

**“ATTACKING NICELY”:  
CAR SALESWOMEN ADAPT TO AN INCOMPATIBLE ROLE**

*This is an account of the way car sales women see their world, forge a place for themselves in the masculine environment, and change from novices into successful salespersons. It explores situational approaches evolved by women to deal with ethical issues in the workplace. Although women's values about fair exchange are altered, at the same time they change the way the work is done, making the workplace less hostile. Using categories such as "Innocents," "Ladies," "Tough Guys," and "Reformers," this study shows how women adapt to an incompatible status and raises important questions for the future of men, women, work and society.*

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**Helene M. Lawson  
University of Pittsburgh  
at Bradford**

In our society car sales work goes against the norms of trust in human relations (Brown 1973; Farberman 1975). Typically high commission salespersons are expected to lie to and to cheat others for profit and gain (Leonard and Weber 1977; Vaughan 1983). Customers are aware that salespersons are trained in impression management techniques based on empathy to win confidence or on aggressive intimidation to overcome resistance to high prices (Oda 1983; Prus 1989). In addition, the car business is unstable; salesman and customers will probably never see each other again. This makes for transient relationships and an environment where the building of trust is problematic (Davis 1959; Becker 1960; Goffman 1961). In fact, throughout the whole social structure of sales interactions, there is little trust.

Researchers find that persons who enter this occupation cope with dishonesty, distrust and immoral dealings in various ways. One way is to concentrate on monetary goals as a measure of success and status (Leidner 1991). A second way is to suppress reflections on the unethical tasks they perform (Oakes 1990). A third way is to claim innocence through apparent unawareness of illicit doings. A fourth way is to claim one was merely following orders. And lastly, workers blame the recipients or victims of their services for negative interactions (Hughes 1962).

Working under these conditions is especially problematic for women who have been socialized as mothers and care takers to be concerned with the needs of others and to maintain honesty in relations (Dinnerstein 1976; Mead 1934; Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982). Although few articles have been written about women's experience in the field of high commission sales, there is research on women in other high pressure, male-dominated fields such as management (Kanter 1977) and the military (Rustad 1984). These studies find that women take on stereotypical male or female roles to adapt to a struare in which they experience inherent role conflict (Turner 1990).

My research examines how women handle the conflict between their socialized roles and their adopted role of car salesperson. I will describe both how the women themselves change and how they are also changing the interactions within the workplace, shaping new definitions of what it is to be a car salesperson. This study, therefore, analyzes modes of personal adaption as well as modes of social change. To provide a framework for understanding these changes, I have identified a concept-adapting to an incompatible status

through role making-as well as five categories of this concept, "Innocents," "Ladies," "Tough Guys," "Reformers," and "Retreaters." I use these categories to describe how women deal with co-workers and customers when they enter the field, and the changes that emerge as they progress along their career paths, from selling their first cars to becoming experienced salespersons. In an effort to explore the ways in which gender roles operate in the bartering and negotiations endemic to selling cars, the article focuses on saleswomen's initial values and attitudes toward co-workers and customers, the adaptations they make as they become more experienced, and finally, the ways in which some women change the dealership itself.

## DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE

I collected the data for this study from in-depth interviews with and observations with 35 car saleswomen and 15 car salesmen at car agencies and restaurants in the Chicago metropolitan area, over a period of three years from 1987 to 1991. The informants were recontacted at intervals in order to follow their career paths. The interviews lasted from one to two hours, and were taped and transcribed verbatim. I wrote interpretive comments following each interview. In two instances, I became a customer out of necessity because I needed a car, buying automobiles from women who did not know I was doing research until after the purchases were completed. An additional male informant was a personal friend who began selling on a commission basis about the same time I started to do my research and who spoke with me about his progress on a daily basis.

My first respondent was a friend of a colleague; she suggested I might find it easier to begin my study by interviewing a woman who lived in my neighborhood and was of my same ethnic background. Additional informants were selected through a snowball sample: interviewees would suggest dealerships where they knew someone I could interview next. They would often call ahead and arrange an introduction.

