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THE TRANSFORMATION OF WOMEN TO FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE

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INTRODUCTION

How did the transformation of women's participation in the workforce occur? The change from single women working only until they married to the majority of women as participants in the labor force occurs. What are the consequences of this participation today? To answer the first question we must first understand something of the historical role of women in our society. The answer to the second question is still evolving but I will provide the most current information available.

The role of women in our society has changed significantly; women are no longer expected to be stay at home mothers. Women are expected to work full time jobs after marriage and at least part-time after child bearing. Stay at home mother's dread the 'and what do you do?' question posed by new acquaintances after being introduced. Women who are stay at home mothers often feel marginalized by society for not participating in the paid workforce. Women who work are expected to also handle the majority of the household work and child rearing duties. (Degler, 1980) The history of women in America is a very broad one and this paper cannot encompass all or even a large part of it. Selected portions of historical information are presented to provide an overview of women workers and the events that helped to shape the female labor force of today.

Often in our patriarchal society, the contributions of women are minimized and in some cases lost completely. Until the 1970's the majority of mainstream history books told only the story of the men in our society. Until quite recently the reader generally needed to go beyond the text books provided in history classrooms and look to the genre of 'women's history' to find a record of the contributions of women to society, labor and unions. Somehow, the history of women has been separated from that of men and more importantly, it has been disenfranchised by its exclusion from mainstream history. In the mainstream history books the significant

contributions of working women to our society have been minimized and are clearly viewed as peripheral to 'real history', that of men. In part, this is due to the traditional view of history which was told through the lens of political events and the leaders who influenced those events. Women until quite recently had very little political influence and therefore were not viewed as a part of the mainstream history. The newer sociological views of history have provided an opportunity to view and understand the history of women.

EARLY HISTORY

In the largely agrarian society of the early 1800's women's work was concentrated in the home and on the farm, the work was diverse and constant. Women cleaned the home, cooked the meals, mended, made and washed the clothes. All of the medicines, soap and candles were home made by women. Childrearing and other household chores were within the domain of women. Women assisted with work in the fields at harvest and planting and cared for kitchen gardens as well. (Degler, 1980)

The rise of industrialization brought with it the notion that labor was a product that could be bought and sold. Both men and some unmarried women began to work outside of the home. Products that previously had been produced at home were now produced in factories. People became dependent upon these manufactured goods. During this period, unmarried women began to work in the newly opened textile mills. These women would leave the workforce upon marriage. (Abbott, 1910)

By 1850, women were working in one hundred and seventy five different occupations in the United States. The vast majority of women worked in what could be considered extensions of their domestic roles in such jobs as clothing manufacture, spinning and food processing. In the U.S. one quarter of the laborers who worked in factories were unmarried women. In the New England states, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, one third of the work force were

women. Women received one fourth to one third of the pay men received for doing the same jobs. Additionally, women who worked outside of the home were subject to censure by the majority of middle class women who believed that work outside of the home degraded women and endangered their morality. (Degler, 1980)

From 1880 to 1920, the number of women in the workforce increased significantly, and at the same time society began to accept that single women should be part of the workforce. Single women who were employed were no longer in danger of being viewed as morally corrupt for working outside of the home. Married women were expected to stay out of the workforce; female teachers were fired if they married.

WORLD WAR I

Contrary to popular belief, vast numbers of women did not enter the workforce during World War I, although there was a major recruitment drive to bring them into the workforce it was largely unsuccessful, there was some increase in female participation in the paid labor force and some of the female workers entering the labor market were married women; they were usually women whose husband or son was serving at the front. (United States Department Of Labor, 1922) There was an increase in the number of women who entered the workforce as volunteers during the war as well.

