UPPSALA PAPERS IN ECONOMIC HISTORY

1989
WORKING PAPER NO 7

THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR,
19TH & 20TH CENTURIES

Six essays presented at the
Ninth International Economic History Congress,
Berne 1986

Department of Economic History
Uppsala universitet
Reprocentralen HSC
Uppsala 1989
CONTENTS

Class and Gender during Industrialization.
By Gro Hagemann .............................................................. 1

Women's Culture at Work: Towards a Conceptual Framework.
By Alice Kessler-Harris ....................................................... 31

Technological Change, The Welfare Stats, Gender and Real Women. Female Clerical Workers in the Postal Services in Germany, France and England 1860 to 1945.
By Ursula D. Nienhaus ....................................................... 57

By Jane Lewis ................................................................. 73

De l'employé à l'employée: figures du travail dans les bureau en France (XIXe – XXe siècles).
By Cécile Dauphin – Pierrette Pezerat .................................. 99

Women and Men in a Pottery Industry – Constancy despite Change in Work Relations during One Hundred Years. The Case of Gustavsberg, Sweden.
By Ulla Wikander .............................................................. 127

Addresses to the contributors ............................................. 151
PREFACE

In Budapest in 1982, the International Economic History Congress had its first session on Women's History, organized by Ester Boserup under the title "Female Labour before, during and after the Industrial Revolution".

That session was followed by a second one, "The Sexual Division of Labour, 19th & 20th Centuries" at the Ninth International Economic History Congress, held in Berne, 24-26 August 1986, arranged by Gro Hagemann and Ulla Wikander. The following articles were contributions on that occasion.

Women's history with a claim to influence how we should look at all history, is in economic history often taking up the theme of industrialisation and in that connection the sexual or gender division of labour, both in the labour market and in the home and its interconnections.

We tend thus to centered on the sexual division of work, how work is valued, if there is such a thing as a gender-character of work, if and how industrialisation altered the relations between men and women in work, how the differences in work distribute the resources of society differently between men and women, and how this accounts for differences in power. We do not forget that there are class differences as well, nor the role of the state and organisations, national and international. What is also a research area, is the "consensus" of women to their own subordination, as well as women's abilities of making something positive out of the places they are restricted to.

The direction of women studies in economic history today is oriented towards asking questions and trying to find answers to problems related to social differences between men and women. The aspiration is to go from a plain history of everyday life to sharing in the theorizing of how production, reproduction and distribution develop and change in societies.
At the next International Economic History Congress in Leuven in 1990, the intertwining between Women's History and Economic History will go on at two different sessions: "Women in the Labour Force: Comparative Studies on Labour Market and Organization of Work 1850-1940", organized by Paul M M Klep and Juergen Kocka and "Protective Labour Legislation for Women" organized by Gro Hagemann, Jane Lewis and Ulla Wikander. The field is widening.

Ulla Wikander
Stockholm, December 1988

Copyright belongs to each author.
It is a fact that economic life in all of the industrialized countries bears evidence of great differences between men and women. Labour is strictly divided by sex, as are wages and career possibilities. On the whole quite a few jobs are dominated by women. The general pattern is that these are jobs which are ranked lowest with regard to both wages and status, and indeed also these are jobs which have less opportunities for promotion. Sexual differences are so pervasive that the problem of low wages, is to a great extent, a problem exclusive of women. A great majority of female wage-earners find themselves in jobs which give insufficient support for more than one person. One consequence of this is increasing poverty among women without a male bread-winner to rely on. This phenomenon lately known as a "feminization of poverty", is observed in the industrialized countries as well as in the third world.

For historians it is easy to establish the fact that this phenomenon is not a new one. In previous periods as well women have been overrepresented among poor people and have had to work hard to get their living. As Olwen Hufton writes in History Today (vol 35, 1985) it seems like the "survival process in the main weighted more heavily on women than men". In fact this has changed little during the last centuries. After 200 years of industrial capitalism and more than 100 years of organized feminism, the differences between men and women in the field of labour seem to be more entrenched than ever. These tendencies have been observed through inquiries in several countries in recent years. I have also found these tendencies regarding women in sewing and telecommunications in Norway during the period of industrialization. The question to be asked is how such a deve-
lopment can be possible. How is it that one generation after another recreates a sexual segregation of wage-work within societies characterized by such as rapid development in the technological, social and political fields?

The problem put forward is indeed not a new one, neither in history nor in other social sciences. There has been a great deal of discussion on the matter. Especially during the last decades several explanations and theories have been presented by researchers within women's studies and in other fields. The final word has not yet been pronounced, and the debate will probably go on for several decades more. It is nevertheless possible to sum up some lines of thinking in the contributions which exist. At the risk of simplifying, I will put forward the argument that most of the explanations in some way or another seem to be incomplete. None of them has been able to catch the totality in which the sexual segregation of wage-work is created and constantly recreated. Among economists and economic historians the segregation is often seen as a simple product of the economic and technological development in general, or just of the market forces. This kind of economic reductionism is not unknown among women's historians either. Opposite are others who emphasize gender-connected factors like family circumstances, appearance of a domestic ideology, competition among male and female workers, etc.. In many of these presentations, however, the more general economic conditions are underestimated. They are taken as granted and not regarded as a dynamic system.

In my own project I have found this to be a problem. To interpret the growing segregation of work as a result of economic development in a narrow sense, is to tell just one half of the story. Nor can the segregation be explained as a heritage from sexual division of labour in pre-capitalist society. This gives even less than one half. Accordingly, I have come to see it as a challenge for women's history to establish explanations and theories which include the dynamics of the capitalist economy as
well as of the sex-gender-system. In some way or another sexual segregation of wage-work has to be understood as a result of interaction between these two systems. In addition, each of them has undergone a separate development and is subject to its own laws. The process in which sexual segregation appears, is consequently a rather complex one. It is the purpose of this contribution to reveal a corner of this complexity grounded on results from my own research.

Women's work in sewing and telecommunications

Sewing and telecommunications appear to be quite different in almost all circumstances. Sewing was an old trade, rich in tradition. During a period of several generations it became transformed into a modern industry. I have followed the trade from the introduction of the sewing machine in the middle of last century to the out-break of world-war two. Throughout this period the situation bear evidence of competition between the old modes of production and the new ones which gave the trade as well as the working people a heterogenous mark. Quite a lot of the trade was still non-capitalist activity, and working people often were not modern wage-earners at all. In telecommunications, however, modern professions existed from the very first moment. Men as well as women were white collar workers within public services. The work was a genuine product of modern technology, consequently there were no first hand traditions either. At the same time the whole activity was managed from the start, since telegraph and the long-line telephone services were a state monopoly in Norway. Although local telephone service was private in the beginning, competition in the sector was nearly non-existant. Unlike sewing the traffic from the start was large-scale.

In spite of these great differences, there are some striking similarities between the two sectors concerning the development
of women's work. In some respects female Isbour turned out to be quite similar in the old trade of sewing and the modern public service of telecommunications. Four points of resemblance can be found.

The first point was a homogenizing of the working force within both sectors. From a starting point which was different, women ended up to be workers of similar kind. Within sewing there was a development from a differentiated pattern to a more uniform one. Around the turn of the century seamstresses were to be found within crafts and unregulated trades as well as in sweding trades, manufactures and factories. A considerable part of them did not sell their working-force for wages, but were independent small-scale producers who sold their goods to order. As varied as the modes of production were the private situations of the seamstresses. A lot of them were married, some supported a family by their own, while others again were elderly or not fully capable of work. During the following decades an obvious homogenizing occurred. At the break of the last world war most of the seamstresses had become modern wage-earners who were, in addition, unmarried and free of family-duties.

The first generation of female employees in the telegraph service were very well qualified and unmarried women from the upper classes. They were wage-earners from the beginning. In other respects, however, they had not much in common with most female workers. Still the typical female employee at the end of the period was not very different from a garment worker. She did not come from the upper classes any more, but from the simple middleclass. She did not have the same extraordinary qualifications as earlier. She was no proletarian indeed, but a proletarization had undoubtedly occurred. Like the seamstress she was mostly unmarried and free from family-duties.

The second point of resemblance was a deskilling of work taking place in both sectors. In the beginning of our period a
seamstress was to a great extent self-employed with full responsibility for the labour-process. Truly enough the quality of the seamstress’ work was varying. Nevertheless she was the one who stood for it all, planning, fashioning, execution and sales. Even a hired seamstress with whole piece-production kept the responsibility for important parts of the labour-process. To produce a complete garment requires more all-round qualifications than just finishing a few parts in a chain. On converting into modern industrial production, the more qualified parts of the work were taken over by others, pressers and cutters, who were mostly men. Besides the transition implied a splitting up of the sewing process, and less control in the labour process for each seamstress. Thus a deskilling of the work took place in the transition to modern industry. The all-round qualifications of the whole-piece were replaced in the specialization of the garment sewer. Since the work also became more rutinized and accelerated, other qualities were taken into consideration. A garment worker had to more than just a skilled sewer. She also had to be quick, persevering and disciplined. Within telecommunications as well there was a deskilling process. The first female telegraph operators were very well qualified compared with other women at that time and with male colleagues too. They were among the first women in Norway who took the ordinary level GCE. This education also was shaped partly by the needs of the telegraph services. The operators’ work was in the first period comparatively many-sided and self-contained. Not only did the operators handle one of the most advanced technologies of their time, they also had knowledge about and responsibility for several aspects of operation of equipment. During our period this changed. Women dropped behind regarding qualifications, work was rutinized and less varied, and telephone service in particular was speeded up. The differences between seamstresses and telegraph and telephone operators decreased. In spite of great differences in the character of activity and the way it was organized, there was much in the working situation of operators resembled the garment workers. Both were located in environments
dominated by women. Both had routinized ana accelerated work. Both were at the lowest level of the occupational ladder with minimal prospects for promotion. Beginning from different starting points, the operators and the seamstresses ended in a situation surprisingly similar.

A third point of resemblance was an increasing segregation of male and female workers. The division of labour between the sexes was old in sewing ana was well established through the guilas. Since the seventeenth century at least, men monopolized the qualified parts of the market production. Women were producing for the market too, but their work was not regulated in guilds, and they received permission to make suits and dresses only in exceptional cases. As the guilds were broken up and the capitalist mode of production spread, the established distinctions of skill as well as sex dissolved. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries an increasing competition between the sexes occurred, and women took over progressively more of the tailors' work. The height was reached in the last decades of the nineteenth century, when women in great numbers invaded even the mans-cloths tailoring and challenged journeymen as well as masters. As time went by, however, a sexual division of labour was reestablished, as insuperable in practice as the old one. The most qualified work still was reserved for men, as tailors or as skilled workers in the industry. One part of men's work was, on the other hand, definitly taken over by women. That was the sewing, the part of tailoring which was first mechanized.

Within the telegraph services in the first decades there was comparatively greater similarities between male and female operators regarding skills and tasks. When they started in the service after having finished the telegraph course, their work was practically the same. Regarding wages and promotion sexual differences were plain enough, but the labour process itself was not segregated by sex. However, the dissimilarities increased as time went by. By the turn of the century male and female opera-
tors were strictly divided regarding education and work as well. In lieu of the old telegraph course, which was the same one for male and female recruits, two different courses were brought in. One was an elementary course for women aiming at practical training for telegraph and telephone operators. The other was an advanced course for men who were meant for promotion to senior appointments later on. Women now definitely did another kind of labour, which was also clearly stated through rules and separate wage scales. To be sure women gradually received equal rights formally in regard to education, promotion and wages. However, these reforms in practice did not alter the structure once it was established. Only in exceptional cases did a woman cross the barrier into the men's area. In spite of advancing feminism, the differences between male and female employees increased during our period.

During the course there was in telecommunications as in the sewing trades competition between the sexes. Male operators accepted their female colleagues as long as sexual differences were not a matter of discussion. When the political climate changed and the equal status of women in society was included in the agenda, men felt threatened and defended their position. They were particularly anxious that promotion possibilities might be worsened. However, as in the sewing trades, competition diminished as time went by and a new division of labour was established. Segregation was so consistent that for most of the workers no competition existed. On the great majority of situations men were either absent or superior.

As a fourth point of resemblance there was finally segmentation among the female workers. In particular there was an important distinction between skilled and unskilled workers. Although a deskilling process took place both in sewing and telecommunication, there still was a layer of women who had high qualifications and far better possibilities than the majority. Competent seamstresses often did well, while unskilled women
entered into stiff competition for work and often had to accept miserable conditions. In addition seamstresses were divided by family connection and age. Married women, as well as the elder ones, often had other kinds of work than the young and independent. However, age and marriage did not necessarily worsen conditions for a competent seamstress. For the unskilled the matter was quite different. Age and family-engagement for them seemed inconsistent with a reasonable income.

Among telegraph and telephone operators as well there were distinctions by qualification, age and family connections. Unlike in the sewing trades these were stated partly in rules. Exams from the ordinary level of GCE marked the main qualifying distinction. Operators of telegraphs and long distance telephones had to pass this exam, while operators of the local telephone network did not. Thus they were sharply divided from skilled employees, and excluded from most of the privileges of the professionals. Even distinction by marriage was strictly regulated. Until 1906 women had to leave the service after marriage, and between the wars there were several restrictions against married women. At most they were allowed to work as reserves. A retiring age of 40, later on 55 years, made a distinction between younger operators and elder ones. For women who did not marry, prospects were not too good. Upon reaching the age of retirement, they were almost worn out and had to make a living from a very tiny pension.

It may not be surprising that women in sewing as well as telecommunications ended up in rutinized, subordinated and low-paid work. Nor is it sensational that there was a sexual segregation of work, and that women's prospects varied with skills, age and family-connections. These observations support the inference of Alice Kessler Harris (1982), Joan Wallach Scott (198 ) and others, that the patterns of women's work have been rather constant during the rapid changes of the last centuries. Still it is a bit surprising to find that the pattern in some senses
seems to have become more rigid throughout the process of industrial development. The rise of capitalism has indeed created some new possibilities for women on the labour market. The consolidation of the new mode of production, however, also put new obstacles in their way.

It is worth noticing too that processes within the both trades were not entirely continuous. Men's work was changed into women's work in the men's-clothing industry. Similarities between male and female telegraph operators as to education and work was replaced by sexual segregation. This should indicate that the pattern in question is far more than just a remnant from former modes of production. To be sure, tradition played a part in the process. But it was also a painful transition during which new relations and conditions were created. Since sewing and telecommunications in so many respects were different kinds of trades, it is not probable that particular conditions within each will give an explanation of the common pattern. More likely these explanations will be found within the social and historical conditions, which determined the development of sewing trades as well as telecommunications.

The capitalist development

To a certain degree what happened with women's work can be seen as a result of the maturing of new modes of production. The rise of industry and large-scale production implied a concentration of the working force, specialization among workers and an accelerated working speed. New ways of running the trades were favourable to certain kinds of workers, and modernization itself involved homogenity and proletarization of labour. The self-employed seamstress who could simultaneous care for house and children did not fit in a modern factory. Neither did the competent dress-maker with an eye for individual cutting. During modernization, most of the old kind of sesamstresses were left
out. Accordingly, modern telegraph and telephone services made specialization among the operators necessary. Mass-communications with a variety of technologies were not compatible with the old educational and working system.

Why new modes of production were encouraged, is a question under discussion among historians and economists. Some lay emphasis on competition between old and new modes of production as the motive force. According to this reasoning, new technology and new ways of organizing work developed to attain superiority over more primitive kinds of enterprises. Among others, Schumpeter (19) appears to interpret the so-called intertype competition as a main force in capitalist development. Indeed, clothing industries bear out such an interpretation, since new modes of production constantly were springing up in competition with old ones. This also had great consequences for women's work in the trades. While the old modes of production offered varied possibilities for them, the new ones reduced the opportunities both in quality and quantity.

Telegraph and telephone services, however, do not fit into such a model. To a considerable extent, similar patterns developed here. This could hardly be due to intertype competition, as competition was almost non-existent. Most of the services were carried on by the State. The only exceptions were a number of local telephone companies. After the political decision of 1895 to take over private companies, their existence did not influence the arrangements made by the Telegraph Service.

Even if telegraph and telephone services did not feel competition from the outside, there were forces from inside which impelled a rationalization. The service was adapted to social needs and was responsible for the extension of telecommunications throughout the country, regardless of whether the single line was profitable or not. The running of many unprofitable lines rested on grants from the state or on services which were run at a profit. Since
grants were always scarce, the endeavour to balance budgets gave motives towards rationalization. It was of importance for the direction of the service to run unprofitable lines with little loss, and the profitable ones with as much gain as possible. Although tele-communication was a different activity, there was strong motivation to make operations here cheaper as well.

Still there were other conditions affecting the development of both sewing and tele-communications. The resistance of the primitive modes of production in the ready-made clothing industry was due to more than just intertype competition. In the clothing industry dominated by women, working conditions were mostly unregulated before the first world war. There was no organized labour, no regulation of working hours and no wage agreements, as opposed to the mens-clothing industry. Correspondingly sweating trades in rural areas during the wars were based on non-regulation. There were neither tariff-regulation nor a normal day, and protective labour legislation often was evaded or neglected. At the same time the garment industry in Oslo was bound to act on the laws and was facing an aggressive union which actively defended the privileges of workers. These were circumstances which did not arise out of the intertype competition. They were, more or less, results of the relationship between capital and labour.

To be sure, this was also the case in the telegraph and telephone services as well. As in the ready-made clothing industry, regulation of the working conditions seemed to have some influence on the organization of labour. Gradually reforms were brought in regarding working hours, holidays, increments and pension. At the same time an increasing number of female reserves were taken into the service. Some of the disadvantages of the improvements appear to have been countered by recruiting a kind of labour which was denied the new privileges simply because they did not get a permanent appointment. Further the service had to face repeated demands for equality between the sexes, both from
the public and from the female operators themselves. As time went by, these demands were carried out. Along with this development, however, an increasing segregation between male and female employees occurred. The effect of the reforms therefore, was rather small. In this matter as well, appropriate measures seemed to be taken against the reforms which reduced their effect.

Even though sewing and tele-communications were subject to some different conditions, in both there was motivation to decrease costs of production. In the sewing trades intertype competition caused these endeavours, while the Telegraph Service operated in the field between social needs and narrow economic limits. Furthermore both of the trades had to face conditions created by the clashing interests between capital and labour. Working conditions were regulated partly by the organized activity of workers, and partly by social security legislation. To be sure, this also was included in the circumstances under which both trades were to operate. Alltogether, in both areas a strategy was required to keep up with the changing conditions caused by competition, narrow budgets and increasing demands from the labour. It is likely to understand all of these variables as main forces in the modernizing process.

Technology and feminization

It is hardly possible to discuss the modernizing process without touching the introduction of new technology. To be sure, technological innovations are important means for keeping up with changing conditions. Moreover, the impacts of new technology are considerable for productivity as well as the organization of labour. Not without reason technology is often seen as the most revolutionary element in the development of capitalism. All the same, the connection between modernization and the organization of work is not explicit. The statement is often made, for
instance, that women's position as wage-earners is simply a result of the technological development. According to certain argument, mechanization and feminization are almost identical phenomenons. As modern technology simplifies the production, neither the competence of the artisans nor the physical strength of male workers are needed. Moreover, technology requires a splitting up of the labour process. According to this argument these changes open the doors for a new kind of labour which is cheaper and easier to handle, implying the hiring of women.

To a certain extent this course can be found both in sewing and tele-communications. In the craft of tailoring, traditionally monopolized by men, women obtained a footing in great numbers as the sewing-machine was introduced. On mechanizing sewing, mass-production as well as division of Isbour were stimulated. In a similar way telephone technology meant a simplification of tele-communications and the great intake of women in the service. Sewing-machines and telephones both were easy to handle, consequently, according to the model the work should be suitable for cheap, female labour.

However, this model tells us just a part of the truth, and may even be misleading as an explanation of the development of women's work. In the first place it is obvious that feminization within sewing and tele-communications did begin with the introduction of new technology. In the sewing trades this process had been going on for hundred years or more before the sewing-machine was taken into the workshops. The machine did not create feminization, it just accelerated an ongoing process. Correspondingly the new and simpler technology did not start feminization within tele-communications. On the contrary, the origin of this process can be found in the early years of the service, when the telephone had not even been invented. At that time the technology of tele-communications was not simple at all. On the contrary, it was most complicated and required operators with high qualifications.
In the second place, the new technology did not effect mode of production, labour organisation and sexual division of labour all the same way. From a technical point of view, the sewing-machine was the basic element of all clothing production throughout our period. Of course there were improvements which increased its speed and extended its functions. But none of these broke decisively with the principles of the tool machine. In fact, the simple tool machine, operated by hand, foot or electricity, remained an important productive force even within massproduction. In factory-like manufactures a considerable specialization took place on basis of a primitive technology.

Nor were all telephone services organized the same way, although basic technology was almost identical. All telephone operators had a work that was rutinized and one-sided, and special skills were not demanded. All the same, there were in the first decades great differences between local and long-line operators. To get a job at a local exchange, no skills at all were demanded. The employers were "taken in from the street", as the professionals in the service used to put it. The long-line operators, however, still had their exams from the ordinary level GCE, ana they had to pass through telegraph course as well. To be sure, this difference was not due to the technology, but to political and social reasons.

Technological innovation was not without any importance for work organization and feminization. Still its significance seems often to be overestimated. Both in sewing and telecommunications there were innovations in the organization of work which had no connections with technology at all. As the occupational iaader in the telegraph and telephone services was developed, technological innovations was relatively unimportant. That also applied much of the Isbour division which developed in the garment industries, such as chain sewing. Understanding the ongoing specialization as automatic result of changes in the technical field is therefore most misleading. It seems to be
more adequate to understand both technical and organizational changes as different but complementary means in efforts to rationalize production.

The question is how the process of feminization is to be understood in this respect. Is it just a result of changes in technology and organization, or is it a peculiar mean corresponding to the others? In the literature the merging between sexual division of labour and other social and professional differences is often seen as unproblematic. It is partly attributed to tradition, and partly to women's less favourable position with regard to skills and organization. The assumption has been that workers who had the best starting point, would also have the best prospects of keeping their positions through a transformation. In this argumentation it is taken for granted that women generally started from a weaker position than men. Therefore women have ended on the lowest steps in the ladder.

This explanation cannot be applied without reservations to women in sewing and tele-communications. A continuous development from the pre-capitalist society is not to be found and the assumption of women's weaker starting point is not correct. In the telegraph service female recruits were from the start even more competent than the males. Nor they were unable to act in an organized way to promote their interests. In addition they were treated with great respect in political circles because of their social background. This was not unimportant, since the final decisions concerning the telegraph services were made by the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget). Female telegraph operators could hardly be interpreted as weak women who were bound to end at the bottom. When they ended there after all, the reason was not lack of defence. It seems a likely possibility that the reason was the opposite one. The telegraph services was in a situation at the turn of the century where the female operators were too strong. Their labour was too expensive as compared with other female labour available. Besides current opinion was in favour
of equality between the sexes. For the telegraph director this was a difficult case to handle. A superior force was laid on to break the strong position of the female operators.

What happened in the men's clothing industries was similar in some respects, even if the results for women were the opposite. Against resistance from male journeymen, women gradually took over the sewing. The situation was not, however, that seamstresses with skills needed for factory work were available. On the contrary, competent workers had to be imported from abroad, especially from Germany. Neither craftsmen nor seamstresses had the adequate skills. With regard to technical skills, the male journeymen were probably superior to the seamstresses. Nevertheless, the domestic workers who were taught as sewers, were chosen among the latter. This was not because of the weak position of the journeymen. On the contrary, like the female operators they seemed to have a starting point which was too strong. As organized craftsmen they constituted labour which was too expensive. When male labour was replaced by female in men's clothing industries, the dominance of an old group of skilled workers was at the same time broken.

