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Service Values-Profit Goals: The Divided Selves of Car Sales Women

Helen M. Lawson
Loyola University Chicago

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SERVICE VALUES-PROFIT GOALS:
THE DIVIDED SELVES OF CAR SALES WOMEN

by

Helene M. Lawson

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June

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My heartfelt appreciation goes to the members of my family who supported and encouraged me along the way. My mom, Leah, who loves and believes in learning, my son, Reid, who learned sociology even though it is not his field, my daughter, Elyce, who edited my work while working on her dissertation, and my husband, Larry, who taught me to use a computer, fixed it when it broke, and forced me to think in the abstract.

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PREFACE

In December of 1986, a short time before Christmas, I was on my way to teach a night course at Elmhurst College. Traffic was heavy on the tollway that evening. I was stopped behind a row of cars on an off ramp when I was rear-ended by a drunken driver and my car was demolished. For three weeks in the dead of winter, I searched for a replacement. I ended up buying a used car, the same make and model of a car I once owned and had vowed never to own again. The salesperson who convinced my husband and me to buy this car was a young woman who told me about herself as we negotiated the sale. She was educated as a social worker and had previously counselled recovering alcoholics and disturbed youth. I was particularly impressed by her ability to run around the icy car lot, pulling out cars for us to test drive, wearing high heels. She fascinated me. Why would anyone with a career as a social worker want to sell cars?

I had just completed research on impoverished unemployed women looking for work. None of these women ever mentioned the possibility of selling cars, and I would never have thought to suggest this occupation to female job seekers. I wondered what led women to this unusual field in the first place. How did they get hired? Were they successful? I

was surprised to find that there was no sociological literature on women car salespersons and little research on other high commission sales work such as insurance sales. There were, however, occasional articles in newspapers about pioneer car saleswomen working the autoshow, or dealers wishing to hire women to sell to working women who were now purchasing their own cars in record numbers. I wondered how they got along in the male environment of the agencies and if their sales techniques differed from those of men. Perhaps they were more trustworthy and easy going. Perhaps they were less intimidating, less pushy. I liked the woman who sold us our car. Even though it was not the car we set out to buy, it was a good car. Our saleswoman was easy to be with and did not pressure us. She talked about her personal life with us. She was a good listener and helpful. She did not pressure us. Yet, I did not fully trust her. Some of the things she said were not true. The stripped down, less expensive new cars she said were coming in the following weekend never arrived. Many of the questions I asked her went unanswered. But she was patient and gentle. I assumed this was because of her social work background. I wondered if other women were like her. Was this a gender phenomenon, or just a matter of differences among people? Usually people dread the car sales encounter. Could my pleasant experience be due to our saleswoman's motherly qualities or her sisterly warmth? Were women more sensitive and honest members of the sales profession? Were they better, or different at men's work?

Here was a way I could understand more about this phenomenon. The social interactions surrounding car sales seemed a wonderful laboratory for research about gender differences, and behavior in the workplace.

I was aware of recent major changes for women in male-dominated professions such as law and medicine since the 60s, when affirmative action legislation opened many doors. Yet in 1989, only 6.8% of car salespersons are women (USDL, 1989). High commission sales occupations continue to show a marked sexual division of labor. Women work mainly as hourly-paid counter attendants and department store clerks; men are the commissioned salespersons of large and costly items. Even in department stores, typically women's domains, men dominate in sales of big ticket, high commission items such as large appliances. Women in home sales (Tupperware for example), generally market small and inexpensive items. Even in these women's domains, managers are usually men who receive the major share of earned commissions (Pevin, 1968).

Automobile sales is different from the typical women's sales work because it offers more autonomy, a better chance to make money, and room to advance. For example, car salespersons and customers negotiate deals instead of depending on prior pricing. In many senses, the salespersons control the deal. They ask the customers personal financial questions, size up the situation, and put them in the car they consider right. Although they must take into consideration how much each car costs the agency, every deal is made autonomously. Department store clerks, on

the other hand, exert little or no control over buyers' decisions and mainly perform services such as accepting payment and boxing items.

In addition, a car salesperson can make large sums of money and substantially advance his or her position, incentives unavailable to clerks. Although there is no salary for beginning car salespersons, there are high commissions. If salespersons stay on the job over a period of time, they can pick up repeat customers and referrals. If they have a following and a consistent record of high sales, the agency will probably want them to stay. Salespeople can then demand an agreement with the agency to receive a salary plus commission. At this point, their reputation as top salespersons has probably spread and they will be wooed by competing agencies. If they continue to do well, they can change agencies, consider going into management, or eventually buy their own dealership.

The potential for high income and advancement in car sales, however, carries its own set of difficulties. The potential for upward mobility is initially dependent on the salesperson's ability to sell a lot of cars. Because there is no salary, the work is risky. As a consequence, if salespersons want to make a good living, they must work most of the hours their agencies are open. In all cases, working hours are long, as much as six days a week, twelve hours a day, or seventy-two hours per week. Consequently, salespersons who have families are extremely limited in the time they can give to their spouses, children

or housework. Single people have very curtailed social lives.

Selling cars also poses problems different from those of selling other kinds of consumer goods. Car salespersons must be more aggressive persuaders. Cars are not sold for sticker price and customers expect to make deals with salespersons. The seller and buyer bargain with each other to make the sale. According to Browne (1973), in order to satisfy buyers that they are getting a good deal, car salespersons must sell themselves, their expertise, and their honesty, as well as the car. This is different from selling merchandise in a department store today. Although sales is unified by the need to persuade buyers that they need the article sold, customers buying goods in department stores today pick and chose what they want themselves, primarily considering price. Thus the sales clerk has little persuading to do, either about herself, her expertise, her honesty, or the product (Howe, 1977). This has not always been true. The art of persuasion and the skills of selling once were resources as important to the department store clerk as they were to the autonomous seller of expensive goods. In fact, a history of women in sales shows that the sexual division of labor widened in the past two centuries.

Women have been actively involved in selling and trade throughout American history. According to Spruill (1972), many 18th century Southern women were partners in or inheritors of a wide variety of businesses, from gunsmith shops to tanneries, barbershops, blacksmith

shops and shipwright businesses. Throughout the colonies, women used their skills in millinery work, upholstery, tinwork, brewing, trading, gardening and midwifery, often establishing their own businesses.

Others ran boarding houses. With the growth of department stores in the later part of the 19th century, large numbers of young women went to work as sales clerks. Bradley (1989) imputes the recruitment of women, especially in clothing and footwear, to the growing association of shopping with glamour, luxury and charm, as well as the fact that they were a cheap labor force.

Theorists such as Braverman (1974) and Edwards (1980) similarly attribute the sexual division in the labor force to employers' drive to acquire ever cheaper labor. In the era of monopoly capital, work was broken down, divided up, and deskilled according to rational management theories. With the centralization of selling and the evolution of the large department store, selling was also deskilled and women provided the labor force for the new selling jobs. Most sales jobs were part-time and seasonal. From women's point of view, this schedule of employment made it particularly suitable for those who wanted to combine jobs with domestic responsibilities.

Lopata, Miller and Barnewold (1985) suggest that women's willingness to take part-time low-paid work can be traced in part to the "cult of domesticity" which arose during the 19th century and persisted well into the 20th century. As the sales workforce grew, the injunction

that women should stay home to take care of families was reworked, using stereotypes about the kind of employment which best suited women's fragile nature and nurturing abilities. If they wished to work, they were encouraged to take jobs which would make good use of these abilities and the jobs they entered were seen in these terms. As more and more women became nurses, teachers, librarians, secretaries, beauticians and clerks, these occupations increasingly appeared suited to feminine attributes. A woman at work was still supposed to concern herself with social relationships and nurturance, abilities that came naturally to women according to the stereotype. In contrast, skill, expertise, strength, and reasoning ability were seen as attributes of men in the work force. Women were not deemed capable of or interested in mastering the specialized knowledge supposedly required for the kinds of selling men accomplished.

Therefore, my research problem was to understand how women accomplished careers in high commission car sales. How did they master the specialized knowledge required for the kinds of selling men accomplished? I wished to uncover the issues specific to this non-traditional work: to answer questions about what attracted women to this male-defined occupation, how they entered the field and the obstacles they faced as outsiders and newcomers. I wanted to describe the careers of women in auto sales from their own accounts, focusing on their "moving perspective", on the "typical sequences of position,

achievement, responsibility, and even of adventure" that they found and created as they pursued their new and different occupations (Hughes, 1971:137).

VITA

The author, Helene M. Lawson received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Education from Roosevelt University in 1959 and the Master of Arts in Education in 1967. She began her career in sociology in 1979 and received the Master of Arts in Sociology from Roosevelt University in 1981. In 1983, she began her doctoral studies at Loyola University of Chicago. During her tenure she was awarded a graduate assistantship, and a Loyola Teaching Fellowship.

Ms. Lawson has chaired, organized and presented papers at a number of professional conferences, including the annual meetings of the Midwest Sociological Society and the Illinois Sociological Society.

Her study of car saleswomen has generated interest on an international as well as national level. Media publications such as the Wall Street Journal, Chicago Sun Times, New Haven Register, and New York Daily have carried articles on her work. She has been interviewed by broadcast networks such as KNOX, St. Louis, and WGN, Chicago. Ms. Lawson spoke on the nationally syndicated talk show "51%" which deals with social and political issues of concern to women, and is produced by the New York Public Radio Network WAMC. She also taped the internationally syndicated talk show, "In the City", which deals with urban issues and problems and is produced by the Canadian Public Radio Network CHEZ FM.

Ms. Lawson has been Statistical Analyst for Women Employed, a non-profit Chicago employment discrimination monitoring agency. She was Research Associate for Chicago United and Roosevelt Center for American Policy Studies. She has worked as coordinator of social services for the Skokie Office of Human Services. Prior to beginning her career in sociology she headed a department for Early Childhood Education at Oakton Community College. She has been part-time Instructor at Elmhurst College, College of Lake County, Chaminade College of Honolulu and Honolulu Community College.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary American society, where there is rapid social and technological change, occupations are constantly changing. Not only are occupational institutions undergoing structural change, but workers are adapting and developing new roles. This study tells the story of the changing face of work in the career of car sales. It is an account of the ways in which car saleswomen see their own world, forge a place for themselves in the masculine atmosphere of the workplace, turn from novices into successful saleswomen and how their community works. It is an ethnographic study based on "thick" description of the "routine ways in which people make sense of their world in everyday life" (Hammersley, 1983:2), using descriptive patterns of explanation and action by members of the car sales culture (Geertz, 1990). I attempt to present answers that informants gave me capturing their colorful descriptive explanations of activities, and interpret their social discourse following Frake's claim that "it is the natives who should be accorded the privileged interpretation of their own cultural texts" (Frake, 1990:61).

I organized my study around the work of Hughes (1971), which

emphasizes examining career as a "system" of stages composed of problems and adaptations which comprise workers' socialization as individuals change behavior, attitudes and values to fit new occupations. I concerned myself with people entering the career and the processes and sequences of learning the techniques of the occupation. I examined the workers' progressive perceptions of the organizational system and of possible places they might hold in it. I studied workers' changing conceptions of their work and of themselves as they moved through the career. And I noted the choices in activities and behaviors they made at each evolving stage.

The problem with which I began was to discover how women are socialized to be sellers of cars. I was surprised to find that socialization was successful only when they were able to acquire a high level of distrust and cynicism, because the car sales world is filled with mutual distrust. The distrust between salespersons, managers and customers is visible and palpable throughout the community. Vaughan (1983) argues that distrust among workers must be learned and is generated by the social structure in which individuals work. She points out that corporate cultures encourage workers to compete for economic success as an approved legitimate objective or goal, while norms supporting legitimate allowable procedures for achieving this objective goal are lax. Because choices workers make on behalf of their organizations are influenced by the rewards and punishments they receive, many workers are motivated to lie and cheat in order to make a profit and establish a career. As Simmel wrote, "A society in which

money becomes an end in itself...has a number of negative effects on individuals", one of which is an "increase in cynicism" (Simmel cited in Ritzer, 1983:175). In such a world, people question the sincerity and goodness of others' motives and actions, believing that everyone is motivated by selfishness, trusting no one.

The problems created by an economically focused culture is highlighted in car sales through the eyes of women who have never dealt with high commission sales situations. The emphasis on competitiveness in car sales pits individuals against each other and necessitates individualist behavior. The women's stories show that newcomer women have difficulty with this perspective. They are not accustomed to working in this type of atmosphere. Hunt (1980) claims that when women come into the factory they can not accept the capitalist work structure as readily as men. She theorizes that because they haven't been socialized as completely as men, they bring a more critical perspective to the workplace. Rather than being primarily concerned with competition, profit and economic success, many women therefore see work in terms of principles valued in their past traditional careers or homemaker roles, and are concerned with relationships built on trust, honesty, cooperation, and satisfactory working conditions.

In many ways, the split between family and work life is illusory, because family life involves work such as childcare, homecare, and emotional support. Car saleswomen spend their wages on material goods for family life. They bring work concerns home and home concerns to work. Most women who work outside the home, have work to do when they

return. When things were slow at car agencies, women thought about what needed to be done at home. When they were at home, they found it hard to relax and separate themselves from their job concerns.

When women first enter the world of car sales, they often attempt to negotiate work relationships in ways similar to those of home and family interactions. They make demands in their place of work aimed to increase control of the work situation. They are more concerned with customer needs than their male counterparts. They are less aggressive. They tend to be friendly and supportive to co-workers. This behavior is in direct conflict with the organization of the car industry, especially as it is becoming transformed into a more corporate based structure, in many ways similar to industries such as medicine and law. Doctors and lawyers are now less likely to be free professionals than a part of a corporate structure which transforms their conditions of work. Yet the structure of the car sales profession still retains certain unique aspects. The work is challenging. It is exciting and risky. It can be rewarding or devastating, similar to a game of chance. Each time a customer comes through the door of the dealership the game begins anew. Even though hours are terribly long, a profitable dealership is busy and there is little time for boredom. And although salespersons don't control the organization, they can control the play.

Analysts say the car industry is currently in a recession. They blame excess capacity for production and strong import competitors. The auto industry has a total capacity to build 21.6 million cars and trucks per year. In 1988, sales ran at 16.7 million, resulting in 4.9 million

units of unused capacity. Donald Hilty, corporate economist for Chrysler Corporation, predicts that by 1992, four United States assembly plants will close because sales will not be able to support the production base (Hilty, 1988). The number of manufacturers selling cars has increased dramatically due to foreign imports. American currency will buy more in foreign markets, consequently foreign cars are less expensive. Foreign automobile manufacturers want the American dollar and the American buyer wants the product. Consequently, the auto market is becoming freer and more competitive. Instead of three or four companies producing the same product there are a variety of products produced by a large number of manufacturers. The slice of the pie for any manufacturer and his dealerships is getting smaller. Dealerships are now selling multiple lines in order to sell enough cars in total to stay in business. Basically, dealers have to work harder at trying to make a profit.

Because dealers operate within systems controlled by outsiders--specifically, large automobile manufacturers, terms for sales are set by the manufacturers and if the dealer does not sell up to quota, he incurs the risk of losing his dealership. The franchise gives power over dealers to manufacturers, and makes the dealer an agent and pawn rather than an independent businessman (Leonard and Weber, 1977). Although dealers and workers wish to be thought of as people who deliver honest and reputable service to the public, this is belied by the fact that dealer and their salespersons receive bonuses for superior sales performance, but no rewards for honest and reputable service. As

Leonard and Weber point out, "What use is a good reputation for service to a dealer whose franchise is terminated because of a poor sales record? The direction in which the incentives operate is clear: enhance sales and downgrade service" (Leonard and Weber, 1977:138).

The political economy of car sales presents problems to the salespersons, as their comments attest. As I stated previously, car sales is work riddled with distrust between workers, customers, and employers. Because of this, car saleswomen have little stability, no protection against job loss, few alliances and no support system. Verbally, these problems manifest themselves in the use of aggressive and violent language. The talk was peppered with discussion of gangster wars in which everyone was "out to get you". Salespeople fight with owners and management, with each other and with customers. They call mass firings "blood baths". Dealerships that do a large volume of business are called "beat 'em up" or "slam dunk em stores". When salespersons sold customers they said they "worked 'em over", and then "put 'em away" or "did them in". After selling a car for a good profit they said the person "came out of the ether". Sex is also linked with violence in car sales language. Dealerships are called "meat houses", "cat houses", and "whore houses". And, co-workers are said to "get in your pants" if not watched.

Trust is based on a long term relationship. It often has a past, but at the very least relies upon a future in which one can depend on an individual for something. If this individual is undependable, how can there be trust? Salespeople told me that they felt bad about their work

because everybody is out to get them. New people were all untrustworthy strangers to established workers. Even when individuals stayed at one dealership, the issue of trust was still significant because they all lie to each other.

Trust in a community involves openness. There is a boundary around the group, not around the person (Goffman:1959). When workers are moving around, leaving, or concerned only with their own success, it is difficult to build trust. Each person in the transaction, from owner to general manager to sales manager to finance manager to salesperson to customer, is in a situation in which he or she must have defensive strategies in order to negotiate their way in the system. Because everybody knows everybody else is "out to get you", you have to get them first.

The public also generally distrusts the industry. In a nationwide Gallop Poll taken in the 1970s, to determine the public image of seven occupational groups--new car dealers, bankers, druggists, supermarket managers, undertakers, service station managers and plumbers, 57% of those surveyed picked new car dealers as those they considered "least honest and trustworthy". New car dealers trailed every other occupation with only 3% of the public considering them "most honest and trustworthy" (Leonard and Weber, 1977). Leonard and Weber claim these opinions are validated by many specific instances of unethical and illegal conduct by dealers in areas such as used car markups, high finance, service gouging, forcing of accessories, and parts pushing.

Public opinion makes car sales look entrepreneurial when it no

longer is. Dealers are not owners, but managers. The change in structure has come from the transformation of work relationships within an occupation that was once entrepreneurial and has come to be increasingly controlled by large scale organization. This organization values selling cars above all else. Staying at one dealership, coming in every day on time and being faithful to your boss has little value in a job structure where making a quota of sales is the number one measure of loyalty. Salespeople cannot be dedicated to their dealerships. They must think in terms of personal gain because the organization forces them to pursue that end above all else. They are forced through the positive and negative reinforcement they receive from dealers into conditions of selfishness and greed.

While the political economy of this industry is based on profit motives, some car salespersons operate according to understandings which are in moral conflict with the economic directive. This is especially true for women, who often vacillate between giving up their ideals or making money. The two moralities create nervous tension and conflict. Most often, the salesperson must choose either to live within this polarized system, or find other employment. However, occasionally, through the push, pull, and strain of these actions, conditions are changed and the work place is modified to a degree. For example, two of the women I interviewed recently persuaded their bosses to let them work part-time in order to spend more time with their families. But these personal solutions do not change the structures which make work conditions so difficult for car saleswomen.

My research problem, as I originally envisioned it, had little to do with these predominant themes of the separation between public and private life for women in car sales (and ultimately for all workers); the low level of support and subsequent distrust and cynicism between workers, employers and customers; and the conflict between service and profit motives. These concepts developed in the course of the research and became the central focus as I analyzed my material and became aware of the underpinnings of the political economy of car sales. Eventually I realized that these concepts reach beyond the narrow occupation of car sales and give one a chance to reflect on some of the more basic social processes that affect the dimensions of social life in a contemporary capitalist society.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN WORK AND NON-TRADITION

Reviewing the Literature

There is currently interest on the part of automobile dealers to hire women salespersons. This interest probably stems from the fact that increasing numbers of women are purchasing their own cars. For example, Lundstrom (1983) suggests that women car buyers do not relate well to "cigar chomping" patronizing salesmen. Furthermore, the car business is in trouble as I have just discussed and women are a cheap source of labor, ready to fill in when men leave as they left nursing and teaching. Saleswomen are now visible on car lots. More than ever before, women are selling cars, but little is known about them. Probably because of their number and visibility, most studies of women in sales are histories, descriptions and analyses of sales clerks in department stores (Donovan, 1974; Benson, 1986), or women who do house party sales (Pevin, 1968). Though women are known to be important members of some high commission sales forces such as real estate and, less often insurance, there are no studies of their work in these occupations. Studies of women in professional, managerial and skilled

blue-collar non-traditional work show they share many problems on the job. They are considered outsiders and have to prove themselves through exceptional performance. Even then they remain isolated, lonely and harassed. They have limited career mobility and difficulty balancing work and family life.

Tokenism, Isolation and Harassment

Men in male-dominated occupations often do not want women as colleagues. Women in corporate settings are discouraged by the men with whom they work (Kanter, 1977), and are shunned by them in the trades (Cockburn, 1984;Walshok, 1981). They are outsiders working in an unfamiliar masculine culture. Walshok describes a woman who had to "talk and act like a 'lady'" in order to be respected by the men. She could not swear or be present when groups of men shared jokes with each other. The men spent a lot of time doing what she could not, expecting the woman to remove herself from the scene each time. She was trapped in an unresolvable contradiction. By acting the "lady" she gained co-workers' approval. But in living up to their stereotyped image of woman she isolated herself from the networks of support and information about the work.

Paradoxically, although women are cut off from informal systems of learning on the job, as tokens with heightened visibility they are under pressure to perform at an exceptionally high level. If they do not perform well, old stereotypes which say women belong in the home are reinforced. Thus, the "superwoman" myth is not simply a creation of

advertising agencies. Women in men's jobs must prove their worth on the job over and over.

Aside from having to do a superior job, women must prove that they can endure forms of harassment that range from mild to violent. Some women are grabbed or touched against their will by their male colleagues. Women Employed in Chicago, an advocacy agency for working women, has documented cases ranging from practical jokes to threats of violence and demands for sexual favors by co-workers and managers in male-dominated jobs. O'Farrell (1980) found that, in white-collar jobs, off color comments are the more dominant form of sexual harassment. She suggests that harassment occurs because men do not know what to expect if they have not worked with a woman before. Men's behavior may be hostile and intimidating because men are concerned with job security, because they fear change, or because they believe women are naturally incompetent and will make more work for them.

Adaptation Strategies

In response to these difficulties, many women develop unusual adaptive strategies. Adapting to a new job is difficult under any circumstances. Women in non-traditional jobs must adapt and develop strategies for negotiating a very hostile environment. Within this framework, some women choose or are forced to enhance their "femininity" as a strategy for survival on the job. Kanter has identified several roles employed by corporate women as adaptive strategies. Among them are: "mother", "seductress", "pet", and "iron maiden". The "mother"

listens to the male colleagues' problems, giving them emotional support. For this she is accepted and rewarded, but she must remain nurturing and non-critical. The "pet" is adopted by the men and even though not considered equal, is sheltered and protected because of her special role in the work group. The "seductress" is a more complicated role, causing competition and jealousy among the men. If a woman is single and friendly to all the men, she may be considered "loose". If she aligns herself with a single man, he will protect her, but at the cost of jealousy from the other men. Her role as "sex object", rather than as worker, will become her core identity on the job. The "iron maiden", a woman who attempts to behave in a competent way and expects to be treated as an equal, bears the label "tough". Men see her as a militant feminist advocate. Her aggressive stance precludes sexual advances or male paternalism, but at the cost of her being labelled "gay" or "dyke". Rustad (1984) found women entering the military used similar strategies in order to cope. They took on roles as "mothers", "sex pots", "daddy's little girls" and "super soldiers". In both worlds of work paternalism helped women survive but discouraged men from taking them seriously as equals and hindered women's mobility.

Success, Satisfaction and Upward Mobility

In most non-traditional job categories, women do not hold powerful positions. Lorber (1984) points out that physicians' careers are built on a combination of sponsorship, visibility and reciprocal favors. As outsiders, women doctors have a hard time mobilizing favors, gaining

sponsors or developing reciprocal relationships for exchanging favors with co-workers. Kanter (1977) concludes that while motivation and ambition help a worker seek out a situation that makes best use of her potential, personal qualities are still insufficient for success. Career paths are shaped within a structure of opportunities and a climate of social attitudes. For example, who you know or have worked under are factors of success. Even the gender policy at a worker's place of employment effects her ultimate career mobility. In the corporation Kanter studied, women were not top level executives. They remained in entry-level jobs or lower paying, less prestigious positions, such as personnel, public relations, consumer affairs and staff functions, rather than the more established and powerful line functions such as sales, finance and production.

Women in other occupations and professions are also limited in mobility. In academia, most women are employed where faculty has lower prestige and power, such as teachers' and community colleges. Carter (1981) showed that even though women have become lawyers, they get placed in charity clinics and similar settings where they can not use the skills they have learned to move up to higher status cases, such as those in corporate or business law. Schroedel (1985) found that blue collar women, if they get to be supervisors, are located in areas that men do not see as desirable, such as scaling supervisors in shipyards or training supervisors in transportation. Some women get their jobs because of an equal opportunity quota mandated by the government and are not given the same duties by upper management as male supervisors in

similar positions. Yet studies show that most women who are successful in non-traditional jobs like their work. They are excited about the money, the new and non-routine aspects of the work and the self-satisfaction they receive. Ruddick (1977) Walshok (1981) Jurik (1984) and Lorber (1984) found that women in non-traditional work who stayed on the job and made a living at it were satisfied with their productivity and accomplishment. They liked the challenge, newness, and variety of non-traditional work. Others spoke of social contacts and recognition. They enjoyed their increased autonomy and control over pacing of work. Many said they had a sense of well-being because of the heightened self-esteem. On the other hand, Schroedel (1985) found that some women preferred traditional work, but said the pay was too low. They had less commitment to non-traditional work and got less satisfaction or feelings of accomplishment from it. Instead they looked for satisfaction in other activities and hobbies.

Family Arrangements

Studies show that most blue collar, white collar and professional women workers in non-traditional jobs consider their work to play as central a role in their lives as family. Lorber (1984) found that women in high status, non-traditional professional jobs (such as physicians) usually married equally high-status people who could understand their work. Walshok (1981) showed that women in non-traditional blue-collar jobs also married men who did similar work. For example, a male truck driver worked as half of a cross-country team with his wife in order to

maintain a close relationship. Still, even when husbands understand and approve of their wives work, there is conflict.