I endeavored to make my sample representative of the population of car saleswomen with respect to age, race, marital status and type of dealership represented. At the time of the study, women made up approximately 7 percent of the car sales labor force in the United States. The respondents range in age from 23 to 54, with an average age of 36. They had been in car sales, but not necessarily with the same dealership, from less than one to thirty years. Although the data are largely based on retrospective interviews, people at the beginning of their careers told stories similar to those told by experienced workers about their initial interactions. I, therefore, do not observe a cohort effect in which newcomers behave differently than pioneering women did when they began.

## HOW WOMEN COME IN

An examination of the work women did before beginning car sales shows that most had traditional women's careers, such as teaching, waitressing, social work, retail sales and secretarial jobs. These occupations primarily involved service to others and paid low wages (Howe 1977). Although ex-teachers complained that students were discipline problems, "little monsters" and "heathens," and ex-sales clerks and beauticians said customers were "pains in the ass," because they returned used merchandise or couldn't make up their minds about how they wanted their hair done, the women basically liked what they did in these jobs, especially the supportive relationships they had with co-workers. However, these women found it difficult to make a living and support families. Such women, with no previous sales experience, were usually encouraged to try car sales by male friends or family members who stressed the possibility of better pay. When they entered car sales, many assumed they would be able to make friends and establish good co-worker relations as they had done at their previous work (Hunt 1980; Lunneborg 1990). Nina commented:

I used to cashier at a discount drug store. The pay was

bad, but I got a real break on formula for the baby and make-up and stuff like that. Mostly, I stayed because the other saleswomen were terrific. We laughed a lot... told each other our problems. When the store closed, I decided to try car sales. I figured, "What the hell. People like me. I shouldn't have a problem." And I was excited to work for commission.

The hours are very long in car sales and salesmen, for the most part, socialize during slow times, telling each other how well they are doing, commiserating over losses, telling jokes or "kibitzing." To further cement friendships, many salesmen go drinking together after work. Most had been in car sales before so they knew others in the field. But even male novices to car sales said they were accepted by one clique or another. Newcomer women also attempted to befriend salesmen and socialize during slow times. They want to talk about a customer who gave them a hard time, family life, or even the weather. But when they approached the men, the women were usually rejected or harassed. Nina related:

When I would try to make conversation with other salesman they were very gross. They swear. They pat you on the butt like this. If I did well, the guys would say, "What do you need to sell a car, a bra?" If I was five minutes late, the boss would send me home. The guys would laugh. They made me an example.

Women who attempted to go to bars with salesmen after working hours developed a bad reputation. Evelyn observed:

You have to be careful. Women learn quick around here. You don't party. You don't hang out with the guys after work. Those who do are called "sluts" or "whores."

Co-worker relations between men and women were strained, and since there were usually only one or two saleswomen at most dealerships, women could not form their own cliques. Interactions between the two sexes remained an area of conflict, and probably will continue as such until there is a more equal balance between women and men car salespersons (Kanter 1977).

There are, however, more important areas than co-worker relations on which women must concentrate. If they are to succeed, saleswomen must interact well with customers. Yet, all 35 saleswomen remembered many initial contact experiences with male customers as upsetting and negative. These women agreed that most "older" men reacted in a rude, insulting manner when approached. Some openly refused to deal with women. Sara said these men "did not want to answer questions about their income or credit rating, or even discuss cars with a woman." Arlene said some "older men used foul language," or were so abrasive that saleswomen ended up "turning them over to a salesman." Because new saleswomen generally began work with no car sales experience, this rejection added to their self doubt and caused them to feel they needed to learn more about cars in order to sell them.

The car has traditionally been identified with men, and most saleswomen said they knew "little" about automobiles. They did not grow up fixing cars, talking about them with friends, or understanding how they operate. Therefore, at the beginning, many of the women said they thought it was most important to become technically knowledgeable about cars. Joyce had been in car sales for two months:

I think it is important to be able to talk to a customer about the vehicle--to understand how the engine works and what benefits the make has over others. I watch videos. I

listen to other salesman. I read all the pamphlets. I want to learn as much as I can.