Consequently, the merging between vertical differences in the labour process and the sexual division of labour cannot be understood simply as a result of the weaker position of women. To be sure, women did not usually have a better position than men, as in the case of telegraph service. This case illustrates, however, that even when their starting point was favourable women belonged to another gender. Female labour was cheaper simply because it was female. By replacing men by women in sewing trades and tele-communications, an extra profit was gained. In the telegraph and telephone services it was possible to get labour with identical, or even higher, competence, at a price which was much lower. The labour which invaded tailors' workshops, was less skilled, and accordingly it was cheaper. In addition it was still cheaper because it was also female. It can be ascer-
tained that feminization as well, has to be regarded as a particular mean to make production cheaper, corresponding to changes in technology and organization.

As to the sewing trades, a special factor should be mentioned. Not only was feminization a way of replacing expensive labour with a cheaper one. Under certain conditions it might also work as an alternative to technological and organizing changes. Thus it could serve as a kind of brake on the modernizing process. Throughout our period, circumstances in the labour market created conditions in favour of non-factory garment industries. For instance the production of dresses, shirts and underwears went on as small-scale industries for several decades after the factory-production of men’s clothes. One of the reasons was the rich supply of cheap, female labour for these trades. Until the first world war there was great shortage of wage-working opportunities for women. In fact, sewing was one of a small number of jobs available for women without special skills. As most women had learnt some of it at home, they could make their living by simple sewing. Therefore competition was keen among those seeking employment, and the wages were cut. Cheap labour made it possible for primitive industries to keep up with more advanced production for a long period. Similar conditions resulted between the wars in a retardation into more primitive production in the ready-made clothing industry. In the rural districts, where the crisis was severe, female labour was abundant. This made one cornerstone in the prosperous sweating trades in rural areas in this period. Because of the extremely cheap labour available, it was more profitable even for factory-owners to put work out in the primitive, rural work-shops. Advanced technology was not able to compete with cheap, female labour, which was consequently an alternative to modernizing.

As the matter of fact, we can make the point that inequalities between men and women played its own part in the economic development. In the telegraph services cheap female labour was used
to force costs down from the very beginning. In the sewing trades it was moreover a brake on the modernization process. However, economic development did not create these inequalities, it made a capital out of sexual differences which existed already.

**Gender system**

When differences between the sexes could play a part in the modernizing process, it was partly because the formal position of women was special. Legally they did not have the same privileges. In the telegraph and telephone services there were different scales of wages for men and women, female employees were excluded from senior appointments and theoretical education. In addition women were not allowed to stay in the service after marriage. Neither were they allowed to apply for posts outside the district where they were living. Obviously, women met many formal obstacles throughout their careers. In the sewing trades, on the other hand, there were hardly any legal restrictions after the 1860s, when a new legislation of crafts was brought in. Freedom of trade was now stated, an equality between men and women in the crafts as well. Neither in the tailoring nor in the ready-made clothing industry women were discriminated against on the formal level after the time in question. The only exception was their exclusion from the union until 1902. In the Telegraph Service as well, there was gradually equality between men and women. As we have seen, however, the effect was rather small. So the differences between the sexes was evidently not primarily a result of legal restrictions.

To some extent the differences between the sexes was based in the prevalent mentality. Conceptions of femininity and masculinity made it easy to create social differences between male and female workers. All of them were in fact within the limits of reason. Neither the female tailors nor the female operators represented a
decisive departure from an existing division of labour. Women's traditions as seamstresses made the distance short to the tailor's work-shop. The telegraphdirectoralsoglanced at the current trend, when he decided to rely on female operators. Among other things he mentioned practices in other countries to legitimize his own decisions. The inclination to use female labour for certain tasks was not at all unaffected by mentality. Not only dia existence of sexual differences make a possible mean in the economic process. At the same time it worked as a break on the free play of market forces. Mentality ensurea a certain continuity, even in a period of rapid change, ana inhibited some of the need to replace male labour with female in any field.

Obviously, the mentality inhibited women's possibilities of choice on the labour market as well. The division of labour which was established in the Telegraph Service from the start was not maintained only by formal rules. As important - or may be even more important - were opinions among the employees themselves, who for the most part founda the division to be reasonable. Sexual differences within the service appeared as a matter of nature, which was useless to oppose. Nor dia many women challenge men's position after the abolishment of legal obstacles. For most women, both in tele-communications and sewing trades, the freedom of choice was in reality limited to fields generally acceptable for women and in accordance with established roles.

However, mentality cannot serve as the main cause for the permanence of sexual differences in the labour process. The fact is that the opinions on femininity changed during the period, side by side with material alterations. In the first years people were often shocked by the female telegraphers and sometimes abused them in public. At the same time women were looked upon as strangers in the tailor's work-shop as well. Half a century later, however, both fields were accepted as quite natural for women. To be sure, the mentality could slow down the process,
and it surely did. But even mentality was not unaffected by the economic and social changes going on. As a matter of fact, social differences are not likely to survive one generation after the other if they are caused by mentality alone and do not correspond with realities of a material kind. This is particularly true within a dynamic economy as the capitalism.

It therefore seems difficult to understand the sexual segregation of wage work without calling attention to material structures creating gender differences. Above all, the organizing of human reproduction is a source of such differences. In spite of changing family patterns during the industrialization, the organization of human reproduction was very much the same. As in pre-industrial society, it still constituted a sexual division of labour within the family. It is no doubt that this division also influenced the conditions under which women as well as men sold their labour. As wage-workers they both had some kind of connection and obligations to the family. When a male worker married, he was bound to support his family. His wages therefore were more essential to him than ever. For a married woman, the obligations to the family were not primary of economic kind. First of all she was bound to invest in household work and family care. These obligations were regarded as, and indeed often were, incompatible with full day wage work. On the other hand, marriage for a woman also meant that vages were less essential. This because marriage more or less also involved economic support.

To be sure, this was reflected in the positions men and women got as workers. In the Telegraph Service married women had to quit the service. On the other hand, the promotion procedures ensured that the male employees after some years were able to support a family. Even expectations that women would marry in the future, affected their conditions at work. At the local telephone in Kristiania (Oslo) both working speed, pensions and promotion were marked by such expectations. In all aspects this was a work which was suitable for women who would quit after a
couple of years to marry. The realities in the sewing trades were not so different, although there were less regulations. Even here married women were concentrated in particular kinds of work. In the factories and work-shops female workers were usually unmarried. Among seamstresses located at home, however, married women predominated. Male workers in the sewing trades as well gradually received wages high enough to be the main financial support of a family. Only exceptionally did women reach such a level. As a rule their wages were hardly sufficient for a single person. Indeed marriage generally marked a turning point in the working lives of women. All the same they constituted a special kind of labour throughout their lifetime. Even as unmarried many women were tied up with responsibility for their families. They might be unmarried mothers or were daughters living at home with old parents or with young brothers and sisters in need of care. As young and independent as well, they were expected to do more household work and receive more assistance from their parents than did their male colleagues. This was one reason why young female telegraphers were paid less and were inhibited from putting in for jobs outside their home-area.

We can make the point that the organization of human reproduction creates some structures which affected conditions in the labour market as well. For male workers wages were essentially life long. As family responsibilities increased, they became even more tied to wage-work, since their burden was of an economic nature. On the contrary, female workers were expected to care for their families by the means of housework. Only in a short stage of their lives was wage work expected to be the main source of subsistence. Generally this meant a more unstable connection to working-life and a less favourable position to compete for work. Furthermore, their dependence on wages was less, assuming that their families included male bread-winners. In some senses the wage-earning women, the married ones at least, were in a position similar to half-proletarians with one foot in primary industries.
The women as well were anchored in two different economic systems, and at this they got another social position than a worker with just his own labour to sell.

These economic structures, certain legal obstacles and a prevalent mentality influenced the free play of market forces and created men and women as different kinds of labour. Put together this gives reason to talk about a gender system creating systematic differences between working men and women. Women constituted a cheaper kind of labour, without regard to skills and a kind of work. They also constituted labour that was less stable than male labour, and at this became a suitable reserve in the labour force. Finally, female labour was not as "free" as male labour. For this reason the adaptability to modern production was not the same. These qualities were created by the gender system, and they made female labour suitable for certain functions in the capitalist economy. Besides it influenced on women's position at the labour market and in the labour process.

Of course the qualities mentioned did not concern female labour exclusively. Men's labour as well was more or less cheap, unstable and "unfree". Seasonal work was a fact even among male journeymen in tailoring. Nor was there much freedom of choice among unskilled, male workers, whose wages were also pressed down by competition. For sure, male workers could also be tied up with responsibilities in the family that made their labour less "free". The gender system naturally was just one of several factors affecting the situation of labour and the labour market. Conditions tending to be more common among female workers, occasionally occurred among male workers as well. However, conditions tending to be more common among women, seemed to affect the situation of all female workers. Notwithstanding actual family connection of the workers as individuals, women in general were treated as a special kind of workers. They were selling their labour under conditions which were different just because they belonged to the female gender. In fact gender worked as an
independent variable influencing the price and the quality of labour. The reason why female labour was cheaper was not just that women generally were less skilled and were bound up with household work and family care. In addition certain qualities were put down to the female labour, as such, simply because women made a separate social category. The qualities in question developed on the labour market through the interplay between the capitalist economy and the gender system.

**Gender conflicts**

The market did not create the gender structures of wage work. Still the importance of the market should not be underestimated. At least these structures were developed through the interaction in the market. The employers wanted labour which was cheap and adaptable. Due to the existence of a gender system, women were able to, or bound to, offer just this kind of labour. Surely the gender division worked as a mean of control as well. The social gender system made it possible to divide and rule under circumstances of rapid change or conflict. During alterations both in the Telegraph Service and in the sewing trades, employers took some advantages of the existence of a social gender system.

It would be a mistake, however, to understand the conflicts between male and female wage workers as a result of manipulation by the employers only. As the labour market experienced contradictions between employers and employees, social conflicts developed among the wage workers as well. To be sure, this kind of conflicts do not exist between male and female workers only. They are rather standard occurrences in a capitalist economy. Both in the telegraph services and in the sewing trades there was generally a keen competition among women, which also resulted in some conflicts. The skilled dressmakers defended their privileges against competition from seamstresses with less skills. The telegraph operators similarly wanted to keep their advantages related to the lower female employees.
The question to be put is whether gender conflicts represented something more than just occasional conflicts between groups of workers. In the literature they have mostly been treated as parallel phenomenons. Since gender differences are rooted in a stable social system outside the production area, this can hardly be the whole case. In addition, it is likely to understand that gender conflicts are a reflection of more permanent differences in the interests between male and female workers. Undoubtedly, the situation of male and female workers was not the same in production nor in the family economy. Furthermore, prevailing mentality comprehends male and female as opposite categories in all fields of life. For these reasons their immediate interests as wage workers were not identical either. On the contrary, there were at least three different sources of conflict in which the gender system could play a possible part.

Firstly, in a capitalist economy there is always a latent conflict between labour of different price and quality. No privileges were established once and for ever. The labour process might be reorganized, skill might be reappraised, the working-place might be lost. As female labour was cheaper without regard to skills, it had to represent a constant threat to the advantages attained by male workers. There always was a possibility that more expensive male labour was to be replaced by cheaper, female labour. Undoubtedly, this was more than just a theoretical possibility, it was truly realized both in the telegraph services and in the clothing industries. Obviously, this was more likely to happen in periods of crisis or of rapid, economic changes. Under more stable conditions the advantages once attained were more stable too. However, even changes in the gender system might represent a certain threat to the male workers. At least as long as the differences in wages were still existing, increasing equality in respect of skills, rights and role expectation brought keener competition. The immediate interests of male workers made one of two reactions probable. They could try to maintain the gender differences to keep the
women out of competition. This was a strategy chosen by both male telegraph operators and journeymen at several occasions to handle decreasing formal obstacles in the labour market. The other way was to accept increasing equality of rights without admitting the differences still existing in life conditions and training opportunities. The real possibilities for women were not equal, even if they were treated the same way by the law. When they were expected to be just like men at work, they still came out as losers in competition. Whether this is to be called a strategy by male workers, is questionable. When homeworking women were pressed out of tailoring, it was not primarily of hostility against women. The case was rather that journeymen automatically based on men's premises when they defended their craft.

Secondly, conflicts were arising out of shortages of possibilities. In sewing as well as in tele-communications men had interests in reserving for themselves the positions which traditionally had been their domain. For instance there were certain conflicts linked to the prospects of promotion where men's interests in keeping their monopoly were obvious. Here equality between gender necessarily meant a keener competition, simply because the number of candidates would increase. Women, on the contrary, took interest in equality, because it opened possibilities to take part in the competition for scarce benefits. Generally, there is no doubt that male workers won the most through the maintenance of gender differences, since from the starting point they held the best positions. To be sure, women as well could sometimes benefit by the sexual segregation, so much that it created recesses for them within working life, or possibilities to escape a life-long wage labour through marriage. All the same, it is preposterous to claim that female wage workers in general were benefitting by their work being lowly paid and subordinate. As a rule their interests were linked to the breaking up of segregation of labour by gender.
Thirdly the gender system resulted in men and women being in different economic situations as wage workers. Women often carried a double burden, as they had household work and familial care beside their paid work. In addition they were attached to two different economic systems for their support. On one hand they were wage workers as their male colleagues. On the other hand they got a chance of provision in the family that men had not. Most men were tied up in the wage work all through their working life, whilst women got other sources of subsistence as well. For young and unmarried women this naturally affected their behaviour and interests. Marriage emerged as an opportunity to quit a strenuous job. Compared to young and unmarried men, their working prospects often were less long-ranged. For married women with a male bread-winner in the family, dependence on wages was less than for other workers. On the other hand there was a lot of housework and family care to be adjusted to the paid work. Accordingly, other aspects in the working conditions could be more urgent than the wages, such as flexible working hours.

The latent conflict between male and female workers was reflected in unions as well. In the sewing trades the male journeymen initiated a separate union for seamstresses in tailoring. The clear purpose was to get the "female competition" in the craft under control. The female union at first did not get the same position as the male ones' in the federation. In the telegraph services the male telegraphers initiated the first union, but after just a few years women were allowed to join. Even if the terms were equal according to the rules, the female telegraphers in reality did not have the same possibilities to make their promotions. At that time women still were a minority among the employees, and their demands were regarded as sectional interests. The union therefore several times refused to back up demands from the women. When they at last defied the union and found support from elsewhere, the collaboration came to an end. From the beginning, then, men's control of the union activities was a premise both in sewing and in tele-communication.
At the same time, female workers did not completely accept male control. On several occasions they gave expression to resistance. The seamstresses opposed the exceptional position they held as women within the federation, and little by little they attained equal rights. Throughout the period the separate union existed, however, loyalty toward the federation was given priority to separate demands. When the interests of the seamstresses differed from that of the journeymen, the former mostly conceded and fell into line. Nevertheless in one single case an open conflict developed. When the journeymen, and after that the pressers, proposed to dissolve the separate female union, the seamstresses refused to fall into line. For this reason the union was not dissolved until 1919, when there was hardly a single female worker left in tailoring.

Among the employees in the telegraph services the cleavage in 1898 was followed by a long period of gender conflicts and separate unions. As a matter of fact, this period has not yet come to an end. The female employees established their union in 1909, and their relations to the male union were strained. The division already established through the gender system and the differentiation of the labour process, was elaborated by the separate unions. On several occasions this probably contributed to a weaker position for the employees toward the employer. On the other hand the women without any doubt could take care of their separate interests in a better way, especially regarding the competition with men in the service.

Conclusion

Finally, it can be stated that several variables have to be taken into consideration to understand sexual division of wage labour. The patterns which can be observed in working life even today are developed and consolidated through a complex process in which both economic, social, political and ideological forces have been
working. Nevertheless, there are some variables being more important than others. Which of these are most important surely will still be a matter of discussion. My conclusion so far is that the sexual segregation of wage labour primarily is developed through interaction between two different economic systems. On one hand the capitalist mode of production implies differentiation among the wage workers and a tendency of replacing more expensive labour with cheaper. On the other hand the organization of human reproduction in a family-household system has different implications for men and women throughout their lives. Women are always selling their labour under conditions which differ from men's, and the female labour all the time has other qualities. This creates certain differences between male and female wage-workers which are systematical, and which appear on each level in the labour process.

The capitalist mode of production accounts for repeated conflicts among varied groups of wage workers. The gender system on the other hand accounts for the permanent distinction between males and females. That does not mean, however, that the sexual division of wage labour is not also developed within the labour process itself. The ways in which employers as well as male and female wage workers coped with the situations coming up, surely had an influence on changing structures. It is meaningless to understand structures without taking into consideration the human beings supporting them. It is indeed also unfair to look at historical actors just as pieces in the play of capital or of an extensive gender system. Although workers often are in a defensive position towards the employer, they are all the time developing their strategies and through that affecting the systems. Consequently both conflicts in the working situation and the politics chosen by unions are of importance. As wage workers, men generally had come out better than women from the start. Therefore they also had got interests in preserving the sexual differences, while women's interests were to go beyond them. Moreover, unions tended to preserve those hierarchies once
established among wage workers. **Stipulating prices** of labour and **valuation** of skills in **fact** is more than just a **matter** of market **forces**. It is also a **matter** of power. Those groups **taking** control over the unions obviously were in the best position of defending their privileges. As long as control was in the hands of the more **privileged**, the hierarchies were not likely to **disappear**.

Oslo in June 1986
Women's Culture at Work:
Towards a Conceptual Framework*

Alice Kessler-Harris
Hofstra University

The sexual division of labor is rooted in the idea of female difference—an idea that hangs over women like a double-edged sword. The notion of difference both describes and purports to explain women's unequal positions in the labor force, but it does not do so neutrally. Its complexities were always visible. That most women had babies and family responsibilities at some point in their lives was clear; that they did the major share of household work and often functioned as the glue that held communities together, we knew. Whether these differences produced separate cultures, or nurturing characteristics was arguable as were questions about whether women engendered values of sharing, collectivity, and affiliation. But the proposition resonated with a kind of common sense truth. Indeed the big debate over women's difference was not historical but philosophical and psychological—the question was not if women had acted and functioned differently from men in the past, but whether they were different. As historians, we watched smugly from the sidelines as debate over Carol Gilligan's conception of moral responsibility and Nancy Chodorow's perception of mothering as the

* Copyright, Alice Kessler-Harris, 1987. All rights reserved. This is a working paper.
"fundamentally determining feature of social organization", as women's "unique and universal shared experience" echoed around us.¹

Recent historical events have shattered our complacency. Based on an assumption that women were different, attorneys for Sears, Roebuck and Company (the largest private employer of women in the U. S.) defended the Company against charges of discrimination against women by arguing that work-fore configurations were not their responsibility, but that of women themselves.² Because women were different, according to Sears, the corporation was not responsible for their paucity in certain kinds of jobs. Women were. The historical record was subordinated to philosophical assumptions. Difference, undefined, and nonspecific as to class, race, and ethnicity, was transformed from a historically circumscribed and therefore changing concept into one with an eternal reality.

For those of us involved in the history of working women, the formulation of the problem this way has a special poignancy. Other historians of women (Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Nancy Cott and Kathryn Sklar among them) have long been able to point to the strengths that the domestic ideology brought to communities of women.³ They have noted its capacity to nurture a women's culture and traced the access roads to power constructed within an ideology of separate spheres. But domestic ideology translated into the workplace has been far more problematic. Since, by definition, domesticity excluded paid work, historians have assumed that when women entered the male sphere of work, they were treated like men, and disadvantaged therefore. This is not
to say that the accoutrements of domesticity, or of women's culture, have not played a role in the workforce; only that they have served functions other than the achievement of equality. Indeed, they have often served as the rationales for unequal treatment, as we can now see in the institutionalization of protective labor legislation, which beautifully illustrates the way in which domestic attachments of some women were used to constrain all women into limited kinds of jobs. Nor is our concern mitigated by recent attention to the ability of working women to create "safe spaces" at work—to bring into the workplace some of the values of the home. For even in the splendid work of such historians as Barbara Melosh and Sue Benson or of British sociologist Sally Westwood, the question remains as to whether the experiences of working women do not demonstrate the creation of community without power. 

Under these circumstances, the dangers of female difference have become deeply embedded—so deeply that the American Civil Liberties Union's Women's Rights Project, in an amicus brief supporting a suit recently decided by the U.S. Supreme Court insisted that the drive for employment equality requires women to reject even the few perquisites (in this case a four month pregnancy leave) that are granted to them on the basis of their unique biology. We are, in short, terrorized by the fear that difference necessarily means inequality.

But the pattern of women's work force experience has been one of struggle for access, and in that context, contemporary disputes lend a certain urgency to the task of historians who
attempt to find out what the manifestations of women's culture (or difference) are in the work place, and how they have historically been used. To do so requires an excursion into the theoretical realm. Historians of the U. S. have only just begun to look at how women entered the wage labor force. Their searches have uncovered the elements that moved women from the state of incipient or actual housewifery (including its concomitants--outwork, taking in laundry or boarders, and domestic service) to their current places as full fledged workers. They have examined the instrumental causes of these changes such as the impact of technology, the changing composition of capital and shifting family demography. But this essential work explains the process of change without confronting women's experience of wage work. Lacking answers to how change is perceived by women, we are forced back on explanations that emerge from class and ethnicity, plunged, in so far as women workers are concerned, into a pre-Thompsonian darkness. That is, we do not know how women see themselves in relation to work, and thus we cannot yet identify the dynamism of change in the labor force nor the impact of these workers on work itself.

To illuminate the problem, we need to find new ways of thinking about what happens to women in the work force, not incidentally as a consequence of their places in the occupational structure or in the home, but so far as possible as a concomitant of their cultural and social roles (of gender itself). For just as we have discovered that men in the process of proletarianization engage in a struggle in which conceptions of dignity, consciousness, community and tradition are pitted
against the demands of the market, and in which they sometimes succeed, at least briefly, in exercising some control over their jobs and conditions of work, so we need to look at the ideas and experiences that frame the struggles in which women engage.

What we need then is some female equivalent of David Montgomery's notion of "manliness"--same sense of how to talk about the identity or dignity, or self worth that drives the female experience. We can call this an aspect of women's culture or "social honor": a convenient shorthand that reflects Weberian concepts of status as a perception of self and reminds us that the moral claims of any group (their perceptions of right and wrong) condition their expectations and inform their responses. For much as, following Herbert Gutman, we would trace immigrants back to their old country values and beliefs to explain their relationships to jobs, we need to have some notion of the ideas that set women apart to help us understand women's relationship to theirs. [We will have to determine the precise content of these ideas empirically]

The logic of these assumptions would seem to be a return to the notion that on the surface explains most--namely that one can understand the relationship of women to work simply in terms of their situation in the structure of the family and the home. And yet such explanations ignore the subjectivity that has become an essential component of comparable analyses of working men. As British historian Sally Alexander puts it, "Theories of history which ignore the construction of subjectivity and sexual identity are of no use to the feminist historian." Nor, we might add
after all the recent work in social history, are they of any use to the labor historian.

A subjective view of women's work encompasses some sense of how women see the job itself, their expectations of it, its relationship to their life goals and to their own definitions of success and failure. It must consider the strategies women bring to work, their capacity to resist and shape it, and it must offer some understanding of how women see themselves in relation to the work force as a whole. Most important, just as subjectivity must take into account, without defending, the structures of the home, so it must consider the structure of the workplace.