Families are likely to be put under stress when women work in jobs which have been structured without their ongoing domestic and child care responsibilities in mind (Coverman, 1989). Husbands generally give only limited help with family chores, while wives take responsibility for planning, managing and running of the household (Gerstel and Gross, 1989). When children are young, some husbands share child care responsibilities if their work schedules allow. In other cases, mothers or sisters help out. Some women use paid sitters or day-care (Gerstel and Gross, 1989). Lopata, Miller and Barnewolt (1986) found that husbands of women sales agents were less inclined to assist with housework than husbands of women in traditional sales jobs, even though the former made higher salaries. They suggest husbands resent "the hours and commitment required of such a job and maybe even the income she (the wife) earns" (1986:257). Schroedel (1985) found a relationship between family breakdown and blue collar non-traditional work, but was not sure of the direction of causality--whether family break-ups led to non-traditional work or non-traditional work to family break-ups.

Studying Car Saleswomen

· Making Contact

In order for me to understand what was happening in car sales and to see how the culture compared with the descriptions of the cultures of

other non-traditional occupations, I had to immerse myself in the world of car sales. It is difficult to interview car saleswomen. Most saleswomen do not want to meet on their time off or at their homes. Free time is limited and very valuable to them and they do not want to spend it talking to strangers about their work. Home is a very private place to them where they can and need to unwind. Many women have unlisted phone numbers. Meeting at dealerships was also difficult because there is little privacy and managers could hear everything we said; so openness would be difficult and confidentiality hard to maintain.

When I went to an agency for an interview, I needed much patience and perseverance. I was either waiting for their customers to leave, or for saleswomen to find time to see me between walk-ins and phone calls. Even when I had appointments, many women stood me up. They didn't come to prearranged lunch dates, or were absent from work at the time and day they had agreed on for the interview.

Prus (1980) discusses this problem in interviews with hustlers who engaged in activities which often made planning precarious. As in sales, "a deal might suddenly come up," forcing him to spend valuable time waiting. Even if he followed respondents around, it was difficult to find a block of time to engage in more involved conversation. Prus (1980:137) found it important to be careful that his activities did not interfere with the respondents "ability to make money". I tried to stay out of the way when agencies were busy. I met women during their slow times, such as early mornings, in the middle of the week, early in the

month, during slower months or days when the weather was bad. I waited around if they had customers and I came back again and again if they got too busy to see me. I chased one woman, Leah, for three months before getting an interview. Once she stood me up in a restaurant and I ended up eating an unwanted lunch. The next time she stood me up at her place of work. Finally, I went to her agency and sat there waiting for hours until she found time for me. During our interview, she told me I was a "super sales person" because I got her to talk to me when she did not want to and had already stood me up twice. I had to become a sales person myself just as Prus became a "hustler" in the course of his fieldwork.

Building Trust

In addition, in order to get interviews, I had to convince saleswomen that I was not going to get them in trouble with their bosses and that I was not out to write an expose about crooked dealing at their dealership. Twice I was turned down because saleswomen said management did not allow interviews due to previous bad press releases in local papers. To get around this, I got respondents to call saleswomen they knew at other agencies and set up introductions for me. That way the current informant would explain that I seemed okay and had promised not to use names of saleswomen or agencies in my study. Probably because I revealed that I was interested in and sympathetic with women's plight in the world of work, they trusted me to a degree. Prus (1980:140) finds that "If you are reasonably discreet and can maintain the confidences of

others, then the persons with whom you interact are more likely to trust you to maintain their confidence". Because many of the saleswomen I interviewed knew each other, I was very careful not to discuss information I had received from one with another. Even though I was let in on insider stories about salespersons, I did not pass this gossip on.

I did not trust saleswomen either. I felt oddly alienated during interviews. In a sense I fit in because I was a woman, but in another sense I did not because I was not a car salesperson and I knew very little about this world. I also looked out of place because I dressed differently from car salespersons. Most saleswomen were "dressed for success" in the latest business career apparel, while I wore the thrift store clothes acceptable and typical for graduate students.

I felt, much as other fieldworkers before me, a deep sense of unfamiliarity with the social world under investigation and its resulting sense of edginess, uncertainty, discomfort and anxiety. Yet it appears that informants do not expect researchers to be just like them. In fact, they are interested and pleased to find them different (see Whyte, 1955; Wax, 1971; Prus, 1980). Prus suggests that it furthers research when the researcher guarantees the status of outsiders so that "respondents see you as largely autonomous, someone who functions independent of others in the community" (1980:140).

Eventually, I also found that saleswomen did not expect me to be like them and that they respected my difference from them. For example, my first informant Ann phoned me at home after reading an article about my research in Today's Chicago Woman. Accompanying the article was an ad

for her agency carrying her picture as a top truck salesperson. She was pleased for both of us.

The Credibility of Stories

Some people's stories of their activities differed from what I had witnessed or heard from other people. For example, I overheard a customer angrily telling Martha, "You really worked me over. Forget it!" He then left the dealership. I asked Martha what had occurred in the interaction and she replied that she had been very "fair" with the customer, going out of her way to get him the "best deal possible".

Frake, discussing informant credibility, coaches the researcher to "take the natives seriously as interpretative ethnographers of their own lives" (1990:61). Becker (1970) argues that statements by members of the group under study about some event which has occurred should not be dismissed as valueless because they tell us about ideals and notify us about problems in the setting. He concludes that even a seriously defective statement of an event may still provide useful evidence if the statement is seen as coming from a perspective which is a function of the person's position in the group at the time. Language is problematic; words do not have the same meaning in the culture of car sales as they do in the culture of the researcher. The culture's spoken words are true, but only if the researcher looks at them from the view of its inhabitants.

In order to understand what the informants are saying about themselves, however, one must study the system as a whole, complete with

politics, power, and economic structure. For this reason, if salespersons say, "I am honest", they mean "I am honest" according to the rules of their system. And, once I began to understand this system, I learned that salespersons' stories coincided with their positions. Newcomer's perspectives of occurrences were similar to those of dropout's pictures of events, whereas experienced and successful people had socialized and thereby different perspectives and realities. For example, most newcomers and drop-outs were angry at having to pressure people into high priced cars and preferred to sell at lower prices and to let buyers take their time about making decisions. Experienced salespersons, by contrast, considered it imperative to make as much profit as possible, thereby being loyal to the dealership.

In the previously mentioned example, the saleswoman was an aggressive closer who made high profits on deals. She felt this behavior was sensible fair business practice. However, it was an area of conflict for other salespersons who felt this was "unfair" practice. In order to validate my findings about this area of conflict, I had the good fortune of having a personal friend who was just beginning to enter high-commission sales work, selling commercial cleaning chemicals. Although the informant was male and not in car sales, his sales situation was similar. At first, he preferred to let the customers think about his product, giving them free samples and returning at regular intervals to see if they would order. This did not work well, he made few sales, and his draw (weekly pay) was cut. In response to this, he became increasingly aggressive, pushing for quick sales.

Eventually he realized he could only make a living if he charged higher commissions and forced items which customers might not need. Because he found it difficult to adopt this behavior, he dropped out of sales after a year, as did some of my informants. I felt great empathy with these people. I could relate to their moral dilemma. I have always valued service over profit in my chosen work. How could I not feel negative about women who succeeded when I did not agree with their attitudes toward profit. Yet I believed they had a right to keep their jobs and make a good living.

Keeping in Touch

The informants were interviewed in 1987. The following two years I transcribed tapes, coded and analyzed data, and wrote up my findings. I did not obtain private phone numbers or addresses out of respect for saleswomen's stated need for privacy. During this time, however, I would occasionally call a saleswomen at work to have her expand on or explain a statement that was not clear to me. I found many changes. Some women had moved into management positions. Others had left their dealership and were working at new locations. A few women could not be located. In the latter part of 1989 and 1990, the study received media attention and newspaper reporters asked for names of saleswomen they could contact for interviews. I again phoned saleswomen to ask for permission to give out their names. This time it was even harder to locate respondents. Sometimes co-workers knew where saleswomen had gone and shared this information with me. Twice I saw articles about missing

respondents in local newspapers. In some cases, however, entire dealerships had gone out of business and there was no way for me to trace the whereabouts of informants, further emphasizing the instability of the car sales business. Because I agree with Altheide (1980:301) that "one of the rewards of field research is the possibility of continued contact with respondents...defined as continued learning", I have tried to keep in touch with the women over the past four years since completing the research and have provided some current information on their job status (See Epilogue).

CHAPTER III

MOVING INTO CAR SALES

The Push to Leave Previous Work

In this chapter, I will focus on the types of work the informants did in the past--their pre-career careers--in order to understand the work cultures they bring with them. I will also look at their motives for leaving previous jobs and what they say they hope to gain from their new positions, taking into account both commonalities and differences in experiences and problems among informants. Because this study is in part an attempt to understand the ways in which women actively pursue a career that has not been staked out for them, it examines how they learn the operation of the new field and figure out where and how they may fit. Women may use some behaviors and skills they possess from previous work experience while discarding others; eventually they evolve new behaviors and identities.

Who are these women toward whom I have such ambivalent feelings? What do they have in common? How are they different? The informants in my study range in age from 23 to 52, with an average age of 36. One woman is Mexican-American, one is African-American, one is

American-Indian and 27 are caucasian. They have been in car sales, but not necessarily with the same dealership, from less than one to 30 years. Eleven of the informants have children school-aged or younger. Six of these women head single parent families. Twelve women are married. Twelve are unmarried and have no children. More than two-thirds of the women entered car sales without ever having worked in an occupation heavily populated by men.

Women's careers in car sales may begin long before they enter auto showrooms. Understandings developed through participation in family, school, work and other institutionalized settings comprise peoples' identifications, personalities and modes of behavior. When individuals enter a new career, they bring with them a set of experiences or cultural reasonings. Past knowledge is applied to new career settings and developed or changed according to the particular demands of the new careers and awareness of what is required of the participants (Gouldner, 1957).

Pink-Collar Workers

One-half of the informants in my study held pink-collar jobs prior to becoming car salespersons. According to Howe's (1977) usage of the term, pink-collar work is low paying service and sales work almost exclusively done by women (85% and above). It is the female equivalent of men's blue-collar or working class jobs. In 1960, 52% of all women were employed in pink collar positions in just four occupations: beautician, over-the-counter sales worker, waitress, and office worker.

Today, in spite of gains made by women in professions such as dentistry, law and management, fully 45% of women workers remain employed in these four jobs (See Women Employed Institute study, 1988).

Pink-collar work generally extends the private care-taking work of women into the public world of waged service work. Secretaries, waitresses, beauticians and sales clerks care for other people. They take orders and service others' needs in a nurturing manner. Although demand for this type of service work is on the rise (USDLBLS:1987), these expanding occupations continue to carry low status. Fox and Hesse-Biber (1984) among others, attribute the low pay of these jobs to their incorporation in a society which does not recognize the value of homemaking skills. Howe found that in addition to being low paying, most pink-collar jobs are routine, repetitious and dead-end. Women in her study take orders from others and perform jobs with little autonomy. Waitressing and clerical work is divided into small tasks with limited activities to be performed over and over. Secretaries complain of the boredom of being tied to their desks, and waitresses serve the same meals and hear the same complaints repeatedly. Lopata, Miller and Barnewolt (1985), say that many sales clerks today suffer similar routinization of their jobs. They are nothing more than cashiers, ringing up purchases brought to them by customers. In addition, Pavalko (1988) notes that there is little opportunity for advancement in pink collar occupations. Jobs that involve more power and control are generally given to men. Kanter's (1977) work found that women in the secretarial pool were not able to rise to executive positions in

corporations because the hierarchy forbid it, and Spradley (1975) claims it is rare for women to become head waiters.

The women I interviewed both corroborate the literature on this type of work and expand upon it, showing in specific ways how women in pink-collar work envision their jobs, and how these jobs affect their lives. They don't get any money. They feel like failures. They know that they are stuck because they don't have enough education. All these points are expansions on pink-collar work and its failures for women. My informants said the issues which pressured them into leaving were low pay, lack of autonomy, boredom and blocked mobility. All 15 women said they wanted to make a living wage. One woman said it was difficult for her to sit at a desk all day. Similarly, another said she found it frustrating to stand behind a counter for eight hours. A full-time housewife and part-time pink-collar worker said her part-time jobs were neither fulfilling nor challenging. All of these women were searching for better jobs; their retrospective accounts indicate the pressures which caused their dissatisfaction and career instability. However, when they discuss the dead-end nature of their past positions, they may offer more commentary on the ways they envision their present work in car sales than on their past work. They may not have been aware in the past of the reasons they wanted to leave. Similarly, the descriptions they use for their new work, terms such as "exciting", "challenging" and "fulfilling", may not have been part of their past understanding.

Barbara, a 38 year-old divorced mother of two, worked as a cosmetologist to support her family prior to entering car sales work.

The dull routine, stress from not being able to make ends meet on her salary and an inability to find hope for the future at her job led to ulcers and hospitalization. On the advice of her doctor and friends, she decided to look for a new occupation:

I worked for a skin care company, and I really wasn't happy being cooped up in an office behind a desk on the phone all day long taking orders, except the times when we taught. I need to move around, see people, try new things. So I used to get sick to my stomach, you know, from nerves. Finally I got ulcers and I had to quit. I wasn't making enough to support my family anyway.

Fran, a divorced woman with three children, helped put her ex-husband through college by working at a number of traditional women's jobs. After her divorce, she became a waitress to support her children. She found the work depressing and exhausting, but could think of no way out:

After I graduated from high school I got married and worked to put my husband through college. I worked in an office and I worked for a salesman. My boss got fired and I was doing his job plus being a secretary and I got a taste of sales and the excitement and I liked it. So I started doing home parties like Tupperware, but I needed more money coming in after my divorce, so I took a waitress job and I hated it. It was so boring, and I had to be on my feet all day. I thought about going into real estate but in my mind I knew it wasn't a good idea because I might have to wait six months or more to make any money.

Nina, a 47 year-old married woman, also worked at a number of traditional female jobs that were low-paying and which she believed led nowhere. She blamed herself because she had a limited education:

I sold cosmetics at a pharmacy and I made \$6,000 a year. I got milk free and toothpaste and deodorant, but I hardly made any money at all. I never made any money before [car sales] in my life. And I used to think this was all I could do and feel bad because I only had a high school education.

Patsy, a 45 year-old housewife and mother worked at a series of

part-time pink-collar jobs and also at volunteer positions when her children were young:

I don't like being a housewife. It is not my thing. When my kids were young, I took any part-time work I could fit in with their needs. I worked out of my house when my kids were small. For a while I was a statistical typist. I sold Tupperware for a while. Then I got involved with my kids' school and I was the PTO president for a couple years. Then I went into market research and it was door-to-door except when I went into malls and then I did executive interviews. Finally my kids got old enough and I looked for something that I really wanted to do, that would fulfill me.

Helen, a middle-aged widow, was the sole woman in my sample who runs her own dealership. She found it hard to keep the dealership when her husband died, because she also had two children to raise. But, because her previous secretarial work was low-paying and offered no autonomy, excitement or upward mobility, she took a risk and kept the dealership:

Before I married I worked with an automobile dealer as his personal secretary. I didn't have an in-hand. I did not work directly with the customers or with the people or what have you. It was boring and dead-end. This is different. This is a wonderful feeling. I can't even explain it. It's exciting, interesting, challenging, demanding.

Women Professionals

Five women in my sample were educated for white-collar professions traditionally held by women. Four women were elementary school teachers and one was a social worker. The ideal type model of a profession as exemplified by Hall (1987), Pavalko (1988) and others relies on criteria and characteristics of work that differentiate professions from other occupations. Professions require a systematic body of theory or

intellectual technique, a relevance to basic social values and a long training period. Professionals share a motivation to serve, a sense of commitment and community among members of an individual profession and a code of ethics. Such work is highly esteemed by the public, relatively high paying and self-regulated, giving professionals control over their own work. Women's professions, or "semi-professions" (Ritzer, 1977) such as teaching, nursing and social work are nevertheless negatively categorized. This is justified through claims that qualifications for semi-professions are less unified than in full-professions such as medicine or law. For example, social case workers can be certified as B.A.'s, M.B.A.'s or Ph.D's. For this reason, theoretical bases for knowledge specific to these professions are erratic and underdeveloped. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the semi-professions is that they are "early ceiling careers" (Pavalko, 1988). For example, once elementary school teachers achieve continuing-contract status, there are severe limits to the kinds of positions they can obtain in the hierarchial ranks of the school system. Similar to hospitals and welfare agencies, schools put emphasis on supervision and administration as the only routes to upward mobility. In such professions, men dominate higher paying supervisory positions. They are the principals in elementary schools, and doctors and administrators in hospitals. Held accountable to male administrators, women lack professional authority and autonomy.

Our culture sets broad guidelines for what men and women ought to do. Stereotyped views involving gender distinction in the workplace

define some jobs as male and others as female. Certain occupations have been defined as sex appropriate. Explanations for this generally correspond to cultural perspectives about men's and women's nature stemming from physiological and psychic characteristics of each sex. Theories that do not rest on a biological model are based on sex role socialization, human capital and social structural theories. According to socialization theorists, children are typically raised according to stereotyped views of what is proper gender behavior which results in their inclination toward sex typed work. Human capital theorists feel these are rational economic choices because women expect to drop in and out of the labor market to raise children and their job expectations are lower. Structural theorists see women as a reserve army of labor in capitalist economy. Feminist theorists say that sex linked work developed out of a preindustrial patriarchal society concerned with control, and is discrimination based on stereotypic gender differences which serve to keep women subordinate (Epstein, 1988).

In pink-collar work and in women's professional work there is a linking of occupation and gender roles which limit status, pay, and mobility. Even though five women in my study made it to the top of the women's traditional job structure, low pay and blocked mobility coupled with lack of autonomy and boredom caused all five women to pursue new careers. Three of the five professional women talked about being "burned out". They said they were physically and emotionally drained. An elementary teacher said that her salary was not enough for her to support her family; so she had to work two jobs, and then come home to a

third job, housekeeping.

Evelyn, a divorced woman, raised two daughters by teaching fourth grade and moonlighting at pink-collar work in the evenings to make ends meet:

I taught fourth grade. But I also had to work a second job. I had to raise two daughters alone, so I always worked a full-time job and a part-time job. Whatever it took to make ends meet. I sold jewelry. I was a waitress. I was a market analyst. I was tired all the time and I still had trouble keeping my head above water.

Gina, a single woman, got an elementary education degree but decided to change careers after her experience with student teaching. She found the work boring and an all-female atmosphere socially limiting:

I have a degree in teaching which I got to please my family, but I have been in sales all my life. Sales has potential. It is exciting. I sold clothes, gift items, health programs. I like to work with adults. Teaching is dead-end. Your salary is limited. You work with all women. I'm single. Being in car sales doesn't hurt socially.

Ida, a social worker, followed a career in counseling. She moved laterally from working with emotionally disturbed youth to counseling recovering alcoholics at a veterans' hospital, where she received top of the line pay for that type of work. She, too, was dissatisfied with the low pay and blocked mobility. As she put it, she "burned out":

I have a Bachelor's in Social Work. I started in a youth service type of thing--light weight intervention, prevention, short term counselling. In college I interned with an alternative to probation program. I worked directly with the kids and instead of getting a probation officer, the kids got me. They didn't pay me, but it was good on-the-job training. From there I got a job with the county working with the kids in the schools. From there I went to veterans' administration. I was a consultant for one of the alcoholism programs and I just burned out. I didn't want to go back

into counseling. In the V.A. you move up when somebody dies or retires. I thought, 'What have I got to lose? I'll try [car sales] and if I don't like it, I'll go back to what I was doing before. I want to broaden my horizons. Do something in a business field, get a lot of background, learn about financing and management. I want to move up. I want some business training. I can always go back, but I don't want to do that for now.

Following a new course of action is risky, but with blocked mobility Ida was motivated to try. Because she feels she is at the bottom and few opportunities are available to her, she sees car sales differently than other people might. Not everyone would trade their profession for a career in car sales. But, with an increased possibility for higher mobility "broadened horizons", she is encouraged to take a risk. Ida uses a "vocabulary of motives" (Mills, 1953) to emphasize her reasons for moving.

Rita, a recent graduate in primary education, also chose to change her career. She was unable to find work as a primary teacher in public schools in her local area because she had no prior experience. A parochial school offered her work, but paid \$9,700 a year, a figure she considered too low to consider because she would need to pay for a sitter for her young child:

I got a degree from National College of Education as a primary teacher and after borrowing \$10,000 to get the education, I found out that no one would hire me where I lived on the North Shore because I didn't have experience, and I could only get a job at a parochial school where I was offered \$9,700 a year. I can't afford to work for that kind of money and be able to pay a sitter.

This is another example of a strategy built from necessity. It should be noted that strategies similar to Rita's used by the other professional and pink-collar women are individual, not collective

strategies. Each woman seeks an exceptional position in her field rather than trying to challenge the problematic structure of the occupation. Rita did not try to organize with other women to form a union or a collective daycare center. She chose to change her occupation to look for "good" work, rather than to try to better offerings in her preferred field.

Artists

Two informants held Fine Arts degrees. One was a freelance photographer and the other a portrait artist. Creative careers in music, art, theater, and dance, among others, share some characteristics with professional jobs. There is a sense of commitment, a long training period, and a sense of belonging to a community with a common identity and norms. However, there are differences as well. The arts have nonstandardized training requirements, and they do not claim mastery over a systematic body of theory which legitimizes their actions. In addition, there is great diversity among functions and activities the artist can perform. This makes the arts difficult to categorize and causes status and identity problems (Pavalko, 1988). Therefore, careers in the arts are associated with instability in the job market and low pay except for a select few. Men who enter these careers generally do so with the awareness that they will have to moonlight at other jobs to make a living and may have to live a life considered deviant by more traditional members of society. Their work will involve late hours, travel and unstable living conditions (Becker, 1963). Family life under

these circumstances is difficult, if not impossible.

Yolanda, a divorced woman and struggling artist, tended bar to support her son. She came from a Southern family which advised her to marry and have children. Although she followed their advice, she wanted to work outside the home as well. At the same time, she regretted her choice of profession because she was now divorced and had to support her family:

I graduated from the Art Institute and what happened was, I was unwise in school. I should have gone into math or something. Everyone kept telling me, 'You are so talented.' So I got into painting without thinking of how I was going to make a living. I couldn't make money at it, so I got a job at night, tending bar. When I got divorced, I had to support my son, so I needed better work.

Sally, a freelance photographer, managed photographic studios to make ends meet before she was married. She quit, got married and entered her husband's family car business. Her office walls were covered with her photography. She too, was encouraged by family to stay home and have children. Her conflict was evident as she weighed her limited possibilities--to stay home, be supported, raise babies and do photography as a hobby or to continue working in the family car business where she made a good salary and had autonomy, but little time for serious photography:

I love photography, but I could not make a living freelancing, and I got fed up with management politics, so I quit. I want to do more of my photography which I am teaching my husband to do. But, having children is the dream of my husband's family. I am the only wife in the Smith family that is working. But I don't know what I'd do all day if I stayed home. My days off, 35% of the time, I'm here. Sometimes longer.

Making difficult choices is seen throughout this study. In the above data, it is evident that individual choices for women are not evident, simple, or easy. Women develop new sets of needs, desires, and understandings about what options are possible for them as their lives and situations change.

Blue-Collar Workers

My sample contains a small number of women who worked at non-traditional blue-collar jobs before car sales. Two women besides Yolanda were bartenders and another pumped gas at a service station. One woman repaired and installed telecommunications equipment. Pavalko (1988) notes that in blue-collar occupations, pay is related to skill level. More skilled crafts, such as construction work, carpentry, mechanical or electrical work, offer higher satisfaction as well as more pay, because workers have more autonomy, and can use their skills to produce something tangible and praiseworthy. Women who aspire to non-traditional jobs are located at the entry level and more boring, repetitious, low-skilled occupations. Many researchers have described ways in which advancement in blue-collar occupations is hindered or blocked for women (O'Farrell, 1982;Walshock, 1985;Schroedel, 1985). Pumping gas and tending bar are at the lower end of blue-collar work and dead-end. Although Leah, a 37 year-old African-American woman went to school to learn telecommunications repair and installment, her work paid poorly and did not lead anywhere:

I got a two year certificate from DeVries Institute before

women ever went there because I wanted to work with technical equipment. My first job was in the telecommunications field doing set up and repair work. But I was not making that much money and I was out in the field every day. It was hard physical labor and I thought I'd like to try something closer to home and better paying. I was raising two kids, and I needed to have more time and energy for them.

This response provides an example attesting to the relative difficulty level of jobs according to gender, which is seen repeatedly throughout this study. It illustrates the theme of paid and unpaid labor in women's lives. If women could relax when at home, they might do better, but many must divide their physical energy between work and home and thus paid and unpaid labor. Therefore, men's and women's work should not be compared without acknowledging this complex issue.

Entrepreneurs

Three of the women in my study were self-employed before car sales. Entrepreneurial work has been largely the work of men because it is risky and requires capital. According to Berch (1982), women do not have equal access to capital or to trust from the banking community or their business suppliers. On the other hand, 30% of all working women are currently in business for themselves, the majority of whom run small low-profit businesses such as home seamstress, word processing and cleaning and child care work (USDLS:1987). Here the capital output is minimal.

Ann, a 52 year-old grandmother, was partners in a small needlepoint business that went bankrupt:

My friend and I opened a needlepoint shop. It did not work,

however, and we went bankrupt; so I had to find new work. Before, everything I did was always with women. I worked in a bath shop selling to women, and I ran the needlepoint shop with a woman partner. So I looked for something different.

Marilyn, a divorced mother of two grown children had been in the car sales business for sixteen years. Before that, she was a real estate broker, but when the market got slow she had to change jobs:

I was selling real estate and the market was real bad in 1971. I had two children to support and could not stay in the field.

Teresa, single, was previously a commodities trader. She was in a motorcycle accident which impaired her memory and she feared she could not perform quickly and aggressively enough in the push-and-shove floor activity:

My father passed away and I got about \$50,000. I bought my own seat and I was there for five-and-a-half years. You have to be tough and wear a lot of pads and steel-toed shoes. If you're going to play the weakling and let them step on you then I guarantee they will not know you are there. You must demand a certain amount of respect. Then I got in a motorcycle accident and sustained slight damage to the part of my brain that deals with memory. I was afraid I would not be quick enough anymore.

