Paper 19: Women, Gender and Paid Work in Britain since c. 1850

Part II Specified Paper, 2021-22

Convenor: Dr Helen McCarthy
Other teachers: Dr Deborah Thom, Dr Lucy Delap, Professor Peter Mandler

This paper enables students to explore change and continuity in women’s working lives in Britain since the mid 19th century. This period witnessed a set of wide-reaching transformations in the character of the British economy and state, in the size and shape of the family and household, and in ideologies of feminism and sexual politics, all of which affected women’s status in the labour market in profound ways. By the end of the twentieth century, recorded employment rates amongst women were dramatically higher than a hundred years previously, women’s presence in senior-level professional and managerial posts was considerable, and combining paid work with motherhood had become increasingly commonplace. Yet this paper does not advance a simplistic story of linear ‘progress’ towards women’s workplace equality. Students will grapple with a rich set of complex and contested narratives, from struggles over pay, occupational sex-typing and childcare, to the impact of two world wars, anti-discrimination legislation and feminist activism in all its varieties. The paper will explore diverse histories of women’s wage-earning as shaped by class, marital status, age and ethnicity, as well as the dynamics of regional labour markets and occupational ‘traditions’. By adopting gender as a tool of analysis, we will examine how women’s paid work has acquired its meaning in relation to normative ideas about the primacy of men’s careers and earnings, as well as assumptions about what constitutes ‘male’ and ‘female’ work. In addition to lectures and supervisions, four two-hour classes will invite students to reflect on the different lenses which historians have adopted in order to recover and interpret women’s paid work, from official statistics and social investigation to representations in popular culture and women’s own life writing and oral testimonies.

Provisional programme:

The course will be delivered through sixteen one-hour lectures, four two-hour classes, two one-hour revision classes and six supervisions (32 contact hours in total). The latter will be taught in groups of one, two or three students by Dr McCarthy or Dr Thom, depending on topic choice. Enrolment will be capped at 16, with most supervisions taking place in LT.

Michaelmas Term Lectures: (broadly covering 1850 – 1945)

(All lectures delivered by Helen McCarthy, unless otherwise stated)

Week One: Introduction: Historicising Women’s Paid Work
Week Two: Gender, Wage-Earning and ‘Skill’
Week Three: Welfare, Protection and ‘Sweated’ Work
Week Four: Women, Trade Unions and Workplace Activism (DT)
Week Five: Women and Domestic Service (LD)
Week Six: Class, ‘Respectability’ and White-Collar Work
Week Seven: Women’s War Work (DT)
Week Eight: Paid Work, Leisure, and Domestic Labour
Lent Term Lectures: (Broadly covering 1945 to the present)

Week One: Sex Work, Sex at Work (DT and HM)
Week Two: Gender, Work and the Post-War Welfare State
Week Three: Education, Training and Career Choice (PM)
Week Four: Work, Marriage and Motherhood
Week Five: Race, Ethnicity and Migrant Women’s Working Lives
Week Six: Feminism, Activism and Workplace Rights (LD)
Week Seven: Inequality and Labour Market Polarisation in 1980s Britain
Week Eight: Women, Family and Work from New Labour to Covid-19

Michaelmas Term Classes:
1. Observing women’s work: social investigation and social research (HM & DT)
2. Narrating the self: paid work, identity and subjectivity (HM & DT)

Lent Term Classes:
3. Feminist perspectives on paid work (HM and LD)
4. Representing women’s work in popular culture (HM & DT)

Indicative Reading List:

General:

Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover, eds., Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women’s History and Women’s Work (Basingstoke, 1986)
Edward Higgs, ‘Women, occupations and work in the nineteenth century censuses’ HWJ 23 (1987)
Marie Hicks, Programmed Inequality: how Britain discarded women technologists and lost its edge in computing (Cambridge MA, 2017)
Janet Howarth, Women in Britain: Voices and Perspectives from Twentieth Century History (London, 2018)
Gerry Holloway, Women and Work in Britain since 1840 (London, 2005)
Pat Hudson and WR Lee, eds., Women’s work and the family economy in historical perspective (1990)
Jane Humphries, Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution (Cambridge, 2010)
Kathleen Sherit, *Women on the Front Line: British Servicewomen’s Path to Combat* (Amberley, 2020)
Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ed., *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2001)

**Essay Topics** (corresponding to weekly lectures)

**Gender, Wage-Earning and ‘Skill’**

The valuing of women’s industrial work; the nature and drivers of horizontal and vertical segregation in the workplace; regional, occupational and ethnic dynamics and differences; the gendering of notions of ‘skill’; the dynamics of wage-setting; the ideological power of the ‘male breadwinner family’; gendered conflict in the workplace.