If the reified home is insufficient to explain women's perceptions, then we cannot assume that there are bonds among all women sufficient enough to assure common sources of dignity. Whatever the shared gender experience, class relationships pose sets of conflicts and decisions that are entirely different for women of different groups. Nor can we assume that whatever beliefs, values and traditions they share, men and women of similar ethnic, class, and work backgrounds possess the same sense of identity or self worth. The key then is to set aside as determining all overriding notions of common experience: of Marxian notions of class as creating a common bond with men, and of radical feminist notions of domesticity as creating shared interests with all other women, and, wiping the slate clean, to look at particular groups of women with an eye to determining the sources of social honor or dignity among them. For purposes of analysis, we need to separate working women from the world of middle class ideology where such attributes as gentleness,
kindness, softness, purity and devotion are reified.\textsuperscript{12} And we need to separate them, too, from the world of working class men who valued provider roles, work skills, and the capacity for occupational mobility and material success. For although some, perhaps many working class women participate in both of these, we have yet to develop a coherent sense of how and in what respects. If we could do so, we might more effectively understand what injunctions they follow--explain seemingly contradictory behavior. We might understand when women accept and revolt against conditions of work, and when they join unions or resist them.

To identify women's self-experience requires an eclectic approach: a notion of culture that is dynamic, a notion of cognition that respects mothering, and a sense of the complexity that constitutes any individual's world view or orientation towards work. I find useful the formulation offered by Charles Sabel whose notion of a worker's "career at work" acknowledges "that different work groups have different ideas of success...that they differ about which powers define dignity, which jobs count as disgraces and which as accomplishments..." The choices made at work thus become in Sabel's words, "a compressed cosmology that defines what virtue is and how to test it."\textsuperscript{13} It reveals workers' ideas about which jobs are acceptable, which violations of custom, and which are intolerable. At the same time, it acknowledges the likelihood of several sometimes competing "world views" within a single person.

These competing world views are held together in an
interpretative framework derived from an individual's experience in society, with social groups and institutions. Because the pieces that make up a coherent perspective are processed through different cognitive and social sieves, the resulting action may be entirely different even for people of apparently similar circumstance. So the psychology, culture, ideology and tradition that filter understanding are crucial. Together they make up that coherent conception of justice on which an individual will act. While as historians we may never understand the complex filters of any group of people, we nevertheless take it as our task to place their actions within their own interpretative frameworks, to understand what sense of right and wrong informs their behavior. Like our conceptions of the gast arbeiter of the "bird of passage" or rural migrants who work seasonally and who put up with outrageous conditions because their immediate goals--their source of dignity--lie elsewhere, so, I want to suggest that notions of "right" or "justice" have some elements shared across gender/racial lines, and somethat are uniqueto women. We can be more confident that such differences exist because the behavior that results from them has so frequently been labelled irrational and used by employers and trade unions to justify discrimination against women in the labor force.

But if "differences" between men and women have historically been used as justifications for discrimination then surely the historian is free to turn them on their heads as it were, and transform them into analytic categories that help us to understand women's approach to work. If we accept the notion that women are in some sense a group whose cognition and
socialization create a world view that overlaps with and differs from that of men, we can more readily accept that at least some of the distinctions in the way men and women relate to work are self-regulated. In other words, we can now see women not simply as objects of discrimination, responsive to, and dependent on either home or a work place over which they have no control, but, granting those areas in which in fact workers have no control, we can observe the ways in which women exercise choice and sometimes power.

Let us take a look, at a world I've been looking at for the past year or so, to see what it reveals about these constructs: the world of white Southern textile workers located in the Piedmont valley of North Carolina. In the 1920s and 1930s, this population is making the transition from rural to mill town and from unpaid family work to "public" work for women. At the same time, the mills to which they are migrating are altering from paternalistic, family-owned operations (in the 1920s) to scientifically managed parts of larger corporate enterprises in the 1930s. Popularly labeled "docile" or "cheap and contented" labor, the mill population responded to intensification of work with major series of strikes in 1929 and again in 1934. At many mills, the initiative to action came, as one historian put it, from "those most warlike members of the human race, enraged girls." These "enraged girls" were largely married women who (depending on the product made) constituted from 40 to 80 percent of the workforce at individual mills. Viewed by an older generation of historians as apathetic, the working population is
seen by recent historians such as Bess Beatty, Jacqueline Dowd Hall, Bob Korstad and others as resiliently preserving older traditions and values,¹⁸ I want to suggest that a different perspective that might enable us to understand how both of these interpretations could be true.

Unlike most working populations, this one speaks to us, albeit in limited ways, through some 400 oral histories (taken in half a dozen surviving towns), and a range of other documents including court transcripts, newspaper interviews, Works Progress Administration and National Recovery Administration records, and fictional accounts. Together these suggest something of how people think, as well as of patterns of behavior. They allow us to speculate about sources of dignity around work, community, and family issues and to think about how these conceptions might explain such behavior as women's responses to shorter work days, to speed-up and stretch-out, and to unionization struggles.

Most immediately apparent from the data is that for most women, the framework of paternalism had two dimensions. It allowed women to satisfy both the instrumental (material) and affective (personal/emotional) needs of their families. But it did so at the rather high cost of their labor in the mills. As in mill towns in general, the control reflected in the tight knit hierarchical community of the southern town was part of a managerial strategy to create and retain an experienced labor force. In the southern textile villages, mills took advantage of crucial elements of traditional family life in order to facilitate long days of factory work for women as well as for men. Yet the mill town also offered particular advantages to
women whose traditions and expectations encompassed wage work. The most important of these was its creation of community. Mill and village existed as a single co-extensive unit that turned the job into an extension of community life, and the community as a whole into a family of which the mill management was patriarch. The perception of hierarchy and the reality of dependence upon it derives credence from the mill's power to regulate the kinds of people hired to work, and to refuse jobs and housing to "unruly" elements. Policing a community was as much a part of a mill's job, as the provision of entertainment and recreation. Women clearly valued their jobs in part, for the safe and disciplined communities within which they could live and raise their children.

For women, and at its best, the mill village sometimes appeared to be an extension of their own families. Listening to those who worked in the mills, especially in the twenties, it is sometimes difficult to think of the mill as a workplace, so thick is the romanticization about it. "It was a wonderful place to live. . .a long time ago; it was a real nice place," is a typical comment.

"You never heard no trouble, no trouble between people, and if a family got sick and needed help, well they didn't ever think about going to the welfare or something, well, they everybody pitched in and helped... I tell you it was just one big family....At work, nor away from work, you just didn't hear tell of people complaining or falling out with one another. That's just something that was unheard of." For these women at least some of their dignity at work lay in the extended community created by the mill. The mill fused with family life as an agent of socialization. "It taught us all to
love one another. And it taught us all to be careful not to fly off the handle and quit unless you had another job."  

If mill workers spoke consistently of a now departed comradeship and love for fellow workers, they also recalled supervisors in the language of family. "We loved him just like he was our Daddy, because when he'd come through the mill, we'd just hang around just like he was our Daddy." In short, this was a paternalism that sustained and affirmed family patterns that might otherwise have been disrupted in the transition to industrialism. Some workers recalled the way that mills distributed work in the thirties as an extension of the families on which they relied. Others had been helped by a superintendent's timely offer of a job or of help with a sick family member. But the center of the community was the factory or mill. If these women located a part of their identity in the extended community created by the mill, they identified equally with their competence at mill work itself. Women, recalled one worker, "did most anything other than machinists work. Now they didn't fix looms or oil, or do things like that, but other than that, they did just about anything that anybody else did." Such memories are confirmed by what we know of the limited nature of sex segregation of jobs in the mills. Though women did not have supervisory jobs, their competence at all the skilled operative processes, including weaving, was widely recognized. Proud of their work, some developed inordinate skill at a single job at which they worked for 40 years. Others noted matter of factly their capacity to move from job to job in a single mill. As Viola
Pitts said of how she met her husband, "I was working in the same room he was, and then to the spool room, and then I went to the warpers, and then we both ended up in the weave shop."

Consistent with the family metaphor, acceptance of the mill hierarchy encouraged accommodation to the factory system. Women felt it important to play the game by the rules. Part of the strength of their self image lay in following even burdensome rules. So, women recalled how "back then they tried to work with the boss, and the boss tried to work with them." Or they noted proudly how stoically they could repress discontent in the service of rules in which they had freely chosen to participate.

"Now I knew before I went to work what I was supposed to make and I made just exactly what I was supposed to make. So when I accepted the job that I had for the price they had on it, well if I hadn't of been satisfied, I wouldn't have started." Equally revealing is the case of a weaver with three children who divorced her husband and was then thrown out of her mill house. Asked how she felt about the rule that denied a woman the right to hold a house, she replied that she thought she should have had a house, "But rules was rules with the Company, and you couldn't tell the Company how to run their job. You'd love to, but you couldn't."25

Does women's dignity, then, translate simply into accommodation to the mill's needs? I think not. For at least as apparent as female persistence in mill life is the mill's accommodation in this early period to women's needs. Women's major weapon in the struggle was quitting. Just as women married (often at age 16 or 17 and frequently by eloping) when they tired of
parental restraints, so they quit the mill when its rules seemed too restrictive. Until the mid-twenties, jobs were easy to come by, and workers, who lacked voice (to use a construct of Albert Hirschman's), had the option of either exiting or remaining loyal. Packing a wagon with one's meagre possessions and moving on to the next town posed no problem to the family not treated properly by the mill. But it was an enormous burden to the mill owner to lose at once several laborers, including perhaps a skilled husband. It looks as if mills relied on women to keep their husbands in place.

Female loyalty may have been bought in part by the quality of community life. But I think there is another equally valid explanation. Pride in work and in their capacity to do it was generally sustained not merely by the metaphor of the family, but by the compromises mills were forced to make in the direction of women's dual roles. The mill took advantage of women's affective or family interests to integrate women into the work process. But that did not mean complete freedom for the mill owner. Women used the mills' need for labor to exact concessions that reduced the cognitive dissonance between workplace and family roles. They benefited from open windows where they could breathe fresh air, they enjoyed flowering bushes on landscaped grounds where they gathered to chat or to eat lunch. Children of 8 or 9 brought food to parents in the mills. An informal integration of work and family time helped this process along as women exacted a flexibility in the working day and the capacity to conform their schedules to those of other workers. Women watched each other's looms while their co-workers ran home to get the mid-day meal,
tend to a sick child or nurse a baby. One worker's 12 hour day was split into segments. She started work at 6 a.m. she said, but "You'd come out about nine o'clock, and then at twelve you'd come home for lunch, and then at three they'd let you come back and then you'd be off at six." In the old days, another woman remembered, "the mills had windows; if a parent looked out the window and saw one of their kids doing something they shouldn't be doing, they'd stop and come out the back door of the mill, went home and hit the child and went back to work." We do not know how romanticized such notions are, but we can feel the sharp contrast between a mode of work that accommodated family needs and a later one that did not.

The carefully balanced truce around affective needs was sustained and supported by the instrumental needs of mill and worker. The mill's ultimate need and its formal power, was to keep wages as low as possible. To this end, mills required the labor of women who, as family members needed to maximize their material well-being, and women readily acquiesced. Though most women had mothers who had never done "public" work, daughters expected to engage in it and frequently did so for most of their lives. Neither husband nor wife expected that the male should be the family's sole provider. No negative judgement attached to the man who was not, and apparently males accepted working wives as part of the norm. The male in one working couple recalled how his supervisor resisted giving him a job because he'd quit so many times before. "Well," recalled Dewey McBride, "you give me a job this time, I'll have to stay... well I've got a wife and you've
got to give her a job too. Don't no use to give me one else, and I'll be danged if he didn't give her one too.29

Women were unequivocal on the need for two incomes, and did not doubt their ability to share the provides role. Asked why she went back to work after each of her 6 babies was only 6 or 7 weeks old, Viola Pitts replied, "to help make the living...reckin you do that now. One can't hardly make it." Gladys Shuping returned to work after her third child was born: "You know we didn't make much money back then. One couldn't make enough. Specially if they have two or three children."

But meeting the family's instrumental needs required some accommodation to new notions of dignity in the household. Just as conceptions of dignity required patterns of flexible work in the mill, so they influenced household relationships. For example, while you would not call them egalitarian households, mill homes certainly involved shared responsibilities. Where children were no longer tiny, husbands and wives might work different shifts and share child care. In some families, husbands took over traditionally female tasks, including shopping, cooking and cleaning.30 I find it fascinating that everywhere, women retained nominal control over the household, insisting that their husbands could not do one essential task or another. Even the best of husbands, they complained could do everything but.... The buts differed, sometimes it was baking bread, at others the family wash, "because 1 like my clothes like 1 want them."31

The pivot on which the economic well-being of many families turned seems to have been the ability of white women to replace their own household labor with "a colored woman" to keep the
household running and stay with the children while they worked in the mills. In tacit complicity with mills that barred people of color, poor white women benefited from this trade off. For anywhere from $2 to $5 a week out of a weekly wage that averaged between 9 and 16 dollars, they could hire someone to "come in and keep the house for you." Many of those interviewed said they preferred this arrangement to running after the children. Black women lived in the homes of their white employers. As one white worker put it, they'd "go home on weekends and go to church."32

Such workers raise fascinating questions about class and race, revolving particularly around the consensual exclusion of black women from jobs in the mills, and their capacity to reduce family tensions in the two-worker household. They illustrate the dual uses of racism in that they simultaneously provided relatively cheap workers for the home, while reducing competition for jobs in the mill. The addition of a second, Black, mother seems not to have threatened the maternal roles of their white employers. The daughter of a mill mother tells us why: "if a child got sick back then, the parent come home too. Used to they'd come home and feed the baby, if they had a baby, and then go on back to work."33

Viewed through the lens of women's culture, the widely observed "docility" seems in part to have been a function of compromise between mill and worker. Women saw the mill as both creator and extension of community life. They took pride in their work and in their capacity to function as family providers and members of the community as well. At the same time, the mills
adapted in ways that allowed for family care, the value of which does not seem to have diminished in women's eyes as a result of wage work. Until the late 1920s, women who worked in the mills could generally do so in a way that was consistent with their own ideas of womanly behavior, thus maintaining their own conceptions of dignity.

But the delicate bond rested on the capacity of the mills to integrate what is clearly a dual consciousness on the part of mill women: to combine the affective needs of workers' lives with the instrumental needs of both family and mill. A transition in managerial strategies that could not immediately accommodate to the affective relationship would ultimately shatter it. In the 1920s growing competition for markets raised pressures for productivity that began to disrupt the system. Scientific management techniques, the 8 hour day, speed-up and stretch-out all attacked women's home as well as work roles, undermining the family's capacity to meet its needs. Women's abilities to meet their families affective needs was particularly challenged. The resulting militance took mill owners unaware.

The leadership of "enraged girls" in the strikes has been well documented and rather than dwell on it here, I want to look at the patterns that ensued as strike activity subsided. The transition to the eight hour day was everywhere accompanied by greater insistence on obeying formerly lax rules, by speed-up, by an emphasis on "production," by removing such amenities as stools to sit on, and by eliminating slack moments when conversation and socialization had been possible. Possibilities for combining child care with work disappeared as the mills
separated the spheres of work and home more completely than in the past. As the mills began to juxtapose the affective needs of workers against their own instrumental ends, they challenged and frustrated conceptions of dignity that had formed "contented" workers. While a lingering memory of family encouraged patterns of resistance within the mill, appeals to the instrumental interests of families inhibited them.

In attempting to increase control over workers, the mills limited the ways they could satisfy their affective needs in the workplace. In exchange for what they had taken away, the mills held out material incentives. For example, the need to "make production" --to achieve increasingly demanding quotas-- undermined a crucial element of the family metaphor, namely the flexible use of time that had permitted workers to help each other. (Evitty, p. 38) But it simultaneously made possible wage benefits that appealed to women in their capacities as providess. At the Plaid mill in Burlington, for example, the speed-up was introduced by a new superintendent (Copeland) who removed the stools and straps on which women customarily sat when they caught up with their work. Resentment and discontent followed. "You didn't get caught up after he came up there. If he come through and saw you with all your ends run, the next day you'd get some more ends." But resentment was tempered by his capacity to provide greater income. As the same worker noted. "He was good. He believed in keeping your frames so you could make production and make good work and all, but he didn't want you to stop off." Similarly, the trade-off between affective and
instrumental needs is reflected in the decision of many mills to sell off their houses at approximately the same time they turned to "production." Workers, who understood that they would lose something of the cohesive communities they had enjoyed, were solaced by the lure of relative material well-being promised by home ownership. In the same manner, the mills that shortened the workday from twelve hours to eight, blocked up windows, fenced off their grounds, and prohibited children from entering mills, arguing that more family time at home compensated for the elimination of family time in the mill.

That women responded ambivalently to such changes reflects something of their dual consciousness. Twelve hours had been long, but it had also allowed women to be family members while they worked. "You had just so much work to do then, and if you got your work caught up you could come home." was a typical comment, made in this case by a worker who claimed that she had sometimes taken off as much as two hours in a day. Eight hours decisively separated factory and family roles. Those who had believed it would reduce the amount of work they performed were unpleasantly surprised to discover that it did the opposite. "I thought signing the paper for eight hours would make me get off early, but I didn't realize that it was going to put more work on me. But you do more now in eight hours than we used to do in twelve." (Buchanan) In eliminating the flexibility that had given women the sense that they had some contact with family, 8 hours created sharper divisions between factory and family life. At the same time, shorter hours mitigated the indignity of increasing managerial control, providing a trade-off that complicated
incipient protest.

The process of unionization in the 1930s participates in the same ambiguity about family life and instrumental goals. On the one hand, women objected to the union's intervention in their parenting relationships with the Company. "...they never did make no success out of it because the people that worked here were pretty well satisfied, and they never did, you know, amount to nothing."37 On the other hand, a worker's failure to join might split up a community and destroy valued community feelings. The most frequently repeated sentiments about the strikes of 1934 are captured by phrases such as, "I always felt like if the majority was in it, well then I wouldn't hold them back."38 Those who joined or struck, recalled the act as one of solidarity with fellow workers not of principle. "When they all struck, I come out too. I didn't want to be thrown out."39 Sometimes an amalgam of these sentiments reveals the depth of ambivalence. Recalling the strike of 1934, one worker remembered, "Everybody just about joined it. But we didn't never go up there. We didn't participate in it...We just stayed at home." Then she added that her mother had joined because..."she thought that they weren't fair, they didn't pay enough...they wouldn't let you raise the window, and it was so hot."40

What is clear in these statements is not that women workers did not have grievances. They did. But that these were placed in the context of a family and community life that could sometimes transcend instrumental goals and sometimes foster them.

Antagonism to Company policies, in short, was one thing. desire
to preserve community life another.

The argument would not be complete without adding some of the larger issues at stake. When we write about the working class (ungendered) we interpret certain forms of behavior as resistance. We think of the cigar maker who takes home his customary three free cigars a day as asserting his autonomy. We describe the printer who takes the afternoon off to get drunk with his mates and the mill worker who goes hunting instead of reporting to his machine as preserving control over work-time. In other words, we see a variety of male forms of behavior as expressions of independence (sometimes of ethnic identity) and interpret them as indications of strength. "Manliness" is characterized by resistance to authority; by an assertion of the non-work self. At the same time, we see female forms of behavior (derived from family/ethnic/racial sources) as expressions of weakness, as explanations for low pay or docility at work. A subjective view of women seems to indicate that women did not see themselves this way.

That leads me to suggest that we maybe asking too much when we insist that "womanliness" reflect a parallel assertion of independence—to insist that women shed the constraints of their culture in order to assert authority at work. Rather I propose that we define womanliness as the capacity to resist encroachment on self and family, and to subvert control by work organizations. And then that we see how the historical narrative falls into place. The capacity to insist upon flexibility in time arrangements, to win relief from work to accommodate the needs of children, and to institutionalize supportive informal work
relationships, may not seem **dramatic** but they are clearly precursors to today's **demands** for flexible working **hours**, day **care** and shared work.

**Such** a definition would allow us to conceive of a woman's family context as an **agent** in part of the **productive** process in precisely the way we now validate ethnicity, **race** and custom as part of that process. It allows us to **move** beyond a vision of the unencumbered male worker as the workplace norm with the family outside it. For, as the southern **mills** demonstrate, reality was never so simple.

Rooted in a culture of their own, millwomen, like **mill** men, made their compromises with the exigencies of a difficult work place. Acting on their own needs to create full lives and life cycles, they asserted values, needs, and expectations that may **have** differed from those of men, but that had an equally important place in shaping the work **force**. For U. S. policy, the **lessons** are **instructive**. Women **have** many sets of needs, and the fulfillment of some compensates for others left hanging. Women can be different without abandoning the workplace as a **terrain** of struggle. Women can be different and still be unwilling to **settle** for secondary **places** in the labor **force**.
Footnotes


10. Sally Alexander, "Women, Class, and Sexual Differences in the 1830s and 40s: Some reflections on the Writing of a Feminist History," History Workshop, #17 (Spring, 1984), pp. 125-149.

11. Although these notions are compatible with them, I am deliberately avoiding here the controversial and problematic work of psychologist Carol Gilligan who argues that women perceive relationships not in competitive rule-related and achievement-oriented patterns but as affectional experiences. More
concerned with attachment and intimacy than men, they are more protective of each; other and less prone to care about who is right and who is wrong. In Gilligan's words, "the standard of moral judgement that informs their assessment of self is a standard of relationship, an ethic of nurturance, responsibility and care...morality is seen ...as arising from the experience of connection and conceived as a problem of inclusion rather than one of balancing claims." In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 160.


13. Charles Sabel, Work and Politics: The Division of Labor in Industry (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982). p. 80. To this should be added the truisms that deeply held perspectives render alternatives invisible thus restricting the believer's perceptions of available choice, that they legitimize disparities of power making inequities invisible and that they are in some sense normative.


15. I think here of the 'moral economy of the crowd', of Thompsonian notions of 'right' and of Temma Kaplan on women acting on their household consciousness.

16. For example, "taste for discrimination" theories as illustrated by Gary Becker.


19. Ina Wrenn, p59. This and the following quotations are drawn from tapes and transcripts of interviews in the Southern Oral History Project, located in the Southern Historical Collection, the Martin Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. The interviews were conducted by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and her students and colleagues between 1975 and 1981. They are identified here by the name of the subject and number of the interview. Page numbers are noted where a typed transcript was used. My thanks to Jacquelyn Hall for help with these interviews.
21. Bessie Buchanan
22. Ina Wrenn, h27
23. Alice Evitt, h 162, p46
24. Ina Wrenn, h59
25. Edna Bargett, h163, 57
26. Alice Evitt, h 162, 38
27. Ada Mae Wilson, h 183
28. Mary Ethel Shockley
29. Dewey McBride, h 29
30. Gertrude Shuping, h 178
31. unnamed h 53
32. Ada Mae Wilson, h 183; cf also, Wrenn and Shuping interviews
33. Mary Ethel Shockley, p.21
34. Alice Evitt, h. 162. 38
35. Mary Ethel Shockley, p. 22
36. Bessie Buchanan, h 174, p. 15
37. Ina Wrenn, h 59.
38. Zelma Murray, h 34p. 13
39. (laughter) Alice Evitt, h162, p.40
40. Eva Hopkins, h 167, 31
Ursula D. Nienhaus:

"Technological Change, The Welfare State, Gender And Real Women. Female Clerical Workers in the Postal Services in Germany, France and England 1860 to 1945."