All three women had somewhat different situations. Teresa and Ann had financial support from family to help them get started in their entrepreneurial work. Marilyn did not. She was divorced and the head of a family. Teresa and Ann were both related to men who were entrepreneurs. Teresa's grandfather was a commodities trader and Ann's father owned a car sales dealership. Despite their differing situations, all three women were motivated to continue to take risks for gain through entrepreneurship. Looking back on their former work, the

informants had created an ideal model of "good" labor--to make more money and to do fulfilling and exciting work.

College Students

Two young women came to car sales straight from college. Carol, a 25 year-old single woman, left school to go into car sales and has remained there because she likes the autonomy and the money:

I was finishing up my degree, a bachelors in management and I needed a job during winter break. Once I got hired, I never left. Originally I wanted to work my way up in a big company like my sister. But I looked at her corporate job and I thought, 'No, it's not for me. I don't like the politics, the rules, the structure.' Car sales is more free.

Denise, also a business major, was working at part-time pink-collar jobs to put herself through college. However, she got an offer to sell cars:

I was sick of working my way through college. I was working as a switch board operator and a deli clerk. I was sick of having no money while all my friends did. I was taking public relations and a degree in that can only get you an interview. I was offered this job. Now I get job offers from other dealers all the time. And, I make a lot of money.

The women I interviewed did not have homogeneous work experiences when they came to car sales. However, there are common themes in their relationship to work and the problems these jobs presented them. There are similarities in the ways in which they conceptualized the problems with their old kinds of work and in the reasons they took the unusual step into car sales, as well as in what they saw as the meaningful

aspects of their new careers. Even though these women came from a variety of career situations --pink-collar, professional, blue-collar, art and entrepreneurial occupations, they shared female status. This produced a number of common grievances. All the women complained about their inability to make a living wage at their previous jobs. The seven divorced women and the one widowed woman all had young children and needed to be able to support their families. They were searching for some way to get into a position that would pay them enough to enable them to succeed financially as the head of a household, to make a "man's" salary, and to find some enjoyment and satisfaction in their work.

Except for three women who had previously done entrepreneurial work and two in the arts, the women desired more autonomy and mobility in their work. They had ambitions they wanted to exercise and were looking for routes to move up in some way. Once these women saw the limitations of their occupations, men's work such as car sales became a viable option because it solved several problems simultaneously. It was one of the main job opportunities they could find which offered a living wage. It also represented challenges, excitement, and upward mobility in comparison with traditional women's jobs. The decision to enter car sales became their particular solution to the problems women face in the workplace and as part of contemporary families.

The Pull of Car Sales

When considering possible occupations, most women would probably not consider car sales. Until recently, women were not encouraged to enter sales forces dominated by men. Most often, men in the field did not want women as colleagues (Kanter, 1977;Walshok, 1981;Cockburn, 1984). In the past, few women bought their own automobiles. Both married and single women brought male friends and relatives to dealerships to assist them with buying cars. Today, however, women are more independent. Many buy cars without the aid of husbands, or male friends and family members. Dealerships say women like buying from other women and ask for women salespersons. In an effort to cater to this new market, dealerships now openly advertise for women salespersons.

Relatives or Friends in the Business

Approximately one-half of the 30 women I interviewed embarked on careers in car sales through the help or recommendation of friends or relatives in the business. All but one of these connections was male. This is one of the most traveled routes for women into men's careers, similar to recent pathways for women in other areas of business and political life (Kanter, 1977;Lorber, 1984). Walshok (1981) found blue-collar women in men's careers have learned about the jobs from male relatives. Not all these women are actively encouraged by their friends or family to pursue men's work, but use their family connections to get hired. Ida, the ex-social worker, was a typical example of a woman

motivated to sell cars by learning from her husband about the work:

My ex-husband was in the car business for a long time, as well as his father, so I wasn't completely cold to the business. As far as selling and things like that, I certainly did not know how to sell cars and was not encouraged to or anything like that. But, I was familiar with the business and what to expect--long hours, quotas to meet, highs and lows, and the possibility of high commissions.

Ann was also familiar with many of the aspects of the business through family. She had developed sales skills, but in areas dealing with female-related products. Although her father and brothers worked in the family-owned car business, she was not encouraged to take part in the enterprise. Later, however, she used the family name and what she learned from observing and listening to family members to get a job selling cars:

My father, when I was born, he had the business. He had a used car lot. When you're raised in the business, like if your father was a doctor, you would understand hours, you would understand terms. Whatever you're speaking of, your children will pick up. It was really a family affair. I had two brothers in the business. My sister's husband was in the business. But my dad never encouraged me. In fact, he was long deceased when I went into the business and the dealership was long gone. I had no experience, but I used my family's name. I thought, "I will use it to get in the door." They didn't even ask me the name. All I said was, "I was raised in the business." And, that got me in the door. I went to three dealerships and two out of the three hired me. This was before women were in, nine years ago.

Helen inherited her car dealership, but family and friends encouraged her to continue to run it:

When I first came in and took over my husband's business when he passed away, the choice was either I sell it or I run it. I had not worked for 20 years. I had been a housewife and a very shy type of person on the quiet side. I came home and I told my children and my youngest son just assumed I was going to do it. "Kids," I said, "I have doubts." My daughter said, "You can do it mom". My

older son, my friends and my family were all very encouraging. I was the first woman automobile dealer in my state.

Owners and Managers Looking for Women

Some women seek out the jobs and others are moved into the business by their connections in some way or other. Arlene, a bi-lingual Mexican-American woman, was approached by the owner of the dealership where her husband worked. He needed a bi-lingual salesperson and he also wanted a woman to work with women customers. At that time, Arlene had no intention of working outside her home, but her children were 11 and 13, "not babies any more", and "the money was good":

My husband was the service manager and the dealership needed someone who spoke Spanish. I was not working at the time. My husband came home one evening and said, "Guess what? I have an interview for you tomorrow." I said, "For what?" "For a salesperson. They need someone bilingual." I said, "I'm not going, I'm not going. I don't want to do it." I didn't use to work, and I didn't want to work. But I went the next morning, and we talked and I started on Monday. The owner likes women working for him. He told me that a woman does a lot better with a woman, because she is not a threat. Women come on very soft. They don't come on harsh, like sign, sign, sign.

Sally, the ex-photographer and new bride was also talked into selling cars, in the family business by her father-in-law:

The dealership was my husband's and his father's before I got married. I had quit my job as a professional photographer which there weren't many females in that line either, and my father-in-law suggested it. He said, "Why don't you try it? You've been around cars. If you can sell paintings, you can sell cars".

Nina, the informant who sold cosmetics in a drug store, was approached at a social gathering by a friend who was in the business. Although she was reluctant and didn't think she could do it, she has

since become one of the top salespersons in the Chicago Metropolitan area:

I met this couple socially, and the male part of the couple owned a few lots. He knew I was looking for work and he said, "Well, would you want to sell cars?" And I said, "Well, I wouldn't know how to sell cars, that's ridiculous." And he said, "Well, you'll get a demo. Why don't you start by selling rust-proofing?" So I started selling after-sales stuff and when my cosmetics job folded, I gave it a chance and I started to sell cars. At the pharmacy I made \$6,000 a year. Here I made a lot of money.

Two women were approached by strangers while at work. Fran, the waitress who was having difficulty supporting her three children, was approached by a sales manager she was waiting on. Although she did not take him up on the job offer at the time because she was afraid she could not sell enough "small American cars" to make the money she needed to support her family. She later found a job selling car stereos and alarms, however, and kept the thought of selling cars in the back of her mind:

I waitressed for about five months and one day while I was there, a guy said to me, "You ought to sell cars. I'm a manager and I would hire you to sell my Pontiacs. Why don't you think about it?" I asked around and people told me you had to sell too many American cars to make a decent amount of money. So I got a job selling add-ons. After a year and a half of selling stereos and alarms I decided to take the suggestion and I went asking around and I finally got a job selling Volkswagens.

Yolanda, the ex-portrait painter, was approached by a stranger at her bartending job. At first she did not believe he was serious, but finally she took him up on his offer and ended up getting a job at his dealership:

A gentleman came in where I worked. And he comes in and he gets drunk and he is telling me all about the car business. I went home and I told my husband, "This guy came in and he got drunk and

he is telling me how great the car business is and maybe I should be in the car business because I would do real well at it because I have a good personality but I think he was just drunk." And my husband said, "Probably." The next time I went to work, he came in again, and he said the same thing. So I told my husband, "Well, he was in again and he said I should get in the car business. I think he was trying to pick me up." The third night he was in I went home and told my husband the same thing. But I thought, "What the heck. This will solve our problems." So I called him the next day and I said, "This is Yolanda and I'm accepting your luncheon date and we'll talk about me getting a job there." And he said, "Yolanda who?" But I went in there anyway and I kind of pushed him and they finally hired me.

This encounter supports the suggestion that agencies are now actively interested in hiring women for car sales. Although Yolanda's particular situation may have begun as flirtation by a salesman, she got hired rather easily by his agency.

Business Majors

Another group of women courted by the automobile industry are individuals who come from business schools. Car dealers have recently been attempting to attract such women into sales. The automobile finance department has become a stepping stone in women's business careers. In my sample, two women had developed sales and business skills by working in finance and credit departments of other businesses and decided to apply their skills to car sales. One woman worked as a clerk in the business office of a dealership and two women entered car sales right out of business school. Carol was in her last semester of college when she answered an ad for a car salesperson. She had intended to work only over the winter break to make some extra money, but she did

not tell this to the manager. She has been in car sales for over three years now and is currently a finance manager:

I had three classes left for a management degree. I wanted a job for winter break and the funniest thing was I called every ad in the paper. Here I was, sleeping one morning, and the phone rang and it was a car agency. "Would you like to come in for an interview?" And I'm like, "What? What in the hell did I apply to?"

I didn't know because I had applied to so many jobs. I just answered an ad in the paper and when they called me I lied about going back to school. I never sold cars. I had done other selling, telephone solicitations, credit card protection service, stuff over the phone. But this was a lot different. But after I found out what I made on my first car, I decided, well maybe school can wait a little. And, they didn't want to lose me. I have recently been made finance manager.

Denise was a somewhat similar case, a business school student lured into car sales, but her mother was a car saleswoman and so she was approached by the owner of her mother's agency:

My mom was the number one salesperson at Roadman's Dealership and when they heard what I was going to be doing, they called me into the office and said, "Why don't you try this?" I said, "No thank you. I'm not interested." I didn't know anything about cars. I barely knew how to fill up the gas tank. I thought, "This is a joke." And they talked me into going to a pep rally seminar for their cars. They were in the process of opening a new store and they figured my potential would be pretty good. You know, I've been here over two years, and it's nice to have money.

Vita, a 29 year-old, got married right out of high school. Her husband was in the military so they moved around a lot, and she took part-time clerical jobs when she could. Before becoming a saleswoman, she was employed in the office of an automobile dealership as a clerk. Vita asked to try sales because she knew the difference between her pay and the pay that the salesmen were getting and she thought she could be successful at such work. The agency was delighted to let her sell:

I answered an ad in the paper for an inventory clerk that knew computers. I was hired to do office work. But I decided to try sales, because I watched the salesmen, saw how much money they made, and I thought I would be good at it. And they loved me because I am.

Pioneers on a Whim

Two women came into car sales on what they considered to be a whim, a sudden decision that it was something they wanted and could do, without any mentors or connections, before dealers courted women. They are the true pioneers. One woman went into a dealership to buy a car and decided to apply for a job. Another woman loved cars her whole life and when her children grew up found herself applying for work at her local dealership.

Oprah, a 43 year-old woman, was a beautician before car sales. When challenged by a male friend, she went out and "sold" herself to a dealership and got hired:

I was out having lunch with a fella and we were talking about different professions. I was a beautician at the time and somehow selling came up. You know how when a bunch of men get together the first they talk about is either cars or women, and we were talking about how women salespeople are better in touch with women customers, and the guy I was with said that was impossible and women could never sell cars, and I more or less took up the challenge and went out and applied and put on a real good aggressive act, because that's what you have to do to sell cars. I sold the general manager on hiring me. Because I sold him on hiring me, he thought I'd do good on the sales floor.

Patsy, the ex-housewife, had been selling cars for 12 years. Currently, she was a sales manager. She said she always loved cars, but one day, 12 years earlier, she decided to take a chance at sales:

Ever since I was a kid I was fascinated with cars. I knew a lot about them. I like Oldsmobiles. We always had Oldsmobiles.

But I never thought I would be hired to sell them. I never saw women selling. But one June, on a whim, I approached the sales manager of an Olds dealer and asked if he'd ever considered a woman in sales. He said he'd thought about it. I said, "Well, don't think about it, I want the job." Those are literally the words I used. And, he said he would talk to the owner and tell him and so forth. By that time, I was real persistent. It was definitely something I had determined I wanted to do and I was gonna do it. I probably called him every day for two weeks. He said they hadn't talked about it, this that and the other, and finally I guess persistence pays off and I got the job.

Here is a group of women who reflect the work and family problems that women experience and a strategy that some women chose, which is to take jobs in a male field to try and better their positions. There are a few women, pioneers in the field, who entered on a whim, with no connections or mentors, before women were courted for car sales. They got hired by walking in off the street and convincing the manager that they had the skills or techniques necessary for sales. Perhaps the success of these pioneer women have made it easier for women now.

Over one-half of the informants were pulled into the field through connections with relatives or friends who knew something about the business and thought women could do well in it. In a way, this is somewhat traditional; this is the way women have always obtained jobs in male fields. The aspect of women's entry into car sales that is non-traditional is that women are currently being actively pursued to try car sales by owners and management. There is now a category of women who entered car sales straight out of business school or from clerical jobs in finance or business offices in other fields. Women are beginning to fill a particular role in the field from the point of view

of bosses: people better able to sell to women and well suited for finance management.

CHAPTER IV

LEARNING THE JOB

Training for an occupation involves both formal and informal methods. Formal training differs in length and complexity depending on the status of the occupation and the body of knowledge deemed necessary. For example, doctors receive much longer periods of training than do bus drivers. Lower status occupations, such as car sales, usually require little formal training and workers must rely on on-the-job training. Ritzer (1972) emphasizes that employers utilize extremely simple methods of formal training with low status employees because there is little danger that a single employee can cause damage to the operation as a whole. If an employee does not produce the desired results, he or she can easily be fired and replaced. In sales occupations, the content and substance of formal knowledge transmitted by administrators, is mainly concerned with meeting a payroll and turning a profit for the agency (Mills, 1953). In car sales that means how to sell enough cars at a high enough price to make money for the dealer. The reprimands salespersons get from their bosses come because they are not paying attention to those things the sales philosophy says they should. For example, they may not have considered every person who walks in the door

a potential buyer. Perhaps they have not been aggressive enough, have not created a great enough need or desire for the product in the customer, or have let the customer go before the manager got a chance to close the deal.

Anticipatory socialization is a type of informal training that occurs before one is actively involved in the work. It refers to imagining or anticipating what it would be like to be a member of a group of which an individual is not presently a member on the basis of information given by people acquainted with the occupation (Pavalko, 1988). Once on the job, informal training in occupations is usually gained through peer networking that occurs once the individual is accepted into the work group or community. People learn what to expect from the job and how to handle themselves by getting insider information from those already experienced in the role (Ritzer, 1972). In this section, I will examine the ways in which newly hired car saleswomen are trained, what they learn, and how they sell their first car.

Informal Training

Mentors, Friends and Relatives

Women in car sales do not speak of peer support and solidarity among salespersons, but they do discuss receiving advice from individual mentors and friends who are familiar with the work. Women encouraged to go into the field of car sales by male friends or relatives familiar with the business develop assumptions about the work from these

informants. They are given insider tips and advice on how to avoid problems with management and co-workers before they begin to work. Ida said her ex-husband prepared her for what to expect in the business by cautioning her not to trust anyone:

My ex and I are friendly, so I got a lot of knowledge from him as far as what happens in a car dealership. I was coached as far as "watch this and watch that", because this is typically what happens to new salespersons at dealerships--other salesmen steal your customers, management does not credit you for the actual number of cars you sell and buyers lie to you about their credit ratings and what prices other dealerships gave them. So I had somebody watching over my shoulder and warning me to look for certain types of things.

Ann's brother similarly cautioned her to distrust everyone in the business:

He said, "I know many people in the business, but I don't trust any of them. You got to understand their motivation. They're in it for the money. If they are making money, if they are successful, they feel whatever they do, they must be right."

Barbara's daughter's boyfriend warned her not to trust customers who waste your time:

Watch out for customers. You spend time with them and they won't give you their trust. They won't give you their real telephone numbers, and some of them won't even give you their real names, because they're just shopping or their credit is bad and they aren't really going to buy.

Denise's mother, Evelyn, who also sells cars, warned her to distrust other salespersons who lie to customers about prices:

Salesmen at other dealerships will say anything to take a deal away. They "low ball". They take customers out of the market that way, and try and talk them into buying another car when the car they promised doesn't come in. Don't cut your commission just because a customer was lied to.

And Wendy, another ex-elementary teacher, had a boyfriend who told her to distrust management because they lie about the prices cars are taken in for so they can cut commissions:

Owners doctor the books. They register the car at a much higher price than it was really bought for, so their profit is probably double what their books show. Try to find out what the car was really taken in for and keep your own books.

Most women, like Fran, the ex-waitress, salesclerk and secretary, come into the field worried about their own competency, and are more concerned about proving themselves to co-workers and pleasing customers than with distrusting others. They entered the field with different backgrounds from men, as discussed in the previous chapter, and were not quite sure how to apply their experiences or even if their experiences were valuable. They were moving into a new situation and as yet, did not have a good perspective on themselves. They were uncertain and worried. Their self-concept was low. Gilligan (1982) finds that women devalue themselves and think something must be wrong with them when they understand the world differently from men. And their fears are validated because what they see in the men they work with is distrust and a lack of faith in car saleswomen. Holly and Grace, two newcomers to car sales, summed up the inferiority new saleswomen feel when they are hired and the ways in which their bosses reinforce their feelings of inadequacy. Holly, an ex-full-time homemaker, however, felt she had little to lose because she had never made a decent wage doing work at home on a part-time basis. Although she was concerned about her competency, she had more to gain than to lose:

I wanted to stay in training for the rest of my life for all I cared. I just wanted to be real sure I knew everything I could--about cars, about sales. I can't say that I was overly confident about taking the job, and when I started, the manager said, "I don't know what is going to happen. I don't know how the customers are going to accept you. I don't know how the salesmen are going to accept you." And I said, "Hey, if it doesn't work out, I'm not any worse off". And that's how I felt about it.

Grace, a newcomer of two weeks, was also concerned about being able to do the work, but she too felt she had little to lose. She did not want to go back to her old career as a waitress because she did not make enough money, but she could always go back to waitressing if she had to:

I didn't know anything. I said, "Give me two weeks, a month. You don't even have to pay me. I have never done this before. I'm coming in fresh. I don't know how good I'll be." And he agreed because he said he was as worried about hiring me as I was about doing the job. And if it doesn't work I can always get another waitress job.

Lorber (1989) notes that men's lack of trust in women as colleagues concerns their cultural role as wives and mothers. Women are not expected to put their work before their children's welfare or domestic needs and are expected to drop out if family responsibilities require it. Women's initial self-concepts based on fear of incompetency are usually enhanced by sexual harassment related to these assumptions regarding their primary loyalty. Three male managers, John, Frank and Larry, exemplified this negative male point of view. They wanted women workers because other women liked buying from them, but they thought most women could not be good car salespersons. They based their judgment on two major stereotypes of competency in woman workers in male

fields: lack of technical knowledge, and presupposed drop out due to family responsibilities and breadwinner husbands (which will be discussed and proven invalid in Chapter IX). John, the general manager at Wendy's dealership, said women in general didn't do well, but a token woman on the lot was okay as long as she sold to other women, because most male customers didn't like dealing with her:

As far as women in the business, I think they are finding they really don't like the business. You don't find very many women that are real, real good--that are real outstanding in the business as far as sales. A lot of people don't even like talking to a woman when it comes to a car. A lot of men are offended. I can give you a perfect example of this woman that we hired. She had a customer about a week ago and she was explaining the car to him. He just jumped all over her. He said her information was inadequate. He started telling her the thickness of the metal. He started getting into real detail things and she didn't know how to respond to it because she doesn't really know the technical background of the car. I think dealerships try not to have too many women because they're weaker than men. Yet, on the other hand, I like the idea of having a woman because a lot of women that come in the store like to deal with a woman salesperson. They feel they can trust her more.

Frank, a sales manager at a dealership next door to Ida's and under the same ownership, brought up old stereotypes, asserting that women would not advance in the business because they were too concerned with marriage and family problems, or were supported by husbands:

I've had women salespersons working for me, but as for becoming managers or owners, I think it would be very difficult as far as the way the hours are set up. The latest I have left the store is 4:00 in the morning. For a woman because, quote unquote, a lot of women are married, and therefore it is additional income, not sole income--or they have kids to take care of.

Larry, an ex-manager now the owner of a related business, brought up similar stereotypes. He felt that divorced women with children would always be concerned about what was going on at home with the children,

and single women would be looking for husbands, getting married and quitting:

I have had a couple women working for me over the years. The problem I have had is that many women try to be a car salesperson with their own personal life in disarray. You get into these divorcees where they have an unstable personal situation. I had a woman coming to me looking for a job one day and she had a baby less than a year old. I looked her right in the eye and I said, "Go home and raise the baby. You don't need the job." Her husband had a job and she wanted to get out of the house and sell cars. Now I can't believe any woman in her right mind would take a job from 9:00 to 10:00 at night with a young child at home. One of the problems we run into with divorced women is they've got the children. Something happens in school or after school and they have to run home. The other problem is with younger women you don't know how soon they are going to get married and have children and then their family life will control their activities so they don't want a job anymore. They don't go into it as permanently as men.

This set of assumptions is certainly an obstacle in a woman's career. Employers fear that single women are going to get married and stay home with their children. Women with children worry that they are not going to be good parents if they work. Epstein (1988) says that these concerns are validated by the fact that there are few institutional arrangements such as day-care centers and bonded housekeepers that can really be relied on, as few norms exist to govern and legitimize their use. Furthermore, Gerstel and Gross (1989) point out that women, at best, can still expect only limited help from men with child care and household responsibilities. In addition, Epstein (1988) blames popular child care authorities, such as Benjamin Spock, for reinforcing norms specifying that mothers should stay home with their children, leaving mothers guilty even if they do manage to find good childcare.

Thus, from the very beginning of their careers, gender becomes an explicit issue between women and their workmates, and within the framework in which the distrustful nature of the business and its resulting lack of support for its workers is vividly illustrated. Themes of gender-related harassment and overall distrust are evident. These themes are replicated in differing forms and woven throughout the varied paths of women workers as they continue on in their careers.

Dealer Philosophies

Women learned different things based on where they worked. Formal training for car sales is not standardized, and experienced saleswomen explained that different dealerships used different types of training programs depending on their geographic location, volume of sales, make and cost of cars sold, and class and education of clientele. In this section, I first examine what women said about their type of dealership and sales philosophy. I then turn to a description of common types of training methods.

"Beat-Up-People" Stores

Eight of the women I interviewed were currently working at what they defined as high-volume dealerships. Informants said that larger dealerships advertised more and got more walk-in customers. In these dealerships, managers put heavy pressure on salespersons to make high quotas or be fired. National statistics show that one-third of

high-volume dealerships have no women salespersons (Richards, 1989).

Wendy's general manager, John, wanted to make his medium-sized dealership into a higher-volume store and in order to do so, he needed to draw in more aggressive people:

I want to draw in salespersons that are aggressive. Those are people that pressure someone into buying a car. People will buy things under pressure. They feel intimidated. Right now, as competitive as the market is, the competition is getting real fierce and only mega dealers are going to survive.

As a result of this kind of philosophy, salespersons at high volume stores did not spend time with customers who were not easily sold. They could not afford to count on call-backs, or let days go by without sales. June, Barbara and Yolanda had all worked at high-volume dealerships selling lower priced cars. They were expected to be aggressive, competitive and not waste time with "shoppers". Barbara, a relative newcomer to car sales, was hired off the street and fired after three months from a high-volume dealership. She explained how the "big numbers" stores wanted "pushier" people, meaning men, not women:

If you actually go to a store that is a very big numbers store, they have a little tougher sales people. Many don't hire any females. Their policy is basically "slam every person." They are a "hard ball" store. You can't get through the door without somebody trying to attack you. People walk in the store and you ask them, "Are you buying today?" If they're not, you get rid of them. The quicker you sell a car, the quicker you'll get your income. They don't care about repeat business because they get enough first time buyers. They are just there for the money.

Gina moved from a small suburban dealer where she made a comfortable but limited income, to a high-volume dealer downtown who handled expensive foreign cars. Here the emphasis was on quick closings

and high quotas, though the rationale was that customers were busy professionals who came in during work hours and did not want to spend a lot of time. Most of these customers could afford high priced cars, knew what they wanted and were willing to pay for it as long as they got good service:

This is probably one of the highest top-of-the-line stores. They sell a lot of cars. They make a lot of money. When they hire people here they figure, "If you got this far you should know the ropes and be able to sell a lot of cars." People that buy here are professionals. They are busy. They don't want long sales spiels. Mostly we hire experienced salespersons with proven track records. Over here we're dealing with a better-educated customer. People know what they want and what cars go for, and they can pay for what they want.

This comment shows that class and status differences are important dimensions along which dealerships differ.

Trackers

Sixteen informants worked at what they said were medium-volume dealerships. Ida worked at a dealership in the suburbs which was also concerned with quick sales and high quotas. In this store, salespersons trained in the track method, which stressed customer satisfaction. Frank, explained the method to me. He said that each salesperson was trained in what to say and what steps to take customers through in order to get them ready to buy. Then a manager would take over and make sure the sale got closed:

This store, we run on what's called a track system. In step one, the salesman is given various specific questions to ask in order to discover what customers' needs are, and how much they can afford, so he can choose a car close enough to their price range to

keep them interested.

In step two, you have to sell them on the automobile. We take customers for a trial run in the car to develop a desire. You are dealing with a piece of merchandise that a customer falls deeply in love with. There are a lot of add-ons and features they should know about. If you explain to your customer what they are getting for their money, we are going to get a higher profit on the car. This is a business. We want to make as much as we can on a car.

In step three, we sell them on the dealership. The salesman has to explain the service department and how special it is.