What actually occurred during the war years was a redistribution of the female workforce. Women who were employed as dressmakers, in domestic service, or as field hands moved into occupations that had generally employed only males. Women shifted from traditional feminine work roles, such as sewing and weaving, skills women acquired in the home that had then been transferred to the workplace to occupations with no connection to the domicile. These new work roles required women to develop new skills. Schools began teaching women work skills. Before the war, it was unusual for women to enroll in higher courses of mathematics, women's enrollment in math, and courses related to work increased dramatically as women prepared to assume male work roles. (Greenwald, 1980) As a consequence of the war, women became replacements workers. At the end of World War I,

the majority of women in replacement positions were forced out of the workforce back into the home or into the traditionally female occupations. In the years following World War I the consumer era was becoming well established, women became identified as the consumers of purchased goods, and were the target audience of the advertising industry. The advertising industry did much to reinforce the stereotypes of women as primarily concerned with domestic chores and motherhood. (Dumenil, 1995)

The positive changes that occurred during World War I while limited were none the less significant. Opportunities and work place autonomy did change for women, the shift in jobs allowed women to experience success in areas previously unknown to them. Attitude changes occurred and it became acceptable for single women to work, although married women were still ostracized by society for being in the workplace instead of the home, society in general believed that women were working for pin money (discretionary income) and that their income was not essential. (Greenwald, 1980)

WORLD WAR II

During World War II, significant numbers of women entered the workforce as replacements for men in the armed services. The number of women employed grew from fourteen million in 1940 to nineteen million in 1945. (U.S. Department Of Labor, 1946) They were employed by the defense industry, manufacturing companies, chemical and metals factories as well as in non-war related jobs. Many women shifted from domestic service, teaching, nursing (female occupations) to the higher salaried male occupations. Married women who had previous to the war been discouraged from entering the work force were now being encouraged by the Federal government to enter as a patriotic duty. (Baxandall, Gordon, & Reverby, 1976)

Women made significant contributions to the war effort as members of the armed services. The Women's Army Corps (WACs) had 100,000 women in its ranks by 1945, including 17,000 women who were serving in Europe and the Pacific and 2,000 in North Africa. They were employed as radio operators at airfields, crew chiefs and technical workers in ammunitions and

artillery. More than 400 worked in Los Alamos, NM, on the atomic bomb project. WACs earned hundreds of military medals and awards. More than 200 WAC nurses lost their lives during World War II. (Brayley, 2001; Greenwald, 1980)

Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES) was a Navy unit comprised of women volunteers during the War. They worked in air traffic control, air navigation and communications. Navy nurses served on board hospital ships and on bases in the Pacific. A number of these women were captured by the Japanese and held as prisoners of war. (Brayley, 2001; Greenwald, 1980)

Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASP's) were a group of civilian female pilots who worked for the U.S. Army as test pilots, running target missions, and ferrying new aircraft to bases around the country. About 1,000 served in the unit, and 38 were killed in the line of duty. (Greenwald, 1980), (Brayley, 2001) The G.I. Bill enabled many of the women who served in the armed services to enter colleges and universities. (Brayley, 2001)

In surveys conducted by the United States Department of Labor, Women's Bureau during World War II regarding the post war employment plans of women, over ninety percent of the working women in Detroit expected to keep their jobs after the war. Nationally, about seventy five percent of the wartime employed women expected to be a part of the postwar labor force. Most women wanted to continue in the same areas of employment as their wartime industries and occupations. (U.S. Department Of Labor, 1946)

As men returned home from the war women's share of the workforce plummeted from thirty six percent in 1944 to just 12 percent in 1948. The same government that pushed married women into the workforce was now intent upon excluding them from the workforce. The majority of women were coerced into leaving their war time jobs to make room for the men returning from war. During the following decade the numbers of both single and married women, entering the workforce slowly increased. (Baxandall et al., 1976)

PROTECTIVE LABOR LEGISLATION

Gender specific labor legislation has been a subject of controversy among women. The laws vary from state to state but all have the

characteristic of dividing women into a distinct and protected class. The theory behind the laws is that the ability to bear young renders them unequal to men in the work force and entitles women to legal protection. (Dru, 1998)

The labor legislation specific to women dates from the 1840's; female textile workers unsuccessfully petition the state for ten hour work days. Some states imposed the rule using gender-neutral language. The majority of states passed regulations governing the hours, wages and working conditions of only women and children. By 1925 due to decisions such as the 1908 case *Muller v. Oregon*, the U. S. Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of ten-hour work days for female workers, citing the public interest in women's maternal functions. The Brandeis Brief which was more rooted in sociology than in law outlined the perils of overwork for women's special physiology. (Deslippe, c2000)