(Report on a research project in progress)

When the German feminists Paula Intlekofer -Liepmannssohn, Agnes Herrmann and Gertrud Israel commented on the 1912 exhibition "The Woman in Home and Professions" they stated that female postal and railway civil servants had met more difficulties with getting employed than commercial clerks. Modern thinking private employers had earlier been inclined to hire women than the diverse and slow operating government agencies or local authorities. This, in fact, did especially hold true for Imperial Germany where the whole story reads as follows.

In 1864, Luise, Grand Duchess of the liberal state of Baden and daughter of the later Emperor Wilhelm I., succeeded in having 13 women employed by the state-owned railway administration. At about this time the first female civil servants also appeared in Bavaria, Württemberg and Saxony. They worked in the telegraph services, a new technology, as well as at ticket-counters.

When in 1871 the Baden railway came under the Imperial administration there were already 100 female civil servants with supposedly the same rights as their male colleagues. They also got bonuses and after 1873 allowances for housing.

However, when in 1870 a Reichstag petition of the Berlin Let-teverein for the promotion of occupations for the female sex asked for wider employment opportunities in the Imperial Postal Services it was flatly turned down by Heinrich Stephan, the Postmaster General, saying that experiments in France for
instance had produced very doubtful results because of "the peculiarities of the postal services". The high requirements of which could not be satisfied by women. Women, for example, were not fit to work at night: or to give orders to subordinate men: or to safeguard the proper continuity of services because of their desire to marry and become mothers. It was also not thought proper for females to work side by side with young males.

Nevertheless, in 1873, some 12 so called unskilled female assistants were employed by the control bureau for money orders, a department to be dissolved in 1876 though. In 1874/5 the Imperial Telegraph Administration hired 250 females because of a lack of male applicants. They were given six month training and having passed an entrance examination were hired subject to a month's notice of revocation.

But when the Telegraph Administration — in 1876 — came under the command of Postmaster Stephan he forbade the future employment of women and had the wages of those remaining curtailed to a daily allowance, saying that he was facing male complaints because of surplus labour.

Stephan finally again gave way to the employment of women when the telegraph offices multiplied very fast after 1879. In 1887 the Reich had 150 telegraph agencies with 22,900 call stations. The first operators — except for the 250 women from the former Baden administration — were male civil servants or auxiliaries with a very high turnover due to promotion and transfer.

This fact was used by Crown Princess Victoria of Prussia, the later so called Empress Friedrich, to press for the employment of "respectable" women forced to seek paid work by the financial crisis of their families, which had come under heavy economic pressure with the progress of industrialization.
Yet, when in 1887 female telegraph operators were hired as "assistants for the telegraph services" it was not with the same rights as their male colleagues. In particular they were not included in the civil service grade system and thus could not hope for a graded salary scale; instead they received a daily allowance and had to absolve a three year probation.

When in 1890 these women had proved themselves a capable and adaptable workforce, highly praised by the customers for friendliness and also for the clear audibility of the relatively higher female voices, they were given a modest rise to 2 marks 50 after their third and 3 marks after their fifth year of service.

Finally, after April 1 1892, the first 123 women were admitted to the civil service grade system on time-limited contracts and achieved another modest rise in income. But until December 15 1917 no female civil servant in Germany was guaranteed lifetime employment. The reason given was that they could become pregnant although unmarried. Wives were excluded from employment by a marriage bar in Germany as well as in England (but not in France where the state tried to raise the notoriously low birthrate by conceding 35 days of maternity leave as early as 1903).

When Stephan died in 1898 there were only about 2,800 female civil servants in Germany. His successor, Secretary of State Podbielski, passed a fast decree allowing women to become telegraph assistants in all of the postoffices of the first class and most of those of the second class but not yet in those of the third class - broadly those outside of cities and towns. It also allowed the employment of women as typists and as operators for mechanical calculators in district accounting sections for money orders and pensions as well as in the head offices of the Oberpostdirektionen and in the traffic offices of the first class.

There were 8,546 female mail and telegraph assistants in 1903,
9.166 in 1904
11.016 1905
12.846 1906
15.855 1907
18.016 1908
19.407 1910 and more than 20.000 in 1913, 80 to 85 per cent of whom were telegraph and telephone operators.

During the First World War women managed to reach positions formerly restricted to men: they even became postal secretaries and head secretaries. They were also employed in offices of the third class. In 1917 there were nearly 31.000 female civil servants in the German Imperial Postal Services. But, also during the war, the Reich Postal Services took on many so called unskilled temporary female workers "their numbers rising from 5.919 in 1913 to 101.000 in the summer of 1918. Needless to say, these women were the first to be dismissed in the demobilization later that year." (Boak) Only after the new constitution of 1919 female civil servants could no longer be dismissed upon marriage. However, "while some, but not all states, were quick to bring their regulations into line with the Constitution, the Reich Postal Minister, Giesberts, Centre Party, was writing to the Reich Interior Minister seeking clarification. He felt that the fact that a female civil servant was married made her unable to do her work and fulfil her duties to her husband and family as listed in the Civil Code of 1900 at the same time... He suggested offering women civil servants a gratuity to encourage them to leave on marriage." (Boak) This suggestion was to find several revivals during the Weimar Republic - (Doppelverdienerkampagne).

Since 1918 female postal personnel was eligible for lifetime employment after absolving a satisfactory 15 year service. After 1922 there was a special female career system for the "simple middle service" including the whole telegraph and telephone service as well as the postal cheque service. Women became also eligible for promotion to supervisory or teaching positions if they passed very strict examinations: but between 1922 and 1933 only 11 women managed to do so.
The female civil servants ranks suffered heavy losses after the National Socialists came to power. Only in 1938 17 highly decorated party members were promoted to supervisors. In 1939 there were only 35.511 or 14.4 percent female civil servants within the postal administration and in 1944 their numbers had grown to 41.960 or 24.4 percent (comparably less than in England where the female staff within the General Post Office made up 46.6 percent in 1933 already).

If we turn back to the introductory statement comparing private employers and the state or - with regard to the workforce recruited: female commercial clerks and female civil servants - we may conclude that the German state actually was slower to hire female white-collar workers. Whereas there were only almost 25 percent female postal workers in 1944 women counted around 50 percent of all the commercial white-collar workers in the 1930s already, reaching as much as about 65 percent in medium sized establishments of the Textile Industry.

Let us take a closer look on how and why women were being employed.

When the German Imperial Post Office replied to inquiries as to why it had decided upon hiring women as telegraph operators it stated again and again that there had been "a temporary lack of suitable male applicants in the Western Prussian Provinces" and that women would work for less money than men.

But while Stephan kept his position as Postmaster General his central administration would also display a whole range of legitimate ideologies why women in general seemed unfit to do more than "helping" work: that it was improper for them to have informal contacts with men in an office setting; that this in turn led to all sorts of organizational and financial as well as social problems (separate rooms, men doing service in smaller towns, where their families would run into trouble, no nightwork for women and as a consequence again special burdens for men); that the physically weak women were more prone to falling ill and that they tended to quit in order to marry anyhow: that all this meant wasting a substantial amount
of both learning on the job and "sacrifices" the administration had made. Finally, last but not least, in the long run it would be necessary to pay equal wages which some women had already demanded after just a few years of service. Thus there were strong normative and cultural limits on female employment. In addition male resistance was a significant obstacle to the process of feminization. A closer look at developments during the Weimar Republic confirms that - at least at times - overall "culture", attitudes and beliefs made state agencies discriminate against female postal workers just as much as or perhaps even more than strictly financial and political calculations.

Yet Stephan's successor had already overcome some of these obstacles at the close of the 19th century. He was not just able to force local offices to end their "men only" policies: he also brushed aside much of the sexist resistance of male employees in the central as well as in local offices. He even overrode sharp criticism emanating from the Prussian Parliament. Still, Podbielski was hardly a feminist. His behaviour was just a bit more "rational" than other men's at a time when the German Imperial Postal Services faced increasing economic pressure due to their large expansion and a growing budget consciousness in the face of governmental fiscal controls and more generally due to the cyclical depressions arising between 1900 and 1902, in 1907-08, and after April 1913. That Podbielski had financial and socio-economic reasons for offering wider employment to women can be seen in recruitment policies.

Women seeking employment in the Postal Services had to be German and between the ages of 18 and 30. They were supposed to come from "respectable" families, must not be in debt, previously convicted or married or - even if widowed - be mothers. They had to be in good health and at least 1.56 meters in height. After 1905 when the number of female applicants kept growing, the authorities imposed an additional medical examination to be taken after the first year of service. They even undertook secret inquiries into female employees' possible hereditary or venereal diseases. In the beginning only women living with their parents could be employed: later they had to at least
live with relatives. The postal administration also required a good general education, to be proven either by school records or, where these were lacking, by rather strict examinations. Applicants for regional instead of just local services must have completed some levels of higher education which had included several foreign languages, especially French and English. So there was also much room for competition among the women themselves.

All these requirements helped the postal authorities to select a highly qualified but nevertheless relatively cheap workforce and to secure the loyalty among the lucky few who were chosen from the flood of applicants. The Imperial Postal Administration was wise enough to recognise the organising efforts which beginning in 1905 some women had undertaken with remarkable results. The many unions of the female postal assistants remained firm but moderate bargaining partners, first with the Imperial, then with the Republican, and finally even with the National Socialist government. These women seem to have been much less "class conscious" than "gender conscious", and above all were loyal to the state, to whose declared welfare policies they turned with their demands for equal rights.

The state, however, kept them very vulnerable as a cheap and specially treated labour force. It upheld strong limits on female employment by practising "occupational sex-typing", which is - according to Samuel Cohn - "the process by which certain occupations are designated as being primarily male or female". Moreover, it also sustained a family household system in which a number of people - even if wage labours themselves - remained dependent on the wages of a few adult members, primarily those of a presumably male breadwinner, for financial and social support. Because it only recruited women who were highly qualified, young, single and childless workers "living in with their families of origin, it tried to define the size and structure of this workforce as well
as to keep down the **price** of its labour power. And thereby it also put limits on the **cost** of its male servants. By recruiting women from **respectable** but "needy" families, it seemed to remedy the **fact** that their families were no longer able to secure their **reproduction** adequately. On the other hand, by operating a marriage bar or otherwise restricting these **women** to lower status **occupations** and paying them wages that were definitively below the value of their labour power, it kept them dependent on their families and /or on future husbands, and therefore also secured a latent **reserve** of labour. But at the same time it upheld the privileges of male civil **servants** as prospective husbands. Thus it also promoted **women's** subordinate **role** in the domestic sphere. That is why we should see the **discrimination against** women in close relation to the **career** and mobility **patterns** of male civil servants.

Thus we find **a whole set of factors that played a role in determining the chances that women were aiven when hired by the postal administration**. It is misleading to **emphasize** just one variable. It is also misleading to stress these **women's** own "responsibility" for their **concentration** in low-paid employment, their domestic attitude, their mentality or self-perception. If the German state was at first slower in hiring female clerical workers than private capitalists, in the end it also came to calculate with a capitalist rationality in much the same ways as private enterprises did. The state authorities, far from proving themselves to be "modern" employers or promoters of the "public"—i.e., female and male—interests, acted with partly irrational and partly profit-oriented motives to the same extent as private or corporate capitalists did under comparable circumstances. But the state, while structured into different and partly competing organizations, was also setting environmental constraints on employers through legislation, **fiscal** controls and intervention.

If we turn to the other countries, we find a lot of **similarities**. In **fact**, there appear to be more similarities than **diffe-**
rences between the states, all national peculiarities notwithstanding.

Susan D. Bachrach and Dominique Bertinotti have shown that women were recruited by the French Postal and Telegraph Administration since 1872, when the first female assistant got hired (on probation). After 1877 female telegraph operators were being engaged at the Paris Central at la rue de Grenelle. Still, massive recruitment of women only started after 1889, and this was in response to a wave of collective protest by male personnel finding their career advancement blocked due to the Great Depression.

According to Bertinotti the administration, which simultaneously faced a growing workload and a diminishing budget, first tried to recruit more male auxiliaries and then turned to the employment of women because they would work for less money.

An English state official similarly had remarked as early as 1871:

"They are very accurate and do a fair quantity of work, more so, in fact, than many males who have been employed on the same duty...". And: "the wages which draw men from an inferior class will draw women from a superior class and hence they will write better than the former and spell more correctly; and they are less disposed than men to combine for the purpose of extorting higher wages." ¹⁸

(Quoted from Silverstone, 1976, lol)

Like the German authorities, the French Postal Administration first kept the women as "stagiaires", that is, as operators on time-limited contracts. Slightly earlier than in Germany, however, they seem to have become "titulaires". Also, France - (like Russia) - had no marriage bar but tried to raise the notoriously low birthrate by conceding to its female servants 35 days of maternity leave as early as 1903.

Nevertheless, the similarities between the two countries seem to be more important: in both cases women were being recruited
from strata of the population which depended on women’s wages. And they were excluded from all so-called "responsible" functions. Bertinotti notes less geographical mobility for women. They had a shorter period of service averaging 25 years compared to men’s 30 years service. Men entered the jobs on average at an age of 21, four years younger than women. Women, nevertheless received higher entry level wages albeit smaller salary increases thereafter, while the remuneration of men systematically rose with years of service. The French Postal Ministry expected different qualities from its male and female staff: men were supposed to be more intellectual, women to have more moral capacity; ironically women usually seem to have had more formal education prior to entering the service. On the other hand: post-entry qualifications were more easily attainable for men, for the Postal Administration offered better education to them in a variety of facilities. There was merely one training school for women.

Finally and again similar to Germany, unionization as well as the impact of the First World War were necessary to ensure that French postal women were finally integrated into the "cadre aes commis" at the end of the twenties.

French female postal servants also organized in separate unions between 1900 and 1908 because of the strong anti-feminism of the mixed "association générale des agents". When they were again incorporated, they still had to face a lot of male chauvinism."

Because Bertinotti's research is a quantitatively and qualitatively oriented project in progress like my own, unfinished, work, more detailed comparisons have to be postponed for the moment.

Samuel Cohn's recent study contrasts the English Post Office, which was the first employer to use female clerks instead of males, with the Great Western Railway, one of the last em-
ployers to make this change. He attempts to outline a theoretical "synthetic turnover model" that can help to explain "occupational sex-typing". 20

The English Post Office became the leading sector in the feminization of clerical work when in 1868 it absorbed the private telegraph companies. The introduction of female telegraphists in 1870 was - like in Germany - in response to a shortage of trained male telegraph operators. Other departments followed the example: The Returned Letter Department already was 48 percent female in 1876, the Savings Bank introduced women in 1875, and a virtually all-female new Postal Order Division was created in 1876.

Cultural values had considerable influence: when the management of the London Post Office was determining what sex of telegraphist to put in what branch, they explicitly took into account the quality of the neighbourhood: and most London post offices were sex-segregated, with women working in separate rooms.

According to Cohn the Post Office nevertheless feminised before the Great Western Railway did because it was more "clerical-labour-intense". "Political hiring" (preferential hiring for veterans in order to support the unemployment policies of the welfare state) was concentrated in a small subpopulation of offices only. But a lot of managerial opposition existed so that women were introduced only after the exertion of outside pressure, usually from central management. Local managers as well as male unions were not effective enough in controlling entry into these occupations. Male members of minority groups or juveniles who would have worked for low wages were less likely to have the relatively high formal educational qualifications of women.

Cohn concludes that under a narrow set of conditions, especially when suffering from the joint problem of tenure-based
salary scales or overannuation, employers within a bureaucracy like the Post Office found themselves forced to reduce the levels of rewards to some workers within the organisation arbitrarily, while maintaining these rewards for others. By operating marriage bars, i.e., using gender as a criteria for differentiating between short-term and long-term employees, they virtually guaranteed that a significant share of low-status office jobs would henceforth be reserved for women.

"Hiring sixteen-year-old women and forcing them to retire at marriage ensures careers anywhere from six to ten years long. This is long enough to ensure the conservation of any firm-specific skills, but not as long as to create a severe crisis of productivity. Thus, ironically, even as tenure bars diminished the opportunities for elder women, they gave younger women a near monopoly on clerical positions, since their tenures could be more easily manipulated to fit the needs of office employers. Synthetic turnover thus helped ensure that clerical work would become a female sex-typed job." 21

Cohn also stresses the role of vacancies in determining sex-typing. An employer cannot immediately adjust his labor force to reflect current economic and social conditions.

"He can only introduce new workers into positions for which there are vacancies. If the number of openings is relatively small, his current sex-type may reflect past rather than present economic conditions." 22

This environmental constraint on feminization was also a recurrent subject in Germany, for instance in 1910, when the budget did not allow for new women being promoted to the graded salary scale.

I would like to stress that my own research so far confirms Cohn's conclusion that clerical work was feminised because managers changed their hiring strategies due to price competition or to budget calculations. There were considerably less "supply-side-limits" to female employment than "demand-side-determinants". In contradiction to what sociologists
as well as historians and economists repeat again and again about "the" clerical workers and their presumed national differences because of the peculiarities of their respective states (with the Germans being the most reactionary, the Anglo-Saxons the most progressive and the French somewhere in between), I found that the specific group of female clerical workers in Dostal services had more in common with each other across borders than with their male colleagues in their own country.

They also seem to have been less prone to "traditional" white-collar values (as opposed to "working-class-orientation") but at the same time, by organizing in separate unions, appear to have been more gender conscious than class conscious. It seems important to insist, that this political orientation was not just "false consciousness" but - at least partly - an expression and a reflection of those women's truly complex situation in gender-structured societies in which overall cultural patterns enforced women's subordination at times even at the expense of economic rationality.
NOTES


7. Denkschrift (op. cit.) p. 7; Zentrales Staatsarchiv Potsdam, RPM, GA 32266.20; GA 3164,51, 55, 56. 85-89, 74-79, 107, 116, 117;

8. Zentrales staatsarchiv Potsdam, RPM, GA 3266,20; Wagner (op. cit.) p. 245-247; Denkschrift (op. cit.) p. 7;


14. Zentrales Staatsarchiv Potsdam, RPM, GA 3164, letter of Sept. 9th, 1878 and many other examples;


16. Cohn (op. cit.) p. 4;


20. Cohn (op. cit.) p. 91ff;
21. Cohn (op. cit.) p. 225;
22. Cohn (op. cit.) p. 231;
It is hard to think of jobs that are not gendered. Furthermore, jobs have always been gendered, even though the boundaries between what is accepted as a male or female job have changed considerably. As M. Stacey has perceived, there have been two quite unrelated theories about the division of labour: 'one that it all began with Adam Smith and the other that it all began with Adam and Eve. The first has to do with production and the social control of workers and the second with reproduction and the social control of women. The problem is that the two accounts, both men's accounts, have never been reconciled'. The task of explaining sexual divisions has only been taken up recently and as the first section (below) briefly indicates, the explanation has been welded not altogether successfully onto existing theories. The paper suggests that it is necessary to take a step back and reconceptualise women's work in both private and public spheres as part of the larger gender order, which dictates that men and women have unequal resources, whether educational or financial in our society. In the sections that follow working class women's work in the early twentieth century is taken as a case study to show the my in which gendered jobs are part of the construction of masculinity and femininity. Only when this is understood can we begin to attempt to integrate an analysis of sexual divisions into specific consideration of the labour market and the changes in the labour process.
THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR: WHAT HAS TO BE EXPLAINED

Major economic theories of human behaviour have, in recent years, paid attention to the sexual division of labour and have stressed the importance of relating women's market work to their familial roles, emphasising the importance of sex roles within the family as determinants of the division of labour in market work. In so doing they have tended to privilege paid work. Thus neoclassicists have taken the domestic division of labour for granted and have concentrated on the way in which it explains sexual segregation and low pay in market work, while marxists have got bogged down on the question of whether domestic labour is productive work.² Both these major theories have tried to incorporate analysis of sexual divisions into their existing theoretical frameworks, but with varying degrees of success.

The 'new home economics' of neoclassical theory recognised that adult married women in particular allocate their time in more complex ways than men— in unpaid non-market work of caring and household labour, as well as in leisure and waged work. It has been argued that because marriage is voluntary, the theory of preferences may readily be applied: wives will hire husbands as breadwinners, and husbands wives as childbearers, minders and housekeepers. The division of labour in the family is assumed to be a natural corollary of women's reproductive role. Because of their childbearing and childrearing activities (which again are assumed to be naturally linked) married women are held to be imperfect substitutes for men in market work. Women's expectations of marriage and children are held to make them less willing to invest in education and more prone to labour market behaviour that is unstable from the employers' point of view. The sexual division of labour is thus 'naturally' complementary and maximises the gains of both partners.
Marxists have also argued that the sexual division of labour may well maximise family welfare, but while neoclassicists argue that the division of labour is a matter of rational choice, Marxists see it as one of the few strategies available to the working class in its struggle with capital. Marxists also emphasise the inherent conflict between married women's two roles at home and in waged work and point to the dramatic recent increase in the divorce rate and in the number of single parent families as evidence of increasing tension between the two roles. In the recent literature which attempts to understand the labour market under late capitalism, radical dual labour market theorists suggest that labour markets are divided into primary and secondary sectors, with restricted mobility between the two, by a process of deskilling. Men are thus the passive beneficiaries of capitalist strategy, dominating the primary job sector where employment is relatively stable, higher paid and tied to career ladders, while women are confined to the secondary sector of temporary and poorly paid work.

Thus both major bodies of theory tend to treat work in the family and work in the labour market dichotomously, despite the recognition of important linkages between them. More often than not, women's position in the family is invoked to explain their position in the labour market. This is because work is not conceptualised as part of the gender order. Rather the sexual division of work is made to fit already existing frameworks of explanation. Thus neoclassicists emphasise the importance of choice and argue essentially that women's position reflects the nature of the choices that women make. Radical dual labour market theorists blame capital, but in the end are, like neoclassicists, forced back on female biology to explain why it is women who find themselves in a subordinate position.

Radical feminists have got over this problem by invoking patriarchy to explain the sexual division of labour, arguing that men as capitalists and as husbands
and as trade unionists control women, keeping their wages low and enforcing their responsibilities for domestic work. Patriarchal theory tends to leave women the passive victims and thus oversimplifies the construction and maintenance of the sexual division of work as part of the gender order.

This paper argues that first, it is necessary to make the analysis of work part of the analysis of the wider gender order and then to consider the way in which separate male and female work identities have been constructed. It will be argued that the latter is a complicated process involving consideration of male behaviour as capitalists, trade unionists and husbands and of women's behaviour as wives and mothers and paid workers, and can best be understood by attempting to reconstruct male and female work experience. Only then can the process by which sexual divisions in the workplace have persisted be understood.

WORK AND THE GENDER ORDER

Ray Pahl has recently perceived the need to draw together the study of production, reproduction and consumption in an effort to reconceptualise the idea of 'work' as opposed to employment. He sets out to do this by focussing on the household rather than the individual and thereby immediately captures the importance of gendered labour. This is of course because much of women's work is the unpaid work of caring and domestic labour.

In fact single and married working women in different social classes have combined different mixes of paid and unpaid work at different times. In the mid-nineteenth century married and single working class women worked outside the home in occupations segregated from men, albeit that the definition of what was a male and female job changed significantly over time. Married working
class women increasingly withdrew from the labour market in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They retained primary responsibility for home and family, but also often engaged in casual paid employment, much of which escaped the notice of the census enumerators. Both married and single middle class women were much more firmly excluded from paid employment, their work in the public sphere being largely confined to unpaid voluntary philanthropic effort. It is of course only since World War II that married women's work has increased so dramatically. These experiences must be located within a broader gender order in which the law denied women access to property and political rights, and the marriage contract often resulted in an unequal division of resources and a particular division of roles and responsibilities.