I try to monitor things as much as I can, even while the people are here. And, even if they don't buy the car, we'll call a customer three days later and find out how they were treated and make sure the salesperson spent time and did their job.

Here, then, owners encouraged salespersons to spend time with all customers, even "shoppers". Ida talked about her method of selling under the track system:

Even though we want you to buy the car that day--of course that's how you make your money--the more quickly you sell a car, the quicker you are going to get your income. But, at the same time, if you're not buying today, okay, that's fine. I'm still going to go through the nine yards with you, and when you are ready to buy, I'm going to make sure you do come back and see me. I'm going to show you everything.

Evelyn, Denise's mom, also worked at a medium-volume suburban store.

Her dealership similarly stressed spending time with customers:

If a customer does come on the floor, even if they are shopping, you say, "Great! Is there anything in particular you are looking for? What are you driving now?" You find that a lot of people are just looking because they are afraid they are going to get attacked and somebody is going to make them buy the car. But if you work with them and help them find out what their needs are and what their wants are and get a nice cross between, it makes them a lot more comfortable because you're working for them instead of just for yourself. So you spend time, and, "Great! You're not buying today, but when you're ready come see me."

"Country Clubs"

Although 80% of small dealerships are male only operations (Richards, 1989), Denise, Fran, and Ann, along with Patsy and Sally, worked in smaller-volume, suburban stores where the atmosphere was quite different from high-volume dealerships. Salespeople were more relaxed because they didn't have to meet a quota. Ann's store had a "greeter" that met customers at the door and salespersons signed up to take turns going on the floor, thereby lessening competition among themselves. Denise said stores like these were called "Country Clubs" by people in the business because there was less activity and less pressure:

This is a family store. They are wonderful people. Here we have a "Country Club". It is a family business and they are happy to have me. It's much more comfortable. You're not under pressure. You learn as you go along and the manager gives me pointers. You have goals, but you don't have to meet a quota. They have goals. Every salesperson has goals. Goals are something you try to achieve, but you know, you don't get shot for not achieving them.

Fran left her first job at a high-volume dealership in the city for a smaller suburban store where she was much happier. Management encouraged her to give customers special treatment, and co-workers treated each other better. However, she sold fewer cars, and made less money:

We do special things for our customers as well as each other. One man comes here from downtown to bring his car in for service. I drive him to the el. Then he takes the el downtown. When he is ready to pick the car up, I'll pick him up. Things that they do here are a little extra special. I'm more relaxed here. I feel real good. You know, over there I could not be feeling well and I'd be afraid to ask, "Could I go home early?" I was under the gun. If I had to go home early, I'd probably lose my job. They are real human here. Sometimes when it's real slow here they'll say, "Why don't you go home because you have kids at home." The problem is, it is harder to make the kind of money I made before.

Of course, all car dealerships are primarily concerned with increasing sales. Philosophy on how to accomplish this however, depends largely on the size of the dealership, the price range and make of car sold, and the status of the customer. Larger dealers encourage competition and little time spent with customers. They get many walk-ins and are not concerned about individuals who do not return. Large dealerships that sell expensive cars use more experienced salespersons and concentrate on service. Middle-volume dealerships with less expensive cars try to increase sales volume by getting "iffy" customers the larger dealers ignore. Smaller suburban dealerships also concentrate on "iffy" customers and special services in hopes of repeat and referral business.

Formal Training Methods

Seminars

Training, according to informants, ranged from structured one to two week programs conducted outside or on the site of the agency, to one to three day seminars and workshops, to less structured offerings, where management trained newcomers on a one-on-one basis, to various types of quasi-apprenticeships. However, training did not always begin when newcomers started work. A majority of saleswomen said they got little to no training before they were expected to sell.

By understanding the training sessions, we learn about dealers' perspectives on customers, employees and work. First, the salesperson must learn to be aggressive, because she must create a need and desire in the customer. She does not just sell a car, she must sell herself, service, and add-ons. In addition, the manager makes sure the new salesperson, anxious to get a sale, does not sell the car for less than what the dealership wants, because he controls the closing.

From the very first training session, then, customer manipulation and the regulation of salespersons emerge as issues of trust. When a salesperson meets customers for the first time, she must convince them that she is genuinely interested in them and their needs, rather than just making a sale. And she must convince customers she is on their side, getting them the best possible deal, when she actually has no real control over the final price. Goffman (1959) finds this an exaggeration of a problem that we all confront in many ways in every day life: convincing people of who we are and that we are genuine, especially when we have an interest in their behavior.

There are a variety of ways in which new saleswomen understood this training situation and learned to manage it. Through training, they began to reconstruct their understandings of the sales encounter and how they would pursue a customer. Some novices liked the track method because they were not sure they could close on their own. Holly, in sales for ten months, learned by watching her manager:

I am new. I don't care if a manager does it if I can't close it. I'll come right in and stand there while they are closing. I learn that way.

The uncertainty of the newcomer is an issue here. New saleswomen are uncertain about learning the ropes; they know their salary depends on how successful they are. The track method adds some control in the situation. Even if control is given to the manager, the newcomer feels more secure about closing the sale.

More experienced women steered clear of dealerships that used track methods. June, a ten-year veteran, said they were "green pea" stores that preferred to hire inexperienced salespersons and to train them in a way that gave the store control over the salespersons by putting a third person, the manager, in control of the sale:

That's how people cut their teeth in the business. The more inexperienced people tend to go to track stores. They get hired there because that way management has more control over them and the customers and makes sure the dealership gets a high price for the car.

Cathy, a two year-veteran, agreed. She said she did not learn much about cars, was forced to use a sales spiel that she thought inappropriate in many cases, and she felt the manager interfered with her completion of sales:

They had a ten step process that they wanted people to follow. They wanted new people, everyone that had never been in the business before, for the purpose of training them the way they wanted them trained. They wanted to have complete control over you which they did beautifully. You role play. I always started out, "Welcome to [name withheld] Chevrolet. My name's Cathy. May I assist you?" Then you ask the customer questions like where they live, how long they've been on the job, what they did for a living, if they bought the car they were driving new or used, then you show them the car. You open the hood. You tell them about the extras. You drive the car with them. You drive their trade-in. If you didn't get the answers to the questions, you were sent right back

out to ask the customer. You had to do all the steps their way. This is basically what they did in the training session. They just taught you the steps. They didn't teach you anything mechanical or technical about cars.

In the beginning I was not allowed to close a deal by myself. I had to present all the information to a manager and say, "Where do I go from here?" He'd say, "Want me to close this deal for you? Well, what are you gonna' do for me if I close this deal for you?" And, Oh my God, I would see my customers leaving! And then he would turn and duck under the table and run out the door and talk to them from the hallway. So he would help me, but torture me first.

Other experienced saleswomen did not agree with the philosophy behind the track method. Leah said she knew how to sell by instinct and not by following a prescribed sales program which called for cornering every walk-in and going through a long sales talk asking a series of prescribed questions. But she was unable to identify what her skill or innate quality was:

I am a human being. I possess certain innate qualities that allow me to know when to strike and when to be still. If I thought it was more advantageous to let this guy go at this particular time, having given him what he came in for, brochure information, whatever, I'm going to believe that when it is time to seriously shop, he will come back and spend the necessary time involved for the amount of money he is spending.

Because management checked up on every walk-in, new salespersons had to justify why walk-ins did not buy a car. Leah, who had too many customers leave, excused herself by saying, "He only wanted a brochure". She was harassed by her manager, who expected her to keep customers long enough to turn over to him. Salespeople such as Leah are punished if people leave without getting a sales pitch or seeing a manager:

I have been threatened to be suspended for a day, no pay. My general manager said, "Listen, nobody can exit people until I see

them. I have not let anybody else let people go. You're not going to start it."

In-House Management Training

Sometimes dealerships contracted out for shorter programs to be held on their premises or sent people to seminars or workshops of varying lengths. This training covered aspects of car sales from sales methods to attributes of new car models being added to a line. Edith, who had been in the business over two years, described her training as helpful:

I went through a week of in-house training. I watched films and read pamphlets to get product knowledge. You have to know your automobiles. You have to know the product that you are selling. You have to know each individual car, car line, colors, options, anything. Then I drove the cars to know how they handle, the acceleration, the brake unit, all of these things. Then you have to know how to talk to people, be a good communicator. They [seminar instructors] teach you how to talk to people. We role played. They told me what questions to ask to find out what customers want and what they can afford. Learning about the cars and the questions to ask customers helped me to sell.

Other training relied heavily on managers. Managers gave saleswomen product brochures, showed them in-house videos on the cars, told them what questions to ask walk-in customers and how to respond to customer inquiries. Many managers also told newcomers that when customers agreed on a car, final price bargaining had to be negotiated through them. The main difference between management training and track, seminar or workshop training sessions was that at the latter, women role played sales techniques and took written tests on sales and product knowledge, whereas women trained by management practiced on real

customers, and usually before they felt ready. Carol was put on the floor on the busiest day of the week, after only two days of training, and felt this was too much of a pressure for a novice:

The general manager said, "I will teach you." Thursday I watched videos on a closed circuit TV about the product. The next day he said, "Now say this and do that and bring the deal into my office." Saturday he said, "You're going on the floor." He worked me twelve hours that day, no lunch, no breaks, no nothing. I think he really wanted to see how far he could push me before I cracked.

This type of pressurized training has a strong emotional impact. However I found no evidence that it affected women's income or ability to keep a job. Carol stayed on and became the top saleswomen at the agency.

Timing was an important issue in training. Even the best of programs were held at times that did not necessarily coincide with the hiring of new salespersons and the sporadic and uncoordinated manner in which most training was presented meant that some women did not attend training sessions until long after they had started selling cars. Other women went to three or four individual seminars in a row, each of which contained differing views on sales techniques. This kind of disorganized training was troublesome to newcomers. Barbara started selling with no formal training. Then she got fired and went to a new dealer. There she got more information than she needed on product knowledge, while she was still confused about how to close a sale:

I didn't really get to go to any classes until I had been in sales for about six months because they offer them at weird times, and I got fired after three months on my first job. At my new place, my training has been all on different things, depending on what seminar I was sent to. If you go to a product-knowledge

seminar, it is going to tell you basically about the car. If you go to a workshop, you are going to learn physically about the car. Getting in and out of the vans, campers. Sometimes they have classes, like when the Fox [Audi] first came out we all had to get certified about the Fox. They told me things about cars--like colors they came in and stuff--I already knew about from experience, and not enough about how to close. The manager trains you here and they have people that come in to do training, so I've had like four different types of sales training since I've been here. The owner says he wants to make sure his employees are taught so they can make money because he would rather they stay here than have a turnover. But, in the short period of time that I've been selling, the different training is just too confusing. I have to incorporate it all into my own personality, because that's what it's about, and I haven't done that yet.

This is an interesting comment on socialization and the career.

Barbara was having difficulty becoming a car salesperson because she did not understand what was expected of her; therefore, she had not been able to incorporate these expectations into her behavior. She was aware that as one moves through a career, there is a change in self-concept and identity, but she was finding this change difficult to make.

As a group, new car saleswomen differed in their reactions to training and were uncertain about what they needed or wanted. Eighteen women had no prior sales experience, and especially wanted to learn sales techniques. All thirty wanted to know more about cars, including the seventeen women who had prior sales experience with other products. All were dissatisfied with the initial training they got, and talked about using natural ability to sell their first cars. The novice was confused, saying, "There is something I need to know but I can't tell you what it is." To add to this confusion, many managers sent new saleswomen out on the floor during the first week with no training,

giving them advice such as, "Follow someone around. Here you go, sell cars! Go ahead kid, sell!" Saleswomen called this the "sink or swim" method.

Apprenticeships

In situations where management did not train newcomers and seminars were unavailable, saleswomen tried to attach themselves to a more experienced salesperson. Despite the fact that management often suggested this approach, salesmen were resistant to accept a new salesperson, especially a woman, as an apprentice. This situation is similar to those of blue-collar women in studies by Walshok (1981) and women medical interns studied by Epstein (1983) who had difficulty finding male mentors. More experienced car salespersons did not generally bother with newcomers until they had proven themselves. Salesmen did not want to be followed around by women trying to learn their jobs. Distrust was especially high because women were seen as a foreign presence in the male work culture of car lots. To follow an experienced salesman around was therefore a difficult if not an impossible task for a woman entering the field. Newcomers like Holly went to salesmen for help, and said they were ignored or refused. Holly said both new and experienced salesmen ignored her for several months:

I missed the training program, so they told me to follow someone around. Actually I had to be on my own because hardly any salespersons would talk to me for at least six months because I was infringing on their territory. Guys that were here for a long time didn't care about me, they cared about themselves. And new salesmen wouldn't talk to me either.

Oprah, who is currently a finance manager, recalled her early days as a saleswoman and the cliques from which she was excluded:

Every sales floor has little cliques. They use each other as sounding boards and support systems. If you have a sales floor that has 20 people, you can have six in one clique, six in another clique and six in a third clique. Then you have a couple loners--usually a woman or a minority. I am not on the sales floor anymore. When I was, it was hard to get in with any male clique. If I would walk over, they would walk away or ignore me.

Kanter talks about women in corporate management having similar difficulties because they are token women in male territory. They eat in separate lunch rooms and are not included in informal gatherings where insider information is passed along.

By contrast, Bill, a 29 year-old male newcomer who worked at Ida's store, explained his experience:

We are a team. We help each other. We are in it together and trying to make our store the best in the business. If there is something I don't know, one of the guys is always ready to help me. We spend week-ends and evenings together talking things over and watching ball games.

Yet, this is not always the experience of male newcomers in sales. Christopher, a beginning chemical salesman whose progress I followed for a year was allowed to join the group, but was kept on the fringes and got little help from anybody:

Sometimes a bunch of us salespersons would meet for breakfast, but the more experienced guys wouldn't discuss sales with me. When I asked other salesmen about what chemicals were best for certain cleaning jobs, they gave me the wrong information. I knew they talked to each other about which chemicals to push because they paid higher commissions, and how to steal customers from new salespersons who dropped out after a few months, even if they

weren't in their territory. But they wouldn't tell me those things.

Therefore, while I did not study men, there is some evidence incoming men are also excluded from the work group. However, while men are excluded from insider information, women face a very different experience. They are also subjected to sexual harassment as a means of forcing them to keep their distance. Yolanda talked about sexual harassment and what she learned:

When I first started, I wanted to be friendly with the guys, but that led to stuff like, "Jesus Christ, why don't you go out with me? I've really got something to offer you. When are we going on a date? C'mon. Sex between us would be really great." If that didn't get me to leave, somebody would say, "Will you leave the room so I can tell this joke?" This one guy finally said, "What are you doing here? You're taking up space where a male could be supporting their family." Now I keep my distance.

Thus, right at the start, women learned that the sales floor was male territory on which they should tread carefully. Through sexist jokes, exclusion, and other forms of harassment, they began to understand that they were infringing on male territory and were seen as potential competitors. If they succeeded in making a connection, they would learn how to do their job and they might get a sale from a co-worker. The problem with informal training and following people around is that you must rely on your potential competitors to teach you what you need to know. Most inexperienced women thus go out on the selling floor with little training and no support system.

Luck and Magic

In occupations such as car sales where there is a very short training period that provides only minimal skills and a rudimentary sense of what membership in the occupation means. Most of what makes the person a member of the occupation is learned on the job. Pavalko (1988:105) explains that, "In many cases, learning a job and doing it are one and the same". With minimal training, women sold their first day out. When asked how they did it, they were not aware of what skills they used and gave themselves little credit for their success. They said it was luck or that it came "naturally". Most said they may not have known much about the cars they were selling, but that their customers did not care. Often, the customers were more knowledgeable than the new saleswoman, and if she was a good listener, customers bought.

All saleswomen told me they began selling before they were certain of cars and sales techniques. They thought they did not know enough and needed to know more, but when they made a big sale they said they discovered they did not have to know very much in order to do it. They spoke in fatalistic ways. When they made a sale, they did not understand what they were doing or how they were doing it. They knew they had something in them that came out, but they didn't know what it was. They thought they had not taken an active role in the sale. This passive voice was part of their self-concept. They said their sales were a "matter of luck", rather than ability. They said, "I had nothing

to do with it," a very passive way of understanding their success. They saw chance, luck and then magic as the cause of their success. Florence was the only saleswoman at a dealership that sold expensive foreign cars. She talked about an "easy" first sale where she didn't even know what she was doing:

I'll tell you the first sale because that one I remember very well. That's when they hired me to sell Alfa Romeos and I never saw one and I never heard of them. They didn't even have one in stock. They just said, "You're gonna sell Alfa Romeos." And my first thing was, "What is an Alfa Romeo?" Well I was there for about a couple 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 jiggling his money and he goes, "I want to buy a car." And I go, "Well what kind of car do you want to buy?" And he says, "I want to buy a Spider." And I said, "Well, we don't have any." And he goes, "Well I want to buy one." And I didn't know a thing. It was my first car. I never wrote up a deal or anything. I was like, "Well, okay, what would you like in it?" So we sat down and we started writing this deal and I didn't even know the price of the car. I wrote down everything he wanted. I found out what the list price was and I wrote it down.

I sold him an alarm which I was good at because I sold alarms before. I sold him a radio and I knew about those. I sold him everything there was. I wrote it all 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!" It was an order car and we called New Jersey immediately and ordered the car for him. It was the most exciting thing I ever did. After that we laughed and the guy even laughed when he came in to pick up the car. He goes, "You were new at selling and I was new at buying. I bet you really screwed me." And I did. I made more money on that car than I made on a Mercedes. I didn't even know I was doing it. It was really fun, and I said, "This is so easy."

For many women, this is how it worked. They started out selling without knowing how or why they made the sale. Fran told me the skills she brought from her previous sales work with Tupperware helped her with cars, but she didn't recognize what her specific skills were. Even Gina, who worked at a top-of-the-line dealer, could not say how she made

her first sale: "My first month I sold a new and a used Rolls Royce. I got lucky."

Edith, who had been selling for two years, still described her ability in vague terms:

It comes natural. At first the manager told me what to do. Now say this or do this and bring the deal into my office and I ended up selling a convertible. You know what was good? First of all, I was lucky. If it was a bad experience, it would have been a real trauma. Once you get one success in anything, it will breed another and another.

Denise was the only salesperson at her suburban store the first two weeks it opened. So although the manager told her to watch the other salespersons, there were none and she sold by "magic":

They said, "Don't worry about selling for a couple months. We'll put you on salary. Just watch all the other salesmen and see what you can learn." It turned out I was the only salesperson for about two and a half weeks. I sold a convertible my very first night. And I'm like, "What am I going to do now?" I went to our manager and I said, "They said, 'Yes'". And he said, "Well go write it up." And I said, "How?" It was funny. It was magic. I didn't get any time off. If you're the only person you can't get time off. So I was here with the two managers and we laughed a lot and I learned about the cars.

Women attributed sales to qualities that were out of their control, such as natural ability. Yet often, they were using skills learned from experiences in service jobs or in family situations which taught communication and interactional skills that they carried into car sales. However, they negated and minimized their experiences because much of what they did was invisible to them.

Traditional women's work involves extremely complex social roles and interactions between people. Until recent studies of women's work,

most of it has been invisible. For example, women who are full-time homemakers and wives of middle-or upper-class men have necessarily become especially good at these traditional types of work. They must entertain social contacts and be available on call. They make the home a haven for the tired working man so he can negotiate the working world the next morning. Women must control and restrain their true feelings, especially anger and aggression, in order to present the expected mask which must be nice or even charming. Flight attendants, for example are expected to act out two roles, loving wife and mother and glamorous career woman.

Hochschild's (1983) study on the controlling of emotions by airline stewardesses discusses how women doing this type of service work must manage their feelings. They must be nice. They must smile and be polite and congenial. They must not get angry or show their true feelings. In the case of cocktail waitresses, they must fend off aggressive comments or even physical advances while showing good will and keeping the customer satisfied (Spradley, 1975). Beauticians must keep their customers happy no matter how much abuse is heaped on them by their clients--often it is a lot. Office secretaries behave like wives, picking up after their bosses, getting them coffee with a smile and smoothing things over after a rough meeting. Office workers are called "the girls". Many act out stereotyped roles of sexual desirability, while older workers behave like supportive den mothers (Kanter, 1977). It is these finely honed skills that novice saleswomen call upon to sell cars. Because they are unnamed, they are not treated as learned skills,

but as natural attributes.

Though new car saleswomen did not know why they had early successes, those that did agreed that selling their first car was a turning point in their careers. They had new positions as car salespersons and new self-concepts and identities. It gave them an incredible high that led to the confidence needed to sell more cars. They were hooked into staying in the field. Carol talked about the turning point where she decided there was nothing she would rather do than sell cars:

I love this business. I really do. It's great. It's crazy, but it gets under your skin and there's nothing else for you to do. You really wouldn't want to do anything else. I can't explain it. I feel good about myself. Everytime I have a customer come in, it's a challenge all over again, and the sky's the limit.

Cathy also talked about expanded horizons. Whereas before she was a struggling secretary with a limited income, now she was a successful career woman with limitless options:

Before, I was unhappy and depressed. But this is different. It's very challenging. You go from high to low and there's really no middle. You're either on top or you're on the bottom. But, I'm successful and there's no limit to what I can do.

CHAPTER V

HAZING AND HARASSMENT: NEGOTIATING A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

Newcomers and Co-Workers

New women's experiences and concerns in car sales reflect the pressure of their situations as neophytes in an established culture where their understanding is limited. Their message is different from accounts by more experienced salespersons, who have learned the ropes and taken on the identity of car salesperson. This chapter continues to examine the body of collective understandings among newcomers about matters related to their entry experiences. Just as fieldworkers in sociology or anthropology must study culture with which they are unfamiliar, new saleswomen must learn to negotiate the environment and become accepted and trusted by its inhabitants if they want to succeed. According to Fine (1980), Kleinman (1980) and others, feelings of uncertainty about fitting in with the culture are common for sociologists beginning research. Gerson (1985) and Roos (1985) suggest that integration into a work culture depends upon people learning the boundaries of their social situations and appropriate responses to particular circumstances. Because most beginning saleswomen had not

worked in traditionally male fields and were not sure how to behave on the job, they did not know how to achieve successful interactions. Now, they worked daily with and among men who assisted with and approved closings, who took care of repairs and got cars ready for delivery, who sold add-ons such as warranties and approved loans, men who appraised trade-ins, men who gave them information on availability of models and men who assisted them with customer demonstrations and other matters. Success in car sales for women required adaptation to this predominantly male environment.

Open Time

Salepeople's hours were very long. They spent more than the average 40 hour work week at the dealership. Depending on the dealership and specific position, the women in my sample worked between 45 to 90 hours a week, averaging about 65 hours. Part of what women had to learn to do was work three 12 hour days in a row. Kate called these "bust out" days:

Normally, you're gonna work three to four 'bust outs' in a row, which is nine to nine, or longer. When you work all day, that's called a "bust out". You're exhausted, and then you get a day off.

Most of car saleswomen's waking hours were spent at the dealership. Newcomers had to learn how to deal with these long hours. Not all or even most of this time was taken up with structured activity. Because they took turns getting customers and had to be on the floor to get the customer when their number came up, saleswomen said there was a

lot of "open" time. Generally salepeople were not allowed to watch TV, read a book, play cards, or anything like that. So, "open" time was spent staring out in space, making small talk, or trying to generate some kind of business by soliciting customers on the telephone or by mail. Arlene enjoyed cooking and housekeeping for her family, and complained that this was the hardest part of her job because she thought about all the things she could be doing at home:

I hate those long "bust out" days. For example, yesterday I started at 9:00 and I got out at 10:30. You have to be here on time in the morning and sometimes you sit here for hours doing nothing which seems like a waste of time to me. There are things I would like to be doing at home.

New saleswomen also desired a support system through which they could share with co-workers what they experienced on the job, socialize and enjoy camaraderie at slow times. Literature on workplace friendships shows this desire is equal for men (Cockburn, 1984); in my research, Evelyn said that salesmen at her dealership tended to get together in a group and make small talk to relieve the boredom. This usually consisted of "telling each other what a good job they were doing", or "telling dirty jokes" to pass the time. Occupational humor of this sort has been given little attention by sociologists, though it has significant consequences at the workplace. According to Koller (1988), it is a coping mechanism and morale builder that sustains workers through periods of boredom and helps men to deal with low status jobs. It is difficult for new saleswomen to join in this talk, because most of the "jokes" are sexist and racist. The effect of the joking was

to distance Edith from her co-workers:

For four days in a row, I worked 12 hour days. They were very long, hard hours. What got me was I am one of these people that are very nervous and I like to do things. When I would get done calling people and this and that, I sat around. And they wouldn't allow us to read books or anything, except sit there and watch the lot. You get tired of that. Then I would try to make conversation with the other salesmen, of course. They were very gross. They don't hold back. Guys joke around here. I would think, "I don't have anything in common with these people".

Using jokes is a common way to keep people out of groups. Ritzer (1977) suggests that such behavior is a strategy that men in low-status occupations use to exclude women. Car salesmen also seem to wish to show women that they are outsiders by gross sexual humor and "practical jokes". But, it is not only low-status salesmen who torment incoming women. As many studies clearly show, professional and executive women also confront men's harassment. Coser (1960) describes similar behavior at academic faculty meetings she attended, and Kanter found that males in the corporate world were always asserting their group solidarity by "tales of sexual adventures and sex jokes".

Mulkey (1988) suggests that practical jokes of this sort also provide a channel for covert communication on taboo topics. Normally individuals are held less responsible for what they say they do in jest than they would be for a serious gesture because "humor officially does not count". However, this humorous harassment has serious results. It creates a difficult or impossible work environment for women and keeps male and female workers apart. Ultimately, such harassing humor "further reinforces men's control over the women with whom they are in

direct contact" (Mulkey, 1988:146). Yolanda described the ways a manager put a camera under her shirt and snapped a picture:

I had a baggy skirt on one day and I went up the steps to the podium to where all the used car slips are and I was looking for a particular deal and my boss, the general manager, came out and he thought he was funny having a good time, and he took a camera and stuck it under my skirt. It was an instamatic and he took a picture. And I hear all this laughing. I saw the light coming on and I went, "Oh!" I chased him into his office and I said, "What is that?" He had pulled the film out by then and I grabbed it. And I was mad. I put it in my purse and I remember telling them off and getting real mad at him, and he's laughing because he thought that was just the funniest thing. And then they pat you on the butt, like this.