Colin Creighton ‘Richard Oastler, factory legislation and the working-class family’ *Journal of Historical Sociology* 5 (1992), pp. 292-320
Katrina Honeyman, ‘Sweat and sweating: women workers and trade unionists in the Leeds clothing trade, 1880 to 1980’ in Mary Davis, ed., *Class and Gender in British Labour History: Renewing the Debate (or Starting It?)* (Pontypool, 2011), pp. 55-75
Andrew Phillips, ‘Women on the shop-floor: the Colchester Rag, 1918-50’ Oral History 22 (Spring 1994)

Rex Pope, Unemployed women in inter-war Britain: the case of the Lancashire weaving district’ Women’s History Review, 9 (2000), pp. 743-759

Jennifer Redmond, Moving Histories: Irish Women’s Emigration to Britain from Independence to Republic (Liverpool, 2018)


Welfare, Protection, and ‘Sweated’ Work

What late-Victorians/Edwardians meant by ‘sweating’ and how its meanings were gendered; home-working as a flashpoint for anxieties about sweated labour; debates over women’s need for ‘protection’; factory legislation and the minimum wage; concerns about the link between women’s employment and infant mortality; prostitution as a particular type of ‘sweated’ work.


Andrew August, Poor Women’s Lives: gender, work and poverty in late Victorian London (1999)


Carl Chinn, They Worked All Their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939 (Manchester, 1988)


B Harrison, Not Only the ‘Dangerous Trades’: women’s work and health in Britain, 1880-1914 (London, 1996)

Katrina Honeyman, ‘Sweat and sweating: women workers and trade unionists in the Leeds clothing trade, 1880 to 1980’ in Mary Davis, ed., Class and Gender in British Labour History: Renewing the Debate (or Starting It?) (Pontypool, 2011), pp. 55-75


James Schmiechen, Sweated Industries and Sweated Labour: The London Clothing Trades (Urbana, 1984)

Women, Trade Unionism and Workplace Activism

*The extent and nature of women’s participation in trade unions; why the late 19th-century women’s trade union movement was led by middle-class women; the ideological character of the movement; whether its leaders were 'social feminists'; the attitudes and behaviours of male trade unionists; non-union action and ‘everyday’ forms of workplace resistance.*


Gerry Holloway, “Let the women be alive!: the construction of the married working woman in the Industrial Women Movement, 1890-1914’ in Eileen Yeo, ed., Radical Femininity: women’s self-representation in the public sphere (Manchester, 1998)

Kristina Huneault, Difficult Subjects: Working Women and Visual Culture, Britain 1880-1914 (Farnham, 2002), chapter 6


Louise Raw, Striking a Light: the Bryant and May Matchwomen and their place in history (London, 2009)

Alastair Reid, United We Stand: A History of Britain’s Trade Unions (London, 2004)


Laura Schwartz, “What We Feel is Needed is a Union for Domestics Such as the Miners Have”: The Domestic Workers’ Union of Great Britain and Ireland 1908-1914’ Twentieth-Century British History 25 (2014), pp. 173-192.


Women and Domestic Service

The extent and variety of women’s paid domestic work; why domestic service was considered ‘suitable’ work for women; how domestic service shaped women’s ‘class’ identities; why residential domestic service declined after the First World War and what forms of paid domestic work replaced it (See also later topic for the revival of the domestic service economy in the 1980s and 1990s).