To make matters more difficult, salespersons were not given much training. Newcomers were usually "thrown out on the floor" and had to figure out what to do on their own. Newcomers, men or women, had a hard time closing their first sales, because they lacked experience. Novices were generally hired by the type of dealership salespersons called "green pea stores." This is an agency which usually hires inexperienced salespersons and has managers close sales in the final stages of bargaining. Larry, a general manager, explained the social arrangements of these types of sales which function to shelter newcomers from the guilt and pressure of customer relations:

They [management] try to keep new salespeople in the dark as far as gross costs on cars. They think it makes them more believable to customers. If the manager tells you, "no, you can't sell that car for this amount," for whatever reason, "this is the price you got to sell it for," you have to go out there, and that is what you do.

Ann, whose father owned a car dealership, said that even more experienced salespersons only got to see the front page of an invoice:

There's an invoice that they [the dealership] can show you [the salesperson] and a customer can buy the car, usually for \$100 over the invoice. But, you [the salesperson] will never see the back page which is all their profit. When they [the dealership] sell a car for invoice there is like about \$1,200 usually in that figure. If you're talking Cadillac, it's more like \$5,000.

Once newcomers in green pea stores had been at work a month or so, management expected them to begin to close on their own. Although salespersons were told by management at the beginning of their careers that making money for the dealership was paramount, the first steps most salespersons, men or women, took was to try to sell the customer a car close to the amount he or she wanted to pay. Generally this was lower than management would like, and meant a smaller commission for the salesperson. However, most women said pleasing the customer through a cheap price made them feel good because they felt they were helping someone:

At the beginning I believed I didn't need to be greedy because there was a price I could sell at that would make everybody happy-the customer, my manager and myself. If you sell enough cars, you are going to make money anyway.

Men informants, on the other hand, were ashamed to have resorted to cutting their commission in order to make a sale:

I am ashamed to tell you how I sold my first car. By price, I guess. I want to forget about it. I gave away commissions before, just to get a deal. Hopefully, I thought I could make it [lost commission] up on another car.

#### HOW WOMEN CHANGE

Yet, what women said about first sales in which they made high commissions show how their values were affected by their work. Fran discussed her new attitude:

I'll tell you about my first big sale because that one I remember very well. I was working for about a couple [of] weeks, and it was right after the auto show, and a young dentist came in with his wife, and he had his hands in his

pockets jingling his money, and he goes, "I want to buy a Spider [Alfa Romeo]." I found out what the list price was and I wrote it down. I got a \$5,000 deposit from him and he took his credit out and I knew nothing. I went into the boss and he almost died. So he goes, "Don't lose this one!" I sold that car way over cost and I didn't even know I was doing it. It was the most exciting thing I had ever done. When he [the customer] came in to pick up the car, he said, "I wanted that car so bad, and I guess I really got screwed." At the beginning I believed it was wrong to ask for too much money--that it was greedy. After that, I started going for the buck.

This sale was exciting for many reasons. It was unexpected, the manager was pleased, and the saleswoman made a large commission. But most of all, selling seemed so easy, as though it were done through luck or magic. Therefore, the saleswoman did not need to blame herself for "screwing" the customer. Events like this became a turning point (Glaser and Strauss 1967) in women's careers, when attitudes and values toward making lots of money at other's expense became fun.

As they progressed on their career paths, women who wished to keep both their jobs and the excitement they felt in their work, continued to change their values, attitudes and behavior. A former teacher who previously valued expanding her subject matter knowledge, said she no longer attempted to apply similar values to product knowledge. Eventually, the desire to learn how the automobile worked was replaced by learning how to sell yourself. Sally expressed her new concerns:

I used to worry that I didn't know enough about cars, but customers know more about the mechanics than I do. Most sell themselves on the car. All you have to do is sell yourself to the customer.

And in order to sell themselves, women developed roles. They made tools of their personalities and gender traits in order to coerce customers into buying cars, distancing themselves from their potential disloyalty to the other in the relationship (Mills 1953;Hochschild 1983).

## INNOCENTS

Probably because the first high commission sale made by most newcomers was painless and negotiated in ignorance, many women continued on in the role of the Innocent. Innocents did not use crude language or insider argot. They employed dress and demeanor to portray their particular role (Goffman 1961). Denise, a younger woman, played school girl:

I've got a baby face and I do not pose a threat to anybody who walks in--young, old, seasoned buyer, first timer. I put people at ease. I don't scare anybody. I've sold many campers wearing sweats with sorority letters on the bottom. I have a face that will show people I'm honest.