Twenty-five of the thirty informants experienced some form of harassment based on gender. Nina, a top saleswoman, was verbally harassed when she did well, even though that is what she was expected to do:

When I would sell, the guys at times resented me. They used to say "What do you need to sell a car, a bra?" If I was five minutes late the boss would send me home. They made me an example.

Kanter (1977), O'Farrell (1980) and Walshok (1981) found most women pioneering in men's jobs experience some type of harassment. Schroedel (1985) argues that it occurs because men are concerned with their own job security and fear of change or loss of status or position, while Martin (1989) suggests that harassment is used as a weapon to maintain women's subordinate social, economic and sexual status.

Stereotypic Roles

New saleswomen reacted in various ways to this harassment.

Although none liked it, if they wanted to work in car sales, they had to find coping strategies. Three women, who had not worked in an all male environment or experienced this type of harassment before, cried.

Crying is known as a traditional female response to problems such as harassment. Whyte (1961) says it is a way to deal with a situation over which one has little control. It may be a response women have used before in other situations. This strategy, however, validates men's power and leaves them in control. Whyte described inexperienced women waitresses who cried from "nervous tension" when they were "hard pressed to keep up with customers." Goffman (1961) placed crying in an "out of play" category, because it is an inappropriate reaction in the work interaction. He said that if people lost control, most times it would increase the tension level and bring about further unwanted incidents. In my study, Carol said if a saleswoman cried, she would only get harassed further; she found crying a poor strategy for negotiating co-worker interactions in car sales. To her anyway, crying wasn't a viable option:

If you break down and cry or show them that you're scared or weak or frightened of them, then it's just going to keep on more. They used to harass me, but I had to prove I wasn't intimidated by it. I had to toughen up.

"Toughen up" is frequently men's advice to women about their harassment. Twenty new saleswomen said they were told this from managers or owners at the very beginning of their careers. Yolanda described her experience with tears and the advice she got from her boss:

There were times when working was real bad. For example, I remember I answered a phone-up and the gentleman on the phone wanted to buy a certain car we had up on the rack. It was pouring down rain that day. As a matter of fact it was a truck if I remember right, and I didn't know the size of the engine in it. And, being a man buying a truck, he wanted to know the size of the engine. I asked him to hold a moment and I would find out.

I went up to the podium where our trade vehicles were, the trade index on them, and the vehicle in question did not have the size of the engine. I think it had a V8, but it didn't put down 318 or 360. I asked my boss who was sitting there and his boss, the owner of the store was across from me. I was still in question, I had been there maybe a month, as to whether they would keep me or not. And I asked him, I says, "This truck we have out on the rack out there, what size engine is it?" He says, "It is an 8." I says, "I know, but is it a 318 or 360? I have a gentleman on the phone who wants to know."

Immediately the owner called me a "dumb bitch", and told me if I wanted to know, to go out there and pull the thing down and look under the hood itself. And I went. I just kind of looked at it. I wanted to be hard and cold, because you have to be in this situation, in selling cars. But I found myself crying.

I told the gentleman on the phone I'd call him back. I went out. I climbed up that dumb thing. I pulled the car down and looked under the hood, and called the gentleman back and put it back and I started crying again. I couldn't hold it any longer and sit at my desk without crying. I remember my boss coming over to me and saying, "Pull yourself together. You've got to toughen up. Why don't you go to lunch. Take an early lunch." He didn't want everyone to see me crying. I was embarrassed and tried to hide my face.

New saleswomen are told to "toughen up" even when the owner is a woman. Helen told her saleswomen to be "strong", to "humor" the men and "overlook it":

I think they [salesmen] feel if you can do a man's job you can take the jokes. If anybody harassed them [saleswomen] a little bit at my dealership, I stepped in. I didn't talk to the guys, I just talked to the girls. I said, "Look, you're going to have to be a little bit stronger, you're going to have to be a little bit smarter, just smile. I mean, that's a hard thing to do, but you just adjust. You've got to accept this."

Gina talked about this behavior as a way to test women's mettle in order to be qualified to be "one of the boys". She concluded that if a woman

got a reputation as "tough", she would be accepted. Rustad (1984) describes a similar process in the army, where women were evaluated on their emotional control under harassment. Learning to deal with harassment is part of what women need to know in the car sales community. Eventually they learn to appease situations which would cause those with less experience to lose control. Literally, they become different people as they work out their responses. And one change they make is accepting the harassment they face.

Once they made the decision to stay, women started to look for alternative strategies or avenues of conduct and ways of behaving and interacting that would enhance their positions. Some strategies were derived from past experience on other jobs and in their families. Fifteen women took on stereotypic gender roles familiar to men: such as kid sister, older sister, girlfriend, and mother. They brought salesmen home cooked food, sewed on shirt buttons, did men's paper work, and listened to co-worker's problems, similar to corporate secretaries in Kanter's (1977) study, and women soldiers in Rustad's (1984) work.

Kid Sister

Three younger women, Carol 25, Cathy 26 and Denise 23, adapted the role of "kid sister". They sought the protection of "brothers" against other men with intentions and advice about the public world of work. Carol discussed how once she adopted the kid sister role she was accepted at work:

I came in and they looked at me like, "I'm gonna kill this little broad." But eventually they liked me, despite themselves. It was like they were all my older brother. I love them all dearly. I think they look at me like a kid sister. Maybe it's sort of an act, where I just act like very bubbly and flighty and have a nice word for everybody because that way they don't feel intimidated. They don't feel that this woman is trying to show them up. They feel when I sell that it comes naturally and they just sort of sit back and laugh. You know, it's amusing, I guess to watch me work because I'm so crazy. If you deal with salesmen in a tactful manner, not where you're threatening their masculinity by saying, "Hey! Bud," but just play little games like, "Okay; la de da...", and now they take care of me.

This role makes the workplace less threatening to Carol. Yet she is treated as a child and denied power. Other women take on different roles which grant them adulthood and therefore more power, but also demand more work.

Older Sister

Seven women, Fran 38, Kate 32, Marilyn 42, Rita 30, Sally 33, Yolanda 38, and Martha 31, took on "older sister" roles. They gave salesmen advice about their love lives, helped them with paperwork and located cars for them. Fran discussed her role as older sister and being treated like a "lady":

A couple of them are like brothers. They come to me for advice with their love life. I think it's funny. I know that they're happy with me. They don't treat me like I'm one of the guys. They watch their mouths. There's a big difference. They are very careful about talking dirty or swearing or anything like that. They don't want me going out in the parking lot at night alone. They don't ask me to move the cars around in the show room where I did that at first. They like me. They respect me. They treat me like a "lady".

Older women also take on "lady" roles that grant more power and

control but the emotional and physical labor involved is even greater.

Mother

Five women took on "mothering" roles. Wendy 40, Patsy 45, Evelyn 45, Nina 47, and Bernice 47, spoke about salesmen as kids who sometimes behaved badly, but needed to be taken care of. When I first met Nina, she was sewing buttons on a salesman's shirt because she kept a sewing kit around and was allowed to do mending when things were slow. During my interview with Wendy's manager, John, she appeared at the door with a hot meal for him and he called her "mom". Afterwards he explained to me:

Wendy's just like that, a mother to us all. She worries that I don't eat well because I spend such long hours here.

Girlfriend

Two informants, Barbara and Ida, took the role of "girlfriend" by dating and becoming involved with men who worked at their dealership. Through this category, these women found acceptance, got help, and fit a social life into the long workday. In some cases this strategy worked well; and a boyfriend became a protector, mentor and supporter who helped his girlfriend gain acceptance into the work group and who warded off harassment. Ida had dated a co-worker, Bill, for a year:

For us it works real well. Originally our boss didn't like the idea, but we didn't tell anyone else for a long time and it worked out. We're always here, same hours, and we are together so we see each other all the time. If I was dating someone outside the

job it wouldn't be as good because we wouldn't have much time and I'd be tired when I got home. On Sundays we get together with other salesmen and watch football and make videos. We're one big family."

However, many negative results may follow from this situation.

The threat of seductions, pursuits, rivalries, jealousies, and the private intimacy of the couple threatens group equilibrium

(Lorber, 1989). Women who go with people at their dealership are gossiped about by other salespersons, and called "sleaze". This is similar to the reputations earned by Rustad's (1984) military women ("Sex Pots") who formed relationships with supervisors and were considered whores. Denise said women who went out with salesmen at their agencies gave women in the business a bad reputation:

I think it's dumb to date people in your agency. What if you don't like each other anymore? I care too much about myself to set myself up with something like that. It's not healthy to play where you work. People talk. That has been a problem lately with Bev [a woman at the agency] and what's going on with Don. I hear she always sleeps with the guys where she works. She won't be here much longer. I can tell. Besides, it's women like her that give women in the business a bad name.

Kanter (1977:237) similarly found that if a woman was cast as a sex object, she risked debasement. 'Role encapsulation when applied to workplace affairs confirms the male dominant stereotype and convinces the male he was right all along about women'.

One of the Guys

Nina, who was a "mother" to men co-workers, also had a role as "one of the guys". She swore, told dirty jokes, and "dished it back".

However, she also felt bad about behaving "unladylike":

I am "one of the guys", really. They use profanity in front of me. Sometimes I have to hold back, because I do too. I want to be a "lady" and sometimes I am "one of the guys" and I don't like being that way and my husband doesn't either.

Nina wanted to be considered a "lady". Her husband wanted this too, but she swore. She worried that if she swore too much in front of the salesmen they would think she was not a "lady". So, becoming "one of the guys" required holding back. Although swearing had become natural for her, she had to control her behavior to convince the men that she only swore to fit in. They saw her occasional swearing as compatible with their behavior, but if she were to show them she actually swore regularly, she wouldn't be properly feminine and acceptable to them.

All of these roles helped women cope, but kept them on the periphery of the groups. Furthermore, there were requirements for roles. Older women couldn't be kid sisters and younger women couldn't be mothers. Mothers were more respected. They were "ladies", but they had to service men and provide nurturance, because these demands are part of the traditional motherly role. These requirements usually led to women becoming "superwomen", a category that cut across all the identity roles.

Superwoman

Being "superwoman" on a car lot meant doing more than the officially required work and doing it well. Even if they were top saleswomen, women were still not accepted as full team members. As they became more experienced and knowledgeable about the workings of the dealership, they attempted to make themselves invaluable to co-workers. They took on additional unpaid work in the same way as office wives described by Kanter ran personal errands such as getting birthday presents for boss's wives and children. Saleswomen ran errands for salesmen, and did secretarial work such as mailing out flyers. Vita talked about the extra work she did:

I've delivered cars for other salesmen that were out to lunch or somewhere. I don't mind doing it. I pull my load. When it was wintertime I went out and moved the cars for the guys. Whenever it came time to do whatever, I was always there. If guys came to me because I had a lot of knowledge of other things, and they'd ask me for help, I'd always help them out. I had a lot of car knowledge, a lot of model knowledge. Everything is in code. So I could find out what cars are at other dealerships because I knew how to work the computer and things and they didn't. I knew how to do dealer trades so they'd ask me, "Can you find this car for me?" To locate the cars and do the actual trades sometimes takes a day. They did not pay me for it.

Newly experienced saleswomen did not rebel at doing this extra work, but considered it pulling their load, or working harder in order to pay their dues into the fraternity of car salesmen. They said it was easier for them because women were "more organized" or "better at detail work". Evelyn made three times the salary she did as a teacher and was so grateful to have the job that she was willing to work harder and do extra work.

I work like a dog. I have more energy than most people. I

sell, very fortunately for me, more cars than most people here. I do all the detail stuff too, like I do all the car ordering stuff. But I make three times what I did as a teacher, and I don't have to moonlight at a second job the way I used to.

Women take on the above roles or predetermined categories because they are available concepts to women in a place where they are in an alien and intimidating situation. The familial roles are familiar and comfortable to men, so women use them. In this way, they situate themselves in a culture in which they feel out of place. "Superwomen" seem to fit in too well and do not challenge the system. At the same time, however, some women do not just establish careers within the field. They also confront the system, and try to subvert it. Arlene told me how she set the salesmen straight at her dealership so that they had to change:

Salesmen would come up to me and say, "Hey baby, want to go for a drink?" They didn't know I was married to the service manager. I didn't make it known unless someone would ask. Then after a while they all knew, so now they understand that that doesn't go. They understand that I am going nowhere. So now they are all like the "buddy system".

Newcomers and Customers

Beginning Sales Techniques

More experienced saleswomen use role playing as a strategy to deal with customers as well as co-workers. Newcomers to car sales, however, are not sure what behavior works best with customers. The women question what they are told and bring new ideas to the workplace because their situations and past experiences are different from those of men.

Many times there is a conflict between women's and dealer's strategies and attitudes towards sales, aggression, and how to spend time.

New salespersons begin by "working the floor" to get customers. This means they go out onto the showroom floor, walk up to people who have come into the dealership, and try to sell them a car. Miller (1964), in his ethnography of men in car sales, divides car sales methods into four time sections: the "contact", the "pitch", the "close" and "cooling". In each section there is a general pattern or strategy sales people use to sell cars. This is a male version of working time, and male models such as the track system have been developed in relation to the amount of time deemed appropriate to spend on customers and how this time should be managed in order to sell a car. A problem arises here because new saleswomen consider time different from men, and many attempt to divide it differently. Arguments between the women and their bosses arise concerning who is to define how much time should be spent with individual customers and what that time should be spent on.

The Contact: Rapport and Rejection

Most dealerships have some type of revolving system where salespersons take turns approaching drop-in customers. A few dealers have "greeters" stationed at the door who wait for customers and lead them to salespersons. At other dealerships, salespersons watch the door from their offices or on the floor and go directly up to customers. Some salespersons are required to take turns, while at other dealerships salespersons vie with each other to see who can get to the customer

faster. This contact usually follows a pattern because of practices and procedures specific to individual dealerships. Generally, however, salespersons must approach strangers on the floor of the dealership and assess their intentions and eligibility as buyers. This is a difficult task for new saleswomen. Evelyn explained that drop-in customers are anxious, and many are not really prepared to buy. Because they want to deflect aggressive salespersons, they may become abusive or reject the salesperson entirely:

Buying a car is a horrid job for most people. People who come in here are upset. They have been mistreated and lied to by other dealerships and they take it out on you. They are terrified they are going to spend a lot of money on a car.

Most new saleswomen, similar to Evelyn, did not like aggressive approaches and said they would rather let customers take their time, look around and approach them if they were seriously interested in buying. But the rule in most dealerships was that when your turn came up, you approached whoever came in and went through a prescribed sales pitch. Leah said this was a "pushy" approach, and one of the aspects of selling she liked least:

I don't like to make the customer sit down and get information out of him and go up there and make him wait for me to talk to the manager. Sometimes customers just want to look at a brochure. Management keeps a log of how many people come in and out of here and information on them. I don't like making a customer wait just to do that. I don't like being pushy.

Evelyn developed another strategy for the contact that she was more comfortable with. She liked to keep busy until she brushed past a customer, rather than sit around waiting for one or grabbing someone at

the door. She moved around the agency, to the service department, outside to the lot and in and out of the business office when I arrived for our interview. I remarked that she seemed busier than the men who were standing around talking to each other, and she replied that keeping busy was a strategy she invented to get around the demand to sell cars aggressively:

I'm always busy. I truly am always busy. I'm always doing something else, but I use this to make it look like, "Incidentally, may I help you?" That's the way I'm comfortable and I feel like hopefully they won't feel like I'm pressuring them. I probably won't talk to as many customers as other people and the general manager says he wants me out there but I hate going into a clothing store where there's this girl doing, "Hi! Can I help you?" I immediately decide, "Well, if I talk to anybody it's not going to be you." And, she's just doing her job. She's greeting that person.

Most beginning saleswomen concluded they had little trouble developing rapport if they were not initially rejected in the "contact" phase. To help customers feel comfortable, new saleswomen served them coffee, listened with apparent interest to their problems and generally treated customers with warmth and hospitality. This type of labor seemed "natural" to women whose private roles as wives, mothers, and previous occupational placement in such jobs as waitresses, receptionists and hostesses, taught them these interactional skills. Edith said she was willing to spend more time in random conversation than on pinning a person down about sales. Many times unexpected bonds are formed:

You have to be nice and talk to them and make them feel at home before you can sell them a car. It is usually easier to sell a car if you take time to 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.

Problems newcomers faced in their first contacts with a potential customer involved time and style. They preferred to approach customers more casually and converse generally with them. However, as Marilyn pointed out, this could not furnish salespersons with everything they needed to know to "settle customers on a car." Customers had to be questioned on specifics such as credit ratings and income to determine their purchasing eligibility and what cars they could realistically be offered:

You should know if they need their wife or husband in order to make a decision. You have to know the size of their family, their budget and what they can afford.

Newcomers who were assertive questioners were able to qualify customers and gained more control over the sales transaction. They got the information necessary to give them a better chance to figure out what customers really had in mind, and what direction they needed to take to satisfy them. This allowed them to manipulate customers into buying cars that would reasonably suit their needs, at a price realistically affordable to them and acceptable to management. Thus, new salespersons had to learn quickly to make a distinction between different types of customers.

The basis for distinguishing between who is a good and bad customer in these first days was built on customer responses and how saleswomen used these responses to understand and categorize customers. However,

connecting with customers can be more difficult for a woman than a man at times. Even in cases in which customers expected or wanted to be approached by a salesperson, they might not want that person to be a woman. Twenty saleswomen remembered many first contact experiences as upsetting and negative. Arlene said that older men especially did not expect or want to be approached by a woman. They felt uncomfortable and were not used to bargaining with women over cars. They did not want to answer questions about their income or credit rating or even discuss cars with a woman:

You can sense certain things. You see the older gentlemen that are, "What is she doing here? She doesn't have to know my business. She doesn't have to know how much I make a year, what bills I pay." When you are talking to them in regards to their credit history, they don't like it. I was helping this gentleman to do his financing on the vehicle and he made a wisecrack to me. He said, "Well, did you get your green card fixed?" All that does is to show me what he is really thinking.

Patsy agreed that many older men reacted in a rude, insulting manner when approached, or openly refused to deal with women and asked for a salesman:

When I started out I took a lot of gaff from older guys. I got kicked in the face a lot. Men coming in and not wanting to talk to you. Men coming in the door saying, "I'd rather talk to a man." Men thinking that I was a receptionist. "Would you get the salesman please?"

Evelyn said some older men used foul language or were abrasive and newcomers ended up turning these customers over to salesmen:

I said, "Hi there, can I answer any questions for you?" An older man said, "No, I just want to see what kind of Jap shitboxes you sell." Right away he was telling me, "Get outta my..." This person was aggressive and insulting. I backed right off. I turned

him over. I went to the floor manager and said, "I can't handle this guy." A salesman sold the guy 2 cars. The guy told him, "I don't like broads."

Although twenty women said harassment most commonly came from older men, four newcomers got rejected by wives who came in with their husbands. Cathy moved from a dealership in a working-class suburb to one in an area with a wealthier clientele because of what she called women with a "blue-collar mentality" who believe that other women should not be selling cars.

Sometimes I have problems with wives. I'm a threat to them. I've run into it twice in this store. At the other store it was worse. They would literally walk away from me. They wouldn't talk to me. Maybe they were jealous or afraid their husbands would buy whatever I suggested. It was a blue-collar area. They thought woman's place was in the home.

On the other hand, all thirty women said it was a positive attribute to be a woman in car sales when providing special connections with business or career women who buy their own cars. Many women who come in alone to buy a car felt vulnerable to hard-sell pitches from salesmen. Ann, who has been in the business for nine years, recalled that women expected abrasive salesmen who did not think women were serious customers or were able to make decisions without men. These customers were thrilled to find women selling cars:

Often women were 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."

Oprah believed this attitude was changing from surprise to expectation,

and many women depended on asking for and finding a woman salesperson:

When women walk into the showroom now, they are no longer shocked to see a woman selling cars. Women are delighted. I talk to them all the time about how much better they feel coming in. They feel there is more common ground there and they can relate better.

Other categories of customers prefer saleswomen as well. Arlene said seniors preferred being approached by saleswomen, and so did young people buying their first car, or immigrants who had difficulty with English. Arlene believed this was because she was gentle, patient and understanding: thus she was less threatening to more vulnerable customers with lower incomes or less bargaining experience:

I find that older couples like me. Especially Spanish-speaking ones. Also people buying their first car. They feel comfortable with me. I don't come on real harsh. I have never been a harsh person. I think sometimes people buy from me because they feel bad for me because I was so nice to them. I listen to them. I spend a lot of time with them. I figure, what have I got to lose, life is short. I translate for Spanish-speaking people. I come on very soft, and if I'm not going to be able to make money, I still treat people nice. Because down the road, I might get some business later. Where some of the men are very short-tempered. They won't spend the time.

Time was a major issue for women newcomers in the contact stage. They said they were willing to spend more of it, were more patient and understanding and more concerned with referrals or repeaters. They struggled with the male model which was more aggressive and called for pinning customers down at the beginning.

The Pitch: Ignorance and Technical Knowledge

Regardless of how it is done, once contact is made, it leads to phase two according to Miller (1964), the "pitch". Time is also an issue in this stage, as it is in all stages of the sale. The most significant strategic issue in the "pitch", however, is learning how to put on a proper show. In the contact stage they speak of gentleness, good listening, understanding and patience. In the pitch they talk about trust. New saleswomen gain trust by displaying their technical knowledge, listening ability and/or innocence. Miller (1964) describes the pitch as salespersons' attempts to convince customers they can best sell them the car best suited to their needs. Goffman (1959) refers to the social interaction involved in this type of endeavor as a theatrical performance. A successful pitch requires the salesperson to "put on a show" better than that of the competition. Various strategies are used by newcomers to be convincing; most involve the issues of trust and control. Saleswomen must get customers to believe they will deal fairly with them in order to gain their trust. In this way they can control the sales situation. Some women find the way to succeed at this stage is to be knowledgeable about the product they sell in order to convince customers their dealership is reputable and service-oriented. Leah who previously held a job repairing and installing technical machinery, said technical knowledge was the key to good selling techniques:

I want to sit down with the guy who subscribes to any and every automotive magazine and talk to him from principles of engineering application, their origin, their point of apex change or modification. I don't just want to sell a car. I want to deal with the young kid out of school, the widow in transition. I want to sell them a technical piece of machinery and I am responsible for their understanding how it operates. It's not just to get in the

car and engage the engine. I sell a piece of equipment. I sell a mechanical object, a piece of machinery. I'm not interested on how much I make on this deal or whether or not you like the colors of what I have. I'm more interested in that you understand what you are purchasing and spending your money on. Too many times a woman couldn't tell you where to change the oil. She wouldn't know what transmission fluid is or where it goes. She doesn't know the brakes are operated by brake fluid. And it's worth their while to never have to be at risk or liable to any individual because of lack of knowledge of something they own and operate.

Other newcomers used just the opposite strategy, building on women's stereotypic ignorance in technical matters as a strategy. If they were new and didn't know a lot about the automobiles they were selling, women said it didn't hurt to say so because that made them believable. Evelyn, said "playing" innocent convinced customers she was trustworthy and could not cheat them:

Customers will think you are too innocent to cheat or lie to them and they will trust you more. The way I got by at first was because I said, "I'm new here." This was true. I knew nothing about cars. When business is slow I sometimes still play dumb.

Another strategy newcomers used was being good listeners. Fran said many customers then sold themselves, and saleswomen could learn about the cars from them:

Volkswagen customers are very educated. They have already researched everything. All you have to do is listen to them. They are going to sell themselves. You're going to get a lot of product knowledge just by listening those first couple weeks.

To further complicate matters, saleswomen said there were mutual strategies going on during the pitch stage. Salespeople were not the only ones involved in manipulation; customers used their own strategies to throw women off guard and gain control. Some male

customers used women's stereotypic lack of technical knowledge to intimidate new saleswomen. Because men traditionally use intimidation in dealing with women, they are fairly likely to be successful according to Denise. She said newcomers feared they did not know enough about the product and should be able to answer even the most ridiculous questions. She remembered the kinds of questions she was asked her first month on the floor:

Women aren't supposed to know a whole lot about cars, and they kind of played me off that way, even if they talked to me. If I tried to ask them questions, they would ask me questions and they would test me more than other salesmen. They'd open the hood and ask me where the carburetor was. Well, the cars are fuel injected so there's no carburetor. They would ask, "How do you lift the engine on the van?" I just didn't know those things. A salesman at my dealership asked me, "How in the hell do you get in that kind of a conversation with somebody?"

By contrast, saleswomen said widowed, divorced or single women were good customers. Women felt they had an advantage when dealing with first-time female buyers, recent widows or divorced women who seemed to trust them more. Many of these customers had relied on men for advice and information most of their lives and were glad to have the help of a woman. Even the pitch of new saleswomen with limited technical knowledge was appreciated by female buyers who usually had even less. Denise said women were glad to discuss their ignorance about cars with saleswomen in order to get help in choosing a car:

My favorite of all my customers are women, especially middle-aged women, or women who just went through a divorce, or single women. I do very well with them. They come to me for advice.

The Close: Manager Assistance and Price

The "close" phase of selling a car is reached when the customer has chosen a car and made a commitment to buy it by making a monetary offer that both salesperson and buyer agree upon (Miller, 1964). This offer is then brought to management for approval, while the salesperson puts on a show of taking the side of the buyer against management in the price negotiations to close the deal. Strategies here involve relationship issues where a person who is working for the house adopts a mediating role where she bargains between the outsider and the house. Gender plays a minor if any role at this stage of the sale. Hughes (1971) says salespersons can not afford to be openly hostile to customers, because they will lose a sale, but they can be hostile to the house as long as they sell. Besides, as Florence said, this strategy helps the customer believe that the salesperson is on their side against the house: "If management looks bad, that's okay, because it's you they're going to trust and it's you they're buying the car from."

Even if customers believe the middleman is on their side, however, this position is fraught with potential conflict. Salespeople lack control in brokerage relationships, because the house is the party with the greatest financial investment in the dealings and holds final veto power over all transactions. A similar problem studied by Hughes (1971) involved real estate salespersons who had to defer to the realty house and nurses who had to take orders from doctors regarding patient care. Browne (1973) found car salespersons' conflicts were intensified in this

type of broker arrangement, because they had an unusual degree of ignorance concerning issues crucial to their dealings, such as the price for which the car has been taken in.