Broadly speaking, there has been a shift over time whereby women have increasingly entered the public sphere of paid work, but have retained primary responsibility for domestic work. This is not to say that there has been no charge in the domestic division of labour. Recent research has questioned early linear models of development from segregated sex roles to the modern symmetrical family and has revealed on the one hand evidence of a deeply based home culture in particular regions by the early twentieth century, with men sharing domestic tasks and caring, and on the other evidence of the persistence of profoundly separate and antagonistic male and female worlds. It is generally true that even when domestic work has become more equally shared, it still remains primarily women's responsibility. It is clearly the case that women have tended to see family responsibilities predominating and paid work as secondary to family responsibilities.

Just as it is important to understand the ways in which women have combined different mixes of paid and unpaid work at different times, it is also important to recognise the way in which much of the work women do has moved in and out of the private sphere. The preparation of midday meals for school
children, for example, has always been done by women, sometimes in the home and sometimes by working part-time for the local education authorities, according to the dictates of government policy. It is easy to find other examples of human service work, such as caring for the elderly, that has moved between the family and the informal and formal labour markets.

The proper framework for analysis is therefore not the particular dichotomies of paid and unpaid work, family and labour market, but a theory of women's work that incorporates an understanding of the gender order. It is crucial to see the gendering of work in relation not just to change in the labour process and employers' and trade unionists' attitudes, but to individual household strategies and the decision-making process between husband and wife, and to the politico-legal process which structures the access to resources, training and education by gender as well as by class.

MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORKING CLASS MALE AND FEMALE WORK IDENTITIES IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

There is clear evidence from the recent past that men and women have had finns ideas as to what constitutes men's and women's work and the male and female rate for the job. A female printing worker was reported in the early 1900s as saying "I know my place and I'm not going to take men's work from them". Professor F Y Edgeworth, the neoclassical economist, regarded this as proof of the existence of 'natural monopolies' of custom regarding male and female work practices. Ramsay MacDonald, who wrote the classic book on women in the printing trades published in 1904, commented that suggestions to the effect that women might undertake tasks commonly performed by men were not only rejected but treated as though something 'indelicate' had been proposed. Similarly these women have traditionally earned somewhere between one half and
two thirds of men's average wages.

The idea of a woman's job and a women's rats may also be applied to women's unpaid work. It will be argued here that the gendering of jobs is part of the larger construction of masculinity and femininity and may best be understood by the study of male and female work experience over time. Julia Matthei has stressed the importance of sex typing of jobs because of the stigma that is incurred if women (or men) cross boundaries. She has argued that sextyping derives from a belief in natural difference which is shared by workers and employers. I too wish to stress that ideas as to what tasks are appropriate for women and what women are capable of have been shared by the majority of men and women over time, but whereas Matthei concentrates on how sextyping has been eroded, I shall focus on some of the elements by which sextyping is constructed.

Sandra Wallman has pointed out that work controls the identity as much as the economy of the worker and that the control of work entails not only control over the allocation and disposition of resources but also implies control over the values ascribed to each of them. The division between male and female workers must be located within a structure of male domination by which women's work is valued less. Because this was in turn part of the structure of femininity and masculinity, it was accepted. The concept of the family wage which emerged in the late nineteenth century was fundamental to determining the mix of activities women engaged in because its acceptance ensured that women twk primary responsibility for husband and family and that their paid work was regarded by society and by themselves to be of secondary importance. The ideal of a family wage was secured by working class and middle class men and women for a variety of reasons, and legitimised by ideas of masculinity and femininity.
The Family Wage Ideal

Social investigators promoted the idea of the family wage primarily because they felt that a firm division of labour between husband and wife was the best means of securing social stability and the moral integrity of the nation. Henry Higgs compared household budgets of the 1890's and commented on the importance of the wife's housekeeping skills and unpaid labour which could actually 'turn the balance of comfort in favour of one workman whose wages are much below those of another'. He believed that the services of a working man's wife were more valuable economically when they were employed at home than in the labour market. Dr William Cgle explained to the Royal Statistical Society that men were stimulated to labour only in the hopes of maintaining themselves and their families. Helen Bosanquet, a pillar of the Charity Organisation Society similarly argued that the 'stable family' of male breadwinner and female and child dependents was 'the only known way of ensuring with any approach to success that one generation will exert itself in the interests and for the sake of another'. Furthermore, social welfare legislation from the period of the Liberal Welfare Reforms of the early twentieth century to the mid 1970's was constructed on the assumption that the family economy followed the male breadwinner model. Similarly the bourgeois family form is seen in the classic formulation of Parsons during the 1950's to be of strategic importance in the way in which it mediates the needs of the larger society for the individual, particularly the child.

Much of the argument of male unionists in favour of the family wage was usually expressed in terms of the threat female workers posed to male wage rates. But the beliefs and behaviour of male unionists suggests first that opposition was based on more than just fear of undercutting and second that their particular concern to prevent married women's work was grounded in the belief that it was
improper and unnatural. As Seccombe has pointed out there were two possible arguments about the family wage; a) if men were able to earn a family wage the wives could stay at home, b) only if their wives employment were curtailed would men's wages rise. Only the second of these was widely used. A male chainworker commented to a Commission on the Factory Acts in 1876: "I should advocate the [women's] time should be so limited as neither to interfere with their own health and morals or with our wages". An 1889 Select Committee heard another plea from a male trade unionist for the restriction of married women's work on the grounds that "when the married women turn into the domestic workshops; they become competitors against their own husbands and it requires a man and his wife to earn what the man alone would earn if she was not in the shop", but he added for good measure, "During the time she is in the shop her domestic duties are being neglected". This dual set of concerns, which should both be seen as real, was repeated by Tom Mann, the socialist organiser of semi and unskilled workers, before the Royal Commission on Labour in the early 1890's. He said that he was "very loth to see mothers of families working factories at all" adding 'their employment has nearly always a prejudicial effect on the wages of the male worker.'

By the late nineteenth century the ideal of the family wage was firmly accepted. Broadhurst's famous speech to the TUC Annual Conference in 1877 in which he urged male unionists 'as men and husbands to use their utmost efforts to bring about a condition of things where their wives should be in their proper sphere at home instead of being dragged into competition for livelihood against the great and strong men of the world' was as much a statement about maculinity as about trade unionists' campaign for a higher, family wage. Even in Lancashire, where in Blackburn, Preston and Burnley as many as one third of women continued to work after marriage, the Cotton Factory Times printed verse which to all intents and purposes ignored the married women's role as paid worker: "How Sweet it is when toil is o'er/To sit upon the hearth once more/To
whistle sing and sweet converse/With the sweetest queen in universe/In homelyway". By the 1890's, the wives of skilled men did not usually work, for the ability to keep a wife had become a measure of working class male respectability.

Ellen Ross has pointed out that the marital relationship between mrkingclass men and women did not enjoin romantic love or verbal or sexual intimacy, but required financial obligations, services and activities that were gender specific. The importance of the economic support provided by husbands is neatly illustrated by working class women's attitudes towards marriage breakdown. A women poor law guardian reported the testimony of a woman who was living in a common law relationship while her first husband remained in the workhouse, to the effect that her husband 'was no husband for her and the one that worked for her she respected'. Social investigators of the early twentieth century showed clearly that the centre of working class women's worlds was their children and that their activities were dictated by the chief purpose of providing for them. Any woman who was forced to resort to full-time work by virtue of the illness or neglect or absence of her husband was pitied by her neighbours. There was then a material basis for women's ideas as to their place and acceptance of the family wage. Domestic labour in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was extremely arduous, childbirth painful and pregnancy frequent. The average woman of the 1890's could expect to bear children and spend years in pregnancy and lactation. Doubtless women took emotional satisfaction from caring and providing for their families. Elizabeth Roberts has argued that working class women saw their lives as purposeful because the welfare of their families depended on their budget- and managing skills, and in the closely knit working class communities of pre-1914, the talents of skillful housewives were readily acknowledged. Similarly Richard Whipp and Joanna Bomalt have argued that women played important organising roles in mediating relations between home and workplace,
particularly in terms of finding jobs on female networks for young family members. Brenner and Ramas have recently argued that there was in fact little room for negotiation of the fundamental sexual division of labour between husbands and wives. Harsh material realities dictated the fundamental sexual division of labour.

Nevertheless, it is striking that the public statements by working women's groups stressed not so much material hardship when women were also forced to shoulder the burden of paid employment, but rather the idea that the working woman's proper role was a helpmeet to her husband. Women in the labour movement also tended to favour the idea of a family wage, agreeing that the withdrawal of female labour would benefit male wages and enable women to better order and manage their homes. Most working women's groups agreed that the respectable woman's place was in the home, emphasising women's contribution as wives and mothers and the importance of the 'woman spirit'. The woman who worked for pay outside the home had less opportunity 'to give thought and companionship to her husband'. The Women's Labour League gave priority to campaigning for the Labour Party's Right to Work Bill, introduced into the House of Commons every year between 1906 and 1908, which they believed would provide a charter of the 'Right to Leisure and Home Comfort' for working men's wives. Mary MacArthur, the leading woman trade unionist, was always anxious to acknowledge women's primary commitment to home and family and as Deborah Thom has pointed out, a crucial role was played by women trade unionists in maintaining the sexual division of labour in the workplace after World War I. Women workers were open in their desire to work only until marriage. As one woman who lost her job in 1921 recalled: 'it didn't bother me, I knew I was engaged to be married and in those days as soon as you were going to be married you left your job... that is the only thing we girls had to look forward to, getting married and going on our own, getting our bottom drawer together and things like that'. Similarly, Joy Parhas found in the predominately female
workforce of a Canadian textile town that young women workers experienced their deepest satisfaction in being caring daughters and prudently preparing for married life. 31

Mothers First and Workers Second: the social reality of the sexual division of labour

Large numbers of working class families did not achieve a family wage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, something that middle class legislators failed to confront. Booth's 1889 survey of London showed that 30% of the population were unable to rely on a man's wage alone and in 1921, Bowley estimated that only 41% of working class families could depend on a man's wage. 32 Among those families who were not in receipt of a family wage, women had to resort to numerous strategies to make ends meet. Women themselves perceived a hierarchy of respectability in terms of what was permissible for them to do within which paid work outside the home did not rank highly. When paid work was undertaken, some jobs were more acceptable than others. For men too as unionists, employes and policymakers, some jobs were more acceptable than others, on grounds that had more to do with conceptions of respectability - itself part of the construction of masculinity - than logic.

Women seeking to make ends meet often resorted to neighbours and kin, borrowing in times of need. Mrs Pember Reeves found that housewives in Lambeth were reluctant to move for fear of foregoing the help they knew to be available in times of need, for neighbourliness implied reciprocity. Less respectable, but very common was the resort to credit, running up bills at the corner shop, pawning and worst of all, moneylending. Large numbers of married women sought casual employment of some kind or other. In line with the ideal notion of women's place, the most respectable of these were home based. Large numbers of
women engaged in what Shelley pennington has called 'extended homework'—washing, charring, babysitting and lodging housekeeping. As Lee Davidoff has commented, the work of lodging house keeping is impossible to categorise as work of production or consumption. Women both sought, and were considered most appropriate for, human service work in the informal sector (something that is perpetuated by the large number of part-time women workers—40% of the female workforce—in service occupations today), or for manufacturing work that was carried out in the home.

In this respect, women engaged in a wide variety of tasks at home, making matchboxes, shirts, artificial flowers, umbrellas, brushes, carding buttons, furpulling, bending safety pins and covering tennis balls. Much of this work was sweated. All homeworkers supplied their own heat, light and materials; shirtmakers also had to hire their sewing machines. Usually women made very small wages in such work. A woman finishing four pairs of trousers a day in the 1880's made 1/2d. Yet such a sum was enough to feed a family for almost two days before World War 1, and women's casual earnings were crucial to their families' welfare before the war. Some of the trades women took up, such as washing in London's East End, they were chosen because their peak availability coincided with troughs in the male employment in gas and building trades.

It is important to consider how far women's direct contribution to the family economy affected relations between husband and wife within the family. John Holley's work on two nineteenth century Scottish factory communities found both multiple earner and family wage economies existing side by side, the former characterising the families of poorly paid, unskilled male breadwinners. Holley assumes this type of family economy was 'in many ways more democratic', but it is not altogether clear that this was so. Patricia Malcolmson has suggested that the power of the London women laundressas was directly related to the extent to which they were the mainstay of their family economies.
Women doing casual or homework were profoundly isolated with no possibility of the workplace friendships or activities enjoyed by their man. Their motives for working were entirely familial, as Tilly and Scott have noted, and were directed towards securing the welfare of their families. It is true that they might have taken great satisfaction from keeping their families together, but equally their efforts may have been overshadowed by the struggle to manage the double day, a much more arduous task in the early twentieth century, and possibly the threat of male verbal or physical abuse if the task was not perceived to have been performed properly. Where women worked for wages in factories, as in the case Holley describes, some accommodation had to be reached between the family's need for extra income and male and female ideas as to women's proper place. Nancy Osterud found in her analysis of Leicester hosiery workers that men supported women's work as long as they confined themselves to traditional female tasks of seaming. It is also implied that such labour took place within the family unit. As long as this was so, working men accepted it. It was much harder to accept the individuation of women's wages (Seccombe). Thus sexual divisions in the marketplace were underpinned by more general ideas of women's place. Men as workers and as husbands always saw women as wives and mothers first and workers second and male domination characterised both the family and the workplace. Even women who essentially became their family's breadwinner, whether through misfortune of neglect on the part of their men, often felt the need to maintain the husband's authority. One Nottingham woman, whose husband earned only 10/- a week as a frameworker knitter in the 1900's, gave him money so that he could continue to give the children their pocket money.

Working Class women had strong ideas as to what kind of work was appropriate and respectable. Homework was taken not just because it was the easiest to combine with child care and domestic duties, but also because it enabled women to stay at home. The more noxious occupations, like furpulling, were not
considered respectable, but button carding was clean work that could be confined to a bedroom enabling the appearance of respectability to be maintained. Women working outside the home had a strongly developed sense of rough and respectable work. Domestic service, for all its drawbacks was respectable, feminine work, considered an ideal preparation for marriage. Within the factory, finishing or warehouse work was considered the most superior because it was light and clean and enjoyed high status despite its low wages. Such ideas as to feminine occupations were encouraged by middle class investigators. Sidney Webb recognised that competition for respectable jobs drove down wage rates, but nevertheless felt: 'As they climb laboriously up into a more and more rarefied air or respectability the codes of etiquette become more rigid and exacting and many harmless diversions and pleasures have to be sacrificed to their totem. But it is a thing to advance in them and its influence for good is incalculable'.

Men, whether as husbands, trade unionists, employers or policymakers, had clear ideas of women's place. As we have seen, male workers always linked the risk to women's health and morals to their fears that women would undercut male wages. Even when male workers in a particular trade 'lost' skill or were not strongly organised, they still demonstrated their capacity to exclude women from skilled processes. For example, after the big lockout of 1895, employers in the boot and shoe trade were able to convert to mass production methods in integrated factories using largely semi-skilled labour, but male and female processes remained distinct and the National Union of Boot and Shoe operatives, while admitting women from the 1880's, failed to press for piecework statements for women fitters and machinists until 1907. Male mule spinners in Lancashire successfully resisted attempts to introduce women (who were quite able to handle the smaller spinning mules), largely because the men provided the employer with an efficient system of labour control. Similarly in the print, male workers were able to turn their political skill against women
workers and exclude them from the typographical associations. In the weaving sheds overlookers were able to exclude women by their position as supervisors and by reserving the work of tuning the looms for themselves. This relationship often involved the exercise of both economic and sexual power.

In the tailoring trade, the position was somewhat different, male tailors excluded women as early as 1834, but themselves became an increasingly endangered species as the market for ready-made clothing expanded, the demand for women's labour to stitch seams and finish the ready-made goods increased, but men continued to preserve their control over the bespoke trade. Thus, technological change in the tailoring trade (together with the male tailoring unions) served to strengthen and deepen the sexual division of labour rather than to threaten it.

Nor did employers act rationally and employ huge numbers of cheap adult female workers. They accepted the stereotypical ideas of women's capacities, often without any direct experience of employing women. Sidney Webb noted in 1891 that because women were rarely fully trained and rarely performed tasks like tuning their own machines, employers tended to accept the popular idea that they were indeed of inferior value as a workforce. The argument came full circle when employers declared that women were not worth training because of their tendency to leave on marriage. Employers were also often loathe to employ male and female labour in the same process. As late as the 1930's, a large-scale employer of women refused to consider 'the indiscriminatemixingof men and women together'. Where large all-female workforces were employed, such as in Cortaud's silk mills, efforts were often made to teach young women workers the principles of mothercraft and a respect for domestic ideals.

Government policymakers also had clear ideas as to what was suitable and unsuitable work for women. The predominant concern of proponents of protective legislation in the nineteenth century was morality. Women in the mines and
women chairmakers operating the 'oliver' - the heavy sledgehammer used to cut cold iron - were perceived as 'indecent'. During the early twentieth century extraordinary pressure was also exerted in Parliament by MPs of all political persuasions to restrict the employment of barmids. Ramsay MacDonald declared that he opposed their work on exactly the same moral grounds as he opposed to women's work in the mines. Women were considered to be a moralising and civilising influence, but their mission was felt to be impossible in the rough atmosphere of a bar. Heavy work, or work in unsuitable surroundings was felt to be at odds with women's role as mothers and guardians of the home. As government policy in respect to social insurance developed during the early twentieth century, it was used as an instrument to push women into the preeminently respectable and suitable occupation of domestic service.

CONCLUSION

The sexual division of labour should be seen as a part of the larger gender order. Women's work is doublygendered, first being confined to 'feminine' tasks, whether paid or unpaid, and second being subordinate to men's work both at home and in the workplace. In terms of unpaid labour, women may have gained satisfaction from their pivotal position in securing their families' welfare, and support from female networks of neighbours and kin, but they remained emotionally and financially dependent on men. Their paid work, especially that of married women, tended to occupy an intermediate zone between home and workplace that has persisted since World War II in the forms of part-time human service work. Such work was devalued not least because of the way in which it straddled public and private domains. Only in the closed middle class female communities of women educators or hospital matrons, described in detail recently by Martha Vicinus, did women manage to create a world dominated by female values and to achieve control over their work.
It has been argued here that the nature and conditions of women's work were not determined solely by autonomous changes in the structure of the economy, but rather should be considered as part of the construction of masculinity and femininity. Ideas of morality and respectability which carried different meanings for men and women as well as for people of different social classes, played a crucial part in the construction of masculinity and femininity. Writing of women's work in agriculture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Keith Snell has concluded that changes in the structure of the economy are sufficient to explain the changes in women's work. But these do not adequately explain the more fundamental issue of the existence and persistence of sexual divisions of labour in agriculture.

It has not been part of this paper to look at the changes in the sexual division of work, which can only be explained by the complicated changes in the relationship between women and men, as workers, trade unionists, employers and the state and in relation to the changing nature and structure of jobs, which is in turn dependent on the scale and technique of production. Sexual segregation has persisted and continues to be underpinned by ideas of masculinity and femininity, although these too are subject to change. One of the most important issues which remains to be investigated by historians is the demise of the idea that working class male respectability depended on a non-working wife. It was during World War II that the idea emerged that women could combine part-time work, marriage and motherhood without their home responsibilities being undermined. However, women have retained responsibility for home and family.
NOTES


10. Ibid., pp.65-6


16. Talcott Parsons and R F Bales, *Family Socialization and Interaction*

17. PP., 'Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Working of the Factory and Workshop Acts with a view to their consolidation and amendment', C.1443, 1876, XXIX, 1 p.cxvi.


23. PP., Minutes of Evidence to the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, Vol.II, Cd.6480, 1912-13, XVIII, 4.20120.

24. Roberts, A Woman's Place.

25. Ibid.

26. Richard Whipp, 'The Subjected or the Subject of History?: women and the social organization of work in the early twentieth century pottery


28. MacDonald R et. al., Wage Earning Mothers (London: Women's Labour League, nd.).


30. Quoted in Roberts, A Woman's Place.

31. Joy Parr, '"This was a Woman's Town": range and limits in the local construction of gender', unpublished paper, 1985.

32. Land, 'Family Wage'.

33. M S Pember Reeves, Round about a Pound a Week (London: G Bell, 1913)


42. Quoted in M Mostyn Bird, Women at Work (London: Chapman Hall, 1911), pp.16-17.

43. Alan Fox, A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe operatives 1874-1957 (Oxford, Blackwell's, 1958)


45. Cynthia Cockburn, Brothers. Male Dominance and Technological Change


50. Judy Lown, 'Not so much a Factory, more a Form of Patriarchy: gender and class during industrialisation', Eva Gamarnikow et al., Gender and Work (London: Heinemann, 1983).


52. House of Commons, Debates, 195, 2/11/08, col.876.


55. K DM Snell, 'Agricultural Seasonal Unemployment, the Standard of Living
DE L'EMPLOYE A L'EMPLOYEE
FIGURES DU TBAVAIL DANS LES BUREAUX EN FRANCE
(XIXe-XXe SIECLES)

Pendant quinze ans de défrichage, l'histoire des femmes a fait surgir des figures oubliées ou exclues; elle a rendu visibles des pratiques et des discours spécifiques. Le temps est venu de "prendre le champ historique dans son entier, sans le restreindre au domaine féminin, en l'interrogeant autrement, faisant ressortir chaque fois qu'il est possible la division sexuelle des rôles. C'est justement sur ce partage entre le masculin et le féminin que le silence de l'histoire s'est abusivement fait" (1). Dès lors les rôles féminins ne peuvent plus être l'objet d'une histoire à part (2). Ainsi le thème de la division sexuelle du travail proposé par cet atelier offre-t-il l'occasion de mettre à l'épreuve du terrain une interrogation majeure de la nouvelle problématique féministe.

En choisissant le secteur encore peu exploré du travail dans les bureaux aux 19e et 20e siècles, nous avons voulu non seulement reconstituer les étapes et les mécanismes qui ont bousculé la division des tâches dans cet espace de travail, mais aussi enquêter sur les discours tenus sur l' "intrusion" des femmes dans une sphère masculine.

...

Du côté de la sociologie, qu'a-t-on fait depuis l'enquête de Michel Crozier sur les employés des chèques postaux (6) ? On trouve certes des publications sur le travail des femmes dans le secteur public, qui traitent du statut, des carrières et du temps partiel (toujours envisagé d'ailleurs comme une alternative féminine) (7). Mais ces cas exceptés, les femmes employées de bureau n'ont pas beaucoup retenu l'attention des sociologues. Et pourtant qui n'a pas été un jour plus ou moins secrétaire de quelqu'un ? Qui n'a jamais eu "sa" secrétaire ? Quel est le journal qui, ces dernières années, n'a pas fait une manchette sur l'image, les qualités, le pouvoir, le bonheur, l'avenir des secrétaires (8) ? N'est-il pas symptomatique que la télévision ait consacré une émission à ce thème (9) ? Par leur "marginalité massive" (10), les tâches du bureau appartiennent sans doute à cet invisible quotidien dont les pratiques n'ont émergé que récemment dans l'historiographie et la sociologie.

L'histoire des femmes elles-mêmes, dans l'urgence des questions à poser, a laissé dans l'ombre ce vaste pan du travail féminin (11). Avec la revue Pénélope, nous avons tenté d'inscrire ce thème sur l'agenda de l'histoire des femmes en 1984 avec un numéro intitulé...
Femmes au bureau (12). Le peu de succès rencontré par ce sujet auprès du public, voire le désintérêt déclaré des chercheuses pose problème. Est-ce le personnage même de la secrétaire qui, en focalisant les représentations de la femme au bureau et en formant écran à ce monde diversifié et mouvant, se montre finalement rebelle à entrer dans les problématiques féministes d'émancipation-domination ? La question reste ouverte.