Innocents continued to view their success as "luck" or "magic," both factors out of their control. They said that most customers would sell themselves a car if they [the saleswomen] said little. Innocents adapted through avoidance. They wore blinders so they did not see the dubious dealings going on around them and could deny being a party to the transactions (Hughes 1962). The woman who sold me my most recent car exemplified this orientation. She originally described the car as having been a manufacturer representative's

car, a "brass hat." A week after I purchased the car, I dropped my pen and was feeling around underneath the front seat, when I felt a small plastic object. This turned out to be a key chain from a car rental agency in Florida. It had my car's identification number on it. I called the rental agency and they verified that the car had indeed been theirs but they had recently sold it to Mazda. I do not think I would have bought this car if I had known it was previously used as a rental car. When I confronted Phyllis with the key chain, she replied:

Is that true? I never asked too many questions. I know I saw literature on the car...that it came from an auction. I know they buy when Mazda is having auctions. I thought it was a manufacturer rep's car.

Other experienced Innocents in my study told me when sales are slow they "dummy up" [use ignorance to sell cars], because customers believed that newcomers did not possess the ability to devise ways of cheating them. The greater trust in the saleswoman made the customers less resistant to her pitches.

### LADIES

Women who wished to remain in the field, but were uncomfortable with the Innocent role, had several other options. One was to become Ladies, taking on exaggerated feminine characteristics. This adaptation was similar to the role of Innocent because it was generally acceptable for women. However, Ladies differed from Innocents because they claimed to be more knowledgeable about the way work should be done than their bosses. They wanted more autonomy over their work. Ladies' greatest conflict with management was over sales strategy. They did not want to play Innocent, or to use the aggressive male sales model. These women considered customers "unruly\*" yet "fearful" and "distrusting," similar to undisciplined, bothersome children. They spoke about them with an underlying tone of warmth and endearment, implying that these misguided souls could be converted or rehabilitated with the proper counselling or guidance;

Ladies said customers were more easily manipulated through forms of stereotypical feminine behavior than through aggressive "pushy" tactics. They cajoled and nurtured male customers in order to deter sexual harassment and to sell cars. Their work relationships became patterned to fit relationships men have experienced in families (Kanter 1977; Rustad 1984). Ann, a 52-year-old grandmother described how she used the goodness of her maternal role to gain trust and respect from her customers: "I tell them, 'Look at these pictures on my desk. I am a mother. I am a grandmother. I wouldn't hurt you, now would I?'"

Ladies helped customers feel comfortable, served them coffee, listened with apparent interest to their problems and generally treated them with familial warmth and hospitality. Rita labelled this method of sales "attacking nicely":

You have to be nice and talk to the [customers] and make them feel at home before you can sell them a car. It is usually easier to sell a car if you establish rapport. This guy and I got to talking, and he said something about playing the accordion and we established a great rapport because I play the accordion. He still drops in to see me every now and then.

Ladies also attempted to manipulate male management and co-workers through these stereotypical feminine traits. I watched saleswomen sew buttons on managers and co-workers shirts, bring them home cooked food, and do clerical chores such as locating cars, or assisting with paperwork. These Ladies were still seen as outsiders, different from the group, and less than equal; but they had become non-threatening, like older sisters or mothers, and they were respected. Mary played big sister.

Salesman come to me for advice with their love life. They don't treat me like I'm one of the guys. They watch their mouths. They are very careful about talking dirty or swearing or anything like that They treat me like a lady.

Many Ladies attempted to find an ecological niche where there was less pressure for quick sales. Some women moved to less competitive, smaller volume suburban dealerships, "country clubs," that were more amiable or compatible with their lower key style. But low-pressure smaller dealerships face increasing uncertainty and may be declining in number (De Lorenzo 1988). Regardless of the location of their work, however, Ladies who were successful, presented new, more gentle role models to salesmen. They were usually not, however, aware of the impact of their style. By setting an example of success with less aggression, they countered the paradigm of the time. Those women who became aware that change was possible and sought it directly, entered the category of Reformer.