When an offer is turned down by the house, the new saleswoman loses credibility. This often happens because the house does not trust newcomers to put on a good enough act to make a high profit on the car, and most newcomers are kept in the dark about actual costs. Managers say they think it is better for newcomers to be kept in the dark because then they will not be tempted to sell a car for less because they are sympathetic with a customer, or are concerned about selling enough cars and afraid to lose a deal so are willing to take less money. Managers say ignorance about real cost is easier on salespersons, and simplifies their job. Frank talked about the benefits of ignorance and the believeability of the saleswoman. He believed that a saleswoman who was truly ignorant about how much profit the house was making on the deal she negotiated was more believable to the customer than one who had to cover up with lies:

You try to keep your salespersons in the dark as far as costs on cars. They don't know how much they can sell these cars for, they have no idea. They don't know how much gross is in the car. And they are believable because they believe what we tell them. If you believe something and you try to convey it to somebody, chances are they are going to believe you more than if you give them a lie. Salespeople are not allowed to have access because it works better for them that way. If the manager tells them, "No, you can't sell that car for this amount", for whatever reason, "This is the price you got to sell it for", they go out there, and that is what they do.

The issue of trust was often new to car saleswomen. Coming to be

a trusted member of the sales group for newcomers meant placing themselves squarely on the side of the dealership. New salespersons find themselves in an uneasy place between the customers and employers. They are distrusted by management as well as customers.

In many situations, stores expect new salespersons to hand customers over to management once the customer makes an offer. According to Bernice, managers handle negotiations this way:

The way they do it is the saleswoman handles the customer. They pick out a car. She gets the customer to make an offer. Then they agree to a given price. Then the saleswoman gets the manager and the manager goes back to the customer and tells the customer, "All right, let's forget about this. This is what it really is. This is what you are gonna pay for the car."

And, in situations where managers allow new saleswomen to close their own deals, they have to go back and forth to the sales manager to announce what they have been offered and see if it is acceptable. Bernice said customers did not like being put in either situation. When offers accepted by the salesperson were turned down by the house, customers lost faith in their salesperson. They wanted to believe they had talked their salesperson down in price and that she was now on their side and would talk management into accepting the amount they had offered, which might not be the best possible deal for the dealership. If customers want to feel that they are beating the house, they have to have confidence in the ability of their salesperson to be able to bargain realistically with the house and win. Customers do not like to deal with salespersons who they think have no sway with management. They want to trust that their salesperson is capable of getting them the

best price possible. It is thus logical to assume that customers will not trust people who are not knowledgeable enough to stand up to the house and will not want them as representative. Barbara gave an example of a lost customer:

My first customer was a gentleman that found the car he wanted and we got to sit down on negotiating the first price. Management turned it down, and he bolted out the door. I couldn't stop him. The problem was he didn't want to negotiate with me. He didn't want to negotiate with someone who couldn't get him a good price.

Most dealerships fired salespersons if they let too many customers get away without closing, so at first newcomers like Barbara were willing to depend entirely on the manager to close deals.

If it was not going well, I'd call a manager. Sometimes a new face means a difference. I'd learn about the price of the cars that way too.

When new saleswomen wanted to close their own deals, they tried to figure out in advance how much they had to ask from customers to make the deal acceptable to management. Before firming a price, they made sure the house got a certain percentage of profit depending on how long the car had been on the lot (insurance was paid on each car for each day it sat), and what the car was taken in for. They also had to try to satisfy customers who said they needed to pay the lowest possible price for a car. This, of course, was in conflict with training that suggested that price was not as important as selling people on the service the dealership had to offer. Furthermore, keeping new salespersons in the dark so they did not have pangs of conscience about

asking high prices, caused further stress. Leah, for example, was unwilling to talk customers into buying something overly high priced. She said she could sell more cars by sacrificing money (higher commission) and that the sale was worth more than the commission as long as the dealership was assured a base amount:

I'm not out to con. I'm out to make a living. I sell a lot of cars because I sell them cheaper and my boss screams at me. We got into fights a couple of times. I would say, "Well, let's call it the McDonald Factory. 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. I'm not going to sit there and try and hit somebody for \$2,000 over gross on the deal to pad my pocket because I've got to shop with these people and live with them."

At most dealerships base commission is \$50.00. That is, regardless of how much the salesperson sells the car for, the least amount she will receive in commission is \$50.00. The average commission an experienced salesperson makes after extras are added is about \$200.00. However, commissions can go as high as \$2,000.00 depending on the make of car and the extras on it. New salespersons rarely make high commissions because they do not ask enough for the cars and don't push extras. This produces major conflict on the part of the new salesperson who is being socialized not simply to make the pitch and close, but also how to think about it in specific ways. And newcomers resist. They say, "I am not going to do this to people. I am not going to con them. I am trustworthy." Future chapters show once newcomers become experienced and socialized into the job, they will say, "I'm a professional. I can do these things. That's what a salesperson does. I can ask for this money." The people who become "professional" don't

just learn what to do, they also learn an attitude. They learn a vocabulary of motives that becomes part of their reality. And the traditional newcomer's ideology is part of the baggage that must be discarded if they want to become true car salespersons.

CHAPTER VI

EVERYDAY LIFE ON THE FLOOR

Experienced Saleswomen and Co-Workers

As previously discussed, female newcomers must show they can sell cars with little assistance or training while being teased and sexually harassed by co-workers who exclude them from their cliques. They are expected to handle themselves during this time without resorting to traditional "feminine" responses such as tears or complaints to management. As they become more experienced, they take on traditional gender roles in order to deal with their co-workers. In this way, they become accepted as different, but familiar and non-threatening. These roles are used as covers or masks to hide women's increasing competitiveness as they vie for sales in the male arena. Eventually, however, saleswomen find it most productive simply to distance themselves from male co-workers.

Tokens and Competition

Work at car dealerships is based on a free enterprise system ethic. Salespeople are awarded SPIFS (Special Incentives for Sales):

they win prizes for selling the most cars in a month, on a busy Saturday, or for selling the first car of the day or the last car of the day. Usually managers display tallys on the wall of their offices, so everyone knows how everyone else is doing. As women become more experienced, they compete fiercely for top sales. Oprah said that aside from trying to meet quotas and make a living, women have to sell more cars than their male co-workers to prove they are competent and to become accepted:

You have to beat them at their own game to be accepted. They'd always say, "Well, what do you know about cars?" So, I sold more cars than they did.

Evelyn said however women progressed in sales led to stressful situations. Managers took advantage of their gender and minority status to spur competition among them:

There was one other woman here in February and we were at six-and-a-half units on the board in the beginning of the month and the men were doing nothing, so the general manager said, "C'mon, you can't let these broads beat you. What the hell is wrong with you?"

Token women are in a "catch 22" situation. They are harassed as failures if they don't sell, and harrassed as overly aggressive if they sell more than dominant male workers who do not want to lose face. Gender is always made of primary importance when saleswomen's progress is discussed. To make matters worse, women are handicapped by managers. Many are not given equal access to products. For example, they are given desks in areas of the dealership where less expensive makes of cars are displayed or where they are less visible to customers. Fran

said even though she was not permitted to sell the higher-priced line of cars at her previous dealership, she managed to make the most sales her first month. Despite this accomplishment, she was harassed for being too aggressive, and unfeminine:

The first month I was there I sold the second highest amount of VWs out of everybody there. So then they got mad and they changed the rules and said I would have to sell everything, even though before I was only supposed to sell lower-priced cars, just because I sold more cars than them. They said I was not feminine, too aggressive and too much of a hustler. It's jealousy. They say that women are catty--men are worse.

Kanter (1977) found that token corporate women are similarly pressured if they make the dominant majority look bad. They too, are criticized for being aggressive "hustlers". Because of the nature of the business, car saleswomen like corporate women, must compete in a hostile male arena. At first, they rely on using the traditional female roles discussed in the previous chapter, such as "mother" and "kid sister". This role playing enables salesmen to patronize them and save face. However, as saleswomen become more successful, their strategy for dealing with male co-workers changes to one of distancing themselves.

Keeping a Distance

For many experienced women, acceptance or cooperation from co-workers becomes relatively unimportant. Twelve experienced women said concern with the need to be accepted as equals began to fade as they saw they could do the job without being part of the male team. While at first they felt a need for a support group, later on their

major concern was how to guard themselves against other salespersons' dishonesty. Vita said it was good to stay away from co-workers because they cheated and lied in order to steal each other's customers:

Salespeople do what is called "skating", where they steal someone else's customer. Like if you had a customer that came in early for an appointment and a salesman would sell them the car and say, "Well, she's not here today, but I'll sell you the car and see that she's taken care of." But, they never did it. If they get caught, they send them home for a couple days. That takes two or three days off the floor and when you're working on commission, that hurts.

Goffman (1961) suggests people attached to a role they are unable to embrace fully may accept the situation, but then withdraw by some gesture or other. Saleswomen who are not allowed into the male team at dealerships distance themselves from the group of car salesmen by proclaiming their difference. Ann said she was more ethical and could be trusted to compete fairly, but that men could not:

I play fair. A lot of guys don't play fair. Some salespersons hold their numbers of cars sold in their offices and don't put them on the board until the last minute or the end of the month, so someone can think they are winning all along and then at the last minute find out someone else did more selling than they did. That's underhanded.

Themes related to co-worker distrust weave through out the structure of car sales, both within informants' own agencies and across other dealerships. There is a very high turn over in this field, and few employees stay long at any one dealership. At any given time, agencies may engage in mass firings or hirings. The car sales field is a "throw away" labor market where people need no particular education or experience to get hired. As a result, newcomers backgrounds may be

suspect. In addition, dealerships come and go, because the popularity of makes of cars is erratic and workers move with the flow. As salespersons grow in their awareness of the instability of the business, their fear and distrust of each other grows as well. Experienced saleswomen such as Evelyn and Ann steered clear of all newcomers, male or female. They kept interactions on a superficial level because they feared they had more to lose than to gain from co-worker relations in which they had no basis for trust. Evelyn complained that befriending newcomers makes trouble for an experienced salesperson:

Newcomers can drag you down. Most are "floaters" who are not conscientious. They come in late, take days off, work a while and then quit. If you try to help them, they will steal your customers or get you in trouble with management.

Ann kept her distance from newcomers so that they could not know her business or gossip about her:

Many of them are starting out. Some of them never make it to the point where I am. To be with a dealership this long is unusual. I have to be one step ahead. I have to carry myself aloof. I don't have to be on their level. If I'm a little beneath the customer, that's okay, but not my co-workers. If I communicate and talk with them and be their buddy, I can lose everything. They will try to cheat me. They could gossip about me. They are not to be trusted. I'll say, "How are you?" I'll talk pleasantly. That's nice to a degree, but I'm like a horse with blinders on. I go in, I do my job, and I go out. That's it. I need cooperation from management, not from my co-workers.

Ann distrusted co-workers and management, but said she needed cooperation from management. In organizations of activities where each individual is isolated and yet connected to a common base, there is a characteristic distrust which reaches horizontally as well as vertically. Usually in a workplace, at least according to classic

Marxist theory, the antagonism between employers and workers encourages the workers to bond together and develop a shared understanding of their situation and an awareness that they have a common enemy, the employer. But the common enemy here is each other rather than the employer. This helps explain the persistence of distrust and fear in a lot of commission sales work.

Car saleswomen are especially vulnerable because they are marginal members in an unstable field. They are trying to support themselves and can be fired at any time. Their stability depends on meeting high quotas. If they spend time helping newcomers, they may be endangering their own position. Newcomers may sell more than they do and thus replace them, or they may turn out to be untrustworthy, lie to management about them, or steal their customers. They can not afford to take risks in the competitive, unstable field in which they work.

Experienced Saleswomen and Customers

Developing Successful Sales Techniques

As saleswomen describe their selling techniques, it becomes clear that women socialized into car sales follow a pattern. When newcomers join a workplace they are much more resistant and independent, whereas people who have done saleswork for a long time adapt to the values of the workplace and learn to embrace them. Entering a culture as a newcomer, the neophyte salesperson does not share the understandings of people who have been around for a while. Some eventually conform to

that understanding, like Nina who knows the more money you make off a customer and the longer the hours you spend at work, the more successful you are. Others fight back and make some changes for themselves like Ann who has set lower expectations for herself economically, but has succeeded in getting time off to spend with her family. In her study of gender and the labor market, Hunt (1980) argues that women bring non-capitalist value to their workplace. In sales, many women like Ann have a work/family conflict. The changes they make are not large scale resolutions. They are personal solutions. Ann has managed to stay at one dealer long enough to have repeat customers. She is a valued employee with a good sales record and so has managed to obtain a part-time position. Of course, she has been put on salary and her income will be less. However, if they wish to stay in the car sales, most women rationalize the requirements of the job.

The Contact: Sizing Customers Up

As they become more experienced most saleswomen change their behavior from letting customers talk themselves into buying a car to taking more control over the customers and the deal. Eventually they feel they know more about what the customers need than they do and concern themselves with making a profit for themselves as well as the dealership.

Some customers are repeaters and their behavior is known to experienced salespersons who have dealt with them before. Most

customers, however, are walk-ins and, therefore, either strangers or first time buyers. Relationships between these customers and salespeople are random, fleeting, and difficult to control. Customer/salesperson relations are somewhat similar to the relationships of cab drivers with their fares. The day holds "a long series of brief contacts with unrelated persons of whom he [sic] has no foreknowledge, just as they have none of him, and whom he is not likely to encounter again" (Davis, 1959:160). Contrary to the client/practitioner relationship of doctors or lawyers, where rapport is built up over a period of time, customer salesperson relationships are generally fleeting. One time contact with a heterogeneous aggregate of clients, over whom one has minimal control, can be dangerous. Cab drivers come up against belligerent drunks, psychopaths, and fare jumpers who may verbally or otherwise abuse them. Women who sell cars, may also come up against belligerent customers who verbally abuse them, as previously discussed. More experienced saleswomen come to expect rejection and verbal abuse. Saleswomen rationalize customers' actions in order to control the implications that they (the saleswomen) are not honest and ethical. Evelyn said customers were usually not in a good frame of mind when they go car shopping because they didn't really know what they wanted, and were confused about what they could afford. And they have probably been given a bad time by other car salespersons in the past:

Buying a car is a horrid job for most people. People who come in here are upset and confused. Most people who come in here are defensive. They want a car but they don't. Some people walk in and they want one thing but can't afford it. They have probably been given a bad time by other salespersons. So you have to make

people trust you. You have to be tactful and you have to "bring people around" to what they really can afford.

In response to these stereotypes, experienced saleswomen may try to dissociate themselves from some of the preconceptions others have of them. One strategy is to blame the victim, speaking about customers in a condescending manner, deploring their actions, yet excusing them because they say customers who have been abused and misinformed by other dealers are naturally anxious and confused. This strategy resembles the rationalization of prostitutes studied by Bryan (1968) who believe that their customers are stupid. Prostitutes learn how to size up their customers and what to say and do during each step of their socialization. Experienced saleswomen, like prostitutes, say customers must be handled tactfully in order to gain their trust, and then educated as to what would realistically suit their needs. As soon as Marilyn learned to interpret her customers' behavior, she said she could begin to manipulate them toward a sale. Currently she is a finance manager and uses this ability to sell add-ons:

Every time you get a little more comfortable, a little smarter, a little bolder. You read the signs of the customer, like if the car is too expensive right at the beginning, or where their hot button is, what they get excited about. Eventually I bring them around.

Kleinman (1980) found field researchers in sociology also need to interpret their subjects behavior in order to have some control over their situation. Similar to saleswomen they "learn the ropes" of their new occupations, and begin to know what to expect from customers so that

interactions become easier to control. Car saleswomen, like field researchers, develop categories of personalities and perspectives of their customers to explain their behavior and help the salesperson to manipulate them toward a sale. Although there "apparently are no firm rules for making the distinction" between "suspect" non-buyers and buyers (Rothman, 1987:166), more experienced saleswomen like June said they assumed that every contact was a possible buyer, and prided themselves on their ability to counter any form of resistance.

The Pitch: Putting on a show

I have described new saleswomen's anxiety over displaying technical knowledge about cars in order to prove their credibility to male customers. However, Harvey, who has been selling cars for ten years, says this technical knowledge is superfluous because salespersons can get help from co-workers:

If there are customers that really want to know everything, I go to somebody that's really good with product knowledge. We have a couple here that know everything about it. I'm a good salesperson. I am not afraid to ask somebody to help me out with a question I don't know the answer to. I just go to somebody else and they'll help me even though they are not going to get anything out of it now. Sooner or later, I'm going to help them.

But, most women are excluded from the male team and cannot get help readily. Even more experienced saleswomen find that technical knowledge protects them from teasing and harassment by customers and helps them to sell to women or men who want to understand more about the product.

June claimed it gave her more control:

It is a downfall for a person not to know the product, know how it works, the major systems and such. When you take people and show them not to be afraid of the gadgetry, you have more control over the sale.

In order to know what cars they have on hand to sell, more experienced women also familiarize themselves with the inventory. Carol said the sooner saleswomen learned what cars were on hand at their dealership and how each was equipped, the easier negotiations became: "I started doing the inventory and now I can tell you every car on the lot. That makes selling easier."

After newcomers become more familiar with the inventory and product, they have to know what the car can be sold for, so negotiations go more smoothly. At first most depend entirely on the manager to okay customer bids. Later, if they want to close on their own, they need to know how much money the dealer has paid for each car and how much they have to ask from customers to make the deal acceptable to management.

Most dealers keep invoices on file and more experienced salespersons are allowed to see them so they can make decisions. Yet, they never really know the true price of the cars, because invoices and books may be doctored by the owners. Thus, most experienced women sell cars at prices they know that managers have okayed in the past or set according to their profit motives. This is another example of vertical distrust and secrecy at the highest level. Larry quit the business because: "Owners use the 'Mushroom Theory of Management' where you keep managers and salespersons in the dark and feed them shit."

Yolanda judged what payments customers could afford, and what

their needs were, and tried to match this with what she had available at set prices:

I listen to what size their family is, what their budget is, and what they can afford. I went out and got myself a really good finance computer and when they say, "Okay, I can afford x a month", my bottom line after taxes, license, and stuff, has to be this amount. Knowing that, I know what car I can sell and at what price, from past experience or from looking at the price set in the book up at the front. That took practice. That doesn't come overnight.

Once saleswomen gain the confidence and ability to identify customer types, and once they become knowledgeable about inventory and pricing, they are more in control of their work. At this point, the work of selling changes from servicing wise and controlling customers to leading ignorant ones. The salesperson takes on the demeanor of a professional who alone is capable of making judgments about the product. The sales relationship then resembles a doctor/patient relationship in which the salesperson as doctor diagnoses the illness from analyzing the symptoms of the customer patient and prescribes the proper medication in the form of a car. Edith said:

I'm more confident in myself. I can talk more about the vehicle. I can give a good presentation. I can wake the customer up to reality and put him in the car that feeds his needs. And not the one he wants, but the one he really needs.

In opposition to the "professional" sales strategy is the strategy in which the saleswoman employs familiar gender role stereotypes to gain customer confidence. Denice played innocent "baby girl", using her looks and youthful personality to convince paternal customers of her honesty and put them at ease:

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 sorrority letters on the bottom. I have a face that will show people I'm honest.

Ann was adept at masking or cloaking pressure tactics by playing the innocent and kindly "grandmother":

So I let them think, "I would never hurt you." I'm an older woman. I'm someone's mother and someone's sister. I am a grandmother. Right on my desk is a grandmother plaque. Would I hurt you? No. I'm not a broad. I'm not a young girl. If someone walked in with their husband, I'm not a threat, so all this is working for me. They trust me.

There is no method that guarantees a sale and nothing that insures that salepeople will continue to be successful over time. Furthermore, changes in the economy and the industry are beyond the control of salespersons. Because of these factors, even the most successful saleswomen have dry spells where commissions fall off. At times when knowledge about cars and ability to assess peoples' needs combined with trusted role play is not enough to keep customers buying, some women resort back to innocent beginner roles for the pitch. As newcomers, having an inexperienced innocence about how to sell cars was equated with honesty by customers; so many initial pitches built on inexperience ended up as closed sales. Ann said:

You say, "I know nothing." They say, "You're a nice dummy you take care of me." Whenever sales get poor, I say to myself, "Dummy up." It's true. People like you to be honest with anything you do and if you tell them you don't know, they think you're honest and are happy to deal with you.

In these ways, experienced saleswomen learn to manage their

identities on the showroom floor. They make instruments of their own appearance and personality in order to become successful. However, once they have managed their personalities, their ideology begins to change and they look at the selling process with a different philosophy and reality.

The Close: Profit Motives and Games(wo)manship

Eventually, saleswomen develop more manageable definitions of their situations. As they become more experienced in closing their own deals, they change their philosophy of sales. Selling at a lower price the way they did as beginners is no longer valued. Satisfying the customer now becomes making the customer like what the salesperson, not the customer, thinks is best for the customer's needs. Carol controlled the choice of car by convincing customers that it was the car best suited to their needs and pocketbook. She pushed service, saying her dealership offered better service than others and therefore the customer would be better off in the long run. She negotiated less:

The first year was very lean. I had a tendency to think that every one was buying solely on price. Then I started getting a little bit higher and negotiating a little bit less. Every year got better. Now I get them relaxed and comfortable, decide what we have that is close to their price range and make 'em like it. Then I bring them into the service department and introduce them to the service manager. I might be \$50.00 higher than the next dealer, but if they know that for the next three years if they need something, if they are having a problem with service, we're going to be right on top of it.

Experienced saleswomen now use techniques similar to those used by

insurance agents, where "downright force and steady pressure" are applied (Pothier, 1974). The words they use to describe what they do become harsher and more "warlike". They talk about "going in for the kill", "attacking", and "putting customers away". Denise called her style of selling, "attack nicely":

My attitude is let 'em come in, let 'em look around. Let 'em feel comfortable, and then attack, but attack nicely. Keep telling them why they should buy the car. Don't let 'em get away. Be very calm and easy-going about it. If you attack and you show them you just want to sell them a car, you send them away.

As previously discussed, car sales argot is violent. These particular phrases are descriptive of customer relations and highlight fierce, competitive, distrustful behavior. The behavior of experienced saleswomen is shaped by adherence to the prescribed patterns of behavior which have become institutionalized in the field (Miller, 1964). Salespeople are there to make money for themselves and for their dealership and they take up methods which others in the field use and which succeed. Nina said eventually selling cars became a game:

It is fun. When you think of all the people that have to make a profit. You can't be in business if you don't make a profit. And making a profit is the name of the game.

As a further ploy, June pretended to change sides, blaming management for the high asking price:

Once you get them where they like you and they like the car, the price isn't that hard. If they come up with a ridiculous offer, you just say, "Let me talk to management." But really, the only time I go into management is to kill time, before I let the customer know what price I'm gonna tell 'em. That makes 'em think I'm on their side. Who do they think they are? Everybody should be able to make a profit. I'm not saying to screw people, but you should be

able to make a profit.

Selling is a profit-oriented game and the customer becomes the adversary--an enemy to be fought and conquered. She or he is a "liar", a "cheat" or a "rip off artist". Evelyn said, "The famous line in this business is, 'If their mouth's moving, they're lying.'" Nina said customers intentionally held out and salespersons had to make them pay up in order to keep the business going:

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.

Ida added:

Some customers really want our vehicle, but they come here to see if they can rip you off. And they will. The biggest rip off artist no longer is the dealer. The biggest rip off artist is the customer. They lie about the condition of their trade-ins. They bring a car in that they just brought to the repair shop and the mechanic said it was going to cost \$700.00 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.

Whereas initially, saleswomen were concerned with selling at lower prices to meet customer's spoken needs, once their ideology changes, customers who are concerned with lower prices are considered problems. Altruistic service is now defined as making the customer happy by selling him the car the salesperson feels he should have at a price the salesperson feels is fair--a deal in which the dealership makes a high profit. Martha berated customers who complained over price:

It's a known fact that people that are the happiest satisfied customers are the ones that paid the most profit. If you sell a car at a little profit what you end up doing is buying a lot of aggravation. The kind of person that will chisel the price down

to nothing is the kind of person that will never be satisfied and is always looking to get as much as they can for as little as possible. They are "malcontents" and "moochers". All they want to do is outsmart the dealer.

Goffman (1959) suggests that since salespersons can not argue with customers or call them liars to their faces if they wish to sell, calling them names behind their backs provides a release valve for alienated workers to reassert control over the situation.

Definitions of fair business practice by experienced saleswomen such as Nina become making a large profit from "good" customers who make the game easier by accepting prices given them without bargaining:

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. I made millions of dollars on it. I am exaggerating of course, but any time this man comes in he gets five star service. He is happy and we are happy and the owner is happy. He comes in and they wash his car and take care of him because he didn't play games with anybody, and he didn't make us give him the car.

Socialized to this ideology, women become aggressive salespersons, bringing in higher profits for the dealership, meeting quotas and earning higher commissions. They have learned to justify their attitudes and actions. Working in car sales is a learning process during which standard practice becomes acceptable to the learner. Ditton (1977) found that English bread salesmen learned to cheat their customers by padding their bills in order to make a living. He explains the logic of the field as follows: "It is hoped by the time the newcomer realizes quite what is expected of him, it will be digestible, and that

any lingering doubts about the propriety of sales life will be dissolved by his increased organizational commitments" (Ditton, 1977:211).

Saleswomen become similarly self-motivated and committed to the occupational ideology of the sales encounter. They feel freer to say, "It's fun to make money. It's not crooked." They rationalize the practices of the sales community, and see their activities as useful for enhancing the image of their occupation. Greed is not something of which they are ashamed. They do not question it in the American culture of the 80s and 90s where greed has not only been encouraged but lauded. Like prostitutes who call themselves exotic dancers, or garbagemen who prefer the title sanitation engineer (Salutin, 1971), at this point, many saleswomen think of themselves as "professionals".

CHAPTER VII

HOW WOMEN ARE SUCCESSFUL IN CAR SALES

The informants were interviewed during 1987, but I have attempted to keep in touch with them over the past three years. Many times I contacted a saleswoman to have her expand on, or explain an issue that was unclear to me, or because I was interested in knowing how her career was developing. In addition, in 1989 and 1990 the study received national interest and newspaper reporters asked me for names of saleswomen they could contact for feature articles. When I phoned saleswomen to ask for clarifying data, to do follow-ups on their career status or to get permission to give their names to reporters, I found many changes had taken place. Some women had moved into management positions and were glad to tell me how they accomplished this. Other women, however, were no longer working at the agency at which I had originally interviewed them. Receptionists said, "She no longer works for us", or "There is no one here by that name". Managers said they did not know where respondents had gone, and in many cases had been replaced themselves. Sometimes dealerships had been bought out and entire staffs replaced.