Leonore Davidoff, Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Class and Gender (London, 1995)
Lucy Delap, Knowing their Place: domestic service in twentieth-century Britain (Oxford, 2011)
Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny (London, 1972)
Judy Giles, ‘Authority, Dependence and Power in Accounts of Twentieth-Century Domestic Service’ in Lucy Delap, Ben Griffin and Abigail Wills, eds, The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800 (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 204 – 220
Katherine Holden, Nanny Knows Best: the history of the British nanny (Stroud, 2013)
P Horn, The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant (London, 1975) and Life Below Stairs in the Twentieth Century (Stroud, 2001)
Kristina Huneault, Difficult Subjects: Working Women and Visual Culture, Britain 1880–1914 (Farnham, 2002), chapter 2
Alison Light, Mrs Woolf and the Servants (London, 2007)
Selina Todd, ‘Domestic Service and Class Relations in Britain, 1900 – 1950’ Past & Present 203 (2009), pp. 181–204
Leonard Schwarz, ‘English Servants and their employers during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ Economic History Review 52 (1999), pp. 236–56

Class, ‘Respectability’ and White-Collar Work

The extent and variety of paid work amongst middle-class women; female business-ownership and enterprise; the growth of white-collar and professional work for women and the gendered practices of employers; how and why some occupations acquired the status of ‘respectable’ work for women; white-collar work as a route to social mobility or source of identity and community; feminist struggles over access to higher education and professional training; the marriage bar.


Penny Summerfield, ed., *Women, Education and the Professions* (Leicester, 1987)


Meta Zimmeck, ‘Jobs for the girls: the expansion of clerical work for women, 1850-1914’ in
Women’s War Work

How far the wartime mobilisations altered patterns of women’s employment; attitudes towards and experiences of industrial conscription; industrial welfare policies and anxieties about the maternal body; how far war work destabilised or entrenched existing gender inequalities in the labour market; similarities and differences across the two conflicts.

Stephen Bourne, *The Motherland Calls: Britain’s black servicemen and women, 1939-45* (Stroud, 2012)


Richard Croucher, *Engineers at War* (London, 1982)


Denise Riley, ‘The Free Mothers: pronatalism and working women in industry at the end of the last war in Britain’ *HWJ* 11 (1981)


Wendy Webster, *Mixing It: Diversity in World War Two Britain* (Oxford, 2018)

Bonnie White, *The Women’s Land Army in First World War Britain* (Basingstoke, 2014)

**Paid Work, Leisure, and Domestic Labour**

How paid work interlocked with unpaid domestic and reproductive labour; how age and marital and maternal status shaped women’s patterns of wage-earning in the household; how women’s wage-earning affected fertility patterns and the allocation of household resources, including the entitlement to ‘leisure’; how far employment practices (e.g. marriage bars) and social welfare regimes reinforced the gendered division of domestic labour; the rise of ‘housewifery’ as a domestic ideology between the wars.

Rosemary Crook, “‘Tidy Women”: women in the Rhondda between the wars’ *Oral History*, 10 (1982), pp. 40-46
A Davies, *Leisure, gender and poverty: Manchester and Salford, 1900-1939* (Buckingham, 1992)
S Horrell and D Oxley, ‘Breadwinning, family employment and household resource allocation’ in CE Nunez, ed., *The microeconomic analysis of the household and the labour market, 1880-1939* (Seville, 1998)
S Horrell and D Oxley, ‘Crust or crumb? Intrahousehold resource allocation and male breadwinning in late Victorian Britain’ *Economic History Review*, 52 (1999), pp. 494-522
Melanie Reynolds, *Infant Mortality and Working-Class Child Care* (Basingstoke, 2016)
L Tilly, J Scott and M Cohen, ‘Women’s work and European fertility patterns’ *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* VI (1976)

**Sex Work, Sex at Work**

The feminised character of the sex work industry and the factors drawing women into it; efforts by government and non-governmental actors to suppress or regulate sex work, and to persecute or ‘rescue’ sex workers; the broader ways in which women’s paid labour has been associated with sexual danger; the helpfulness of concepts such as ‘parasexuality’ ‘body work’ and ‘erotic capital’ for analysing gender relations in the workplace. (See also reading for domestic service.)

David Gutzke, *Women drinking out in Britain since the early twentieth century* (Manchester, 2013)
Judith R Walkowitz, ‘Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in King’s Cross in the 1980s’ *Twentieth Century British History* 30 (2019), pp. 231–263
Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), chapter 3

**Gender, Work and the Post-War Welfare State**

How demobilisation and post-war labour shortages affected the size and shape of the female workforce; how far the Beveridgean welfare state institutionalized women’s subordinate status in the labour-force; whether anxieties over ‘population’ and ‘Bowlbyism’ constrained employment opportunities for mothers of young children.
Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford, 1992), chapter 4

**Women, Education and Career Choice**

*Gender differences in educational achievement and progression to higher education; whether the post-war education system prescribed marriage and motherhood for girls; continuity and change in the jobs and careers deemed suitable for women; why so many middle-class women went into teaching in the post-war decades; whether education was a route to occupational mobility for working-class women.*

