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## SEX ROLES AND WORK ROLES IN POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

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### ABSTRACT

It is argued that one of the reasons for the slow change in work and sex roles, despite policies designed to encourage such change, is an inadequate understanding of the process of industrialization and its impact on women's status. This impact has been both increasingly to favor money as the sole criteria for status and to force a separation of the home and the workplace. Both of these factors have had an adverse impact on women's status which the growth of technology, expansion of education, and increased control over fertility have not been able to counteract. The limitations of current policy regarding women's work roles are then discussed, and suggestions for policies which might facilitate a better integration of work and home roles are explored.

It has been said, almost from the inception of the women's movement, that the movement is at a "crucial turning point." Thus I hesitate to make that claim here. Yet, now the momentum does seem to be shifting from the movement's advocates to its opponents, and one may question exactly how wide and how deep are the changes in sex and work roles the movement has effected. The depth of change has been limited both by the strength of the opposition and by limits within the feminist analysis. Too seldom have feminist theorists based their critique on an understanding of the macro socio-economic processes largely responsible for the present sex role patterning. Chief among the macro socio-economic processes is industrialization. It has revolutionized the nature of work and thus the nature and status of women's work; it has altered the relationships between women and men, between individuals and communities, between communities and the state. By neglecting study of these changing social relations, many feminist writers have failed to realize that, paradoxically perhaps, women's status can not be improved by a one-sided attack on sex roles per se. Rather, for women and men to achieve a more satisfactory distribution of work roles they must come to see that the only way to revolutionize sex roles is through revolutionizing work roles.

It is the intent of this paper to, first, describe these tendencies common to industrialization in its many and varied settings, second, to show why present thinking and policy choices are ineffective, and thirdly, to suggest some considerations which might lead to a better integration both of women in the workplace and of work in women's lives. It will be suggested that what is needed is a more basic restructuring of the workplace than such measures as child-care, part-time work, or affirmative action, can effect, and, that such a restructuring can occur only if we are willing to change the values guiding marketplace behaviors and thus, in a sense, society as a whole. The outlook for such massive structural and attitudinal changes is, of course, not optimistic.

In order to understand why such changes, difficult as they may be, are necessary, we need first review the impact of industrialization on women's economic position and status. Concerning this relationship there are two contradictory views. The first, growing largely out of American research into changing sex roles, tends to equate woman's status with her ability to make autonomous decisions and to participate in a number of societal arenas. Status may or does lead to autonomy which in turn is defined as the variety of rights a woman may or may not enjoy. Blumberg (1975), for one, is concerned with issues such as whether or not a woman's "life options" include "deciding whether and whom to marry; deciding to terminate a union; controlling one's sexual freedom, pre- and extramaritally; controlling one's freedom of movement; having access to educational opportunities; de facto share of household power - and controlling reproduction and completed family size to the extent that it is biologically possible." Another writer, Giele, (Giele and Smock, 1977), in reviewing the literature, finds a concern with rights, or life options, falling into six different areas which she defines as: 1.) political expression, 2.) work and mobility, 3.) family formation, duration and size, 4.) education, 5.) health and sexual control, and 6.) cultural expression. Naturally, as such things as voting rights and higher education tend to increase with industrialization, these writers see an increase in women's status as industrialization progresses.

However, it is problematic how one is to evaluate the answers to these questions these authors see as indicative of the presence or absence of options. It is not clear to me, taking the first category of political expression, whether it is necessarily good or bad for women's status that they "show clear signs of dissatisfaction" or that a social movement for women is present. An even more fundamental problem with using

the accumulation of options to define high status is the fact that it is often the women playing the most restrictive of roles who enjoy the highest status in a given society.

A second school of thought which develops the opposite view, namely, that women's status declines with industrialization, finds its inspiration in the writings of the underdevelopment theorists. While such writers are concerned with the Third World nations alone, we shall see here that their analysis, as it concerns women's status, can be broadened to encompass certain effects of industrialization in other settings as well.

The underdevelopment argument, developed by such theorists as Samir Amin (1971), Gunder Frank (1972) and Dumont (1969) begins with the fact that the nations of the Third World have been systematically "underdeveloped" by the world powers and the multinational corporations. That is, through colonialism and the world order which followed, these major nations and multinational corporations used the former colonies for their own growth instead of that of the colonies by extracting more by way of goods and labor than they returned. Through this process of inequal exchange these world powers succeeded in creating an infrastructure and a social structure in the underdeveloped nations designed more to support this extractive process than to aid in any larger social good or development of the Third World nation.