### TOUGH GUYS

Some women went directly from Innocents to Tough Guys, where they attempted to adapt the aggressive, competitive male model of sales. Generally these women said they took on this role because they were told to "toughen up or get out" To toughen up means to block feelings. To Tough Guys this was interpreted as being able to handle verbal abuse in order to become "one of the boys." Once Sheila became insensitive toward the use of profanity and sexual innuendos, she was allowed to join the men:

At first I used to break down and cry and show them I was scared or frightened of them. Then they just kept on more. They teased me, called me a 'bimbo' and asked me if it was that time of the month when I got depressed. At home, we never swore; we showed respect I had to toughen up. Some women don't They stay home when they're "on the rag." Me, I'm just like one of the guys. They use profanity; I do too.

This woman not only accepted harassment, she had been socialized to use it against others. Most Tough Guys worked at high-volume dealerships they labeled "Revolving Door," "Beat 'Em up," and "Slam Dunk 'Em Stores." At these dealerships the transiency of the business was clearly evident and salespersons claimed they could trust no one (Davis 1959; Becker 1960, Goffman 1961). Generally, women at these agencies had to make enough sales to meet a high quota and were continually worried about being fired. Therefore, they learned to "fight for the door" [grab persons who walk in the door before other salespersons got to them], and pushed hard on these would-be customers, often intimidating them in order to make quick sales. This style of selling resulted in many negative interactions which Tough Guys blamed on customers.

Innocents and Ladies labeled customers too, but Tough Guys were more extreme in their antagonism. Innocents viewed customers as "knowledgeable about cars," but "rude" or "disrespectful." Tough Guys put customers in an "out-group" as "enemies" who needed to be conquered (Hughes 1962). Respondents described what they did using argot that depicted a wrestling match between themselves and the customer where they "pinned customers down." Tough Guy language became progressively more violent and war like. Women claimed to "put customers away," and "do 'em in." Carol blamed the customer for causing the dishonesty and animosity in car sales:

Some customers really want our vehicle, but they come here to see if they can rip you off, and they will They lie about the condition of their trade-ins. They bring a car

that they just brought to the repair shop and the mechanic said it was going to cost \$700 to fix the damage. That's why they want to trade it in. They lie about their credit ratings, and they say they can get cars at other dealerships for less. The people who come in here can afford bucks. Probably, the more money they have, the harder it is to get it away from them.

Tough Guys valued most what the customer gave them, not what they could do for the customer. Gina defined a "good" customer as one who gave her lots of money, and a "bad" customer as one who tried to bargain:

We have wonderful people like Mr. Smith. What a wonderful guy. He brought his wife with him. She picked out the car. They added every accessory on it imaginable. The first price that I gave him he bought the car at. So the dealership made millions of dollars on it, and I made millions of dollars on it. But other people are always trying to chew you down. They're whiners, complainers. They deserve nothing and wouldn't be happy under any circumstance.

Yet, even when Tough Guys sold at high volume dealerships, blamed the customer for dishonesty in the business, sold more aggressively, and distanced themselves from concern for customer needs, male co-workers felt female Tough Guys were not equal to salesmen in their competitive attitudes. Frank, a manager said:

The women, they're more laid back. They don't have what it takes, the "killer instinct." People will buy under pressure. They feel intimidated. I have the killer instinct. My first four months I was here every day, 12 hours a day, because I didn't want to miss anything. I wanted to have the most numbers. I just wanted to win. I wanted to be on top, to get every walk-in. Competitiveness. Just about every guy here now has it. They hate to lose.

Frank was so competitive that he did not consider the customer's needs at all, even when he was a customer. He was angry that he was asked to pay too little for his own car, even though he could not have known exactly what the dealership made on him:

I went to another dealer to buy a car for my family. Because I am in the business, I was willing to pay a certain amount over cost, and without them even trying to make money off of me, because considering I'm in the business. We're in this business to make money and they didn't try to take money on me. Bad manager. I wouldn't want to have a manager like that I wouldn't want him managing my store if he is weak that easy. They built no value in the vehicle [added no extra options] and they had the list price dropped down to a \$200 deal.

When I repeated the story to Patsy, a self-proclaimed Tough Guy, she explained:

That guy is brainwashed. He would sell his mother to make a profit for the dealership. He has gone over the deep end. But, people change in this business, even women.