It was difficult for me to locate missing respondents, because I

did not ask saleswomen for private numbers or addresses in order to respect their stated need for privacy. Sometimes, remaining salespersons told me what had happened to their co-workers. Other times, I located them by accident, such as reading about one of my respondents in a newspaper article. What I did find out is that as of May 1990, eleven of the 30 women respondents were working for their original owners, although one of these women transferred to a different agency under the same ownership, and two of these women have requested and been allowed to work part-time. Eighteen respondents were no longer with the same dealer. Five of these women made lateral moves, two of them out of state. Thirteen women's whereabouts are currently unknown. The woman owner has opened a second dealership. None of the five men respondents are with their original dealerships, and all of their whereabouts are currently unknown. This chapter looks at pressures that push women out of sales, who stays and where they go.

Factors Pushing Women Out

As yet, there are few separate statistics for women's staying power in car sales. There are however, factors and dimensions to car sales that all women talk about and that have a great bearing on their ability to build successful careers. This chapter will examine these factors and analyze why and how some people overcome them and others do not.

The car industry is always changing. Dealerships come and go, and workers are forced to move around. June blamed the fickleness of the consumer and the inability of the manufacturers to guess which cars would sell:

The fish stinks from the head down. The whole industry is too unpredictable. The popularity of cars is chancey and dealers go broke all too easy. A few years ago a Toyota store would fetch several million for a ticket over night. Now you can't give Toyota away. I know people who bought hot tickets in a hot area and lost. It's a crap shoot. You might as well go to Las Vegas for your money.

When dealerships begin to do poorly, according to Larry, there are mass firings:

I came in on a Saturday once, and at about 1:00 o'clock we had sold one car. So the owner called me in the office and he asked me to fire seven new guys. Some of the guys had only been selling two or three weeks, and he felt that was it.

June called these firings "blood baths":

There is so much politics in the business that it can be a blood bath. It happens all of a sudden. I lost my job in January. The people I was originally hired by got yanked out and I got a new boss. My responsibilities were divided up.

This account agrees with the findings of a Philadelphia-based outplacement firm, Right Associates, which says 85% of car saleswomen who came to them for counseling held positions that were eliminated in a merger, acquisition or downsizing (DeLorenzo, 1988). The resultant forced move from store to store by a car salesperson is called "jumping". According to Vita, it is quite common:

The car business is notorious for what we call "jumping" from dealership to dealership. We all go from store to store. You

can't stay too long at one store because things happen. Since I have worked here I couldn't tell you the people that have come and gone. I couldn't count them. We had a list at one time.

Larry talked about the difficulty of succeeding under these conditions:

Because there is very little security for dealers, they try to get the same job done for less money or they think if they hire somebody else the business is going to get better. They fire salespersons in slow times, change managers, cut commissions and blame us for not selling. This gives salespersons so little security or respect within the industry it is unfortunate.

Limited Mobility

To complicate matters, the lateral moves car sales people are forced to make cause them constantly to have to prove themselves to new dealers and interferes with their upward mobility. It is common to see managers return to sales, and salespersons with contracted salaries reverting to straight commission. As Nina said:

They brought me here on a contract of guaranteed salary. I mean, it was incredible. It was a solid dealer. However, he went bust, so I could do nothing with the contract.

Furthermore, women in car sales may make more money than they did in women's jobs, but they do not have a higher status and their horizontal mobility is similar to what they experienced in women's jobs, such as waitressing or service work. Kate was dissatisfied with being forced into horizontal mobility. She expected to progress through upward mobility:

There was a change in sales manager. I was originally paid a percentage agreed upon up front and I exceeded what they penciled me in for or anticipated paying. Even though I made them larger

dollars, they wanted to change the percentage, decreasing it. I did my job and then I did better at it than when I originally started and then they wanted me to work for less money.

Car saleswomen lack support in numerous areas. They work under unstable market conditions which limits upward mobility; yet they have no professional organization, no union, and few support systems in the male environment of car sales. In addition, they lack support in balancing work and family life.

Family Pressures

The unequal division of domestic labor decreases women's economic success. Women have a difficult time making decisions about balancing work and family life. Currently, structural changes in the economy and the organization of the workplace and private life have combined to create new avenues for women outside the home. Decisions regarding committed work ties develop out of negotiation constraints and opportunities, often unanticipated, encountered over the course of their lives. Yet women must also respond to numerous dilemmas and constraints once they enter the work force. Simultaneously fulfilling too many roles, such as spouse, parent, homemaker, and paid worker, causes great stress. Coverman (1989) found that women employed full-time who were single heads of households suffered keenly from contradictory pulls of time and place. Arlene told a story about a single parent saleswoman at her dealership:

There was a new lady that was a good salesperson. She had two teenage daughters and was divorced. She had no family living in this state. The girls were running around with the wrong crowd and

she was always on the phone and worried and crying. It interfered with her work.

Vita felt that the attitude of a saleswoman's husband also made a difference:

We had another lady here, but she got burnout. She didn't have any cooperation at home. She was very good at selling cars but the strain and stress from home life was hard on her. It was her husband. They were having marital problems. He didn't want her to be here that many hours with him at home. A family that does not understand is a big pressure for married women.

Coverman (1989) claims that some husbands are able to be more supportive because of their own work situations. But, even when they are in work that allows them the time to be at home, husbands do not increase their participation in housework and childcare on the whole. To deal with the problem of family, some car saleswomen remain single and live at home. Some marry men in the business who understand the hours and agree to hire live-in help if they want children. Other saleswomen get help from relatives or neighbors (This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IX).

Difficulty in Adopting Sales Ideology

An additional factor which interferes with saleswomen's success is the difficulty some have in acquiring profit motives and learning to use the high pressure tactics needed to close sales. Yolanda talked about how difficult it was for her to feel good about herself and make a high profit:

In this business a measure of how talented you are is how much you can sell a car for. Salespeople have to talk customers into buying add-ons and paying high interest rates. They brag about

it to each other. If you don't do well and you don't make any money, you don't have a job anymore. It's real hard to be where you're making the customer happy and you're still making enough to make yourself happy too.

In the early years of this century, supply of and demand for cars were more balanced and customers eagerly greeted salespersons who were knowledgeable about and could supply them with these scarce commodities. Salespeople had higher status among consumers who looked to them as experts about their products who provided a real service (Mills, 1953). This attitude no longer prevails. As a consequence, Leonard and Weber (1977) say clients must deal with salespersons with profit motives firmly in mind, and relationships with them are evaluated by superiors entirely on the basis of the number of sales. As a result, the salesperson who seeks success is encouraged to use any means available to achieve this goal.

Who Stays and How They Become Successful

There are many interesting variations in how women build careers in car sales. In this section I will examine the ways in which women became successful in sales and even moved up to management or ownership positions, despite the unstable market, limited mobility, lack of support systems, family pressures and difficulty in adopting sales ideologies. What did successful saleswomen do to become successful? How did they overcome the problems they faced? What behavior and situations did successful women have in common?

Stability

Twenty-five of the thirty saleswomen interviewed considered themselves successful at their work because they made better than a living wage at it. These informants said they worked hard to find a stable dealership and remain there, because stability meant referrals and repeaters which made the job easier. All of these women had worked in car sales for at least two years and one for thirty. Bernice had been in car sales the longest (30 years), starting out by selling car insurance when it was sold separately from cars. Eighteen of these informants had been at their current agency from two to eighteen years. Four for two years, three for three years, two for four years, three for five years, one each for seven, nine and twelve years, two for fifteen years and one for eighteen years. Oprah attributed her ability to stay with one dealership to the structural stability of her agency and the personal characteristics of the owner which included his active involvement and personal interest in his employees:

I have been with the same dealership for fifteen years. I've never had a change in ownership. We have a strong dealership. The owner comes in. He is a very good man. He knows all his employees by name, first, last, and speaks to everyone. He owns seven stores and he can tell you everyone that works for him. He asks, "How are you doing?" He knows if your children have been sick.

Evelyn found that working at the same dealership for a lengthy period of time helped her to get a base of repeat and referral customers:

One of the reasons I do so well is because I stayed in one

place. I have been here four years. Because of that I have people come back to me. I get a lot of business from referrals.

After nine years at the same dealer, Ann rarely needed to take walk-ins anymore:

If you want to make a lot of money in this business, you build a clientele by staying in one place. You keep business because people feel comfortable coming back and working with the same person.

At first, I found it hard to believe that salespersons could make a living from repeat customers who might come back every two to four years to buy another car. I became convinced, however, when I had the opportunity to watch Ann prospect for repeater sales after an interview. She had a list of people who bought new cars from her on a regular basis. She contacted the people on the list when the time for reorder grew near and told them about cars she had in stock she thought they might like.

The first customer she called was a man who traded his car in approximately every six months. On the phone she talked to him about his loneliness, the health of his dog and some personal financial matters relating to the purchase. Ann was extremely nurturing, and the tenor of the conversation was that of two long time friends. She told me she had "inherited" this customer a few years back when his regular salesperson left the dealership.

The second phone call was to the Mother Superior of a local convent who regularly purchased cars from the agency for use by the nuns. Like the first call, the talk was friendly and personal. Ann

inquired about the health of other nuns whom she knew by name and heard about events of the past year.

In addition to the chance to gather repeaters and referrals, women tried to remain at one dealership because they did not trust most dealerships. Nina said:

I hate change. I have been here five years. I do not want to lose old customers, and do not believe the grass would be greener anywhere else. I have been offered jobs at other dealerships where they told me I had greater possibilities for making more money, but I turned the offers down because I did not believe it [the money] would be there once I changed. I saw other people fall victim to these management ploys and I'm leery of false promises. I've only moved once. Even when this dealership changed owners I stayed.

Patsy had been at her dealership for 12 years and agreed that lateral movement usually meant starting over, not moving up:

Anytime salespersons change dealerships they have to prove themselves all over again. This means taking walk-ins, losing referrals and repeaters and working out relationships with management. Then you don't know if the cars are really selling like management says they are. There is no utopia, so why move? I sold on the floor here for seven years. Then I was made part-time manager for two years. I have been sales manager for the past three years. If there is something I am unhappy about here, most likely there is something I will be unhappy about somewhere else. The dealership is fair, the people are fair. Why start over? As long as the benefits of staying outweigh the liabilities of changing, I will continue to stay here.

Ritzer (1972), claims that once a salesperson, there are few steps left in terms of a formal career for moving up a career ladder. There are however, informal rewards such as bigger sales, a better territory or bonuses. Nevertheless, when the informal rewards or benefits of staying do not outweigh the liabilities of leaving, women do consider change.

Career Lines

Higher Profit Stores

If the dealership a saleswoman has been working at is small and times are hard, some women move to a store with a higher volume of sales or a more expensive product which brings in more commission. Kate reported:

When I started, it was at a little store. They sold about 50 cars a month. It was nice, because they didn't have a whole lot [of cars] and I got to take my time doing what I had to do. But I didn't make very much, and as time went on I got a little better and I went into a little bigger store and obviously the bigger the store the more people, the more sales, the more money you make.

The advantage to this type of movement, taken during a period when the market was good, is exemplified by Nina, who probably made more than any other salesperson in the industry one year:

I was selling Chevys. The timing was right and the product was right, so I moved. I made \$85,000 selling Chevys. The next year, I moved to Cadillac and made \$160,000. Those numbers were a joke. It's difficult now. I'm not making nearly as much as I made then, but I'm still doing fine.

Management

Because of the limited formal upward mobility pattern of car sales, if salespersons move on to become sales managers they have moved out of the sales occupation and entered management (Ritzer, 1972). Thus car saleswomen who become managers can be compared to women managers in other fields. Many move into lower management

positions such as rental managers, managers of used car departments, or assistants to the finance manager. These positions are quasi-administrative and do not carry much authority or pay. Such movement means longer hours, a lot of extra paperwork, and word processor and clerical duties like those required of secretaries. In addition, the pay is so low that women must continue to sell cars to make a living. This is similar to the situation of women at the entry level in the corporate management structure who remain peripheral to the more established and powerful positions (Kanter, 1977). However, these positions give women a chance to learn more about the business and eventually work themselves into full-time higher management positions.

Finance

One management position most coveted by women is the position of finance manager. Finance managers arrange financing for the customer after the purchase has been decided. In addition, they sell add-ons such as warranties and rust-proofing. Nine women in my study were finance managers and one is an assistant. They moved into this position through a number of paths. Two women were hired from outside the agency because they had a background in finance even though they never sold cars. Some proved they could sell and were then sent to a two week course in finance management by the dealership. One woman came into finance by accident with no prior experience. She applied for a job as a salesperson and was asked if

she would consider assisting in finance instead. Most women (six), however, worked their way into finance by starting as salespersons and initiating an apprenticeship with the finance manager on a part-time basis, doing much of the clerical work plus selling on the floor. Vita is currently an assistant:

I did sales for about six months and I did really well at it and saw I could sell after-market stuff. You know, things that go on the car after the sale, as in rust-proofing. I did really well at that and that's what you need to learn how to sell if you're going to be in the financial office. Now I'm an assistant, kind of like an apprentice to Mr. George, our finance manager. He's training me. I started by doing paper work. I get a salary plus I can sell if I want on Saturdays.

Sometimes women are lucky. When Oprah's boss quit, she got his job:

I initiated it on my own. They had a mini-computer. It was an old style one and I would go in there and ask the current financial manager, "How does this work and how does that work and how do you figure out what you have to do?" I didn't know anything about the job. He showed me all the books and how to work the machines. When customers gave him finance contracts, I said, "Let me try and do this for you." And I would do it two or three times a week. When he quit the agency I was already familiar with how to do it and instead of putting an ad in the paper for a new finance manager, they just let me do it.

Ida saw finance as a realistic goal because managers and owners are currently advertising for women to fill this position. She thought this was because of gender expectations for women:

Managers think, "Whatever the public wants. Whatever works." The public sees finance as more of a clerical position, so that's acceptable for women.

Kate agreed that women in finance were readily accepted by the public who saw them as order-takers or clerks, roles in which they expected to see women in:

Women in finance are much less intimidating to a customer. Women in a finance office can sell more because the customer doesn't feel like they are being sold. If the salesman gave them a real bad time out there on the floor and they feel he was trying to get them to pay too much, if they came in here and saw a man, they would feel that same defense. When they look at me I'm not going to have them do anything but sign the odometer statements, sign the documents for the state, and make sure all the paper work is right. That's harmless enough. When they are in this office I always say, "Call me Kate the clerk, but buy extras from me."

Traditional gender role expectations affect the duties and treatment of finance managers by owners as well as customers. Kate argued that women in finance did their own paperwork, whereas men usually had secretaries to assist them. For this reason, women saved money for dealers, but were overworked and frustrated:

When you're initially trained the paper work will bog you down. You could become extremely frustrated when what you're really here for, to generate a profit, is going to suffer because you're so bogged down with paperwork. Men don't have the patience, so they want help. But, once you get all that down, you can do okay and it seems that more and more they specifically want a woman for this job.

Arlene said that women like finance, even though it is equated with long hours and work overload, because it is more prestigious, pays more than straight sales and finance managers don't have to deal with the pressure involved in the initial sale of the car:

When you sell cars on the floor, you get paid a commission on every car you sell. When you work in the finance office you're being paid a commission on every car that goes out based on the profit that you are actually generating in dollars. Every customer has to go through financing. Even if they aren't financed through you, they still have to be billed out. So you have an opportunity to sell different things to people--warrantees, insurance. You can double your money in the finance department, and there's less pressure selling.

Ultimately, Kate made a good income in finance management:

In this office, percentages are worked out depending on the number of retail units they sell in your store. You're going to make something close to \$60,000 plus, even in a small store. Here I will probably make \$75,000 to \$90,000.

Sales

There is a gradual movement of women into areas of car sales management other than finance. These positions, sales manager and general manager, are somewhat different from financial manager because, according to Gina, the major concern of the manager must be with the productivity of others rather than oneself, and supervising men is difficult for women:

I have been a sales manager before, but not in car sales--in a department store. It is tough managing men. You have to push them, get them involved. They do not like to take orders from women. They don't take women seriously and you don't get a lot of help from higher-ups.

Most research on women in management concludes that men's attitudes are to blame for the rigidity in the traditional division of labor where sex bias excludes women from competing with men (Kantor, 1977; Tausky, 1984). Ellman (1973) and Schwartz (1971) describe the strong negative stereotypes of women as managers held by male managers. Women are said to put family above work, have high absenteeism, shy away from added responsibility, and have less team spirit. Danco (1981) describes similar feelings among male owners of small businesses. A survey of personnel directors and men in management finds that 79% of large firms and 74% of small firms believe "men prefer not to work for

women--they use feminine wiles on one hand and are aggressive and emasculating on the other hand" (Schwartz, 1971:80-82). In the past, few women were counseled into business schools, and programs such as the Harvard Masters of Business Administration did not admit women until 1963 (Lopata, Miller and Barnewolt, 1986). Legislative acts forbidding discrimination have opened some doors, and recent movement of young women into colleges of business administration has opened others.

Despite the difficulties and although their numbers are few, women are becoming sales managers. Wendy and Patsy are two examples. Both women moved up the career ladder from salesperson to finance manager. Neither actively sought the position of sales manager, but were recruited by their bosses. Wendy said:

I did not look for this job. When I moved from assisting in the finance office to head of finance, I was perfectly happy with that. I was actually surprised when John suggested this. He told me at that point, not, "Let's see how you do." But, "I've always wanted a woman in that position. I just had not found a woman strong enough to do it before." And, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to do it. I can handle the responsibility. John has been nice enough to offer me an opportunity to be able to grow and there aren't many women sales managers and to me that is more important than money at this time. If I stay with John and prove myself to him, the money will come. Eventually it will be there, but I have to pay my dues. I know I could walk down to Ford. I have been offered on several occasions a job in their finance department, but I, also know I would never be a sales manager there. I want that and I am willing to sacrifice some money.

The situations of these women are somewhat different from their male counterparts. Wendy was so grateful for the opportunity to train for the job, she agreed to do the work without a pay raise, and Patsy's work is divided with a male partner:

I am a full-time manager now, but Phil (the sales manager

she previously assisted) and I work as partners.

Wendy and Patsy moved up the women's ladder in car sales, through stability and apprenticeship, going from the sales floor to finance management, as other women described in this study have done, and then to sales management. However, an important similarity in their situations is that both women have decreased family responsibilities. Patsy's children are older and can take care of themselves. Wendy's ex-husband has custody of their children and they live with his mother. Research on a variety of careers for women shows that reduced family responsibilities is necessary for success (Coser, 1974; Bird, 1976).

Another gender related similarity in the promotion to sales management for Wendy and Patsy is that they are paid less than men doing similar work. This is typical for women in the work force. Statistics for women's yearly salaries in managerial occupations show that their salaries are 39% lower than those of men in the same occupation (Women Employed Institute, 1988). Berch (1982), and Stromberg and Harkness (1978) conclude that discriminatory wages are the outcome of power struggles in the labor market. "Employers, well aware of past and present discrimination against women, offer women lower wages than men--not because they feel women's productivity is less than men's, but because they can use the social fact of discrimination to offer women less pay. Women accept lower wages because they need an income to survive and because they have not had the market power to enable them to bargain for more" (Berch, 1982:66).

Wendy and Patsy had titles as managers, but their jobs were divided and had limited power. I observed Wendy consulting with the general manager before making decisions and on many occasions I saw him lecturing or correcting her. Patsy shared her duties with a male sales manager allegedly on an equal basis. However, he was located in a back office, less accessible to customer complaints. She said he dealt more with employee problems such as hiring, firing and setting policy, while she took care of upset customers, and located cars for salespersons.

General

Statistics for management employees show that women constitute only 10% of the field (Women Employed Institute, 1988). Because women have only recently been allowed and encouraged to enter car sales on any level, their numbers are especially low in upper levels of management. At the time of this study, I could find no women at the highest level of car sales management, general manager. This is not surprising as women constitute only 1% of top level management (Harlan and Weiss, 1985). Wendy however, wanted to become a general manager and saw this as her next career step:

From here I am going to become a general manager. That's what I want. I didn't ever think that was something I would want or could do, but it is where I am. The next move to make would be general sales manager. I see that happening relatively soon.

Hennig and Jardim (1977) claim that women separate self-support and career issues, as opposed to men who learn early that they will have to support at least themselves and focus on careers as a series of jobs

in a path leading upward. Wendy disproves this theory. So does business school graduate Carol:

Management? Sure. I'm learning all I can. I am certainly not ready to be a general manager yet, but after a couple years of this and other experiences, then I will be there.

Ownership

The upward path from general manager leads to partnership with an established owner, buying out an existing dealer, or opening a new dealership. Most saleswomen were afraid of the risk. Oprah said she feared bankruptcy:

Buying a lot is not easy. You have to put a lot on the line--your personal guarantee on everything. If for any reason you fail, there goes your house, there goes your savings, there goes your stock, there goes everything you've ever... I've seen a lot of bust outs by good people.

Kate was also afraid of the risk:

My husband says, "Gosh, you know with what we know, we could do well. Why do we always do these things for other people. Look at all the money we're making for them." But I don't know, I'm not that brave.

Women's inability to consider large scale entrepreneurship is based in exclusion of women from training or encouragement in this direction. For example, male owners of even small businesses do not consider preparing their daughters to take over the business, concentrating only on sons and son-in-laws (Danco, 1981). Yet, some women are starting or taking over businesses, and as the culture changes "we can expect more men to 'trust' women into inheritance of management, or as 'protegees',

or even 'partners'" (Lopata, Miller and Barnewolt, 1986:188). Active women owners are still very scarce in the automobile business. In order to locate a woman who was willing to give me an interview and who was not an owner in name only, I was obliged to go outside the CMA. A widow who took control under extreme conditions with no previously mapped-out career plans, Helen was a great success:

I took over my husband's business when he first passed away. The choice was either I sell it or I take it over, I run it. Had I sold the business at this time, what I would have received for it would have been a very small amount and I was not going to let all the sacrifices that my husband made and that I made, really, as being part of him and his wife, go for nothing. So I thought, "I really don't have anything to lose. If I keep it a year and I don't do well, I will sell it at the same price that I'm selling it now." So I made my decision to go ahead.

Helen helped out in the office of her husband's dealership, but was mainly a homemaker. She said it was rough going at first, and there were times she was afraid she was not going to make it. She had to convince the manufacturer that she could learn the business and make a profit. She had to associate with other dealers who were not very receptive to having a woman around. She had difficulty keeping male employees who did not want to work for a woman and there was family to contend with because her children were still young. Her story clearly reveals the complex difficulties women face in male-dominated careers:

I was the first woman automobile dealer in my city. I was afraid they were not going to let me keep the dealership. I went to dealers' training courses. I went to every single dealer meeting. And believe me if you don't think that's hard when you're the only woman. I learned quickly to listen and not say anything at meetings. There's a lot of chauvinists in business. Men are incredibly patronizing. I just overlooked it. The top was that some thought I could not do it and a man could have done it, you

know. The hours were a problem. At the time I started my youngest son was twelve and my daughter was sixteen. When you're a woman you do have both worlds you have to worry about. You can not forget one you know, to sacrifice one for the other. You still are a mother. You still are a business woman. You just have to combine both.

When I first took over most of the workers walked out on me. So I thought I should be loyal to everyone who stayed. I had to learn how to fire people. If people do not sell and you still think you should be loyal to them, you have to think about the fact that they are not being loyal to you and they are not being loyal to their co-workers. I had to change managers and I had to change salespersons. This is new to me and it is new to most women. We have to change. We don't know how to fight the way men do either. They are able to sit down and discuss business concerns and smile at each other and then they go out there and stab each other in the back and think nothing of it.

You are not going to be a dealer just by selling cars for a few months, or a year or two. There are so many aspects of the business that affect the dealership besides the sale of cars. You have a service department to contend with, parts department. You've got used cars, body shop, and everything has to click.

Four years later, Helen was considering the possibility of opening another dealership:

Before I had two goals, trying to keep the business going and my children going. Now that the business seems to be going and my children are older I'm still scared, but I'd love to buy another dealership. They're very difficult to get in this area. People are not going to sell. It's very difficult to buy a dealership. I'm trying to find somebody that's willing to sell. Why? Because I am finding this experience so exciting. There are so many worlds out there to conquer. I wish I was ten or fifteen years younger. But, that's not gonna make me stop. I'm not gonna stop because of my age, you know. It is a wonderful feeling. I can not even explain it. I am tired many times. I go home worn out and think, 'I can not do this another day. I can not go another day with the pressure of this job.' But the next morning I'm up at 5:30, 6:00 getting dressed, and I can hardly wait to come in. It's an exciting, interesting, challenging, demanding business. It's maddening sometimes, but it's exciting.

Helen did recently purchase a second dealership. She held the highest position of all the informants in my study. She has learned to

mix family and work, to feel competent and intelligent. She likes herself and her life better. On the other hand, her story exemplifies her newly learned ideology. She has been socialized to put profit first. She has learned to be a member of a male team that functions outwardly as a group and yet "stabs each other in the back". She has been socialized into the capitalist labor market and is very successful.

Who Leaves and Why

Not all women are successful at car sales. Frank says his fifteen years of experience in the business bear witness to the fact that it is very difficult for either men or women to survive in sales:

In the auto industry, 94% of the people don't make it six months. They wash out. It is typical. I've seen it here. To learn it, to hang on, to make it through that first year is unbelievable. The first six months 94% go and then there is an additional 2% to 4% that drop out and don't make it a year. The people that make it a year and can withstand it a year end up staying in the auto industry.

For these reasons, car sales is called a "revolving door" occupation, with newcomers having little chance of survival. Most experienced informants said that newcomers who got fired just "Don't fit the mold," or "Aren't aggressive enough". Ida explained firings of people who could not make enough sales as rational for both the salesperson and the dealership:

They let one girl go because she was taking a lot of people, but for some reason she was having a real difficult time closing. They worked her and trained her and spent a lot of time with her and still... It was probably better for her though, because there was no way she could have survived on what she was making and the

dealership was hurting too.