Scholars concerned with the question of women's status in Third World nations have taken the essentials of this argument and adapted them to their own purposes and problems. The theorists I see as comprising this school (Seidman and Pala, 1976; Tinker, 1975; Bossen, 1975; Sow, 1973; Diarra, 1971; Remy, 1975) all agree that women experienced a marked loss of status during the colonial era because of this process of underdevelopment.

Basing their concept of status on women's economic participation, these writers argue that before the arrival of the colonists, women played a role of major economic importance in the fields, as well as in the market and as artisans. With the arrival of the colonists we find the imposition of a monoculture system based on the men and the men alone; women's role in subsistence agriculture increasingly loses in importance as the men become increasingly integrated into the money economy. Where once all had worked in the fields, now with the introduction of such cash crops as cocoa or peanuts, men became involved in

these enterprises which were tied into the emerging world economic order. Women often remained alone on their land, doing all the labor traditionally involved in the maintenance of family and community.

In the urban sector as well, the newly created positions were for men only. As the colonial educational system emphasized the creation of a male elite, throughout the first half of the twentieth century and in some cases up to the present, middle level administrators and professionals, clerks and secretaries, were overwhelmingly men. Women were trained only for those jobs that men could not fill, such as teachers of girls or midwives. Thus women are seen as both losing their important role in subsistence agriculture while also being systematically locked out of opportunities in the expanding modern work sector.

While the underdevelopment perspective can be seen as explaining the general thrust of economic transformations occurring during industrialization, it does not adequately account for the impact of industrialization on women's status, largely because of its over-simplification of the question of status. It is a far more complex subject than the equation of status with economic role would suggest. Before proceeding, let us review some of the considerations to be kept in mind in our study of industrialization's impact on work and sex roles.

#### THE QUESTION OF WOMEN'S STATUS

Presumably, if we are concerned with changes in status, we need a clear definition of exactly what it is we are examining and to what we can look as possible indicators of change. Status, as it concerns women as compared to men, is not easily defined. Introductory social science texts tell us that status involves social position and the esteem awarded a person in a particular role. However, the case becomes complicated if we accept the theory that women may achieve esteem not simply through the roles they themselves play, but also through a rise in the esteem granted their husbands through their husbands' roles, or through class. Therefore it is suggested that some women will be esteemed simply because of their high class standing.

Secondly, we have the problem of generalizing from individual esteem to general esteem. If the proportion of women in the higher professions, for example, increases and along with this increase their prestige in the eyes of society, does that

increase the status of women as a whole? And what is the importance of women in certain key societal positions, such as Indira Gandhi or Golda Meir, for example, for the rest of their nation's women? Presumably, there is a symbolic value. Other than that, is there any real filtering down of the esteem they enjoy to the women of the lower classes? The little empirical evidence there is suggests not.

In addition, it has been suggested that sex serves as a filter which closes or opens access to a variety of roles which either do or do not carry esteem. This suggestion reflects a certain feminist logic which assumes that by adopting roles earlier restricted to men women will naturally also come to enjoy the status associated with such roles. Such is the frustration of women in high places who are "still treated like a woman." Rather than seeing sex as a filter, I believe it more appropriate to view it as actively interacting with the actual role in determining the amount of esteem which will fall to the individual. Therefore, a high status role for men may mean little status for the women who attempt to play it. To cite an example, the widespread entry of women into certain roles formerly restricted to men may serve to decrease the amount of status associated with those roles, as in the case of the Soviet doctors or, closer to home, the American secretaries.

Also, feminists have long warned of the negative impact the "pedestal treatment" may have on what they consider "real" status. Women given such esteem are seen as too limited in movement and scope to the men who control their stance. It has long been understood that upper and middle class women usually pay a price in freedom for the rewards of such esteem, and pay a price for being considered superior in specifically feminine ways (emotional qualities, spirituality, etc.). Lower class women, by definition, are not expected to conform to this model, so that while not reaping the rewards of honor and respectability, they at least maintain freedom of movement and of action (c.f. Silverman, 1975).

Thus the question of women's status must not be seen as reflecting simply how much "esteem" women enjoy in a given society but also how much "freedom" or "autonomy" they have to enter a variety of roles. While most writers on this question have not recognized this dual nature of status, I would emphasize that both facets are needed for our definition. A call girl, for example, may enjoy much autonomy within her role but little status is accorded that role. In many societies, "independent

women" lack status, for they are not considered as being "on the right path." In such societies, the single woman is not entitled to the respect due a married woman and is often not considered a responsible adult member of that society.