Patsy then told me about a divorced woman, Wendy, who was training for the position of general manager at a nearby dealership and gave up custody of her children in



order to work longer hours. I did, in fact, interview Wendy, who explained her situation:

I am being trained for general manager. This is unheard of for women in this field. I have to spend all my time here [the dealership]. I used to cook, clean, take care of my family, and work. Now that the kids live with his mother, I eat out, and I don't clean. I see them on Sundays. I don't remember the last time I cooked. I'm here most of the time. My boss says I'm the most dedicated person here.

I found that more than a few of the women informants--Innocents, Ladies, Reformers as well as Tough Guys, had to change their family and social life drastically in order to fit into the male work world and make a living wage. Married and single women had to curtail their social activities. Younger women even lived at home with their parents because they could not find the time to keep up an apartment. Not unexpectedly, divorced women like Fran, who were responsible for the care of young children, had the hardest time dividing their loyalties between work and family:

Before, when I was married, I worked part-time at home doing typing. I was there when Billy came home from school and we did lots of things together. Now, I can only spend Sunday and Wednesday with him. I have no time for myself, and it's hard. I need to help him with homework, do chores like grocery shop and laundry, go to the dentist--things like that It is very hard.

Yet, Tough Guys, even those who found car sales hard work, did not fight for change. They continued to try and fit into the male model of work.

## REFORMERS

Reformers believed that women were intrinsically better at selling than men. They generally begin as Ladies who were motivated to change the way work was structured because of how they felt about what they did, and the conflict this brought them. Reformers, similar to Retreaters, had difficulty blocking feelings. They reflected upon workplace interactions. Most Reformers were in conflict over the imposed priorities and resultant interactions between themselves and their customers. They wanted to be more client centered. Many wanted a life style that did not divide work from home so drastically. Yet, unlike Retreaters, they did not wish to quit

Ladies who turned to Reform usually began by distancing themselves from male co-workers. They stopped mothering and nurturing them. My data showed that over three-fourths of the Reformers in my sample had at least two or more years of college education, twelve held bachelor degrees. Reformers usually continued to relate to customers through the role of Lady. They explained their withdrawal from social contact with salesmen as a reaction to their inability to gain anything further from their less-educated male co-workers. Betty felt that most salesmen were crass, ignorant, and dishonest, and therefore, befriending them was dangerous:

I am not like salesmen. We [women] are not even in the same business as they are. I am an educated professional. I smile, and am polite to them [male co-workers], but it is best to tell them nothing. They try to steal your customers. They lie to management about you.

Reformers claimed most women are more trustworthy as co-workers, and that they treat customers better. Sally said that women customers expected salesmen to be abrasive. Single women customers, she explained, are often not considered as serious buyers by

salesmen because salesmen believe that women need male assistance in order to make decisions.

Often women are like, "Oh God, I'm so relieved to see there's another woman here, because when I was down the street it was awful! The man told me to come back with my husband. I've been divorced for ten years and I don't need his decision."

Reformers who led Reform were very concerned with building trust. For this reason they were willing to risk effort and time in interactions that might not result in a sale. They spent more time with customers who were not easily sold, might need more time to consider their purchase, or wanted to "kick the tires," leave and perhaps return later. Reformers like Evelyn said patience and understanding bring in referrals because previous customers remember you:

I come on very soft, and I spend a lot of time with people. If I'm not going to be able to make money, I still treat people nice and spend time with them, because down the road, I might get some business.

Lorber (1984) and Lunneborg (1990) found similar patterns in their studies. Medical women scheduled longer appointments with fewer patients in order to devote more time and energy to answering questions and listening to concerns. And, women stockbrokers spent more time learning about client's particular needs rather than attempting to push them into pre-arranged high-profit packages.

In addition to spending time developing trust, Reformers, more than any other category of saleswomen, fought for the stability needed to develop a work environment which encouraged trust. This was in opposition to the male sales model which defined success as a move to a higher volume and more lucrative dealership or a dealership that sold more expensive cars. Most salesmen moved from dealership to dealership, depending on where the "grass was greener," i.e., what cars were hotter sellers that season, where they thought they could make higher commissions, or where they were promised a contract for salary plus commission. In contrast, Nina managed to remain at her dealership for six years, and defined success in terms of stability, trust, and ongoing customer relationships as well as money gained:

I have been here six years. Right now I'm not making as much money because the business is slow and the cars aren't selling as well as in the past, but I have repeaters and referrals and I still make a good living. If I move to another place, that place may not do so well in the long run. My boss trusts me, and it is a good place to work.

