this direction than in the reverse. Perhaps power is corrupting; perhaps aggressive underdogs are always eliminated over time or perhaps more powerful people ignore or are not injured by inequities from below. Perhaps the generally higher pay of the more powerful gives adequate recompense. In any case it is generally the less powerful who report inequities the most. Since less powerful people by definition have less influence and since more of them are black and female, it is not hard to see why it is difficult to get rid of micro-aggressors in <u>general</u>, let alone specific individuals who happen to be the victim's own supervisor or advisor.

·Traditionally white male environments may even support and reinforce certain kinds of discriminatory behavior like the aggressive and humiliating telling of dirty jokes, or racist or ethnic jokes, in a lab.

·In a traditionally white male atmosphere it may also be harder for bystanders to stop certain kinds of micro-inequities, because the slights are so normal that they simply are not noticed. Many white males are acutely uncomfortable around Orientals or blacks or secretaries; they ignore them or fail to look at and address them--but do not notice it and neither do bystanders notice it. Traditional pornography on walls, and traditionally racist and sexist jokes, and the use of sex in ads and announcements is so ubiquitous that probably most men do not notice them. Thus while some general forms of harassment and difficulty may be stopped by bystanders, some aggressive behavior may be overlooked because it is so "normal."

·There is a more acute role-modelling problem for blacks and women in non-traditional studies and jobs, with respect to their witnessing micro-inequities against others like themselves. That is, disproportionately more blacks and women see people "like them" put down or ignored or ill-served by their superiors and elders. This point may be clearer when one remembers that in most work environments, the principal (if unintended) same-sex and same-race role models for blacks and females are clerical workers and hourly workers, and that these are the groups most frequently reporting micro-inequities. This inadvertant role-modelling is the stronger because nearly all blacks and women are continuously being taken to be in jobs traditionally held by blacks and women. Thus the identity problem for blacks and women in non-traditional jobs is exacerbated by unconscious stereotyping. "I am constantly being taken to be a file clerk," says a black woman engineer, "I constantly feel a struggle to develop my own self image, but it is not affirmed by most of the world around me, as it is for my male colleagues."

·It may be harder for minorities and women to find mentors to help them deal with micro-inequities. There are so few senior minorities and women in most organizations that junior members of the community cannot, on the average, find the same amount of high-status, same-race, same-sex mentorship that white males can find. Sometimes the higher-status women and minorities try to compensate by spending extra time as same-sex, same-race mentors. It is, however, almost inevitable that the burden of dealing with micro-inequities falls on victims who are already somewhat disproportionately drained of energy by caring for others.

·There is also sometimes a peculiar difficulty in finding an <u>appropriate</u> mentor when one has been the victim of a micro-aggression. If one goes to a white male, he may or may not understand. If one goes to a friend of the same race and sex, he or she may be just wonderful in helping one to deal with it,

set your salary," and many more innuendos: "If you'll come on the trip with me, we'll see about promoting you to further responsibility."

Then there have been the occasional serious allegations of unequal rating and grading of blacks and women in jobs and schools. And the stories of men who go into deep withdrawals or rages, when faced with the need to communicate with female secretaries and students. There are the occasional men and women who flatly refuse to work with or for those of other races, who permit minorities to get into dangerous situations or who provoke accidents around those of other races, or who deliberately try to make them feel afraid or incompetent. There are the occasional men who expose themselves, who won't take no from a woman they want to date, who need to seduce women they see as competitive, who pick on handicapped women, who will deliberately and repeatedly lie to women, who deliberately try to arouse a women's guilt or worry about her family or femininity, who will smilingly say to a woman student, "I believe the only interesting thing about you is between your legs."

Where Do Micro-Inequities Come From?

I have presented random incidents from many hundreds of stories a year. One wonders, where does this behavior come from? Why does it persist? Sartre has written at length about the need of bigots to aggrandize at someone else's expense; the hostility and anger of one who discriminates "precedes the facts that are supposed to call it forth."[14] He further hypothesizes a need in bigots to blame someone (else) for the evil in the world. The discriminator "is afraid of discovering that the world is ill-contrived, for then it would be necessary (to be) master of his own destinies,"[15] to have to do something to make matters better.