One final difficulty with the issue of status is my suspicion that we may be arriving at a definition which will have little correspondence with how women actually perceive their position within society, and, while sociologists profess faith in their own definitions above those of their subjects, still, such a discrepancy might give pause for thought. For example, it has been suggested that a woman loses her economic role through the introduction of monoculture, and loses her sexual freedom through her conversion to Christianity. Yet is she really worse off in status terms, compared to men, now that she does not have to do the backbreaking work in the fields, now that she has some degree of education, better health care for herself and her children, a more leisurely existence, and perhaps even all the insignia of having "arrived"- the villa, the television, the Citroen? If we insist, theoretically, that her status has declined both compared to what it was before and compared to men now, and she insists, theoretically or not theoretically, that life could not be better; who is kidding whom? Whatever the answer, what we should bear in mind is that status position, however defined, and personal satisfaction with that status may not always go hand in hand. I would suggest that our definition of status must include the following considerations:

1) Life Options. The writers on changing sex roles (Blumberg, 1976; Giele and Smock, 1977; Safilios-Rothschild, 1972) have made a valuable contribution in outlining the study of life options as a central concern in the study of women's status. I would adopt this focus, but emphasize that it is not simply how many roles women play, but rather their freedom to choose to participate which interests me. Contrary to the underdevelopment writers, I would not see a decline in women's work in the fields as involving a necessary decline in status for, given the choice, I believe most would choose to give up that demanding form of labor. In any case, I would be interested in whether or not women could make the choice. I am interested in the comparative options open to men and women, and in their comparative freedom and autonomy in choosing among them. This freedom implies a second consideration in the study of status, namely:

2) Societal Esteem. We cannot look just to labor force, educational, and political participation rates to gauge women's relative status. Rather, we must also look at the societal evaluation placed on these roles; how society evaluates and

rewards the performance of each of the sexes in each activity. For example, for many women in developing countries, leaving the fields brings an increase in status, as it did in many western families where both spouses were proud if the husband could be the sole provider. Here I may differ somewhat from the writers on life options when I insist that an increase in life options may not necessarily bring about an increase in societal esteem. In fact, sometimes women living the most restricted lives with the fewest of options are awarded the highest status: witness the Victorian role model of "the perfect lady" or the impact of "marianismo" on Latin American women (c.f. Vicinus, 1972; and Pescatello, 1973). The variation in esteem granted the role of housewife is broad. Women professionals are still held suspect in many countries (especially if they are not married in some nations, especially if they are in others). Thus the societal valuation placed on women's choices among the various options must be considered along with the more objective considerations of the range and content of such options. I am suggesting here a delicate interplay of "rights" and "esteem" in which these two factors may not always vary in the same direction.

3) Personal Satisfaction. Finally, I have already suggested that a third consideration be taken into account, that of how a woman herself evaluates her own status and the importance of her own contributions. Rather than decriing the restriction of women in the home as do some underdevelopment theorists (c.f. Bazin-Tardeau; 1975), I would first be interested in knowing whether both the society and the woman view women in this context as "mere producers of labor" or whether they place great esteem on the role of the mother. In like fashion, I should like to know on what basis women make their choices among various life options and what satisfactions they gain from them.

With these three considerations as my focus, I will suggest that industrialization has had an adverse impact on women's status. I believe this is largely due to two major factors relating to industrialization, 1) the expansion of a money economy, and 2) the separation of the home and the workplace. Both of these factors have tended to create a separate work world which takes precedence over the world of the family. While woman's contribution in the home is recognized and valued, the esteem granted the role of wife and mother becomes increasingly problematic as status criteria become increasingly couched in monetary terms. This ambivalence is reflected in the phrase "just a housewife." The woman who utters it may be ambivalent herself as to how much status a woman who does not command a salary may claim. Some women have reacted to this concern and



problem by characterizing housework and child care as menial labor; others have tried the other tack by demanding wage payments. Some women have taken a more traditional stance by insisting that women's contributions as mothers and wives be valued for their intrinsic social and cultural value rather than for any arbitrary monetary sum. Nonetheless, the problem of how much societal esteem is granted to, and how much personal satisfaction can be found in the choice of these life options remains problematic in post-industrial society where the criteria for such judgments appear to be based increasingly on monetary considerations.