The concept of "trust" between management and salespersons was seldom found in this field, where upper management sometimes replaced complete sales forces overnight. When Reformers managed to be more stable, distrust was minimized for customers. Clients could expect to get to know their car salespersons and form ongoing trusting relationships concerning service or future dealings, as they do with doctors, dentists, or other tradespersons.

Nina was satisfied to make less money in order to remain at the same dealership. Some Reformers were willing to make less money to find time for family. A few women even fought for and achieved part-time status. Ann was ecstatic:

After 12 years, I finally got management to let me work part-time. Now I have time for my grandchildren; I can go shopping with my daughter, and see some friends. I have missed doing these things. I have been put on salary so I make less, but I'm doing okay. The owner knows my

capabilities, and I have lots of steadies. They're willing to come in when I'm there.

Although Ann became a part-timer in 1990, she was fired six months later. Her boss complained she "did not fit with the team any longer" and had "lost her love for the work." She felt the real story was that "the car business is in a recession" (De Lorenzo 1988) and she was "fully vested" in a retirement program which was costing the dealership too much to keep her. Ann seemed very confused by the owner's singular disloyalty to her after 13 years because she made "good money" for the dealer over a long period of time, and her part-time pay was a relatively small salary of \$ 100 a day. Yet, the mere fact that Reformers were continuing to demand and receive shorter hours, a concession rarely heard of in this field, changed the structure of the workplace and set important precedents.

### RETREATERS

Early on, many newcomers became disenchanted with car sales because they could find no role that allowed them to adapt to the changes they had to undergo to make a living at this work. Most Retreaters left the field because they felt the customer deserved better treatment—more honesty, lower prices, and less pressure to buy something he or she did not need. Retreaters could not distance themselves from their feelings, and did not "feel good" about what they had to do to build a career in car sales. Leah quit after a year:

I told my manager I wanted to sell a lot of cars cheaper, and he screamed at me. I would say, "I'll sell a whole bunch for you, but I'm not going to make a whole lot of money on any one of them because I just couldn't do that, because I've got to shop with these people and live with them."

Mary, in the business for six months, was also leaving:

I don't like the selling aspect of car sales. If you do well and you make your boss happy, you feel sick inside. I have a conscience. I am not the kind of individual who can gain your confidence and respect during the initial transaction of purchasing a car and then when it comes down to the dollars and cents, treat you like I never met you, which is to make the highest profit off of you. 90% of the men in this business have no conscience. When you purchase a car and come back, they'll start hiding. They pretend they don't know you for fear you're coming back to make a complaint, to address something that was not dealt with properly in the first place. I don't like approaching people and having that look come over their faces and having to overcome that objection of, "No, I'm not a crook," and "Yes, I'll sell you a car cheap," knowing I can't because if you sell a car cheap the boss will say, "What are you doing, giving my cars away? Do you want to work here long?"

The sales culture's firmly established response to these self-recriminations was to encourage the salesperson's estrangement from a higher conscience (Prus 1989; Oakes 1990). Saleswomen were told to "toughen up or get out" They were expected to confine their emotions to feeling good about making a lot of money. If women complained to their bosses about their guilty consciences, they suffered negative sanctions. Complaints about having to overcharge or pressure customers resulted in ridicule, taunts, or they were sent home for the

day. Such women were told they were weak and could not "make it" in car sales. Ann, who recently got fired after 12 years at the same dealership, said she was so beat-up from conflicts with management that her "blood was on the walls." On the other hand, saleswomen were praised and rewarded for how much over-invoice they could sell a car. A really big sale was talked about throughout the area dealerships and the salesperson became a celebrity. This resulted in a lack of introspection on the part of many salespersons. They stopped reflecting about what they were doing and reasoned that this was the way things should be done in order to keep the dealer in business and to keep their jobs.

### MALE ROLES COMPARED

Female role adaptations tend to be dramaturgic, taking on the characteristics of specific characters such as a big sister or grandmother. Males do not appear consciously to engage in role play. Nevertheless, their adaptations are not outside of the typology just presented. Males take on the Innocent, Tough Guy, Retreater, and even a "Mr. Nice Guy" role, which is comparable to that of the Lady.