With the New Deal came new laws that replaced much of the gender based protective legislation, The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 and the more recent Family and Medical Leave Act, are gender neutral. Additionally Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Supreme Court decisions applying Fourteenth Amendment guarantee's of equal protection in instances of sex discrimination. Women's place in the workplace was the product of an ideology that assigned men the role of breadwinner and women the role of housekeeper. The effort to provide workplace protections only to women served to reinforce the negative stereotypes of the abilities of women in the workplace. (Briskin, 1993)

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION

The number of women participating in the paid workforce continues to grow it has risen from 5.1 million in 1900 to 18.4 million in 1950 to approximately 65 million working women in 2003. The U.S. department of labor indicates that by 2012 the number of working women is expected to exceed 77 million. (United States Department Of Labor, 1994) Women will have increased participation from 18% of the labor force in 1900 to an expected 48% of the labor force in 2012. The participation rate for women in 2004 is 46% of the total population. In 2004, 53.8 percent of women without children younger than

18 are in the labor force. Half of all multiple job-holders in 2003 were women; women are the majority of temporary and part-time workers. (AFL-CIO, 2004)

TABLE 1
Percentage Female Labor Force Participation 1990-2003

Year	Number ¹	% female population 16 + ¹	% labor force population 16+ ¹
1900	5,319	18.8	18.3
1910	7,445	21.5	19.9
1920	8,637	21.4	20.4
1930	10,752	22.0	22.0
1940	12,845	25.4	24.3
1950	18,389	33.9	29.6
1960	23,240	37.7	33.4
1970	31,543	43.3	38.1
1980	45,487	51.5	42.5
1990 ₂	56,829	57.5	45.2
1993	58,785	57.9	45.5
1994 ₃	60,239	58.8	46.0
1995	60,9994	58.9	46.1
1996	61,857	59.3	46.2
1997	63,036	59.8	46.2
1998	63,714	59.8	46.3
1999	64,855	60.0	46.5
2000	66,303	60.2	46.6
2001	66,848	60.1	46.5
2002	67,363	59.8	46.5
2003	68,272	59.5	47.0

For 1900 – 1930 data relate to population and labor force age 10 and over; for 1940, population and labor force age 14 and over; beginning 1950 to civilian labor force age 16 and over

Data beginning in 1990 are not strictly comparable with data for prior years because populations controls were adjusted

Data beginning 1994 are not strictly comparable with data for prior years because of a major revision to survey methodology.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor (United States Department Of Labor, 2004)

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Women make less money than men do, they are subject to economic discrimination due to the

inequity of lower wages for jobs held by women that can be compared to higher wage jobs held by men but are under valued due to the concentration of women within the profession. Even with higher

levels of education, women in the same professions earn less. Men who work in female dominated professions, such as nursing tend to earn less than men do in male dominated professions.

TABLE 2
Median Annual Income, by Level of Education, 1998–2001

Sex and year	Elementary/secondary			College					
	Less than 9th grade	9th to 12th grade, no completion	High school completion	Some college, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor's	Master's	Professional	Doctorate
Men									
1998	19,380	23,958	31,477	36,934	40,274	51,405	62,244	94,737	75,078
1999	20,429	25,035	33,184	39,221	41,638	52,985	66,243	100,000	81,687
2000	20,789	25,095	34,303	40,337	41,952	56,334	68,322	99,411	80,250
2001	21,361	26,209	34,723	41,045	42,776	55,929	70,899	100,000	86,965
Women									
1998	14,467	16,482	22,780	27,420	29,924	36,559	45,283	57,565	57,796
1999	15,098	17,015	23,061	27,757	30,919	37,993	48,097	59,904	60,079
2000	15,978	17,919	24,970	28,697	31,071	40,415	50,139	58,957	57,081
2001	16,691	19,156	25,303	30,418	32,153	40,994	50,669	61,748	62,123

Source: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, "Money Income of Households, Families, and Persons in the United States," "Income, Poverty, and Valuation of Noncash Benefits," various years; and Series P-60, "Money Income in the United States," various years. From *Digest of Education Statistics 2003*.