The fact that most women continue to opt for marriage and children for at least some period of their lives naturally affects their choice of other life options, particularly their labor force participation. While in agricultural societies women could have their children with them as they worked in the fields, this integration of roles is increasingly difficult as development progresses. It is only at a fairly late stage in the process, such as found in the United States at present, that there emerges a concern for factors which may facilitate this integration, such as part-time employment and child-care facilities. Even so, for many women family responsibilities often limit (and often through the woman's own choosing) her participation, and consequently her status, in the educational and economic arenas. Therefore, while women may continue to receive societal esteem for their home roles, the esteem and personal satisfaction they will achieve from choosing among life options outside the home remain even more in doubt.

There are, of course, a number of other major factors which are having an impact on this relationship between industrialization and status. Chief among them I would list 1) changes due to technology and improved health care, 2) changes in marital patterns and fertility, and 3) changes in women's education. Changes in these areas are often seen as opening up new opportunities for woman. The issue, however, is whether these opportunities, when fixed into roles, are easier to integrate or are any more satisfying.

Consider, for example, the impact of changes in technology and health care. Women now live longer, healthier lives; they have a longer "empty nest" period when they are free from child-bearing and child-rearing activities and still fit enough to play an active role in the labor force, if they so desire. The lightening of burdensome housework through technological advance also supposedly makes the assumption of roles outside the home that much easier.

Yet studies show that women still spend a large percentage of their time engaged in housework and child care, and it is still, in this liberated age, a rare household indeed where the husband shares fully in these chores. Further, although much attention has been given to the older woman reentering the labor force after a break of perhaps as many as twenty years, this has not meant that she is now readily and easily employed at a job suitable to her talents and her goals. To the contrary, older women, along with youths and the never employed, are still hard to place in work which makes full use of their talents.

Secondly, and related to the first factor, are changes in women's marital and fertility patterns. We have yet to discern what the full impact will be of striking changes which have been appearing in recent census such as a trend toward later marriage, increasing divorce, and a decreasing childbirth rate. Many women, particularly among the educated, are opting for later marriage and are either putting off or deciding against having children, in order to favor their careers in the crucial early building stages.

Two age groups have, as opposed to all others, seen a marked increase in fertility: the 10 to 14 and the 15 to 19 year olds. Their situation reflects the impact of the "sexual revolution" and increased availability of reliable birth control methods as much as does the first group of those putting off childbirth. It suggests that, contrary to the thinking of some, birth control does not automatically create a liberated woman; rather, that child-bearing is more dependent on a woman's emotional state and structural position than on mere technological advance alone. Again, we may be seeing a proliferation of choice in post-industrial society, but I detect little by way of improvement in status or integration of roles coming from it. The very fact that women are having to postpone marriage and children in order to get a start in the workplace forcefully demonstrates the difficulties present in achieving such an integration.

A third and related factor is the increasing opportunity for women to continue their education. I must note here, however, as others have elsewhere, that it is only recently, in the late sixties and seventies, that the percentage of women achieving advanced degrees is beginning to equal their percentage in the 1920's and 1930's. Thus, in a sense, the increasing participation of women in higher education is only a making up for lost ground, ground lost to the World War veterans and the fifties emphasis on the "feminine mystique."

What impact does their educational training have on women's status? At best, one might argue that it is creating a dual class structure for women, one consisting of an upper class of women with professional degrees who enter academia, law, medicine, business, and who then set themselves up or are set up by the media as models for other women who become, more than ever before, second class citizens.

Despite the impact of the women's movement, despite the long-fought-for legislation of Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action, women are still clustered in the lower economic categories, or what one writer has aptly termed, "The Pink Collar Ghetto." In fact, one of the major surprises to come out of a recent census was that women's wages are actually falling as compared to men's wages. It is becoming clear that present policy has been largely ineffective in moving women into positions of power and influence which has been one of its major goals.

What has happened instead is that those women who cannot be the architects, doctors, or businesswomen feel increasingly devalued by a society which has declared that women's status, like men's, shall be based on money, power, and drive. Seen in this way, our current policy is a failure on both counts. It has failed to integrate the woman into the workplace while devaluing her role in the home.

Why has this been the case? We again need to look at the two classes of women separately.

It was originally thought by women involved in the women's movement that the entrance of women into positions of power would force an altogether beneficial and necessary feminization, more broadly, a humanization, of the workplace. The opposite has occurred. Women have found that, in order to hold their own, they need to adopt and master the competitive, aggressive behaviors that the marketplace runs on, perhaps with a feminine touch. Books and courses have emerged to counsel women in the business of business, and to assist them in dealing with the all-too-common naïveté which is often problematic during their first years "on the job." Even among the group of "successful women" with high status, high pressure jobs, there is strong evidence of disillusionment with what has come to be known as the "super-woman" image - the woman who holds down an impressive job while running a household, raising children, and keeping a husband delighted with his good fortune and her organizational talent. Many of these successful ones often face severe problems in resolving desires for family and friendship relationships with

work demands. These women, one study found, put a moratorium on "femininity" for up to ten years(Hennig and Jardim, 1977).