Le vocabulaire est révélateur des obsessions d'une époque et permet de situer les cadres sémantiques de notre terrain de recherche. Limitons-nous pour l'instant aux seuls termes de secrétaire et de bureau qui sont loin de couvrir les fonctions et les espaces du vaste domaine des emplois de bureau ; les hiérarchies, les formes et les différents degrés de compétences techniques et intellectuelles que l'expression générique "emplois de bureau" englobe et masque du même coup.

La permanence du terme "secrétaire" cache des glissements de contenu dont l'histoire en forme de pyramide raconte la descente depuis la position d'élite et de distinction jusqu'à la base la plus large et la plus commune, parallèlement au passage du genre masculin au genre féminin. Signifiant anciennement "confident", avec la référence à l'image suprême de la "Vierge Secrète" - confidente de Dieu -, "secrétaire marque d'abord la distinction de celui qui, digne de confiance, "était attaché à une personne de haut rang pour rédiger", transwire des lettres... (13) (les secrétaires du roi, par exemple). Au XVIIe siècle, à l'élément distinctif se juxtapose la désignation des tâches spécifiques d'écriture, de rédaction, d'organisation, soit pour le compte d'une personne privée, soit pour celui d'une assemblée, d'une société, d'un service administratif. Bien que, dans les dictionnaires, "secrétaire" soit toujours du genre masculin jusqu'à la fin du XIXe siècle, l'usage le faisait exceptionnellement accorder au féminin (14). Par ailleurs, on note déjà que le statut des secrétaires était loin d'être homogène : ne pas confondre par exemple le
secrétaire d'ambassadeur, domestique ou homme de maison de l'ambassadeur, et le secrétaire d'ambassade, ministre du prince qui l'a nommé (15). Le titre apparaît souvent plus prestigieux que les fonctions exercées. Ainsi "ce nom honorable peut être (abusivement) pris au lieu de clercs et de scribes" (16). Quand l'ironie s'en mêle, le terme de "secrétaire" devient l'arbre qui cache la forêt: les secrétaires de Saint-Innocent (du nom de la fontaine où ils s'installaient) étaient de "misérables scribes qui écrivaient des lettres pour les valets ou le peuple qui ne savaient pas écrire" (17). A chacun son secrétaire!

Dans la langue contemporaine, le contenu du mot "secrétaire" reste fonction du genre. Au masculin, c'est une charge qui qualifie (secrétaire d'ambassade, d'Etat, de rédaction...) et qui fonctionne avec sa propre hiérarchie (jusqu'au secrétaire de mairie). Au féminin, sens le plus commun, c'est une "employée capable d'assurer la rédaction du courrier, de répondre aux communications téléphoniques, etc. pour le compte d'un patron" (18). En réalité - toute secrétaire peut en témoigner - les fonctions sont multiples et indéfinies. Savoir taper à la machine est une condition distinctive nécessaire mais pas suffisante de l'exercice du métier. Au contraire, la part de la compétence technique spécifique est d'autant plus forte que l'on descend dans la hiérarchie des qualifications et que l'on s'approche des pools de sténodactylos (19). Le terme de secrétaire est devenu polysémique et cache la multiplicité des situations depuis la secrétaire rédactrice, tête pensante, femme-orchestre, assistante, gestionnaire... jusqu'à la plus modeste exkutante confondu avec les meubles. "Secrétaire" relève finalement de l'étiquette qui permet de s'identifier à une image de marque et ainsi de se distinguer de la foule des bureaux; distinction que revendique autant le patron qui veut sa secrétaire que l'employée qui se nomme "secrétaire".

L'autre mot-clé qui définit notre objet est celui de bureau. D'abord "grosse étoffe faite de laine, plus fort que la bure", bureau
désigne ensuite "l'espèce de petit pupitre couvert de bure verte que les Présidents ont devant eux...", puis "la table garnie de quelques tiroirs ou tablettes" pour mettre les papiers (sens particulier où bureau et secrétaire se confondent) et enfin, "les lieux où se traitent les affaires. où se font les paiements, etc." (20). Dès le XVIIIe siècle, l'éventail des termes qui désignaient le travail de bureau présente une image très diversifiée de la "bureaucratie" (21) d'Ancien Régime. Ce qui deviendra une véritable institution de la société moderne désignait aussi un mode plus informel de diffuser les informations : "on dit figurément, savoir le vent du bureau, connaître l'air du bureau, pour dire connaître ou pressentir le sentiment des juges qui ont commencé de travailler à une affaire" (22). Alors que les définitions du mot bureau ne se réfèrent pas à un genre en particulier - elles sont neutres -, on note un glissement péjoratif avec l'expression "bureau d'adresse": "lieu où on va donner et prendre des avis pour les choses dont on a besoin. On appelle bureau d'adresse, une femme qui sait beaucoup de nouvelles et qui les va débiter çà et là, une "gasette" (23).

* * *

L'analyse statistique que nous ne pouvons développer ici (24) montre que l'action des femmes dans le salariat de bureau résulte, d'une part, d'un transfert de la main-d'œuvre féminine des secteurs de production vers les secteurs de service, soit pour occuper des postes laissés vacants par les hommes (désaffection qui s'explique surtout par la faiblesse ou la stagnation des salaires), soit pour entrer dans des métiers neufs comme ceux de téléphonistes, de dactylos ou de mécanographes. La féminisation résulte d'autre part de la professionnalisation d'un travail féminin traditionnel. Les filles, épouses, secrétaires de leur père et de leur époux deviennent,
quelques générations plus tard, dans le modèle de l'économie moderne, des salariées d'entreprises, de sociétés ou d'administrations. Dans ce cas, c'est le travail fantôme qui devient visible par l'effet du salariat (25).

La féminisation des bureaux doit être également appréhendée dans le contexte culturel et social au tournant du siècle. La nouvelle catégorie des femmes en "cols blancs" ou "roses" (26) est née, à la fois de l'expansion administrative et de la scolarisation généralisée des filles.

Les bureaux ont accueilli des femmes de toutes origines sociales, venant aussi bien de milieux déclassés par la crise (artisanat et petit commerce), que touchés par la chute de la rente ou la modicité des salaires, en particulier chez les fonctionnaires et agents de l'État, ou bien d'origine plus populaire et qui désertaient l'usine et le service domestique dont les images et le statut étaient particulièrement peu attractifs. La chute générale des revenus des milieux de la moyenne et petite bourgeoisie réduisait les possibilités de mariage pour les filles, une dot ne pouvant plus leur être assurée: leur entrée dans le travail salarié s'imposa donc comme une nécessité, soit pour leur permettre de se constituer un pécule en attendant le mariage, soit aussi pour assurer leur propre subsistance, le célibat, prolongé ou définitif n'étant alors pas à exclure. L'endogamie fréquente entre employés rendait aussi nécessaire le travail de la femme en raison de la modicité des salaires masculins. Tous ces faits convergents vers l'inéluctabilité du travail féminin n'en empêchaient pas moins les discours sur la femme au foyer.

Fixons brièvement la chronologie et les étapes de l'entrée des femmes dans les bureaux. On sait que le seul débouché offert aux femmes les plus diplômées du milieu jusqu'à la fin du XIXe siècle était l'enseignement. La coïncidence entre ce seul choix professionnel et l'image de la femme, "institutrice naturelle" n'était pas fortuite.
Soigneusement cultivée par les penseurs sociaux — y compris les plus hostiles au travail féminin — cette image intégrée par la plupart des femmes fit longtemps écran à leur accès à d'autres professions. En dépit de la faiblesse des salaires, les femmes diplômées visaient donc d'abord un poste d'institutrice. Leur nombre dépassa vite les possibilités offertes et les candidates refoulées constituèrent alors un réservoir de main-d'œuvre instruite, prête à se rabattre sur d'autres emplois moins qualifiés s'il s'en présentait. Les Postes, qui employaient des femmes dans de nombreuses petites recettes depuis la Restauration, et surtout le Second Empire, période d'intense développement du service postal, leur offrit de nouveaux emplois après l'annexion du Télégraphe (1878), la création de la Caisse d'Épargne (1881), la reprise du réseau téléphonique (1889) et, bien plus tard (1921), la création des chèques postaux (27). Dans les années 1890, on décida l'accès des femmes aux guichets de grands bureaux de poste urbains où n'étaient employés jusqu'alors que des hommes. Cette "féminisation" toute relative déclencha une violente hostilité des agents masculins, entretenu par les journaux de la corporation et qui trouva l'assentiment de l'opinion publique. Les images "immorales" de la femme exposée aux regards concupiscents ou aux quolibets du public, semeuse de désordre dans un environnement masculin venaient renforcer la résistance générale au travail des femmes (28). L'appel à une main-d'œuvre féminine dans des secteurs nouveaux et la substitution de femmes aux hommes dans des emplois plus anciens devaient résoudre les difficultés dues à la crise du recrutement masculin et à son niveau qualitatif de plus en plus bas, en raison de la faiblesse des salaires. Bien que généralement plus instruites, les Dames-employées ne pouvaient qu'accepter, faute d'autres perspectives, des traitements et des possibilités de carrières inférieures à ceux des hommes — les commis — pour un concours de niveau égal et un travail identique (29). En 1896, les P.T.T. emploient 5 253 femmes, receveuses ou Dames-employées, 6 682 en 1899 et 25 200 en 1911. En une quinzaine d'années leur nombre a quintuplé et elles constituent alors 45 % de l'effectif du personnel non-ouvrier de cette administration (30).
Dans les nombreux guides du début du siècle édités à l'intention des chercheurs d'emplois des deux sexes, les P.T.T. figurent naturellement en bonne place pour les femmes (31). Les autres administrations publiques ne sont citées souvent que pour mémoire, tant les emplois féminins y sont réduits ; ce n'est que lorsque la machine à écrire s'est enfin imposée que de nouveaux postes ont été offerts aux femmes remplaçant peu à peu les expéditionnaires devenus non rentables (32). La véritable entrée des femmes dans l'administration n'a eu lieu qu'après la guerre de 1914.

Les jeunes filles et femmes en quête d'un emploi de bureau, telle que la fille d'artisan que Camille Rouyer met en scène dans son Guide (33), peuvent aussi se tourner vers les banques, en pleine expansion depuis le Second Empire. Le niveau requis pour les femmes y est faible (le Certificat d'Etudes suffit), le travail monotone, le salaire de début bas (3 F par jour), le promotion inexistante. Mais l'emploi, après une période probatoire, y est garanti ; le salaire, augmentant régulièrement, peut atteindre 2 400 F et une petite retraite (de 400 à 800 F) y est assurée (34). Pour l'obtenir, cependant, il faut la plupart du temps être fille, épouse ou soeur d'un agent déjà en place (condition obligatoire parfois) ou avoir l'apostille d'un personnage puissant. Nantie de ces avantages, il faut encore beaucoup de chance ou de patience pour faire partie, par exemple, au Comptoir d'Escompte, des quelques 150 femmes qui travaillent dans une salle entourée d'une verrière dépolie "afin qu'elles ne soient ni vues, ni distraites par personne". Le Crédit Lyonnais, à la même époque, emploie 80 à 100 femmes, réparties entre les services de la correspondance, de la dactylographie, des titres : 700 à 800 candidates se présentent chaque année pour les 80 à 100 nominations possibles.

Les services administratifs des Compagnies de Chemin de Fer et d'entreprises publiques s'ouvrent aussi peu à peu aux femmes. Le métropolitain, en 1899, reçoit les demandes de 3 000 postulantes pour 193 emplois à pourvoir !
Dans un marché du travail si restreint, les métiers traditionnellement féminins (mode, couture, lingerie) eux-mêmes atteints par la crise, les jeunes filles et femmes saisissent la "chance" nouvelle que représente la machine à écrire, le "sésame" des bureaux de maisons de commerce et, comme on l'a vu, de certaines administrations, peu à peu transformées par quelques innovations organisationnelles ou techniques. Innovations qui "e vont pas sans douleur pour les hornmes évincés. Chez Felix Potin (Maison de commerce à succursales multiples), "les employés après un certain nombre d'années de servage, étaient arrivés à gagner 5 ou 6 F par jour. On les renvoie sans plus de forme et on met à leur place des femmes qu'on paie 2 F par jour et qui produisent avec une machine le travail de trois hornmes" (35). Amertume des uns, sentiment d'exploitation des autres vont ainsi ensemble, sans pouvoir se donner la main, plus séparés que jamais par une logique qui échappe aux deux parties.

Quelles qu'aient été les difficultés et les désillusions pour un grand nombre de ces femmes (36), leur accès aux emplois de bureaux présente une image positive d'identité sociale et d'insertion dans la vie économique.

Le versant négatif de ce phénomène est celui de la ségrégation: c'est une évidence, plus le pourcentage de femmes dans un métier est élevé (d'où l'appellation de "métier féminin"), moins elles sont susceptibles de rentrer en concurrence avec les hornmes et réciproquement (37). Dans le cas des métiers de bureau, cette ségrégation se lit à l'horizontale: la féminisation varie en fonction de la qualification et du prestige, avec cette autre évidence que c'est toujours à la base de la pyramide que sont cantonnées les femmes. À la verticale, les carrières sont également très différenciées selon qu'elles sont suivies par une majorité d'hommes ou de femmes (38).
L'exemple de la fonction publique, où l'égalité est inscrite dans les textes, nous apparaît très significatif de cette ségrégation verticale. Selon l'enquête de Dardel et Schnapper (39), par suite de la féminisation de la moyenne fonction publique, la carrière des hommes est systématiquement favorisée. "A diplôme égal, les femmes accèdent moins nombreuses aux postes les plus élevés de la hiérarchie. La différence est encore plus accusée dans les administrations centrales, où règnent une compétition plus vive et une plus grande souplesse d'organisation et de carrière, que dans les services extérieurs" (40). Les banques offrent aussi un bel exemple de ces filières "réservées" : aux hommes l'exploitation, aux femmes l'administration (41).

* * *

On ne peut appréhender la féminisation sans mettre en évidence la manipulation de stéréotypes féminins, essentiellement celui de "nature féminine", pour les besoins de l'économie. La correspondance qui est établie entre les qualités féminines et certaines technologies est particulièrement révélatrice de cette manipulation. La machine à écrire en est l'exemple le plus typique. On pourrait citer aussi le téléphone et la plupart des appareils bureautiques. En termes économiques, le choix d'une technologie nouvelle répond à une "décision optimale" : il vise un équilibre entre le coût de la machine, les rendements escomptés et l'économie sur la main-d'œuvre. L'emploi d'une main-d'œuvre féminine, perçue comme une réserve où l'on puisse et que l'on renvoie si nécessaire, résulte essentiellement de ce calcul (42). Traditionnellement moins payées, les femmes apparaissaient au début de ce siècle et aujourd'hui encore comme la force de travail la plus apte à rentabiliser le capital investi dans ces nouvelles machines de bureau. Mais la rationalité économique ne
s'exprime pas de façon si abrupte (43). Elle doit justifier ses choix, tiraillée qu'elle est entre les pressions contradictoires : besoins d'économie financière et présence massive d'une main-d'œuvre féminine ; hostilité et lutte des hommes contre le partage du travail avec les femmes ; et images négatives du travail féminin.

C'est dans cette optique qu'il faut comprendre les propos, ressassés depuis l'apparition des machines à écrire, sur les dispositions naturelles des femmes pour toute forme de clavier (et plus généralement, pour les tâches monotones et répétitives) (44). En inversant ces codes, on découvre combien ils sont symboliques et se fondent sur des préjugés : la familiarité millénaire de la plume et de l'écrit ne prédisposait-elle pas les hommes plus que les femmes à s'approprier la machine à écrire ? Pourquoi le goût naturel des hommes pour la technique et la force de leurs doigts plus aptes à vaincre la résistance des touches (au temps des premières machines), pourquoi ces dons n'ont-ils pas pu prévaloir sur la dextérité des dactylos qui, en définitive, n'étaient pas toutes pianistes ?

Dans les années vingt cependant, quelques études scientifiques sur le travail de la dactylographie tendant à dégager les capacités requises pour la réussite dans cette profession, ne mettent en évidence aucune qualité spécifiquement liée au sexe. "C'est beaucoup plus d'après ses facultés intellectuelles (mémoire, compréhension des textes, connaissance de l'orthographe) qu'on orientera un candidat vers la carrière dactylographique plutôt que d'après des épreuves portant sur les fonctions motrices" (45).

Poser la question de la féminisation des bureaux revient donc à s'interroger sur les mécanismes culturels qui ont fait que les femmes, jusqu'alors exclues des métiers de bureaux, ont pu être intégrées au point de fixer dans ces fonctions, les images les plus stéréotypées du travail féminin.
Au cœur du débat sur l'entrée des femmes dans les bureaux, on peut reconnaître les arguments qui construisent la notion de qualification, telle qu'elle est aujourd'hui utilisée dans la sociologie du travail (46). En effet, quand on définit la division du travail en fonction des capacités individuelles et des nécessités techniques et économiques, on met en place du même coup des échelles de prestige qui reflètent un jugement social et qui s'expriment concrètement en hiérarchies et niveaux de revenus. Dans le travail de bureau, tel qu'il nous est restitué dans les textes de l'époque (47), ce que les intéressés estiment, ce n'est pas le degré de qualification au sens productif. L'employé est un "homme qui est attaché d'une manière permanente à un service d'administration publique ou privée, c'est-à-dire à la surveillance, au rangement, au placement, au transfert, à l'appréciation, au calcul des choses, au rapport de toute sorte entre les hommes". Cette définition met en évidence l'importance de la fonction sociale de l'employé "tout effacé et silencieux qu'il soit habituellement (...), à mi-chemin de tout et en tout. Il incarne la moyenne apparente de la population" (48). La valorisation du travail relèverait plutôt d'une identification à une personne morale supérieure - l'État - ou à "l'être social" - le service des citoyens ou des clients. Ce travail d'identification, où la plus grande proximité spatiale peut aller de pair avec le plus grand écart social - cas d'un gardien de bureau -, accorde l'aura du prestige et un certain pouvoir, mais au prix d'une soumission symbolique aux règles et aux contraintes.

Le rôle croissant de la bureaucratie et des services (administratifs, postaux, téléphoniques, bancaires...), dès la fin du 19e siècle, a peu à peu transformé la nature même du travail: suivant la logique de la division et de la spécialisation des tâches, il est devenu de plus en plus éclaté, formalisé, routinier, enfermé dans un monde clos, perdant souvent toute finalité aux yeux des exécutants. L'idée même de service est dévalorisée. La faiblesse de la plupart des salaires, imposée par des budgets sclérosés, sanctionne un travail perçu alors comme impéctif.
"L'empirisme de la vie sociale oblige toujours ses participants à résoudre d'une façon ou d'une autre les problèmes pratiques que celle-ci soulève ; mais il "e s'ensuit pas pour cela que le problème ait le même sens pour tout le monde, et que chacun l'analyse de la même façon ; c'est justement pour cela qu'il est un " problème" (49). Ainsi la crise du recrutement dans la fonction publique, à une époque d'extension de la bureaucratie, est perçue par les uns, du côté des hommes, comme la conséquence d'une déqualification du travail que traduit directement la stagnation des revenus, mais représente pour les autres, les femmes en quête d'un emploi et particulièrement un emploi stable, la chance à saisir.

Les représentations qui se mettent peu à peu en place pour résoudre cette contradiction, représentations qui sont aussi fondatrices de pratiques, ont été magistralement synthétisées dans une thèse de droit sur La femme et le fonctionnarisme, parue en 1906 (50). L'auteur, Paul Cambon, explique que l'emploi public traverse une crise de déqualification parce qu'il "effémine" ses employés. En effet, explique-t-il, ce travail ne requiert plus que soumission, souplesse, esprit de précision et de détail, autant de "qualités" attribuées à la femme (51). Par ailleurs, selon Cambon, le mouvement féministe a poussé les femmes à revendiquer l'égalité professionnelle : elles veulent partager les occupations des hommes, "vivre une vie d'homme". Bref, elles se masculinisent. Pour endiguer cette double maladie qui risque d'ébranler l'ordre social en perturbant les catégories masculines et féminines, Cambon justifie a posteriori (le phénomène apparaît fermement enclenché quand paraît sa thèse) la féminisation des bureaux et propose de reserver tous ces emplois aux femmes, à l'exception, évidemment, des postes de direction.

Heureuse coinncidence. Ou résolution de la contradiction, il se trouve que l'"âme féminine" et l'"âme fonctionnaire" sont identiques. Comme le remarque D. Bertinotti (53), il y a "coïncidence de l'image sociale de la femme et de l'image sociale du fonctionnaire
subalterne". Les qualités "naturelles" de la femme sont conformes à la qualification du travail de bureau. "La vie bureaucratique est une forme de vie intérieure. L'administration est, dans ce pays, ce que le ménage est à la famille". Autant pour l'homme les tâches d'exécution, de détails, répétitives sont contre "nature", autant la femme y trouve son épanouissement et s'y montre même supérieure à l'homme, comme les premières expériences le prouvent.

De tels discours, récurrents au tournant du siècle, se doivent aussi de convaincre le parti évincé qu'il gagnera au change. En fait, l'idéal proposé ne se réalise pas sans manifestations de la résistance masculine. L'argumentation consiste alors à sauvegarder l'image de force et de pouvoir dévolue à l'homme, par opposition à la faiblesse et à la soumission de la femme, en faisant miroiter un avenir meilleur dans des métiers qui requièrent qualités physiques et capacités à diriger. Un texte comme celui d'Emile Faguet illustre bien cette symbolique de la compensation: "Les femmes sont d'excellentes bureaucrates, un peu lents, mais ponctuels, dociles, exacts et minutieux. Elles remplaceraient très avantageusement ces employés de ministères... qui, robustes et vigoureux, font véritablement un métier de femme et qui seraient infiniment mieux, ne fût-ce que pour leur santé, à courir le pays comme conducteurs de travaux ou comme commisvoyageurs" (54).

Il est tout à fait caractéristique, dans ce raccourci des discours de l'époque, que la notion de "qualités innées" tienne lieu de qualification. Les sociologues (55) ont en effet montré que la valorisation de tout travail dépend étroitement de l'"acte éduqué", c'est-à-dire de l'apprentissage et du temps de formation. Ce critère était déjà fondamental dans l'apprentissage d'Ancien Régime et l'accès à la maîtrise. "La qualification correspond ainsi à la fois à un savoir et à un pouvoir. De toute évidence, plus le travail est le résultat d'une acquisition (institutionnelle et sociale), plus il apparaît qualifié ; plus il est l'effet de capacités que l'on peut
appeler naturelles, moins il est qualifié" (56). La formation accélérée de sténo-dactylographe proposée au début du siècle par les constructeurs et vendeurs de machines a écrire menaçait l'image de compétence de cette profession.

Conscientes de la dévalorisation de la profession par un apprentissage escamoté et une culture générale insuffisante, des femmes ont fondé la Chambre syndicale des sténodactylographes pour résister, mais en vain, à cette dépréciation.

Ainsi l'argument clé des dispositions naturelles de la femme pour le travail de bureau a justifié et continue de justifier leur recrutement et leur maintien dans des emplois dévalorisés et donc la faiblesse des salaires. La masculinité de l'emploi majore la qualification et le salaire ; la féminité de l'emploi inverse le rapport (57). On peut comprendre à travers ce schéma que l'idée même de concurrence est insoutenable. Seules les situations de dépendance-soumission et de ségrégation paraissent acceptables et sont effectivement réalisées.