Chester Pierce has hypothesized that discrimination develops as a syndrome from the practice of "childism": The systematic putting down of children and of aggrandizing at children's expense.[16] Brownmiller suggests that rape may be a fundamental paradigm in human behavior.[17]

I agree with the analysis of bigotry, and believe that in our culture the habit and perceived legitimacy of micro-inequities may indeed start with childism. I also believe that sexualization of aggression is frequent, whether or not innate. In a wider context, I think that "pecking order" behavior is ubiquitous and may be innate, but the form it takes is very malleable and sensitive to different socialization patterns and sanctions. I think of micro-inequities as a complex phenomenon which helps to maintain a pecking order, with respect to whatever group is being put down. I believe micro-inequities are at their worst where people are functioning in what is for them an unusual or non-traditional environment;[18] since "unusual" people are easy to pick out for the purposes of maintaining a given pecking order. If this is true, a good deal can be done to ameliorate micro-inequities by making "non-traditional" persons seem less unusual in traditional environments. However, before we plan amelioration, it is important to analyze what is the process of damage in the first place.

What Damage is Done by the Minutiae of Discrimination?

I know of no systematic study of micro-inequities, but one can suggest many hypotheses as to why such behavior does damage. Obviously, from my own point of view, I believe that these inequities <u>do</u> cause serious damage or I would not label them a major barrier to equal opportunity. I will therefore set forth my hypotheses:

or may not be helpful at all. That is, listeners of the same sex and race may be so discouraged and angry, or so full of denial, that they are worse than useless. I believe therefore that it may often be more difficult for minorities and women to find adequate help in dealing with racism and sexism, than for average members of the community to deal with "general inhumanities."

·I believe many minority and women students and employees have a disproportionate need for supportive white male mentorship, and are disproportionately injured when an advisor or teacher or supervisor assigned to them is just generally inhuman. Let us take an example, Susie Hernandez, who is a student. She has a need for support if only because she will inevitably live through many micro-inequities. She needs someone to advise her about getting ahead in our white male environment because it is foreign to her. She may not be getting much support from Spanish-speaking women at home because she is living a non-traditional life. (She is in other words less well supported by the general society and may be less well supported by her family than if she were a white male.) If her assigned advisor turns out to be just generally inattentive, grouchy and cold, she has been deprived of a needed, positive mentor in circumstances where she needed a mentor probably more than the model white male student. The situation will be compounded if she is afraid to ask for a new advisor or does not know how to find substitute help.

I believe therefore there are many reasons why the problem of micro-inequities for minorities and women goes beyond the general inhumanities of large organizations. The point may be clearer if you will imagine being a solo, young, white, male childcare worker in a large, conservative, inner-city day care system. The "general harassment" might include sincere questions and snide comments on your sexuality. Other white males might find you odd. Women might distrust your skills. You might be in fact inept, in some ways, your first year. You might be very sensitive to run-of-the-mill anger from your cross-sex, perhaps cross-race, supervisor. You might find the constant assumption that women-are-better to be very oppressive--the ads, the jokes, the pictures on the walls, the fathers deprived of custody. You might have no one like yourself to turn to. You might get to hate always being asked to fix things and being asked by visitors why you are there.

In summary, I believe that discriminatory behavior itself causes pain, and also may constitute for minorities and women a situation they cannot control, evade, or ameliorate (or, as we have said, they may see it that way). Continued experience of destructive situations which cannot be improved can start unhappy cycles of behavior ranging from declining self-esteem (which makes one feel still less efficacious in changing the environment) to withdrawal, resignation, poor work, fantasies of violence, and so on. At the very least it either takes a lot of energy to deal with an environment perceived as hostile, or it takes lots of energy to maintain one's level of denial of difficulties. (I have known victims to struggle for days at a time with their profound anger at an apparently "petty" insult).

Are Micro-Inequities Ever Useful?

Occasionally one will find someone who believes that hardship is good for people, creativity requires incessant pain, harassment inspires excellence. Sometimes someone will say, "I made it through terrible anguish--so can everyone else."

It is hard to respond to these ideas because individual situations vary so much. The speaker who remembers having survived terrible anguish may also

have had exceptional health and energy, or a wonderfully supportive parent or uncle or religion, or extended family--or may be the only person of his or her type ever to have survived that background--or may have come through terribly scarred.

I think most of us believe that challenge is good (in the right doses), that creativity requires intense concentration and effort, and that excellence and high expectations inspire excellence. Most people believe that intermittent positive reinforcements--that carrots--are more powerful than sticks. I do not believe our world to be so devoid of sticks that we need more of them. And there seem to me to be enough good reasons to believe that micro-inequities cause damage, that we should try to ameliorate them. The Law of Parsimony would suggest that it is simplest to assume that human ability is randomly distributed, and that we could therefore double the incidence of, say, excellent management and government, by equal opportunity for minorities and women. Is this not a sufficient incentive for us to try to undo any disproportionate damage that occurs? And is it not simpler to assume people survive in spite of damage rather than because of it?