Beyond these "lucky" women, there are the majority of others for whom the "superwoman" ideal is just not a possibility because of educational background, marital situation, discrimination, personal preference, or whatever. Yet the need for additional family income is there and is real. Increasingly, these women find themselves with the double burden of a low-status job and the usual household demands. On top of this, they find little support for their activities in a society in which the idea of a separate and distinct "female contribution" is increasingly derided.

#### POLICY IMPLICATIONS

If this, then, is the case, what are the major policy implications? I would argue that our present policies have failed largely because they failed to realize that women's status will be improved only through a fundamental rethinking of our values and a reorganization of our society. For, if we insist that women will gain status only by jostling for positions of power and prestige, we must at least realize that this will force, as it is now forcing, conformity to means, images, and patterns of success which many women find alien to them. The calls for a femininization of the workplace have been doomed; unsupported by a logic of their own, they have failed to realize that the workplace has a logic of its own which runs counter to the desires and goals of many women and, for that matter, of many men.

In light of the apparent defeat of our present policy emphasis, the danger is now that the only apparent answer will be retreat. This, I believe, is a very real danger: the difficulties faced by the Equal Rights Amendment are but one among many indicators that a counter-swing is well under way.

Yet we might profit from looking at the question from a different angle. Instead of continuing our overwhelming concern with status, we might address ourselves to women's expressed dissatisfactions with the work-force, dissatisfactions which are concerned not so much with status differentials as with other aspects of the organization of work. These dissatisfactions reflect in their core a more fundamental dissatisfaction with some of the basic structures and principles of our post-industrial society.

What do women want?

I shall attempt the complex task of summarizing here what many, not all, women seem to want from their work. My conceptual framework for these assertions is a wide reading in the literature on sex roles, plus my own research on the subject, and intuition as well, if that may be allowed. On this basis, it seems apparent that:

1) Many women do not want to decide "family or career," but to have both.

2) Women do want to live integrated lives. Before industrialization, integration was easier, as work was close to or centered in the home, with the family forming an economic unit. Now, this is increasingly difficult.

3) Women do not want to be considered men or to compete with men on male terms. They are often reluctant to give up control of the home. They may not want to be restricted to the home, but they do want the home role and their contributions in this realm to be valued by society.

Thus, instead of devaluing "female work," equating housework with "shitwork" and trying to feed women into now predominantly male power slots, policy makers concerned with the issue of women's work should direct their efforts toward:

1) Revaluing women's contributions. This means changing the status criteria of society, namely, the overwhelming emphasis on money as the basis for status judgment. Before industrialization, status could come from a number of sources, such as age, family, spiritual power, skill. Now we increasingly have this one standard, which is clearly inappropriate for judging many of the contributions that both men and women make every day and which go unpaid.

2) Striving to integrate work back into the family cycle. To some extent this is already being done, through such measures as flex-time, which allows the individual greater freedom in choosing his or her work hours.

In addition, the availability of child care as well as the possibility for further education are also important. But, along with these measures which are currently in use, we might also work to see a certain degree of de-professionalization to bring as many types of work as possible, including child care, basic health care, some areas of education, government, even industry,

back into the community. Family businesses might receive more support and encouragement than they presently do. The important consideration is whether we let the workplace regulate the family, or make it subservient to it.

In this effort we may well look for inspiration to various examples of communal organization. Where work has been more communal in form, in the kibbutz, in many of America's utopian experiments, women have not necessarily enjoyed status equal to men. But often the efforts of these women have been directed less toward status concerns per se and more to life quality and life satisfaction. The evidence from communal experiments tends to tell us two things: first, that women, if they are not originally restricted to a female sphere, tend to insist on its creation, although they usually still participate in other ways in the rest of the society, in its governance and economy; and that, secondly, they enjoy the communal and familial supports, in terms of child care, friendship networks, and household assistance, which are so lacking in our society. These supports are crucial in integrating women as full community members and in facilitating a balance between the demands of being a family member and a community member.

It is certainly worth the effort to make the workplace more responsive, perhaps even subservient, to family and community, instead of the reverse pattern prevalent today. For, in so doing, we may also succeed in making whole, integrated, meaningful work and family lives possible for both women and for men.

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