Sian Edwards, ‘Nothing gets her goat!’ The Farmer’s Wife and the Duality of Rural Femininity in
Liz Heron, ed., *Truth, Dare or Promise? Girls Growing Up in the Fifties* (London, 1985)
Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Basingstoke, 2005)

**Work, Marriage and Motherhood**

*Changing patterns of employment over the female life-course and the rise of the ‘dual role’ model; the extent to which the dual role was a cross-class phenomenon; the growing significance of part-time work for wives and mothers; the extent to which growth in married women’s employment altered divisions of labour in the home; the extent to which working motherhood became socially acceptable or even aspirational in this period.*

Stephen Brooke, ‘Gender and working class identity in Britain in the 1950s’ *Journal of Social History* 34 (2001), pp. 773-95
Helen McCarthy, ‘Women, marriage and paid work in post-war Britain’ *Women’s History Review* 26
Helen McCarthy, ‘Social Science and Married Women’s Employment in Post-War Britain’ *Past & Present* 233 (2016), pp. 269-305
Margaret Williamson, “‘I’m going to get a job at the factory’: attitudes to women’s employment in a mining community, 1945-65” *Women’s History Review* 12 (2003), pp. 407-421.

**Race, Ethnicity and Migrant Women’s Working Lives**

*How migrant women’s employment patterns differed from those of white, British-born women, and the factors behind those differences; experiences of racism in the workplace; the identification of migrant groups with particular occupations; the significance of empire and its racialized legacies for women of colour in Britain; the existence of the ‘ethnic economy’ and women’s place within it; black and minority ethnic women’s growing involvement with trade union politics in 1970s.*

Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley, 2012), chapter 5
Haifaa Jawad and Tansin Benn, eds., *Muslim women in the United Kingdom and beyond: Experiences and images* (Brill, 2003)
Linda McDowell, *Migrant Women’s Voices: talking about life and work in the UK since 1945* (London, 2016)
Louise Ryan and Wendy Webster, eds., *Gendering Migration: Masculinity, Femininity and Ethnicity in Post-War Britain* (London, 2008)
Feminism, Industrial Action and Workplace Rights

New feminist critiques and activism around workplace rights in the 1970s; women’s growing visibility in trade union activism; the origins and impact of sex discrimination legislation; the growth in maternal employment rates; mounting demands for public investment in daycare provision; how far women’s changing aspirations around paid work help to explain demographic change in the 1970s. (See also reading list for class one)


Anna Coote and Beatrice Campbell, Sweet Freedom: the Struggle for Women’s Liberation (London, 2nd ed, 1987)


Elizabeth Meehan, Women’s Rights at Work: Campaigns and Policy in Britain and the United States (London, 1985)

Jonathan Moss, ‘We didn’t realise how brave we were at the time’: the 1968 Ford sewing machinists’ strike in public and personal memory’, Oral History, 43 (2015)


Ruth Cavendish, Women on the Line (London, 1982)


George Stevenson, ‘The Women’s Movement and ‘Class Struggle’: gender, class formation


Anitha Sundari and Ruth Pearson, *Striking women: struggles and strategies of South Asian women workers from Grunwick to Gate Gourmet* (London, 2018)


A Zabalza and Z Tzannatos, *Women and Equal Pay: The Effects of Legislation on Female Employment and Wages in Britain* (Cambridge, 1985)

---

**Inequality and Labour Market Polarisation in 1980s Britain**

How growing social inequality shaped women’s employment opportunities and career mobility in the 1980s; the ‘feminisation of poverty’ and the reappearance of ‘sweated’ labour; how mass male unemployment affected women’s working lives; women’s advances in management and the professions; whether ‘neoliberalism’ helps us to understand the dynamics of women’s paid employment under Thatcherism.