What Is To Be Done?

The question of micro-inequities can be addressed at national, organizational and individual levels. My experience these last three years leads me to believe we can be at least somewhat effective, at all three levels, in relatively short periods of time.

At the national level, we need to communicate what we know, and find out more. For instance, recent discussions on this general topic have already produced serious changes in the process of higher education in many institutions. Changes in newspaper language, publishers' editing manuals, advertisements, and TV programming are beginning to be widely seen. Several unions have begun seriously to consider micro-aggressions against their members. Congresspeople say "him and her" now and then. School children are beginning to talk of these things with their parents.

We need more research. What are the relative micro-patterns of religious discrimination, racism, ageism, sexism, and inverse sexism? Are micro-inequities indeed more prevalent and/or more damaging for people working in non-traditional environments? How do micro-inequities occur in schools? In blue collar jobs? In professional work? How are they related to status, physical appearance, wealth? What do we know of micro-hostilities in different ethnic groups? Can we test the hypotheses presented above?

At an organizational level there seem to be three major resources for change: leadership by top management, grass roots groups, and an innovative grievance process.

The top administration needs to be the major source of male-to-male consciousness-raising, and anti-discrimination goal setting. I recall once when the all-white, male executive group of a large corporation was leaving a meeting. A sudden silence fell; an unfortunate sexist comment was widely overheard. A Yankee-Brahmin Vice President, himself only recently sensitized to sexism, drew himself to his full imposing height: "Gentlemen, I believe that is the kind of belittling language we need never hear in this firm again." There is no substitute for this kind of sturdy, consistent leadership, at the top and disseminated vigorously downward.

The other major contribution from top management is aggressive recruitment of minorities and women for the higher levels of professional work and administration. The best way for these newcomers not to "appear unusual" (as easy

targets for the pecking order) is for them not to be unusual. I believe much of racism and sexism will disappear when minorities and women are randomly distributed throughout organizations of all kinds.

Grass roots groups of blacks, and Orientals, of the Spanish-speaking, and of women can be very effective media of support to each other. Many top managers are hesitant about these new employee groups; others have found them very effective. If managers can countenance the formation of many different groups, they may find a healthy diversity and communication springing up. Fanatics tend to get "cooled out," and responsible minorities and women are given leverage, in the many such groups I have seen.

There is no substitute for the work of such groups in illuminating abuses, problems, and progress for top management. (The better the company president, the less likely he or she is to know of discrimination in the organization; almost nobody misbehaves in front of a good president.) Variegated minority groups and women's groups can turn up thousands of small problems, and deal with them; the very presence of such groups tends also to prevent micro-inequities. I have repeatedly noticed a drop in the abuse level in various work areas, upon formation of a responsible group.

These informal groups speak to others of the concerns raised above, in addition to communications and consciousness-raising. Groups may foster a gentle rise in assertiveness. They tend to expand the effectiveness of healthy role models whom many minorities and women might otherwise not meet. They provide support, counsel, and a sense of reality to weary senior women and minorities and help them to become the mentors so sorely needed. They further provide a structure to support improvement on "macro" problems, like recruitment. Probably most important, they are a leaven for change to improve work and educational processes for everybody, male and female, minority and non-minority.

Innovative grievance procedures also help with micro-inequities. My own suggestions are several. I believe in mildly redundant procedures so each person has a greater chance for sympathetic help. I believe grievance procedures should handle "inquiries" as well as complaints. As many a union steward and supervisor knows, most inquiries can be dealt with in a way that prevents grievances by working on them early. I believe all but the worst grievances can be dealt with by mediation (seeking for common ground) rather than arbitration.

Informal, open communications at every level including the top can often handle problems at the seedling stage. A complainer or inquirer who jumps the formal channels will probably be sent back through the channels, but one can at least support people to represent their concerns more effectively and responsibly. Moreover, dealing informally, one often finds the complainant or supervisor has a hidden issue or problem, sometimes not even consciously understood. Sensitive support may help such a person to third-party help (for example, a minister, lawyer or physician).

This kind of grievance procedure must be dependably confidential at the inquiry stage. Even if keeping an inquiry confidential means that for a time no direct help can be given, sometimes a sympathetic ear itself will help; many people simply need someone to listen.