THE WAGE GAP

The wage gap, between men and women earnings is persistent. In 2002 women only earned seventy seven cents for every dollar earned by men and for women of color the gap in pay is even wider with African American women earning sixty seven cents per dollar earned by men.(U.S. Department of Commerce, 2003) Equal pay is a problem across occupational categories, in 2003 technical and professional women earned nearly twenty seven percent less than their male

counterparts did. Office and administrative support workers earned twelve percent less than males in the same jobs. The wage gap does not lessen with higher levels of education, female physicians and surgeons earned forty one percent less than men in these occupations did. College and university teachers earned twenty one percent less and female lawyers earned thirteen percent less. In occupations where women outnumber men, such as nurses, twelve percent less, word processors/ typists, eight percent less, and elementary and middle school teachers, between

nine and ten percent less, the wage gap continues to be a factor. Women with master’s degrees earn twenty eight percent less than men do. (U.S Department Of Labor, 2004)

This inequality has serious implications for women when they retire from the workforce. Because women earn less, they retire with fewer benefits, they receive smaller pensions and less than one half of all wage and salaried women in the United States are participants in a pension plan. In 2001, half of all retired women with income from private pension plans received less than 5,600 yearly, retired men averaged 10,340. (U.S. Social Security Administration, 2002) It has been 40 years since Congress passed the Equal Pay Act, and still the majority of working women make less than working men in comparable jobs do.

GENDER SEGREGATION IN THE LABOR MARKET

The segregation by gender in the labor market is believed to be one of the major reasons for the gender gap in earnings. The Institute for Women’s Policy Research conducted a fifteen year study of women workers between the ages 26 to 59, from 1983-1998. One of the findings of this longitudinal study was that “Within six gender tier categories, at least 75% of the workers are of one gender. In each tier, women’s jobs pay significantly less than those of their male counterparts do even though both sets of occupations tend to require the same level of educational preparation.” (Rose & Hartman, 2004) Additionally the time spent caring for family limits the earning power of women. Family responsibilities make women more likely to be part time employees, they are less likely to work year round then men and are more likely to have years away from the labor force. (Rose et al., 2004) Gender roles tend to be self reinforcing within the family and society, women bear the majority of responsibilities for child care and house hold chores. Men are able to earn significantly more money in the workplace, so

when an economic decision is made as to who will care for young children, the task generally will be relegated to women. (Becker, 1981)

Occupational Distribution of Women 2002

Women remain clustered in jobs that are traditionally dominated by women and pay low wages. See TABLE 3.

COMPARABLE WORTH

There are two main view points to comparable worth issues; the first is that the system as it exists is unfair to women. It undervalues jobs in which women are the majority of the workforce and over values male dominated jobs. Opponents of comparable worth dispute that the current system is unfair and maintain that the market sets wages and that the excessive demand of women for certain jobs drives wages down. The bias that is evident in pay scales for men and women can be eliminated by assessment of economic value through gender neutral job evaluation systems.

HISTORY OF STRUGGLE FOR FAIR PAY

TABLE 4 contains highlights of the history of the fight for fair pay legislation.

UNIONS

“Union Membership benefits working women, pay for women in union is higher than for their nonunion counterparts. Women who were union members earned 31% more than nonunion women, According to the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics.” (AFL-CIO, 2004) Workers in Unions are more likely to have health and pension benefits. As of 2003, women accounted for 11.4% of the union workforce. Fifty-five percent of all new workers organized are women.(Bronfenbrenner, 2001)