Jane Lewis, *The End of Marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relations* (Cheltenham, 2001)


Nicky Gregson and Michelle Lowe, *Servicing the Middle Classes: Class, gender and waged domestic labour in contemporary Britain* (London, 1994)

Valerie Grove, *The Compleat Woman: Marriage, Motherhood, Career: Can she have it all?* (London, 1987)

C Hakim, *Home-Based Work in Britain* (Department of Employment: London, 1987)


Linda McDowell, *Capital Culture: Gender at Work in the City* (London, 1997)


Women, Family and Work from New Labour to Covid-19

Whether the later 1990s and 2000s were decades of advance for women in the workplace; the character and impact of New Labour’s gender equality and labour market policies; the debate over whether women can ‘have it all’; the extent to which men’s roles in the family were changing; the emergence of ‘post-feminist’ identities and the rise of ‘neoliberal’ feminism in the new millennium; the impact of Covid-19.


Heather Joshi, Hugh Davies and Hilary Land, *The Tale of Mrs Typical* (Family Policy Studies Centre, 1996)


Alison Wolf, *The XX Factor: how working women are creating a new society* (London, 2013)

Zoe Young, *Women’s Work: How Mothers Manage Flexible Working in Careers and Family Life* (Bristol,
Classes

Class 1: Observing women’s work: social investigation and social research

In this class we shall ask how women’s paid work has been made visible by different kinds of social research and investigation. We shall first explore how late-Victorian and Edwardian observers ‘read’ the meanings of women’s paid work and the extent to which those readings were shaped by the wider dynamics of class, race and ethnicity. We will consider the claims to authority and objectivity made by social researchers. Moving on to the period of expansion in married women’s employment in the 1950s, we will ask whether the ‘social problem’ paradigm associated with women’s paid work shifted. We will consider the role played in this by new sociological accounts of women’s lives, and we will explore how ‘expert’ or ‘official’ knowledge about women’s paid work intersected with ‘private’ or ‘vernacular’ knowledge. Finally, we shall consider how this knowledge might have shaped the parameters of policy and employment practices.

Primary source texts:

Extracts from Royal Commission on Labour, The Employment of Women: Reports by Miss Eliza Orme, Miss Clara Collet, Miss May Abraham and Miss Margaret Irwin (HMSO, C.6894, 1893), data collected by Collet in London, ‘Laundresses’ pp. 17-23

Beatrice Potter (later Webb), ‘Pages from a Work-Girl’s Diary’ The Nineteenth Century (September 1888), pp. 301-314


Secondary readings:


Helen McCarthy ‘Social Science and Married Women’s Employment in Post-War Britain’ Past & Present 233 (2016), pp. 269-305

Questions for essay-writing: How has women’s paid work been made visible by different kinds of social research and investigation? How did late-Victorian and Edwardian observers ‘read’ the meanings of women’s paid work and to what extent were these readings shaped by the wider dynamics of class, race and ethnicity? How ‘objective’ or ‘scientific’ were their accounts of women’s paid work? Did the ‘social problem’ paradigm shift in the mid-twentieth century and how did this affect new sociological accounts of women in the 1950/60s? How has expert or official knowledge about women’s paid work intersected with private or vernacular knowledge? And how has this knowledge shaped the parameters of policy and employment practices?

Further Reading:

John Goodwin and Henrietta O’Connor, ‘Pearl Jephcott: the legacy of a forgotten sociological research pioneer’ *Sociology* 49 (2015)
*Jordanna Bailkin, The Afterlife of Empire* (Berkeley, 2012), ch. 5
Shirley Dex, *Women’s Attitudes towards Work* (Basingstoke, 1988)

**Class 2: Representing Women’s Work in Visual Culture**

In this class, we will explore how women’s paid work was represented in visual form in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with a particular emphasis on the new technology of photography. Comparing and contrasting photography with other genres, we will ask how historians should interpret these visual representations of women’s work and evaluate their ideological effects in the wider culture. In seeking answers to these questions, we will look at the very different uses of photography evident in the archives of mid-Victorian flâneur Arthur Munby and the activities of Edwardian campaigners seeking to regulate ‘sweated’ work.

**Primary sources:**

Arthur Munby’s extensive collection of photographs of working women form part of his large and unusual archive, held at Trinity College, Cambridge, details here: https://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0016%2FMUNB
Images from the collection:
Handbook of the Daily News Sweated Industries Exhibition (compiled by Richard Mudie-Smith, May 1906), ‘Artificial Flower-Making’ (pp. 30-32), ‘The Box-Makers’ (pp. 33-36), ‘Birmingham Hook and Eye Carders’ (pp. 37-39) ‘Sack-Sewing’ (pp. 47-50), ‘Chain-Making’ (pp. 58-63) and ‘The Home Life of the Sweated’ (pp. 115-116)

https://archive.org/details/handbookofdailyn00mudi/page/n6

Secondary sources:

Kristina Huneault, Difficult Subjects: Working Women and Visual Culture, Britain 1880-1914 (Farnham, 2002), chapter 5

Questions for essay-writing: How has women’s paid work been represented in visual form over the 19th and 20th centuries? How should we read these representations and how should we understand their ideological effects in the wider culture? How did representations of working women in popular culture change over time? Were they reconfigured by conditions of war, and if so, how and why? Has women’s paid work been the object of commemoration or a subject for public history? Can we identify any enduring patterns in depictions of women’s work or is it impossible to impose any kind of order on this chaotic symbolic field?

Further Reading:

TJ Edelstein, “‘They Sang the Song of the Shirt’: The Visual Iconology of the Seamstress’ Victorian Studies 23 (1980), pp. 183-210
Lise Shapiro, Consuming Fantasies: Labor, Leisure and the London Shopgirl, 1880-1920 (Ohio, 2006)
Stephanie Spencer, Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s (Basingstoke, 2005)
David Saunders, ‘Wired up in white organdie: framing women’s scientific labour at the Burden Neurological Institute’ Science Museum Group Journal 10 (Autumn 2018) – open access online: http://journal.scinemuseum.ac.uk/browse/issue-10/wired-up-in-white-organdie/
Rosaline Gill and Shani Orgad, ‘Confidence Culture and the Remaking of Feminism’ New Formations (2017)

Further Reading on Arthur Munby:

Munby (1828-1910) was a civil servant, minor poet, diarist and collector of photographic imagery of working women. He has been a subject of great interest to historians because of the richness of his personal archive, his class-crossing relationship with Hannah Cullwick, a maidservant, and his lifelong fascination with women who performed heavy manual labour. Some of the key scholarship is listed below:

Leonore Davidoff, ‘Class and Gender in Victorian England’ Feminist Studies 1 (1979), pp. 87 141
Derek Hudson, Man of Two Worlds: The Life and Diaries of Arthur Munby (London, 1972)
Angela V John, By the Sweat of their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines (London, 1984)
Carole Wolkowitz, Bodies at Work (London, 2006), chapter 2

Other Resources:

Sylvia Pankhurst Exhibition at Tate Britain 2013-4, exhibition guide:
http://shura.shu.ac.uk/6836/6/ReeveSylviaPankhurstTateBritainDisplay%20documentation.pdf

Some of the paintings of Dame Laura Knight, a commissioned war artist during WWII:
http://www.damelauraknight.com/tag/wartime/

Berwick St Collective, Nightcleaners (1974) – an excerpt from this film can be viewed here:
http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/sisterhood/clips/activism/campaigns-and-protests/143934.html

A self-published book by Gina Glover, reflecting on her work as a feminist photographer in London in the 1980s:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57876e45414fb50d7405f10c/t/5a0079e1e2e4839469463744/1509980703346/Gina_Glover_Social_Action.pdf

Class 3: Feminist Perspectives on Women’s Paid Work
In this class, we will consider how feminists have framed paid work as a site for gender-based struggle by focusing on two key moments: first, controversies over equal pay and women’s economic dependence in the early twentieth century; and second, the development in the 1970s of new analytical frameworks for understanding women’s oppression in the labour market and family under the influence of the Women’s Liberation Movement. We will contrast and compare these debates, asking how feminists identified the causes of workplace inequality over time, how they theorised the relationship between paid work and domestic and reproductive labour, and what solutions they advocated.

**Primary source readings:**

Eleanor Rathbone, ‘The Remuneration of Women’s Services’ *Economic Journal* 27 (1917), pp. 55-68  

**Secondary readings:**


**Questions for essay-writing:** How have feminists theorised paid work in relation to the wider problem of women’s economic dependence and inequality? How have feminists explained women’s unequal access to the labour market and what remedies have they identified? How have feminists understood the relationship between paid work and domestic and reproductive labour? How have they characterised the effects of the Industrial Revolution on women’s lives and the value of their labour? What have feminists meant by the term ‘patriarchy’ and to what extent have they regarded it at the root cause of women’s inequality in the workplace? How has feminist thinking been shaped by differences of class or race? How have feminist debates regarding the emancipatory potential of paid work changed over the period studied?