Le stéréotype a longue vie et fonde encore nombre de discriminations. Par exemple, lors de tests d'embauche, le même critère "ne pas aimer taper à la machine" ou la même réaction "s'énerver devant son clavier" deviennent occasion de promotion pour un homme ("on va vous trouver autre chose") et motif d'exclusion pour une femme ("il faudra chercher du travail ailleurs"). En raison de son sexe, une femme est automatiquement envoyée à la machine, sans tenir compte de sa capacité à pouvoir faire autre chose (58). On retrouve les mêmes arguments. À la fois économiques et symboliques, pour justifier l'embauche préférentielle de femmes dans les centraux téléphoniques.

La féminisation des bureaux - pas plus que celle d'autres secteurs - ne répondait à un projet délibéré. Bien au contraire, elle
s'est mise en place dans des conditions de nécessité sociale et économique de la logique capitaliste qui s'opposaient aux représentations negatives du travail féminin, surtout celui des femmes mariées. Mais cette opposition s'est résolue dans la mesure où les femmes se sont majoritairement conformées, dans ces emplois, aux rôles qui leur sont traditionnellement assignés et au partage qui en découle.

Le modèle de la secrétaire paraît imprégné de façon emblématique l'ensemble des représentations du travail des femmes dans les bureaux. L'analyse de la relation d'attachement (59), avec sa valeur indissociablement professionnelle et affective, permet de comprendre comment les femmes se conforment au modèle de la féminité, à travers un ensemble complexe de relations, intermédiaire entre le consentement et la contrainte.

"C'est par des attentions souvent imperceptibles, autant que par des ordres que le patron assigne la secrétaire à son rôle et rend impossible que la relation s'objective dans un code (règlement)". Intuition, dévouement, gentillesse, discrétion, charme... sont les vertus indispensables pour servir la cause du patron et de l'entreprise. "La secrétaire, de son côté, adhère à cette définition... en proportion des bénéfices spécifiques qu'elle trouve à la féminité". L'imposition de cette image est le meilleur moyen de neutraliser toute menace de subversion. Autrement dit, comme le soutient avec pertinence Josiane Pinto, "l'attachement... est l'essence même de la compétence socialement conforme".

Imaginer que les femmes puissent travailler dans les bureaux un siècle avant leur véritable "intrusion" était proprement subversif. Quand on en trouve quelques-unes sous la Révolution, les hommes fulminent : "N'est-il pas contre le bon sens et les bonnes mœurs de voir dans plusieurs administrations et notamment dans l'Agence des armes portatives, des femmes qui pourraient être de bonnes mères de
familles et qui ne sont que de misérables commis aussi inutiles que nuisibles au bon ordre ?" (60).

Imaginer aujourd'hui que les hommes soient simples secrétaires, attachés, qui plus est. à une patronne; qu'ils investissent les pools de dactylos ou les centres de chèques postaux, le monde en serait renversé (61).

Pourtant l'inimaginable craint l'usure du temps : la révolution féminine des bureaux a bien eu lieu. Mais une modification des rôles dans la division du travail ne doit pas faire illusion sur la permanence de certaines fonctions. Que le regard de Balzac sur l'employé du milieu du 19e siècle (62) puisse être traduit au féminin presque terme à terme, dans le langage d'une psychologue en 1981 (63) - couple, attachement, discrétion. compensations - peut suggérer que, quel que soit le personnage du théâtre bureaucratique (64), la mise en scène obéit aux mêmes règles. C'est la fonction du travail de bureau, et non l'acteur, qui est spécifique.

Cette interprétation n'exclut nullement les changements de décor, d'accessoires, de costumes qui accompagnent les personnages masculins ou féminins. Le pouvoir des hommes qui s'exprime dans les hiérarchies, les revenus et les carrières, ne s'en trouve pas non plus ébranlé, au contraire (65).

Au-delà des figures multiformes, mouvantes, contradictoires de la division du travail, surgit la question sur l'acharnement ou le besoin des sociétés à penser la différence. à théoriser sur la nature féminine et à imposer, à l'un et l'autre sexe, des modèles qui constituent et structurent pratiques et représentations. "Cette construction, qui lutte contre la menace de l'indifférenciation qui met en danger toute organisation sociale, est incessante et plastique" (66).
Les modèles traditionnels de la division des rôles ont été mis à l'épreuve par la mise en place d'une organisation sociale de plus en plus orientée vers la production industrielle de masse et la multiplication des services collectifs, comme le voyaient avec effroi Le Play (67) et ses disciples, dès le premier tiers du XIXe siècle. Crainte entretenu tout au long du siècle: "Il n'y a plus d'hommes ni de femmes" seulement "des unités de production" écrivait en 1905 Madame Daniel Lesueur (68) ; crainte que l'on retrouve aujourd'hui de manière inattendue chez l'Illitch (69).

L'inéluctabilité du mouvement, l'impossible retour en arrière ont provoqué des réajustements des discours et des représentations de la division des rôles intégrant peu à peu les nécessités - et les réalités - économiques. C'est ainsi que le travail des femmes, s'imposant dans la vie concrète, s'est imposé dans les esprits. En France, 66,5 % des femmes de 25 à 54 ans travaillent aujourd'hui (dont les 3/4 dans le secteur tertiaire. I.N.S.E.E., 1985) contre 44,6 % en 1968 et 53,1 % en 1974. Cette progression s'est faite en dépit du sur-chômage qui les frappe depuis la crise.

Nous avons tenté de montrer comment s'est réalisée la féminisation des emplois de bureau et quelles nouvelles représentations du travail féminin elle a générées, notamment avec la figure emblématique de la secrétaire. Cette intégration n'a pas toutefois remis fondamentalement en cause la hiérarchie des sexes dans ce secteur professionnel. Pourtant des verrous sautent : des carrières, des formations jusqu'là interdites aux femmes, s'ouvrent à elles. Des déblocages psychologiques libèrent peu à peu les femmes du carcan de la fameuse "nature féminine". Mais slagit-il là de l'amorce d'un mouvement qui va progresser? Ou bien est-on prvenu à une sorte de seuil dans les transformations possibles de la hiérarchie des sexes ?

La situation actuelle est riche de contradictions : d'une part le pouvoir politique est toujours et de manière quasi absolue entre les mains des hommes, mais par ailleurs apparaissent sur d'autres scènes
des formes de partage des fonctions (dans la famille notamment) et une tendance à l'affaiblissement des différences dans les apparences, en particulier chez les jeunes (70). Que cachent, que recèlent pour l'avenir ces modifications dans nos sociétés qui se veulent à la fois libertaires et conflictuelles (71) et qui privilégient l'individu au détriment du groupe ? La répartition des pouvoirs en sera-t-elle modifiée ? Nous posons ici simplement la question.

Cécile DAUPHIN - Pierrette PEZERAT
C.R.H.-E.H.E.S.S.
Notes

4. Histoire de la France urbaine, t. 4, ch. de Y. LEQUIN sur le "renouvellement des classes moyennes".
8. Bibliographie succincte de ces articles de la grande presse dont les titres à eux seuls nous paraissent significatifs:
"Où en est la cuisine bureautique ?", La Revue d'en face, automme 1982.
"Que vont devenir les secrétaires ?", Marie-France, oct. 1983.
"Comment garder votre secrétaire", L'Expansion, 4-17 déc. 1981.
"Discrete, soignée, compétente, disponible, c'est le portrait-type de la secrétaire 1979", Le Matin, 7 février 1979.
"Le pouvoir des secrétaires", Le point, 2 fév. 1981.
"Le bonheur des secrétaires passe-t-il vraiment par ces supermachines à traitement de texte ?", Femme pratique magazine, oct. 1979.
"La révolte des secrétaires". Marie-Claire, mai 1981.


11. On ne compte qu'un seul projet de recherche sur les secrétaires parmi les 130 proposés au C.N.R.S. en 1984, dans le cadre d'une Action Thématique Programmée. Ce projet a d'ailleurs été retenu.

12. Cette communication s'inspire largement de ce travail.


14. Par exemple, Mme de Sévigné écrit (à Mme de Grignan, 14 février 1680, Lettres inédites, Ed. Capmas, t. II, p. 98) : "Je mets dans notre troupe Mme de Janet et la secrétaire". Il s'agit de Mlle de Montgobert, qui écrivait souvent pour Mme de Grignan (cité par le Littre, éd. de 1974).

15. JAUBERT, Dictionnaire raisonné des arts et des métiers, 1773.

16. FURETIERE, 1690.

17. Ibid.


20. FURETIERE.


Une liste des métiers de bureau a été dressée par J.-C. PERROT, dans Genèse d'une ville moderne, Caen au XVIIIe siècle, Mouton, Paris, La Haye, 1975.

22. FURETIERE.

23. Ibid.


25. Cf. la publicité de la Faculté féminine de sténodactylographie et de commerce, reproduite dans le Livre des candidats et candidates aux emplois administratifs pour 1912, édité par l'Ecole du fonctionnaire : "La connaissance de la sténographie et de la dactylographie est (...) indispensable aux dames et jeunes filles qui veulent gagner leur vie dans les bureaux. Ajoutons que de nombreuses jeunes filles et jeunes femmes de situation aisée apprennent la sténo et la dactylographie pour servir de secrétaires à leur père ou à leur mari".


L'auteur développe longuement le récit de cette période. Elle montre comment les arguments moraux et natalistes développés contre le travail des femmes voisinent avec les accusations de la concurrence déloyale des femmes.


\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Année} & \text{Commis} & \text{Dames-employées} & \% \text{du traitement des Dames-}\text{employées} \\
\hline
1883 & 2 700 & 1 800 & 66 \% \\
1907 & 3 300 & 2 200 & 66 \% \\
1914 & 3 700 & 2 500 & 68 \% \\
1919 & 9 000 & 7 900 & 80 \% \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

31. La disparité des possibilités ouvertes aux hommes et aux femmes se mesure à la place qu'elles occupent dans le Livre des candidates et candidats aux emplois administratifs pour 1912, édité par l'Ecole des Fonctionnaires : 600 pages sont consacrées aux carrières masculines et 53 aux carrières féminines.


34. Le niveau de salaire après quelques années est un peu plus élevé que celui des postières et supérieur à celui des institutrices dont le traitement moyen se situe entre 900 et 1 000 F en 1896.

35. Article de La Voix du peuple, 10 février 1901.

36. Pour les témoignages sur ces déceptions, voir par exemple le Comte d'Haussonville, qui parle de femmes non-classées (Salaires et misères des femmes, Paris, 1900). Cf. également C. ROUYER, Les chemins de la vie. La femme dans l'administration, Tours, Mame, s.d.

37. D'après E. GROSS ("Plus ça change ... ?", The sexual Structures of occupations over time, Social Problems, 16, Fall 1968, pp. 198-208) et dans la société américaine, la ségrégation des sexes dans la vie professionnelle est plus importante que la ségrégation raciale : bien que les secteurs d'activité féminine aient changé,
cet indice est resté constant depuis le début de ce siècle. E. GROSS conclut que lorsque les femmes accèdent à des métiers "masculins", la ségrégation augmente dans la mesure où les hommes les quittent. Mais quand les hommes accèdent à des métiers "féminins", non seulement les femmes ne les quittent pas, mais les hommes occupent alors les positions de contrôle. Le concept de ségrégation professionnelle a été particulièrement développé dans l'histoire de l'Amérique. Cf. l'article de L. TILLY ci-dessous.


40. Ibid., pp. 19, 53 et suivantes.


42. Dans d'autres contextes, c'est la main-d'œuvre immigrée qui répond à ces exigences, ou celle employée sur place dans les pays du Tiers-Monde. Dans ce cas, l'économie de profit ne s'embarrasse pas de discours sur les capacités particulières de ces travailleurs bon marché. Sur l'utilisation des femmes comme main-d'œuvre à bas prix, cf. K. BLUNDE, Le travail et la Vertu, Paris, Payot, 1982, pp. 178 et suivantes.

43. Encore que de nombreux patrons affirment sans ambages préférer le travail des femmes parce qu'elles coûtent moins cher. La théorie économique elle-même, avec Adam Smith, a intégré cette donnée comme allant de soi.

44. Ce consensus soudain nous apparaît d'autant plus suspect que, quelques décennies plus tôt, l'opposition à l'entrée des femmes dans les bureaux était l'attitude la plus répandue. Ainsi, Alexandre Dumas, qui fut lui-même secrétaire avant de devenir auteur dramatique, leur promettait solennellement "que si elles
mettaient le pied dans un bureau, elles perdraient toute féminité" (cité par E. SULLEROT, La femme dans le monde moderne, 1970. p. 147.


49. P. NAVILLE, op.cit.


51. L'article Femme dans la Grande encyclopédie du 19e siècle est la référence "scientifique" de l'idée de nature féminine à cette époque.

52. On peut être frappé par ailleurs des références "féminines" qui ponctuent le portrait que Balzac fait du secrétaire en 1841 (dans Physiologie de l'employé, Paris, Aubert, 1841) : "Il est dans le ménage ministériel ce qu'est l'aide de camp chez le général. Son rôle est l'attachement... J'ai toujours plaint les secrétaires particuliers autant que je plains les femmes et le papier blanc : ils souffrent tout... Comme la femme chaste, ils doivent n'avoir de talent qu'en secret, et pour leurs ministres s'ils ont du talent en public, ils sont perdus...".

53. D. BERTINOTTI, op.cit., p. 76.
54. Dans la Revue bleue, 5 mars 1904 : "les métiers féminins". La même argumentation se retrouve chez J.H. HAENDEL, Ce que doit être le sténo-dactylographe, Ravisse éd., 1913 et beaucoup d'autres.


56. P. NAVILLE, op.cit.

57. "Dans l'accroissement de la part des femmes s'exprime tout le devenir d'une profession et, en particulier, la dévaluation absolue ou relative...", P. BOURDIEU, La discipline, Paris, éd. de Minuit, 1979, p. 120.


59. Nous nous référons ici à la thèse de J. PINTO-GUICHOT, op.cit. Cf. aussi ses articles dans Pénélope, op.cit.: "La secrétaire : attachée ou employée ?" et "De la sténodactylo à la secrétaire... La transformation des représentations sociales de la femme dans les emplois de bureau".

60. FEVELAT, La chasse aux intrigants aux jupons, 3 Fructidor an III.

61. Selon une enquête de l'ADIA (travail temporaire) auprès de chefs d'entreprises de huit pays européens, interrogés sur La secrétaire idéale, 1982, la personne remplissant ces fonctions ne pouvait être un homme pour la plupart d'entre eux (l'échantillon comporte un certain nombre de femmes patrons). Les raisons évoquées: "L'atmosphère 'féminine' ferait défaut", manque d'aisance pour dicter ou faire faire une course, gêne de le prier de faire un café ;n'y ont pas pensé ; l'occasion ne s'est pas présentée; crainte de l'impression vers l'extérieur...

62. La physiologie de l'employé, op.cit.

63. Thèse de J. PINTO-GUICHOT, op.cit.
64. Pris ici dans le sens étymologique, persona: masque de théâtre.

65. L’enquête de DARDEL et SCHNAPPER, op.cit., montre bien que le statut et la carrière des hommes tirent bénéfice de la présence des femmes dans leurs rangs.


67. F. LE PLAY (1806-1882), sociologue qui se voulait réformateur et s’attacha dans une œuvre imposante à dénoncer "l’ébranlement" des sociétés occidentales lancées dans la recherche unique du bien-être.

68. in L’évolution feminine, cité par Drumont dans la préface de l’ouvrage de C. Rouyer, op.cit.

69. I. ILLITCH, "Le genre vernaculaire, Le Seuil.


WOMEN AND MEN IN A POTTERY INDUSTRY - CONSTANCY DESPITE CHANGE IN WORK RELATIONS DURING ONE HUNDRED YEARS.
The case of Gustavsberg, Sweden.

Ulla Wikander, Uppsala university, Sweden.

If there ever was a widespread, more "natural" and functional sexual division of labour earlier in history or if there was less of sexual division of labour when the family was a work unit or if the sexual division of labour has been more or less a constant fact in history, with only a changing content, is one of the main questions dealt with by scholars of women's history. Many of the earlier generalisations regarding this problem have been discussed and rejected as being too simplistic.

The tendencies towards more or less segregation between men and women at work seem to be different in different historical periods and can be contradictory as regards different kind of industries and occupations in a given period, between different regions and so forth.'

However, some degree of gender segregation can always be discerned in the general social division of labour. Women's status in a given period and/or society has probably vague or contradictory connections with that society's outspoken ideology about its own progressiveness, radicalismetc. Ordinaryhistoricalperiodization has been shown irrelevant when applied to women's conditions.²

The period we call industrialism has changed a lot of human living patterns and habits. To what extent has it changed woman's position in relation to man's? A consensus seem to exist among women's historians on the fact that women have been subordinate in relation to men and still are - but to what extent and

---


2 Kelly (1984)
depending on what? Are maybe the nuances in the changes as important as the subordinate position? Is there a tendency towards equality or not? Is the work situation, the so-called gender or sexual division of labour and/or the evaluation of work in money and status among the important factors that explain the ongoing subordination?

1 think the last question is answered in the affirmative by historians dealing with women's working lives, although we might differ as to the stress we want to give each factor as well as what other factors we want to advance in order not to be only economistic. A strict hierarchization of the factors that influence the situation can also often turn into such an academic problem that the clarifying discussion is disturbed.

In industrial society the division of labour and its consequences - the division of resources and thus power - will remain in focus of interest and research as long as resources and power are unequally distributed.

As a contribution to the debate on the sexual division of labour during industrialism and to the related debate on the evolution of women's work in relation to technological change, I will present a case study of work in a big pottery in Sweden during the last hundred years.1 I want to develop the argument that relations between work done by women and work done by men in this specific factory have not changed to any great extent during this period.

My aim is thus to show a constancy despite change, that is a constancy in the relation despite an almost total change of technology and work organisation. The production process and thus the work done is indeed different today from a hundred years ago, but that has not meant any significant change in the relative characteristics of men's and women's work.

---

1 A book in Swedish about the factory is forthcoming during 1988.
But I want to attempt to put nuances to this square statement by
pointing out work situations in which this tendency of constancy
despite change is not totally valid, but broken up for longer or
shorter periods. I will try to give you the particular reasons for
such deviations from the pattern of constancy despite change.

As to the constancy itself, I admit already at this stage, that
I will not find the reasons for it directly in my material from
the pottery. Nonetheless, I hope to be able to argue that such a
constancy actually has been prevalent and that the gender segrega-
tion of work today can be at least as strict as it was at the turn
of the century. I am presenting an example of the functioning of
the gender system, but I will not prove that such a system exists.
Its existence is a premiss of my investigation.

My concern is with productive work and its change within the
factory and I will not describe nor relate that to the homework
women have had to do. The conditions and relations in waged "work
can also be seen as acting to reproduce occupational segregation
by sex over time"⁴, as Cynthia Cockburn has expressed it, and are
thus as important in upholding an asymmetric gender relation as
the work conditions at home and the rearing of children. Of course
there is an interdependence between the paid and unpaid work, but
I have chosen to look here solely at work from the angle of the
shopfloor.

The Gustavsberg pottery, a short background

The Swedish pottery industry differs considerably from the
English. Small factories have been almost nonexistent and the
market dominated by two or three big factories. They have produced
mainly for the home market and have had to compete on this market
with cheaper imports from abroad since after the First World War.
Clay as well as coal were imported to the 1930's; nowadays clay
is still imported.

---

⁴ Cockburn, (1985)
The pottery of Gustavsberg was founded in 1825 as the second pottery in Sweden. In 1850 the factory had 186 workers; 25 per cent of these were women, in 1880 it had 611 workers; 38 per cent women. In 1890 Gustavsberg had 820 workers, and of these 41 per cent were women. This was approximately the numbers and relations for almost fifty years to follow. In the 1960's women worked more part-time and the real relations in time and thus work between men and women become more difficult to ascertain.

The pottery is situated on a fairly large island in the archipelago of Stockholm. Despite its proximity to the capital, Gustavsberg was a rather isolated village up to the 1940's, when bridges and buses made communications with Stockholm easier and more frequent than the earlier steamers ever could. Before that Gustavsberg had been a one-factory-village, with a strong patriarchal structure. The family owning the factory also owned all the houses in the village and could control the labouring people through this, as through its influence on local politics and ownership of the infrastructure such as shops, ships, streets, drainage, electricity and water system.

Not until 1919 could a labour union be started, which was rather late even in a Swedish perspective. Thus begun the change towards "modern times", but that change did not really take off until 1937 when the owner, the Odelberg family, sold the pottery to the Cooperative Organisation (Kooperativa Förbundet) in Sweden. Capital became available and rationalization on a large scale was initiated.

The factory has gone through two important periods of expansion, from 1875 to the turn of the century, when it almost doubled the number of its workers as well as its sales, and from 1940 to the mid-50's when its sales rose tenfold and its workers augmented with a third of its former number up to 1159 workers in 1955. Through rationalizations in the 1930's and 40's a diversification of production was carried out from general earthenware and bone china as tableware to an addition of sanitary ware and bathroom equipment.
deal only with the mass-production of tableware, not with sanitary goods nor with the art products that always have been made at the factory. The difficulty of making the distinction from art products lays in the fact that what today is considered the way of producing art goods was the way all wares were produced a hundred years ago. Still today some of the parts of tableware, like coffee-pots and jugs, have to be made in the same way as fifty years ago. The forming and decoration of ordinary saucers and cups, on the contrary, have totally changed during the century, and particularly rapidly during the last twenty years and is now done in very automatized ways. It is the process leading to this 1 focus on.

Production and gender relations before the First World War.

The productive work in the pottery was — and still partly is — done at five locally separated areas and as different work processes, which called for different skills and work tools/-machinery. The localities were the slip-house, the workshops for the making (throwing, turning, casting etc), the ovens, the rooms for decoration and the warehouses/the packhouse.

Men always dominated in the slip-house and the ovens. In the workshops women always have been present but not dominating in numbers until lately. The same can be said about the warehouses and the packhouse. The rooms for decoration have traditionally been nominally dominated by women.

According to Jacqueline Sarsby, the segregation between men and women was far from total in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the pottery industry in England. In those days many women could possess "independent skills and were not female attendants".5

Gustavsberg imported its production methods from England in the 1830’s and 40’s. In 1838 twelve skilled workers and one foreman

5 Sarsby (1985)p 75
from the Potteries in England were contracted to work in Gustavsberg. Among those were two women, who were both hired to do "transferring", which was to transfer a printed decoration from paper onto the ware. The male immigrant workers had other occupations. To do "transferring" was to be an attendant to a male printer. No woman of "independent skills" was coming from abroad to Gustavsberg. Skilled male workers were coming from countries like Germany and France as well as from England during the nineteenth century.

The archival materials indicate a strict sexual division of labour in Gustavsberg, among all kind of workers. Men were "saucer or sagger makers", "throwers", "turners" or "glost & biscuit fire men", they were executing "slip making, printing or pressing". Women were mostly attendants or "paintresses".

A few words should be said here about what I intend to describe with the terms "independent skills" and "attendant". Firstly - an "attendant" often had to be skilled, trained, but she (more seldom he) was always secondary in the work process in question; not doing the main work but helping out doing it. She could not do it all by herself in any situation, whereas the opposite was possible for the person being assisted. Secondly - a person with "independent skills" knew the whole work-process, but in practice often had to concentrate on the most skill-demanding parts in order to ration his/her skills and thus raise productivity and the profit for the factory-owner. These definitions are not rigid in any sense but I have found them useful.