My principal observation is that all men who remained in the field eventually became Tough Guys. For these men, this role was not as much of an act as it appeared to be for the women. It is a role representing the behavior expected of salesmen by their peers. It seems to be natural consequence, in the heat of the sales arena, for men eventually to become hard boiled. Men said that they wanted to be tough.

When men or women enter the field, they are forced into the role of the Innocent. However, none of the men interviewed in this study were without previous sales experience. So the Innocent role for men appears to be transient. Unlike women, who would cultivate the role of innocence, men wanted to shed any such appellation as soon as possible.

The Tough Guy role for men seemed to be something that became part of their personality overtime. In contrast, the roles for women often appeared to be masks to hide their true identities and feelings--feelings which were often quite disparate from those they chose to express.

The Retreater men and the Retreater women were quite similar when interviewed. They were people who were unable to feel comfortable meeting management's expectations. One of the men who left car sales went into consumer electronic sales at a bargain center, where the prices were fixed and haggling was absent. He, as the women, wanted more respect in his sales interactions. Another man who left was one who, although personally known as a fast-talking "bull-shitter," said he simply could not talk fast enough, and could not feel good enough, about himself.

### DISCUSSION

What has emerged from this study is a description of the various roles assumed by women and the paths they took as they searched for ways to cope with the incompatible statuses they had to take on as car salespersons. Much of the research on "dirty work," and high commission sales, from the 1960s to the 1990s, analyzes male perspectives. My data includes women's orientations, which in many cases, modify previous findings. For example, Hughes (1962) found that people who did dirty work were generally those with a history of failure and poor adaptation to the demands of work, who were enticed by promises of status. Many of the women in my study have held higher status jobs in the past. Some had been at the top of the women's professional ladder, such as teachers and social workers. Although one could argue that even car sales work is rated higher over-all than the highest of women's work, women's decisions go into car sales appeared to have been motivated mainly by the need to make a better wage.

I argue that changes are taking place in the selves of car saleswomen due to their increased concern with monetary gain. This internal change has not been stressed in studies of women and non-traditional work, and needs to be given more attention. Kanter (1977) and Rustad's (1984) analyses are mainly concerned with organizational influences on women and the resultant stereotypical roles they adopt. These studies define these roles as impression management techniques and survival tactics. Although car saleswomen adopted roles for similar reasons, these roles were not superficially imposed strategies, but were indicative of value changes occurring in the very selves of these women. This is evident by analyzing the violent, competitive, and war-like language they adopted, which theorists consider "elements of identity and signs of self" (Peringanyagam 1991:128).

Taking on stereotypical roles causes women to change their behavior and methods of interaction, as well as their worldviews. As evidence, Innocents distanced themselves from disloyalty to others. Ladies made tools of their personalities and gender traits to coerce customers. Tough Guys labeled those they served as deviant and not worthy of ethical treatment. Women in all categories changed their attitudes toward the importance of family and social life. Future research needs to look more closely at the ethical implications of women's changing values.

On the other hand, I also found that there is no doubt that interactions between salespersons and customers were becoming more positive through the moderating effect of women in the sales force. Their continued introspection and gendered values have exerted a subtle but significant influence. Car saleswomen's definition of success seemed to include more factors than mere profit. Quality of life, both at work and in the home, were more important to them than mere gain. Reformers defined success to include a stable work environment where trust could be built, and a home life which could include a family. These gendered values, reflected in the classification scheme used in my work, show that sales tactics based on these ethics help women to remain reflective, as well as to build successful. The linking between the Reformer and the Lady categories is an argument in favor of the idea that the expression of even stereotypical female behavior may exert a positive influence in improving relations in the workplace.

However, changes that did take place depended upon the strategies adopted by the women, and the philosophy of the dealership where they worked. Often changes were not permanent. Yet, the fact that Reformers were usually top-volume sellers made them enviable examples to men they worked with. They showed men that profit need not be sacrificed in order to obtain other rewards such as job stability, trustful relations with customers, and shorter work hours to accommodate family life. These rewards, often thought to be unobtainable, may lure men to emulate women's examples (Lunneborg 1990). Because women are increasingly entering male fields where humaneness in relations has been devalued, their ability to construct role models combining profit-making with concern for others needs future study.

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