TABLE 3

Occupations	%	% low
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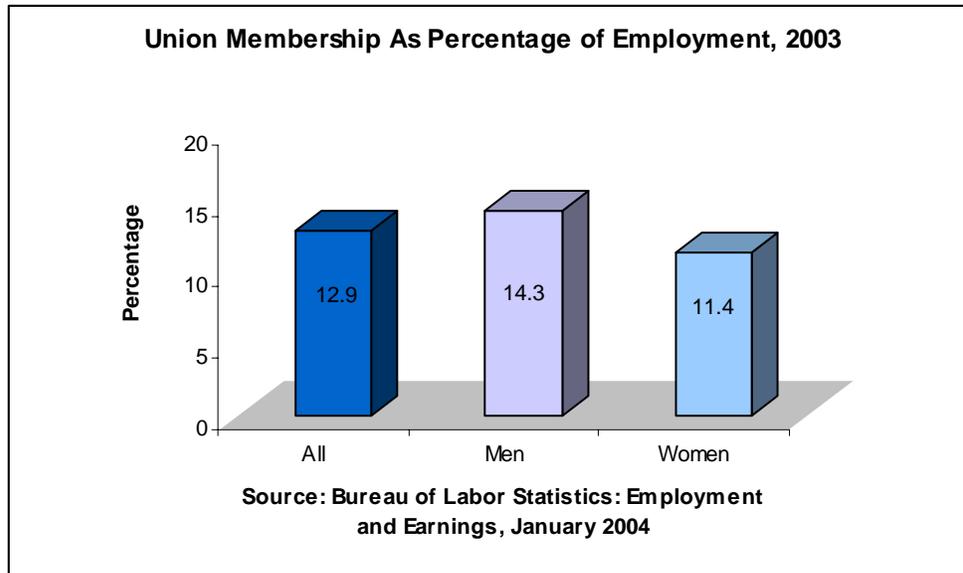
	women	income ¹
Nursing/Home Health Aides, Occupational/Physical Therapy Aides	90	74
Paralegals, Legal Assistants, Legal Support Workers	86	26
Health Diagnosing/Treating, Clinical Laboratory Technicians	81	43
K-12 Teachers	75	27
Office and Administrative Support	75	55
Food Prep/Servers, Bartenders, Counter Attendants	61	89
Community and Social Services	58	33
Postsecondary teachers	40	18
Chiropractors, Dentists, Dieticians, Optometrists, Pharmacists	30	5
Lawyers, Judges, and other judicial workers	29	3
Computer Scientists, Systems Analysts, Computer Programmers	26	11

Statistics compiled by Women Employed Institute from BLS based on 2002 data

TABLE 4

1932	Federal Economic Act passes to ban wives of federal employees from holding government positions. In industry women with employed husbands are to be first on lists for firing
1935	National Recovery Act Women to receive 25% less pay than men in same jobs
1950's	Equal pay bills introduced by both parties --- No results
1963	Equal Pay Act passes – equal pay for equal work
1964	Civil Rights Bill passes Title VII bans employment discrimination against women
1979	20 women groups, professional organizations and unions form National Committee on Pay Equity
1981	County of Washington (OR) V Gunther , Supreme Court rules Title VII applies even if jobs are different
1988	Pay equity for Federal Workers passes House 302 - 98
1990-1991	AFSCME (NY) wins \$1 million for 1,000 telephone operators
1993	911 operators in Detroit win pay equity

¹ Lower income is defined as workers who earn less than \$30,000 a year



(Kopelov, 2005)

ORGANIZING

Women have a long history of organizing for mutual benefit. In 1863, women in Troy, New York, organized into the collar Laundry Union. These women went on strike and won an increase in wages, the leader of the laundry workers Union Kate Mullaney became assistant secretary of the National Labor Union, and (organized 1866) The Collar Laundry Union disbanded in 1869, due to the adoption of paper collars for men's shirts. The first two national unions to admit women were Cigar makers in 1867 and Printers in 1869. The Daughters of St. Crispin, organized by Lynn, Massachusetts shoe stitchers in 1869 was the first national union of women. (Balsler, 1987) The Knights of Labor, began admitting women into their Union in 1881, and established the Women's Work Department, which was dissolved in 1890. (Foner, c1979) The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) was founded in 1903. It brought together women of all social classes in an attempt to organize working women. Women have made contributions to the United States labor movement in a number of ways, one of which was to organized auxiliaries to male unions. (Foner, c1980)