**Further Reading:**

Sally Alexander, ed., *Fabian Women’s Tracts* (London, 1988)  
Ellen Mappen, ‘Strategies for Change: Social feminist approaches to problems of women’s


Susan Pedersen, Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience (London, 2004), chapters 6 and 10

Birmingham Feminist History Group, ‘Feminism as Femininity in the nineteen-fifties?’ Feminist Review January 1979, pp. 48-65

A Phillips and B Taylor, ‘Sex and Skill: some notes towards a feminist economics’ Feminist Review 6 (1980)

George Stevenson, The Women’s Liberation Movement and the Politics of Class in Britain (London, 1999)

Sylvia Walby, Patriarchy at Work (1986)

Veronica Beechey, Unequal Work (1987)


Class 4: Narrating the self: paid work, identity and subjectivity

In this final class, we will ask how women have articulated the meanings which paid work have held in their lives. Looking at a range of ‘ego-documents’, we will consider who gets to speak for working women, and whether paid work been central to personal identity and narratives of selfhood for women (and which women and when). Analysing these texts from across the period, we will ask how personal narratives of working lives were shaped by class, race or other factors, and whether writing or speaking about paid work as a component of identity become easier for women in the later twentieth century.

Primary source readings:

Margaret Bateson, Professional Women upon their Professions: conversations recorded by Margaret Bateson (1897), Preface, and choose at least three profiles to read.

https://archive.org/details/professionalwom00bategoog

Extracts from Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham, eds, Dutiful Daughters: Women Talk about their Lives (1977), Janet Daly (pp. 10-19), Annie Davison (pp. 68-73), Jean Mormont (pp. 139-144, pp. 151-56)


Valerie Grove, The Compleat Woman (1987), Interview with Barbara Mills QC, pp. 129-139

Secondary Readings:


Questions for essay-writing: How have women articulated the meanings which paid work have held in their lives? Who gets to speak for working women? Has paid work been central to personal identity and narratives of selfhood for women, and if so, which women and when? Are personal narratives of working lives shaped by class, race or other factors? Did it become easier for women to write or speak about what paid work meant to them in the later twentieth century, and if so, why? To what extent have women adopted the narrative trope of ‘career’ when writing or speaking about their working lives?

Further Reading:

Christine Etherington-Wright, *Gender, Professions and Discourse: Early Twentieth-Century Women’s Autobiography* (Basingstoke, 2009)


Jonathan Moss, ‘We didn’t realise how brave we were at the time’: the 1968 Ford sewing machinists’ strike in public and personal memory’, *Oral History*, 43 (2015)


Julia Swindells, *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence* (Cambridge, 1985)


Sample Exam Questions
Part A: students answer ONE question focused on the class themes:

1. ‘British feminists were always ambivalent about paid work as the solution to the problem of women’s economic dependence.’ Discuss
2. What do social surveys reveal about the working lives of EITHER working-class women OR middle-class women? Answer with reference to a period of at least forty years.
3. Did paid work become increasingly central to feminine selfhood after the mid-twentieth century?
4. How have working wives and mothers been depicted in popular culture since the late nineteenth century? Answer with reference to at least two of the following genres: art; film; fiction.

Part B: students answer TWO questions from the following, based on supervision topics:

5. Why did so few women perform the same work as men in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century industry?
6. ‘The essential element of evil’ (SIDNEY WEBB) Why was home-work described in these terms in late-Victorian Britain?
7. To what extent were middle-class women’s professional achievements reliant on the paid domestic labour of other women? Answer with reference to any period of at least forty years.

OR

What counted as ‘respectable’ work for middle-class women between the 1870s and 1930s?

8. How widespread was married women’s wage-earning before the 1940s?
9. ‘War work did little to improve women’s position in the labour market.’ Discuss with reference to EITHER the First World War OR the Second World War.
10. To what extent were women’s employment patterns determined by the availability of affordable childcare? Answer with reference to any period of at least forty years.

11. To what extent did the work histories of female migrants differ from those of British-born women in the post-war period?
12. ‘Women’s career opportunities were revolutionized by the sex equality legislation of the 1970s.’ Discuss.

13. Did the growing availability of part-time work from the 1950s improve or retard women’s status in the labour market?

14. How did increasing income inequality transform the composition of the female workforce in the 1980s and 1990s?
15. ‘British women’s working lives changed largely in step with those of other advanced industrial societies after 1945’ Discuss.