People involved in grievance work must be scrupulously careful about the equal protection of everyone's civil rights. Perhaps it would be good to have an aged, handicapped, minority, Jewish woman as ombudsperson; it is obvious that aged, handicapped, etc. people will feel more free to go to such a person. In dealing with sexist and racist micro-inequities I think it is necessary for

the grievance process to include women and minorities. However, such people cannot act as advocates in their grievance work. Advocacy belongs with the minority groups and women's groups; a passionate committment to objectivity belongs with the grievance process.

I think it helps to have a universal grievance process which deals with every pay classification and all levels of students and trainees. Macro- and micro-inequities are often very complex, involving many different people and/or needed resources. It is helpful to see problems in the real-life web in which they actually occur. And one universal process is much more easily understood and communicated.

How can we work with individuals, to help them help themselves not to be victims? With respect to individuals there can be little universal advice. Situations differ, from those where protest could even be life-threatening, to arenas where probably anyone would recognize and protest a micro-inequity. Chester Pierce has called for teaching each person "to be an expert in the analysis of [discriminatory] propoganda."[19] Sartre wrote, "ceasing to be passive takes away all power [from the oppressor]."[20] Margaret Campbell called for, and exemplified, a growth away from denial, toward recognition and analysis of micro-inequities.

I agree with these strategies, as minorities and women grow strong, to see reality as it is, seek and create support wherever possible; to hold up one's head. It often helps to write up micro-aggressions, so that in the aggregate they will help one communicate one's feelings. Many victims have noticed that abuses drop off sharply where people themselves have found it possible to take responsibility for changing their environments. The experience of helping to create a healthier environment for everyone also itself undoes some of the damage done to self-esteem.

Women and minorities vary so much in person and circumstance; it is difficult to find general rules for change. But two rules of thumb are perhaps in order. One person is hardly ever a critical mass; one must seek advice and support. And secondly, it is rarely effective just to complain to oneself; one must responsibly act for change. In doing so, we may help, as well, to foster equal opportunity and more humane environment for everyone.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]With diffidence, because I do not know first-hand what it means to be a minority American, I will discuss the question of micro-inequities very specifically in the context of minority women as well as in reference to all minorities and all women. Some 15% of all American women are minority women and half of all minority folk are female. This group naturally therefore has been part of my concern at M.I.T. and as a labor economist. Minority women, though they made great gains from 1940-1970, are demonstrably worse off in the economy than white women or black men. Like many people I believe this is due to both racism and sexism; minority women therefore deserve more than proportional attention with respect to the subject at hand.

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See also his "Offensive Mechanisms." In Barbour, Floyd (ed.), The Black 70's. Sargent (April, 1970), pp. 265-282.

[3]Sartre, Jean-Paul, Anti-Semite and Jew. Schocken Books, 1965.

[4]Maccoby, Eleanor and Carol Jacklin, The Psychology of Sex Differences. Stanford University Press, 1974.

[5]Harrison, James, "A Critical Evaluation of Research on Masculinity/Femininity." Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1975.

[6]Money, John and Anke Ehrhardt, Man and Woman, Boy and Girl. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.

[7]Green, Richard, Sexual Identity Conflict in Children and Adults. Penguin Books, Inc., 1975.

[8]Treiman, D.J. and Kermit Terrel, "Sex and the Process of Status Attainment." Center for Policy Research, Working Paper, August 1973.

[9]Ellison, Ralph, The Invisible Man. The New American Library, Inc., 1952.

[10]Kent, Martha, "Higher Education and Gender Role Socialization." University of Vermont, 1974.

[11]Campbell, Margaret, "Why Would a Girl Go Into Medicine?" New York: Ann O'Shea, 1973.

[12]Fields, Rona, "The Taxonomy of Sexism." Distributed by KNOW, 1971.

[13]Potter, Stephen, Gamesmanship. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1948. See also his Lifemanship, 1951, and One-Upmanship, 1971.

[14]Sartre, J.P., op. cit., p. 17.

[15] Ibid, p. 40.

[16] Pierce, Charles and Gale Allen, "Childism." Psychiatric Annals, 5, 7, July 1975, pp. 15-25.

[17] Brownmiller, Susan, Against Our Will, Men, Women, and Rape. Simon and Schuster, 1975.

[18] Earlier versions of this paper have explored racist and inverse sexist incidents reported respectively by minority people, and by men working in non-traditional jobs like nursing and child care.

[19] Pierce, Chester, "Psychiatric Problems of the Black Minority." op. cit., p. 516.

[20] Sartre, op. cit., p. 137.