There were four distinct waves of union organization, craft unionism (1800's), new unionism (1910-1920's), industrial unionism

(1930-1940), and public-sector and service unionism 1960 -). (Dru, 1998)

In craft unionism, the majority of the male dominated trade unions excluded women from the trades and from membership within their organizations. Craft unions banded together to become the AFL and had a history of excluding women and blacks up until the 1940's and in some unions, such as the building trades and machinists there are still informal discriminatory policies that discourage women and minorities. (Milkman, 1990)

The new unionism that appeared around 1910 was really an off shoot of craft unionism, and was centered on the garment industry. By the 1920's, forty three percent of the women in unions were workers in the garment industry. The membership of these unions was almost all women but the union leadership tended to comprised of all males and paternalistic. An example of this is the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, ninety percent of the membership was women, but none of the leadership was female. Women were not treated as equal partners in the labor movement. (Milkman, 1985)

In the 1920's and early 1930's, the number of women and men in unions decreased significantly. The Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) organized massive union recruitment drives; they recruited skilled, unskilled workers and women.

By the end 1944, three million women were members of unions. The CIO unions like their predecessors had almost an exclusively male leadership, but by policy and contracts opposed discrimination on the basis of sex, color or creed. (Milkman, 1985)

Public sector unions emerged in the 1960's; about the same time, that private sector union participation began to decrease in the United States. Health care was one of the few private sectors to show increases in unionization. Women began to take on leadership roles within the new union structures. Additionally, there was pressure applied from groups such as 9-5 National Association of Working Women and The Coalition of Labor Union Women, CLUW to encourage women to have active leadership roles in unions. (9-5, 2005; CLUW, 2005) The unions that have emerged from this restructuring tend to work to better address the concerns of women workers. (Baron, 1991)

FEMINISM

The women's movements have had an impact on society in the United States. Women's groups have changed many people's views about male and female roles. The changes have affected their roles in the workplace and the family, and the way women live their lives. Women's groups have influenced election results and government with their votes. They have also been instrumental in influencing legislation. With the availability of birth control women gained control of their bodies and could choose when or if they would bear children. The contemporary women's movement contributed to an increasing acceptance of careers for all women, including mothers with young children. Such changes were incorporated with a growing expectation that women would combine employment with their roles as wives and mothers. For over one hundred and fifty years, women in America have organized political movement to obtain social, economic and political rights, the same rights that men have traditionally been given. Feminist movements have worked to change laws to prevent discrimination against women, to provide equal opportunities for education, employment and government representation. (Briskin, 1993; Tax, [c1980])

TODAY

Women have made many gains in both society and the work environment. More women are better educated than ever before and are achieving higher levels of representation in politics, union leadership and in business. However, there are few women in the highest levels of management; the glass ceiling is still firmly in place. (Commission, 1995) Working women have made changes to the social fabric of America, more people eat out more frequently, child care facilities and preschools are now the norm. More families have higher standards of living with greater access to technology and education.

Unfortunately, eight of ten women are still in the same traditionally female dominated, low paying workforce categories. The media continue to stress traditional roles for women. Child care is insufficient and many women executives are locked into the baby track, limiting their abilities to attain the same success as their male counterparts. There has been a price to pay for success; work/life balance has been difficult to achieve. Women often must make a choice to either be a parent or successful in their careers. In 2002, nineteen percent of all women ages, 40 to 44 are childless; this is twice the number of childless women of the same age group in 1980. (Statistics, 2003)

CONCLUSION

The transformation of women's participation in the workforce occurred in an incremental manner. There were many obstacles in the way, society's expectations regarding the roles of women, household responsibilities, inability to control procreation. Wars enabled women to enter occupations that had been previously closed to them, although women were forced to leave these occupations at the end of war, the precedent had been set. Women realized that the jobs were not beyond their capabilities. The women's movements, birth control, higher levels of educational attainment all contributed to the ability of women to enter the workforce as permanent workers. There is some concern that women by entering the workforce as direct competitors for the same jobs as men drive down wages for both genders by flooding the market with workers. I

have not seen any empirical evidence of this in any of the research studies I have reviewed.

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