In Gustavsberg, the 1880's brought the introduction of machines to do the work of the thrower at his wheel. It led to certain alterations in the sexual division of labour in the workshops.

The machines, called jiggers (for hollow ware) and jolleys (for flat ware and small hollow ware such as bowls) were power-operated mechanical throwing and pressing machines to produce all kinds of
simple circular ware. The work of six adult men could thus be done by one man and one boy;\(^6\) or by one woman and one boy.

In England, the introduction of the new machinery had met with resistance, but the male throwers had been faced with the fact that women could be employed to do the work on the machines unless they accepted it.\(^7\) Both in England and at Gustavsberg in Sweden, the introduction of machinery in the production process increased the number of women employed. We have seen that also the proportion of women to men rose hastily during the years of expansion in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Considering the relatively limited labour market in Gustavsberg, the increased hiring of women met with no opposition from men. The individual man did not face unemployment because of the factory's expansion and men kept their positions as being better paid than women.

A few of the newly recruited women in the workshops could become workers at jolleys or jiggers, but the majority of women were needed to take care of the finishing of the ware, a procedure that had not been simplified and demanded more manual workers when the productivity rose. Women who were accepted as jiggerers or - mostly - as jolliers had the same piece-rates as men, but usually they did not work with exactly the same ware and earned somewhat less. During the 1890's some women were clearly earning good money in this way, double or triple the usual "woman's pay". At the same time, however, the division of labour in the workshops became more pronounced and women more and more the sex which did the finishing jobs, such as sponging, fettling, sticking-up and handling, which earlier had been done by children or elderly, both men and women. These finishing jobs were paid less than the jobs as jiggerer or jollier.

Women were taken in as workers on the jolleys and jiggers in the workshops - thus upsetting the earlier strict sexual division of labour - but they did not stay on as such. No woman was trained

\(^6\) Sandeman (1901) p 125, Thomas (1971) p 56

\(^7\) Burchill & Ross (1977) p 154, Whipp, p 18
to that kind of work after the turn of the century. The jobs of an attendant character were being divided more after gender lines than before and given to women.

In the early twentieth century another mode of production — casting — made its revolutionary entrance in the workshops. Earlier the ware that could not be made on the thrower's wheel or on a jolley or jigger had been made by pressing by hand. The presser applied clay on or into a plaster mould so that the clay received the form of the mould. The presser made ware that was not round or for other reasons not suitable for machine work or the potter's wheel.

Casting was to use clay in a liquid state, slip, and pour it into a mould of plaster, which usually consisted of several parts tied together. By capillary attraction a film of clay formed on the plaster. When a sufficiently thick coating had been formed, the worker poured out the superfluous slip and put the mould to dry. After drying the ware was taken out of the mould for later burning.8

The technical manager of the factory made the comment, that the new method demanded "less skilled workers". It took approximately half a year to learn to master casting. It was as heavy and as dirty a job as working at a jigger or jolley. Casting did not have a high status in the workshops when it was introduced. The workers at jollies and jiggers considered themselves the true followers of the throwers. From the very introduction of this new technique, both men and women were employed at casting. Within casting there existed a division of labour, so that women made the smaller ware and men the bigger. Women had somewhat lower wages than men, but much better than as attendants. Casters as well as jiggerers and jolliers of both sexes used boys from the age of 12 to 17 as personal attendants, "errand-boys".

In the decoration rooms for painting the majority of painters were women, but the most skilled or at least those with the best pay

---

8 Sandeman (1901) p 108 & pp 115-116
were men. According to an oral tradition in the factory, some women were as skilled as men in painting. The most skilled painters were called free-hand-painters. They decorated unique or almost unique goods without rigid models to follow. Some of them were artists in their own right. The female free-hand painters had only around 60 per cent or less of the wage per month that their male colleagues had.

Most of the painting done, however, involved repeating a pattern several times in series and such painting was done by women. But all paintwork must be categorized as independent skilled work. It required years of training and was a craftwork. An ordinary female painter earned a third of what a male free-hand painter earned, but despite its rather low pay it was considered the "best" work for women in the factory, because it was cleaner and the milieu more "decent" than in the workshops. It was also more interesting because it involved more skills than most other jobs for women.

The other mode of decoration was printing. Before 1910 the work was done by teams, each consisting of one printer and three female attendants, two adults and one girl. The printer worked at the printing press, producing a paper with a decoration. The women cut out the decoration, transferred it with the help of soapwater and brushes to the ware and washed the decorated ware in the end. They were skilled attendants. The team worked tightly together and earned a common piece-rate. The girl got a small steady sum from the earning and the rest was divided between the adults so that the man got 50 per cent of the sum and each woman got 25 per cent.

The basis material for the printing was engraved copper-plates. In 1880 the factory had four male engravers. That engraving on copper "requires a considerable amount of technical training" and "artistic feeling for arrangement and design" is stated in a book on the production process from 1901, found in the library of Gustavsberg.⁹

⁹ Sandeman (1901) p 291
Between 1880 and 1890 several women were taken in as engravers and worked side by side with men. In 1890 four men and three women worked full-time as engravers. By 1900 only one of the female engravers remained and there were five men at that time. This woman stayed on into the 1910’s, but she was the last female engraver until 1980. The male engravers were fairly well paid. The women earned half of the men's wage as engravers. Men and women were probably doing the same kind of work, but in the books of design, which the engravers kept, there are no designs made by women.

In summary it can be said, that between 1880 and the First World War, women - as well as men - got new occupations in Gustavsberg. For some women it meant that they got a chance to get away from the prevailing jobs as attendants to men and to learn more skills than earlier. But that did not include the majority of women, who continued to do attendant work, finishing products made by men and often having their pay calculated in relation to men’s pay, when working in teams together. Women in teams usually earned 30 to 50 per cent of men’s income.

My explanations to the augmented but later mostly discontinued possibilities for women to get independent skilled work and sometimes also better paid work during the decades around 1900 are for this special factory the following if we consider the reasons factory management might have had:

In the case of jollers and jiggers, the management gave the women the possibilities because (1) the new machinery had no previous gender-character, (2) the wish to show the male workers that they had no possibility to hinder introduction of man-saving machines, (3) the work on the machines was less skilled than the former work as a thrower. The training to become a good jiggerer was one year or less, but a good thrower had an apprenticeship period of four to seven years. The new training could be done without a formal apprenticeship.

In the case of engraving, (1) the job must, with the then prevailing norms about "women’s work", have seemed particularly
suited to women as it involved similar kind of work as painting and it was tidy. (2) Women got considerably less paid than men.

In the case of casting, (1) the work needed less skill than the former as presser and had no formal or traditional apprenticeship period, (2) it had a lower status than other work for men in the workshops and it had no definite gender-character in the beginning, (3) a certain unwillingness on the part of pressers to take the new job can be presumed and thus a reason for management to show that they could have their will, (4) the work could be separated in work with smaller and larger goods, so that a kind of sexual division could be upheld within the occupation, thus the male workers did not object strongly.

For all the jobs it is valid to point out that the factory was in an expansive period and needed more workers badly. Women as an untapped resource also for more demanding jobs had to be used.

Women did not remain in engraving or in work at jolleys and jiggers. On the contrary, they remained in the casting and are still there today. Casting can be seen as the only gender-integrated occupation on the shop floor in Gustavsberg in the 1980's.

There is a lack of source material to show clearly why the outcome of the attempt to let women work as engravers came to an end. But the most probable indices point to a resistance on the part of the male engravers. In the year of 1900 two new male apprentices were accepted at the workshop and after that no woman started in that workplace although some stayed on for a while. It must have been a threat to the men that women were considerably less paid as engravers. It could mean a dangerous eroding of their claim for skill and its evaluation in money.

Also as makers of ware on the jolleys and jiggers, women were excluded gradually. The last woman stopped in 1904 after her silicosis had become too heavy for that kind of work. In those days the work in a pottery workshop was very unhealthy, but women worked there as attendants and as casters with as much risk as the
others to develop silicosis. There are no firm written evidences that could explain why women stopped working in the best paid jobs in the workshops, but it seems clear that when the expansion period of the factory was over and the production process stabilised, there was a pressure to get back to the "normal" situation of rather strict sex segregation in the factory. Women were used to being seen as attendants to men rather than as independent skilled workers. And additional reason might be that women in Gustavsberg had worked even as married but in the beginning of the new century the tendency to stay at home after marriage got stronger and training for a full year could be considered a loss both to the factory and to the worker.

The introduction of new machinery disturbed for a while the sexual division of labour, but it did not alter it. It can be stated, that work on jolleys and jiggers was compatible with women's physical strength and learning capabilities but still a work that women could not keep. It became - when fully introduced - one of the high status jobs in the pottery, it was well paid and also gave other fringe benefits as better housing and less controlled work hours.

At its introduction many special factors had influenced the situation. There were some transitional years when the more prestigious job as a thrower still was the highest in the workshops and machine workers were looked down upon by these. During these years, women were trained as jolliers and jiggerers. Later when the throwers were no longer around and the new machinery had taken over most of the production of ware in the workshops, women were not wanted any more. When it comes to casting, an occupation in which women remained, it must be said that it never got the same status as the work on jolleys and jiggers. The training time was shorter and it remained less prestigious.

About the decoration side of the production, which in pottery always has been considered a female domain, it can be stated that all of the artist-painters were men. They were often from abroad, had special work conditions and-monthly salaries. The so-talled
free-hand-painters were mainly men, also with a very good pay although on a piece-rate. Some free-hand-painters were women, but they never earned anything near the same as men. The majority of paintresses, in a job that indeed needed independent skills in those days, had almost as low wages as female attendants in other parts of the factory. In a traditional workplace for women, it seems hard to expect wages that evaluate properly the skills involved. When men acquired those similar skills, they were valued higher. In Gustavsberg, it was more possible for women in men's work to get good pay than as skilled in traditionally women's work. For a woman it was hard to get a man's work or if so, to keep it.

In other parts of the factory than workshops and decoration rooms, the traditional sexual division of labour lingered on or was further accentuated. An example; more women were taken in into the oven work, but only to "attend". They were taken in a process of further division of labour in the oven teams, to do some of the work men formerly did. As a matter of fact, the oven-men did not at first appreciate the "help" because it took lighter jobs away from them, leaving to them only the' heavy work. As a man's proportion of the team's earning was higher than a woman's, the more women a team contained the better wages could the men in that team earn. So the new female attendants in the work of "filling" - a quite skill-demanding occupation - were accepted because men benefitted economically from it.

Rationalization and gender work confusion in the automatization process up to the 1970's

The jolley and the jigger were machines but they were controlled by the worker, who decided the speed of the work as well as influenced the quality of the ware. There had been a continuous interaction between the machine and the worker who could put more or less pressure on a handle and smoothed the surface of the ware with a cloth or with his/her hand while forming. The process was not automatic in any sense. The machine was an extended tool, not a shaper and a regulator of the result.
Before I go on, I would like to introduce some terms beside the ones of "independent skills" and "attendant", to be able to categorize and differentiate between the new occupations that were the result of the introduction of more or less automatized machinery and from the new work organization from the late 1930's and onwards. I hold that there is a distinctive difference between doing a work in your "own work rhythm" and in "machine rhythm", where the former is preferable to the worker because of the control it gives and the variations in the structure of the workday it can provide. One's own work rhythm often equals skill and machine rhythm often equals monotony without skill.

However, there might be a difference between machine rhythm conditions as well. To work at a machine which you can stop at any time and which is only served by yourself is certainly better than working at a machine, the speed of which is controlled by somebody else and where a whole chain of work can be cut if the procedure is stopped. Much machine-work is of the later kind and such is also work at a conveyer belt, even if there does exist some small possibilities to alter the rhythm sitting at such a belt. So I will use the expressions "self-controlled machine rhythm" and its opposite "non-controllable machine rhythm", where self-controlled of course is considered better from the worker's point of view.

Let us look at work at jolleys and jiggers in those terms. The worker clearly decided his/her own work rhythm. Many workers augmented the rhythm in the morning, had a somewhat slower rhythm during the early afternoon but made a final speed-up so that they could finish the expected daily quota of goods almost an hour before the work-day ended. Everyone discovered his personal speed preference. The variations in rhythm during the day was a topic for endless discussions and comparisons. The errand-boy had to conform to the rhythm of the jollier or jiggerer. The female attendants to the men could do the finishing work manually in their own rather varied work rhythm as long as they kept up with the work volume per day decided by the makers.

To be an attendant was to follow somebody else's work rhythm, be that a person or a machine. The attendant to a person probably had
more room for variations in the work rhythm but at the same time could be the victim of rather harsh psychological pressures and outright work penalism if she did not work well enough in the view of the person being attended. A common piece-rate was often involved. Considering the many variations of dependence one could experience as an attendant, I am not going to judge if it was/is better to attend a person or a machine.

In the workshops, a different kind of forming was under development. In the 1920's a half-automatic cup machine was bought from England. It was a so-talled upright jolley, on which two cups beside each other were formed by two iron "arms" moving automatically up and down, not steered by the worker. The person working at this machine had to do the work of the errand-boy used to perform to assist the jollier; put the mould with clay in place for the forming and then take the mould with the ware away when the making was over. The cup machine was tried out for some time, with a woman as attendant, but soon taken out of production because it was considerably slower than the work performed with jolleys or jiggers.

This half-automatic cup machine was taken up for experiments now and then during the following decades and was always attended by a woman in those periods. The work can be characterized as performed in a self-controlled machine rhythm. In the mechanical workshop of the factory, the cup machine was improved from time to time, but not until the 1950's had it reached such a shape that it was used for production for any longer time. The work on this machine was considered woman's work as long as the jiggerer and jollier still commanded the most independent skills in the workshops.

In the 1940's conveyor belts were introduced. Women were put to work at them. They did their earlier jobs of finishing the ware but now bound to a non-controllable machine rhythm, instead of to a jollier's day rhythm.

The jiggers and jolleys were, for reasons of rationalization, linked to a new kind of machinery that took care of the drying and
hardening of the ware in its plaster mould. That machine was continuous and placed beside the jigger/jolley. Instead of having an errand-boy who had to adapt to the work rhythm of the maker, the maker himself now had to adjust to the non-controllable machine rhythm of the drying machine. He could no longer speed up at intervals as much as before, but he could slow down by not filling every shelf of the drying machine. Thus even a person of independent skills got trapped in a more monotonous rhythm from the 1940's onwards. Women as a group got more monotonous work situations than men with less possibilities for personal variations.

During the 1950's and 1960's more and more forming of goods was done on half-automatic machines, the construction of which was constantly being elaborated. This meant the gradual transfer of production to this kind of machines. Work as jolliers and jiggerers became scarce. Women had first been working at the half-automatized machines as long as more independent skilled work existed for men, but gradually men also got into the new less skilled work at the new machines. Otherwise, there would have been no work left for men in the workshops. For a period of twenty years, women and men worked at the half-automatic forming machines while the machines were developed more and more. The making of the ware seemed to become more of a gender-integrated process.

Painting did not change very much during this time, but the designs were simplified and longer series were produced. Artists and free-hand-painters were fewer. The jobs became even more dominated by women and still required independent skills.

Printing had been rationalized just before the First World War through the introduction of a continuous printing machine. The male printer's work was thus changed from demanding printing skills to demanding mechanical skills. The female attendants were separated from the printer and worked together in huge rooms, where the tempo of the work was intensified but its nature remained the same. They were attendants to an non-controllable machine rhythm, working three and three in teams. The stress was
high, with *competition* between the teams, as *well* as irritation within teams if somebody was slower than the others.

**Automatized machines**

The technological development of forming machines went further and in the early 1970's a new kind of more fully automatized machines were introduced for producing simple, round, flat or hollow ware of ordinary size, the staple goods of any pottery. The machinery was *imported* from Germany. It integrated the drying of the ware, the heavy handling of the moulds, as well as some of the finishing work and the sticking-up of ears onto cups. The machines were *complex* and huge. The were approximately 20 meters long and four meters broad and were very noisy.

Few workers are needed to tend them. For the constant surveillance and for "loading" the machine with rolls of clay at one end and "unloading" the ware at the other end, two women are employed. Theirs is a rather demanding work as constant attendants and as carriers of heavy clay and ware *during* every work-day. They work *isolated* from each other and are totally dependent on the non-controllable machine rhythm. Under no circumstances can they *leave* their workplaces. If *any* disturbances in the continuous smooth *production* occur, they *have* to stop the machine and *call* for a service-man.

Two male service-men are employed to take *care* of *any* irregularities in the functioning of the two *automatic* machines installed at Gustavsberg. They *have* a job that *demands* independent skills as qualified mechanics and knowledge of the special problems of dealing with earthenware and *china*. Their work-days are *varied*.

Thus, in the forming of the ware, a *strict* sexual division of labour has *been* reinstated with the latest technological development. At the same time, earlier *production* methods are still used because not every kind of goods can be mass-produced. Women, but very few men, are still used at half-automatic machines. Only one
remaining jigger is still in production and handled by a man with a female attendant.

Decoration of tableware has changed radically during the last fifteen years. Very little is actually painted nowadays and these jobs are mostly complementary to the ones done with the new printing machines. To paint still demands independent skills. Women paint = very few men.

Printing as a process had changed. The work is done at individual machines by female attendants. Paper has been eliminated from the process and the decoration is put on to the ware by the machine - not by women's nimble fingers anymore. The attendant has to follow the machine's rhythm and load and unload it with ware. The work is very monotonous but done in a self-controlled machine rhythm, which makes it preferred by the women, compared to other work at conveyor belts. The new so-called Murray-printing-machines need service ever so often and to give that, men are trained as service-men. The sexual division of labour is clear and unchallenged in the decoration department. The male foreman has remarked, that even with higher pay than women, men have refused to stay as attendants at the monotonous new printing machines.

Engraving of copper-plates is still needed. That work process has been radically changed but still requires independent skills. The factory employed in 1983 two engraveras, one man and one woman. The woman was hired for training in 1980, the man had started in 1960 as one of the last apprentices.

Engraving, with only two persons employed, is thus sex-integrated nowadays. It demands independent skills, of the character it had at the turn of the century, as well as of a new character. It is still a craft.

In casting, women still work as they have done since casting on a large scale was introduced at the beginning of this century. There is a segregation inside casting, according to the size of the ware. Women mostly cast smaller ware. Despite that, it would be unfair not to call casting a sex-integrated occupation. It is
still carrying the stigma of being rather dirty but it has an advantage of being a work of independent skills, where the worker decides the work rhythm and has several different stages in a work process to execute. The work is—today considerably less monotonous that other works in the workshops.

**Summing up**

Engraving and casting are today the only jobs that can be called sex-integrated on the shop floors of Gustavsberg.

Most of the work is strictly sex-segregated. Women are usually attendants; nowadays attendants to machines, be they of a non-controllable or a self-controllable type. Women work at conveyor belts, not as often as in the 1940's and 1950's but often enough.

Men have kept the advantage of working with more independent jobs than women, although it must be said that also men sometimes tend machines and execute unskilled work. With all the new kinds of machinery introduced, especially during the last twenty years, a new position as "service-man" has been created. The service-man is a person with independent skills of how to keep machines going and in function. The job gives a variety of tasks every day. The work is done totally in the worker's own rhythm and as he himself finds best. A service-man is of course a man. It can be said that he is the person, who today has the work most equivalent to the craftwork of the thrower, later on of the jollier and jiggerer, when it comes to possession of skills as well as status in the workshops.

Thus it must be summarized, that the sex segregation in this pottery factory has been entrenched, deepened, dug-in and seems to be of a perpetuating nature. The last twenty years might well be seen as promoting the sexual division of labour. All the new machines have created a need for workers, who can tolerate very monotonous occupations. During the same period, more and more possibilities have been given for part-time work. Women, who work less than a full day, can manage to execute these extremely boring
and health-damaging tasks, which are impossible for any worker to endure during eight hours per day.

The work relations between women and men have not altered in any obvious ways in the pottery production during the last century. Women have always been working in jobs subordinated to men or jobs with lower status and pay than men's jobs. There have been exceptions to this pattern. The sex segregation has been less strict in periods of business expansion. It sometimes relaxed during introduction of new machinery, sometimes not. It was always reintroduced in a way that secured the most varied jobs for men and the most dull for women.

In an article on stratification by sex in the labour market, Alice Kessler-Harris has shown how a pattern of segregation between women and men was accentuated by the accelerating job specialization in factories, which raised the demand for unskilled and semiskilled labour. An ideology stressing women's role as mothers and wives and men's as providers of their families, augmented the sexual divisions of labour. She points out that the new industrial pattern of segregation had been confirmed by the end of the 1920's in the United States. My factory study shows a similar tendency towards a more strict division of labour, when the first more turbulent period of industrial expansion was over. The period of organisation in capitalism seems to reinstate a order of women as subordinate to men after a period of less clear rules for segregation.

There has been no tendency in Gustavsberg to a more sex-integrated work structure over time. On the contrary, it seems that the decades around 1900 saw more attempts to work integration between women and men than later periods. In the forming of the ware a new strict division of labour has been reinstated with the latest technological development after some decades of an opposite trend.

---

10 Kessler-Harris (1975)
11 Kessler-Harris (1975)
A constancy in the work relations between women and men despite change of technology, work organisation and degree of unionization can be stated. This constancy is not realized by the workers as a constancy because of the changes taking place and also because of the total rise in living standards for everyone. The constancy can not satisfactorily be explained only with factors inside the production nor related only to skills and/or education. We have seen that women often for shorter periods could do men's work and there is no doubt whatsoever that the most of the jobs done by women could be done by anybody. The constancy of the inequality between men's and women's work must be sought after in the context of the total functioning of the gender system, a power system allotting less prestigious and less well paid work to women than to men.
References;


Burchill, Frank & Richard Ross, A history of the Potter's Union, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent 1977

Chaytor, Miranda & Jane Lewis, "Introduction" to Alice Clark (1982)

Clark, Alice, Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century, 1919, London-Boston 1982

Cockburn, Cynthia, Brothers. Male Dominance and Technological Change, London 1983

Cockburn, Cynthia, "The gender of the job: arriving at a theory of sex segregation in work" synopsis 1985

Hagemann, Gro, "Kapitalisme, lönnsarbeid og kjønnsarbeidsdeling" (Capitalism, wage work and the sexual division of labour), Kvinder, mentalitet, arbejde. Kvindehistorisk forskning i Norden. Århus 1986

John, Angela V, By the Sweat of Their Brow. Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines. London 1980


Kergoat, Danièle, Les ouvrieres, Paris 1982


Wikander, Ulla, "Rationalisering vid Gustavsbergs porslinsfabrik under 1830- och 40-talen" (Rationalisation at the pottery Gustavsborg during the 1930's and 40's) paper at History of the Workplace conference, 1984-0504, arranged by the Swedish Work Environment Fund.
Addresses of the contributors:

Cécile Dauphin, Centre de Recherches Historiques, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 54 Bd Raspail, 75006 Paris, France.


Gro Hagerann, Universitetet i Oslo, Historisk Institutt, Postboks 1008 Blindern, 0315 Oslo 3, Norway

Alice Kasler-Harris, Temple University, College of Arts and Sciences, Dept of History, Gladfelter Hall (025-24), Philadelphia, PA 191 22, USA

Jane Lewis, London School of Economics and Political Science, Dept. of Social Science and Administration, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, Great Britain.

Ursula D Nienhaus, Frauenforschungsbildungs- und informationszentrum e.v.(FFBIZ), Danchelmannstrasse 15 und 47, 1000 Berlin 19, BDR

Ulla Wikander, Uppsala University, Department of Economic History, Box 513. 751 20 Uppsala, Sweden
RESEARCH REPORTS


WORKING PAPERS


BASIC READINGS


