

Reproduction and Production The emphasis on reproduction and on analysis of the household sphere indicates that the traditional focus placed upon commodity production is insufficient to understand women's work and its roots in patriarchal relations. It focuses on the internal organization of the capitalist firm to explain sex segregation and wage differentials, rather than on factors of supply and demand developed by other models.³⁵ The dynamics of this internal organization tend to foster the formation of job ladders and clusters that create hierarchies among workers. Maria Mies's study of Indian women lace makers in Narsapur, Andhra Pradesh, for example, shows how the seclusion of women has conditioned their participation in nonhousehold production.³⁸ Although lace making is a producing industry geared toward the international market, it is highly compatible with seclusion and domestic work. The new emphasis on reproduction is the result of the questions posed by feminists; it can be viewed as an elaboration of the simplifications inherent in Engels's initial formulation. In order to understand fully the nature of sex discrimination, women's wages, women's participation in the development process, and implications for political action, analysts must examine the two areas of production and reproduction as well as the interaction between them. A strict focus on the productive aspects of lace making—this is Boserup's approach—to the exclusion of reproductive aspects, such as seclusion, presents only a partial picture of the nature of women's exploitation. In this model, occupational segregation, wage differentials, and other types of discrimination by sex are viewed as resulting from the hierarchical and self-regulatory structure of production. The system is made possible by the ideology of seclusion that rigidly confines women to the home, eliminates their opportunities for outside work, and makes them willing to accept extremely low wages. This situation persists even though the industry has grown considerably since 1970 and represents a very high proportion of the foreign exchange earnings from handicrafts in the region. Radical policy would involve elimination of the hierarchical structure of production, perhaps by some form of workers' control and equalization of

35. Boserup Revisited Winter 1981 295 productive structures would automatically erase women's oppression. Mies argues that this highly exploitative system has in fact led to greater class differentiation within local communities as well as greater polarization between the sexes. This notion can explain, for example, why sexual mores are less strict among the poor than among middle- and upper-class people in many urban as well as rural areas. A variety of recent studies on women in Third World countries have focused on the interaction between production and reproduction to analyze women's work. This model represents a step forward from neoclassical explanations of women's secondary status in the labor market. Their average daily earnings amount to less than a third of the official minimum wage for female agricultural laborers. An example from the field of economics—the internal labor market model of sex differentials in the work force—illustrates this approach. Traditional Marxist thinking and traditional leftist and liberal politics have followed a similar pattern. Sex is one factor by which workers can be separated. Two policy implications can be drawn from this model.