Five of the women I interviewed did not consider themselves successful at making a living in car sales. Grace and Edith had been in the field less than six months and were having trouble closing sales. Barbara was in the business less than a year and went from dealership to dealership, staying less than six months at each location. She was at her current dealership only a few months when I interviewed her. She had been fired from her previous car sales job after a similar amount of time, and blamed her previous firing on her inability to use the high pressure tactics needed to close sales:

I talked to the customer, and I tried hard, but I couldn't close the sale. The dealership was one where you must learn to close your own sales, so the bottom line was I didn't do much for them because these same customers could have talked to the manager that ended up closing the sale anyway and bought from him.

Ann recently told me that Barbara was fired shortly after our interview and went to work at another dealer where she was also fired. Her current position is unknown.

Holly had worked in car sales for ten months at the time of our interview. I called her a few months after our interview and she told me she was considering leaving the field. She said car sales involved too much pressure and not enough service:

I need a break from car sales until it really changes. I feel I would be more effective in a position rendering the same kind of service through servicing people's needs more, not shoving people into anything that they're not ready for.

Leah quit after 18 months during which she tried her hand at

sales, office work, and being a customer-satisfaction consultant for the dealership. She said she could not convince herself that it was right to ask customers to pay high prices and found it difficult to talk them into buying cars they didn't want or could barely afford. She felt dishonest pretending to be on the customer's side when she was really on the side of management. She disliked being the object of customer's distrust and she was tired of their rejection. Leah could not justify the ideology that this practice made happier customers, or that they received better service. She could not convince herself that selling a car for the highest possible price was something of which she could be proud:

I am leaving the car business. I don't like the car business--the selling aspect of cars. I don't like that feeling. If you do well and you make your boss happy, you feel sick inside. If you don't do well and you don't make your boss happy, you feel sick inside.

I'm getting out of cars because I have a conscience. I am not the kind of individual that 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 possible profit off of you. 90% of the people 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 beginning.

I am tired of selling cars--tired of approaching people and having that look on their faces and having to overcome that objection of, "No, I'm not a crook." and "Yes, I'll sell you a car cheap." And then if you sell too many cars cheap, you got the boss saying, "What are you doing, giving my cars away? Do you want to work here long?"

These justifications for leaving are the reverse of rationales for staying, as I will discuss in Chapter VIII. People who leave tell stories and so do people who stay. Both groups of women talk about the

contradictions between service and profit in car sales. The women who stay try to smooth these contradictions over to cope with them while the ones who leave highlight the conflicts they face to explain their desire or decision to leave.

CHAPTER VIII

IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY

Co-opted Professionalism

Once women have developed successful roles and strategies to handle customers and co-workers and learned to adapt to the problems of an unstable market, they begin to think of themselves as professionals. This section explores the concept professional from the viewpoint of the car saleswoman.

Professions are at the top of the prestige hierarchy of the work world. They are distinguished from mere occupations by the requirement of training in professional schools, a body of esoteric knowledge, memberships in professional associations, adherence to ethical codes of conduct, self-regulation, motivation to community service rather than self-interest and monetary rewards and authority over clients (Ritzer, 1972). By making claims to these characteristics and standards, professionals gain status over other occupations.

Professions such as medicine are high in status because doctors lay claim to expertise that is unavailable but necessary to those who use their services. Physicians regulate themselves and support each

other to keep outside interference minimal. Doctors downplay the monetary aspect of their profession, and insist that good doctor patient-relationships are based on trust and respect. Medicine is perhaps the paradigmatic profession; until recently doctors have convinced others of their status and received respect. Many occupations aspire to the professional standing of medicine. Some occupations however, are marginal, on the border line of negative evaluation.

Car sales is such a profession. It is a very low status occupation whose members are in a precarious position regarding job security and stability. It has no organization to support its members. There is no standardized period of training and no body of esoteric knowledge. Car salespersons service customers rather than clients, have no written ethical codes and are motivated to pursue monetary reward as an end in itself. These factors are among the reasons why salespersons continue to appear untrustworthy. Self-esteem for people working under these conditions is difficult. Workers tend to be alienated and defensive, like the janitors described by Gold (1964) who are constantly subject to abuse from both residents and management.

In order to bolster self-esteem and status, car salespersons pursue certain aspects of professionalization. They resemble funeral directors studied by Habenstein (1963) who promoted themselves as professional counsellors of grief, but whose negative public image grows from their desire to sell lucrative funeral plans in advance for financial gain.

Car saleswomen adopt a "co-opted" professionalism, through which

they define certain characteristics as professional even though these characteristics deviate from the standard views of professionals.

Borrowed Prestige

Imitating the Upper Class Through Dress and Behavior

One characteristic essential to becoming a professional car saleswoman is having the proper appearance. Dressing in expensive clothes and displaying social mannerisms borrowed from Hollywood and television celebrities of our times increases success. Dressing well, is very important to most car saleswomen because first appearances are essential. Marilyn pointed out, people can not be a success, if they do not look the part:

Appearance is everything. You've got to look successful. Our salesmen are all required to wear coats and ties, which is the way it should be. It looks a little more professional if you wear heels. If you wear flats it takes away from the dress. It seems when I look more professional I do better in sales.

Concern over clothes is probably a behavior left over from the days when clothes more readily depicted the type of work one did and thus the status they held. According to Mills (1953), white-collar workers' claims to prestige, as the label implies, were originally based on their style of appearance. Although today, advanced technology has eradicated much of the need for blue-collar uniforms or protective clothing, working class attire originally differentiated blue from white-collar workers who could wear suits or fancier clothes, because they did not handle dirty or greasy objects. In 1953, Mills found that

"women sales clerks spent a good deal more on clothes than wage working women with similar incomes" (241). And today, some 25 years later, much free time and money are spent by car saleswomen such as Denise on buying clothes to help them be "professional":

I like to shop for clothes. You need it to be professional and if you can't afford it now, you'll probably make the money on your next deal. If I buy a \$200 dress, I can say, "Well, that's alright. I'll sell another car."

Professionals must also present a high class demeanor. Dressing well and making a good impression by affecting upper class social skills is important to the white-collar notion of success, according to Mills (1953). Patsy said professionals had to look and act as if they made money, to "dress for success", and to carry themselves "properly":

You can tell a professional by the way she dresses. By the way she walks up to people and shakes hands and so on. Not the "schlocky" walk up to a person with a cigarette hanging out of your mouth.

Evelyn gave an example of a an unprofessional saleswoman who not only did not adopt upper-class clothes and manners, but also had loose morals:

She was new, and she didn't know how to dress. She'd come in with high heeled sandals, skin tight pants and peasant blouses. Her hair was all ratted. Make-up--you'd go in and there'd be eye lashes in the sink. It was like she was on a different plane. She wanted to party all the time. She'd go wheeling here at night with her five children at home and she had her car stereo blasting. She'd say, "I'm going out partying. Want to go partying?" I'd go, "No!" She certainly wasn't professional. She didn't last very long.

Ultimately, emphasis upon dress indicates an equation between economic success and professionalism in car sales.

Personal Virtues

High Morals of Gentlemen and Ladies

Evelyn's assessment of her temporary colleague associated her lack of professionalism with questionable morals. This is a common theme among the informants. Forty years ago, Mills (1953) discussed a success ideology tied to personal virtues. He described how aspiring rural and small town boys bolstered their egos and learned how to behave so they would not be intimidated by "City Slickers" who had better educations than they. They assumed "moral pre-eminence" and gentlemanly manners would help them succeed. They subscribed to the ideology of the entrepreneur, the "man bent on success" who is "upright, exactly punctual and high-minded", who will "soberly refrain from liquor, tobacco, gambling and loose women [sic] and in all things will insure a moral presence of mind" (261). In my study, June held a similar ideology, equating moral high-mindedness with professionalization and success:

I consider myself a professional. I made a point of being straight as an arrow. Five or ten years ago it was unusual to see women in the busines that were not tramps. They slept with the customers--customers and workers to sell cars. Not me.

Stability

Another personal virtue equated with professionalism by saleswomen is stability: the ability to work long hard hours for the entire length

of ones' career, and the ability to remain at one dealership for two or more years, regardless of the instability of the field itself.

New college graduates are automatically considered professional when they receive degrees. They have exhibited dedication and stability by completing a lengthy period of schooling. There is no mandatory schooling or necessary qualifications related to car sales. Anyone can get hired and call themselves a car salesperson. For these reasons, professional stability must be proven on the job. Vita said "floaters", those who go from place to place or in and out of the field are not professional:

Professionals have to be dedicated and work at it every day, day in and day out. No matter if you've been in this business five years or two, it's something that's constantly changing and you have to work on it. So if there's anybody that would come up and say, "Should I go into sales?", I'd tell them, "Yes, if you want to forget the rest of your life," because you have to be that dedicated to it to make anything out of it or else you'll be just like all of the other goof-offs coming in and out this door.

Vita felt not having dedication to one's work, regardless of the problems associated with that work, was wrong and a moral failing.

Work in a Professional Community

Because car sales work offers little chance for external prestige or internal self-esteem, Mills (1953) says prestige is borrowed from contact with wealthy customers as well as the product sold: "It is usually possible to know the prestige of salespersons in terms of commodities they handle, ranked according to the expensiveness of the

people who typically buy them" (243).

According to informants, another characteristic of a professional is that she works in a store located in a higher class neighborhood. Working in an area where there are professional people, is envisioned as an indicator that the salesperson herself is a professional and can expect more respect from customers. Teresa worked in Highland Park, an upper-middle class suburb of Chicago; and kept her customers in line by reminding them that they should behave in a professional manner because she too was professional:

I said, "Sir, living in Highland Park I should think you would know that we are very professional here. This is a professional type community. You know, you are not a garbage man. You're a professional type person and we want to treat you that way. This isn't Western Avenue". And he shut up, so I didn't have to be rude.

Work at a Stable Dealership

Mills (1953) says salespersons "bury the low status of the work they do in the name of their firm" (243). For example, department store saleswomen say, "I work at Bloomingdales", or "I work at Marshall Fields". Mills claims, "These material signs of the status environment are in themselves crucial to the white-collar sense of importance" (1953:244).

Saleswomen also say they are professional if they work at a well-known, stable dealership that has been in business for some time. Usually these are family-owned like the one where Ann has been working:

I feel working at [name withheld] is the finest place to be. I feel you must be very honorable to your profession and not work at

"fly by night" dealerships.

According to Gina, dealerships who hire floaters or inexperienced people are not professional dealerships:

[Name withheld] is a top-of-the-line store. They don't get any better. The salesmen in this store have been in the business five to twenty years. They are all very mature, very successful and very professional. Here we are given a very personalized structure. We are our own boss. The other place I worked there was a much younger staff. They didn't want people with automobile experience. They wanted to mold you their way. The owners kept changing. It was not a very professional place.

Handling People Tactics

Empathy

Aside from emphasis on dress, mannerisms, personal virtue and type of dealership, when saleswomen talk about being professional, they also emphasize tactics used to handle customers. Many women feel they are professional if they have developed a successful selling technique. Sales literature stresses 'agility', 'techniques of self display' and the 'generalized knack of handling people' (Mills, 1953:263). Successful sales tactics are the special body of knowledge saleswomen claim separates amateurs from professionals. Nina said she had developed an individualized formula for selling that worked with all kinds of people, under all circumstances that was based on empathy and nurture. She identified and interacted with the ethnic, class, age and race values and behaviors of her customers in order to put them at ease. She said her methods were different from those used by more aggressive

closers:

Professional is knowing how to sell. I am like a chameleon. I can relate to a truck driver, to the attorney, to ma and pa that come in here, to young people, to old people. You change. You be what they want you to be. You come on nurturing, understanding. I had gypsies. I had a band of gypsies. I put a scarf on my head. I said, "I'm going to put beads on. Oh my, give me my crystal ball." I had a great time. They bought two cars. I do my own thing. I don't have to be told what to do and how to guide people and all. I have been in the business for a while. I know when I have a buyer. I know how to handle the customer. I don't need a heavy close with a manager, "What's it gonna take? I'll throw this in." That's "schlock".

This is another example of the contradictions faced and embodied by saleswomen. They want to be professional, yet they must acquire learned moralities of profit and greed. On the one hand, they value nurturing, understanding and service; on the other, they must make money. There is no way to reconcile these issues. If saleswomen were to resolve them, they would either have to give up their ideals or not make any money.

Willingness to Spend Time

Other informants also claimed that their selling tactics were low pressure and thus more professional. Cathy, Carol and June talked about integrity in customer relations. Cathy said she spent more time with customers in order to understand their needs:

There are some very non-professional salesmen. They say, "Lady, do you want to buy a car today?" Else they don't spend time with them. Professional salesmen will sit down with the customer and find out what they are looking for and need. All that kind of stuff and go from there. They'll find out what you want to spend, where you want to be and put you in the right car. If you're not

ready to buy, they'll talk with you anyway.

Carol claimed she did not attempt to force customers into buying the wrong car just to make a sale:

Some salespersons are hammers and they work you until there's nothing left and if you don't buy, then they kick you out and they take the new person. This calibre of salesperson is not professional.

Virtuous and Honest

June said professional integrity also meant you did not promise people cars at prices that the dealer could not deliver in order to "take them out of the market" [Customers usually stop shopping for cars at other dealers once they order a car. If this car never materializes and they are worn down sufficiently from waiting, they may buy a more expensive model already on the lot]:

It is not professional to "low ball" or offer people things you can not give them. Pressurized selling is not professional, and neither is lying. If I can not get a person a car for what he wants to pay, then I will not tell him one is coming in and take a deposit from him in order to take him "out of the market":

Because salespersons are in this contradictory position between service and profit motives, women try to redefine their role and actions in order to make sense of their world. Some read sales literature on how to sell and watch other successful salespersons.

Customer Needs vs Profit Motives

June, Cathy, Carol and Nina said they were professional because

they sold through virtuous tactics such as honesty and concern for customer needs. Yet the sales literature stresses high-pressure tactics and financial goals. Concern for customer needs is secondary to profit motives. As a means of success, salespersons are prodded to become instruments of success, to acquire tactics, not virtues. Therefore, Cathy also said she was professional because she sold through manipulation tactics such as intimidation. In this way, she made a good profit for the dealership as well as herself:

I try and do everything very professionally. I read basic how to books: "How to Gain People's Trust", "Winning Through Intimidation". And I try to remember in the back of my mind that it is a financial institution, and I am here to make money.

The lesson they learn is summed up in the following comment by Mills: "money success is assumed to be an obviously good thing for which no sacrifice is too great" (1953:264). Regardless of what characteristics they say determine professionalism, all informants who define themselves as professional discuss success in terms of monetary profit.

Monetary Profit as a Measure of Success

Women who moved into management, especially those in the finance department, automatically considered themselves professional business women, because they were concerned with profit. Rita stated:

Finance is automatically professional because it is managerial and more business oriented. Here we are concerned with profit above all.

Conflict and Rationalization

When saleswomen are thrown into situations which demand they adapt perceptions, attitudes and behavior, they must find methods to help them deal with the new socialization (Schreiber, 1979). One method they use is rationalization. Concern with monetary profit no matter how fairly gained or how much time is spent with the customer is still in direct conflict with the traditional definition of a professional: a person primarily concerned with service beyond a profit motive. Although this concern for profit characterizes the sales industry, women come from backgrounds which are usually service-oriented. The informants' previous work roles (wives, mothers, teachers, social workers, beauticians, waitresses) like full professional occupations, stress service to others rather than pecuniary goals. Thus saleswomen face a conflict with new monetary goals and old moral codes of virtue. They struggle to find ways to be simultaneously serving and profit-motivated. Two women said they were not aware they were going to be confronted with this problem when they entered the field. They were innocent. Carol said she always liked cars and had only positive feelings about the occupation before she entered it:

Being that I never purchased a car in my life and I never went with my parents when they purchased a car, I knew nothing about the business. I never had any preconceived notions. I never knew that people didn't like us. I never knew that we were looked at as "Ooo a car salesman! He's out to get our money!"

Although Ann grew up in the business, she was sheltered from goings on,

and was also unaware of the negative attitudes surrounding car sales and profit motives:

I thought everyone loved them [car salespersons]. My family was in the car business--my father and two brothers. I had no idea they were considered the "scum of the earth".

However, once in the field, women rationalize their roles in an attempt to deny the negative stereotypes with which they are confronted. Gina said making a profit was just and fair and rationalized that that was what business was all about:

You know this industry has such a bad reputation and I get quite offended by someone that tells me I should sell them a car for \$2,000 less than I paid for it because it is an 88 and that offends me. I have a right to make a profit just like Jewel does. The owner puts the money out to buy these cars and we are going to make a profit on these cars. That's what he pays us to do. I try not to rape anybody, you know, to make so much money that it's unreasonable, but I think it's fair to make x number of dollars over what you paid for the car. If you look at percentages on what mark up there is on washing machines and dryers, or refrigerators or clothes and food. Cars are nowhere near that, even if you stayed at full list.

Oprah, currently a finance department manager, used a similar justification. She worked hard and made money for her dealership, so she was professional and virtuous:

A professional will bend over backwards to make sure their department is run without any snags, without any legal problems and not just close the door in somebody's face when they have a problem to be solved. You take pride in what you do. A lot of dealerships have a lot of legal problems, a lot of complaints from The Better Business Bureau, a lot of complaints from the State Attorney's Office. I solve those problems before it even gets that far. We've got a real good reputation. I know my job. I know what is required. I carry it out to the best of my ability. I take care of customers. If a customer comes in with a problem with contract payments, I try and help them. I take care of people. I make money off of them, but I earn what I make.

Conflict and Denial

Some women deal with the conflicting role demands of car sales by distancing themselves from the role and denying that they perform the role in the same manner as other workers. Many women try to isolate themselves as much as possible from what they consider the contamination of the situation. Goffman (1961:113) concludes, "situated roles that place people in occupational settings they feel are beneath them give rise to role distance". Informants separate themselves from the negative status of the business by blaming salesmen who preceded them for being dishonest and giving the occupation a bad name. Most women claim to be different than the shoddy car salesman of the past. They mention changes in the structure of the business and that more professional people are being attracted to it. The college educated women who came from women's professional fields (social workers, teachers) said that because of the emphasis on pressurized selling and monetary rewards, the field itself is not very professional. They separated themselves, however, by claiming that they were "college educated", "articulate" and had the "customer's needs as a primary goal." Almost all saleswomen said that the dishonesty and high-pressure sales tactics customers complained about were becoming extinct. They blamed salespersons of the past, the long hours they were forced to work and the resultant taudry lives they lived, for the current bad reputation of the industry. As Bernice described it, the business was.

changing for the better:

Over the years I've seen an upgrade of people in the automobile business. Everyone has their image of the used car salesman with the cigar and bright jacket and so on. These old time salesmen never had a home life. They often drank. They gambled. They were working nine to nine, three or four days a week. What woman wanted to put up with that. The people coming into the business today don't have to work these hours anymore. It is a pleasure. It is not a low class type of job anymore. I think we're getting into this field a more educated person. Someone who doesn't want to work the horrendous hours and they don't have to anymore. You see the young people that are coming into the business, a good portion of them have college degrees. They want a professional job and to some extent I can see where this is going in that direction.

While it is true that lots are now closed on Sundays in the Chicago metropolitan area, and salespersons work somewhat fewer hours than in the past, other saleswomen still voice negative views on the structure of the business and its affect on workers. When they describe the current schedule of work hours and resultant family and social life, the description sounds much the same as the "old days". Yolanda described her highly unstable family life:

This business plays havoc with your family life. Marriages are very short lived in this business. I think the hours have something to do with it. My ex-husband is a car dealer. I met him at the car agency. Then I married someone else, but it only lasted a year. Morals are loose and alcoholism is common. Salespeople need to get hyped up so they drink. It's kind of scary. I see so many men and women who do that. Some drink during work, but basically it is after work. My son sold cars too. He made a lot of money but he was not happy with the pressure to sell and the lies he told. He got wrapped up in drinking. For the last year he was doing drugs as well as drinking. People circulate drugs and drink every night in this business. That is one reason so many people drop out and there is such a turn over.

This relates to workers concerns with unprofessionalism and loose morals. Women remain concerned, but are unable to change the structure

of the business or resolve the resulting value conflicts which affect both men and women in negative ways.

CHAPTER IX

BRIDGING PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIFE

This chapter is about the mix of paid and private work for saleswomen. Home is brought to work and work is brought home by saleswomen. Both family and social life effect saleswork. The way public and private life are defined in Western culture divides the two; however, the split is artificial and misleading. This chapter addresses this issue. How do car saleswomen manage home and family responsibilities while working long hours? What specific strains and conflicts do they experience? What strategies do they devise to balance the roles of mother, wife and worker. For women without families, how are private lives affected?

Patchwork Compromises

Working in car sales means long hours, with little time left for other activities. Workers get Sunday and one weekday off each week, but most stores are open late every night except Saturday, and workers put in "bust out" days of twelve hours or more each week. This leaves few hours for family life. Therefore, I expected to find mostly single women in car sales. It was surprising, however, to find that over one

third of the informants were married. Eleven of the informants had children school aged or younger. And, six of these women were divorced or widowed heads of families. Only eight women were single with no children. According to Gerstel and Gross (1989), the biggest increase in women workers since 1950 has occurred among married women, mothers with children (especially preschool children) in the household, and women aged 25 to 44. An increasing number of women workers are married, rearing young children, and working full-time on a more or less permanent basis.

Child Care

The five married women with school aged or younger children who worked in car sales had little time to spend with family and on domestic chores. Some got help from their husbands. Vita was the only one of the women I met whose husband worked shorter work hours than she and was willing to help out with cooking, child care and housework:

My husband is at home more than I am and he cooks for our son. It seems like the answer is to have a really really helpful husband. He has been very helpful. If he hadn't been so supportive, I could have never done it, because the hours I work are so long. My husband gets home right after my son gets home from school, so he is there with him.

The ten other women with children did not have available to them a willing husband with a work schedule compatible with their children's needs. Such women made do with a patchwork of day-care centers, after school care and the help of neighbors and friends. Kate had such an arrangement:

All the kids go to the neighbor's house after school. My husband comes home at 6:00 at night and picks up the kids, so it is all right.

Hiring a live-in person is another solution for dual-career marriages. The housekeeper is a "wife" who allows both the man and woman to pursue jobs with long hours. When her youngest child was born, Kate hired live-in help until the baby reached school age, when she was old enough to be left with the neighbors after school, as were her older children. Kate disliked this arrangement because it was "very costly" and afforded her "little privacy". She was glad to return to using neighbors.

Arlene's sons, by contrast, were teenagers, and fended for themselves on "bust out days". However, Arlene found having home-cooked meals together enjoyable, so she tried to shop and cook on her days off. Her husband worked somewhat shorter hours, but seldom helped out with family chores:

I try and cook on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. I make a decent dinner and we all sit down together. These are days when we are able to do it, so we make a big thing out of that. It is nice, but it is hard to cook. I hate going to the grocery store. It is getting to be very rough.

Because many working women found satisfaction in work they did for their families, they wanted to continue to do it and many times were torn between priorities. It was still both constituted and experienced as a "labor of love" (Gerstel and Gross, 1989).

Female-headed families are on the increase and women who head such families are often torn between work and family. The six divorced or widowed informants with school aged or younger children such as Fran, said their first priority on their two days off was to spend much of the time with their children because this was the only time they could.

Yet, Fran's children were left alone a good deal of the time:

I have three kids. One's fifteen, one's thirteen and one's ten. I try to spend whatever time I have with the kids because the little guy is still being molded. On Sunday I help him with his homework. Sometimes we go to a ballgame. My weekday off usually turns into a fiasco, because you're running around to like either the eye doctor, or the grocery, and you're trying to get this done and taking your kid to the dentist, and you run, run, run. I work a lot of hours though, so my kids are alone a lot. Once they come from school that's it. They can't leave. They wait till I come home. They have to stay in because I can't control what goes on out there, so that is a hard part of this job.

Some women looked to ex-husbands for help in child care, in a patchwork compromise similar to that which married women used. Though Leah was divorced, she considered herself fortunate because she could depend on the children's father for help with the children:

My ex and I have a great relationship. He gets the kids in the middle of the week, and they stay with him Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. That's a plus.

Other single parents got help from family members. Oprah depended on her mother when she started out:

My son was very young when I started in the car business. My mother would take care of him. She lived very close and I would just drop him off at her house.

All of the women talked about how they had to fit child care and household work into their off days. And when things were slow at work,

it was doubly hard for them because they thought about the work waiting for them at home and how they could have been doing it.

Although the employed wives devoted fewer hours to domestic labor than full-time housewives, all labored from dawn to dusk like their nineteenth century counterparts (Gerstel and Gross, 1989). They cooked, cleaned, shopped and managed domestic routines. Even when husbands "helped", they did far less than their wives. Informants said they had no time or energy for much of anything beyond business and chores, including personal care. Single and family women alike usually spent Sunday shopping, cleaning and sleeping. Evelyn spent Sundays doing chores:

Sunday is the one day all I want to do is be at home. I don't want to talk to anybody. I need to do laundry, maybe go grocery shopping, or something along those lines.

Rita, mother of a nine month-old baby, did the same: "Sunday? I go to Jewel, I clean my house."

Sometimes June was too tired to do the chores, and ended up sleeping all day:

For a while there when we [the dealership] were short handed, the only day I had off was Sunday. I spent the whole day sleeping, trying to catch up from the week before.

Standards of housework changed, as noted by Gerstel and Gross (1989). Many women, married and single, with and without children, altered their approach to household chores because of their sales work. Barbara became less concerned with others opinions of the cleanliness of her home:

During the week there is no time for the house. By the time you get home it's 10 o'clock. Who wants to do anything then? I've gotten to the point where if my house is dirty and somebody comes over, if they don't understand, that's their problem. It's not a number one priority anymore where it used to be years ago. I'm not embarrassed anymore. You get used to it.

As broader national statistics attest, fast food restaurants now provide a good number of meals once cooked at home. Wendy has stopped cooking for other people as well as herself, and complained about her poor diet:

I have stopped cooking. I cooked for ten years in my marriage. Then I lived with a man for two years and I cooked for those two years and the last two I really haven't cooked. You eat out. I eat lunch here and that's about it. I don't have time to cook. I eat out mostly. My diet is potato chips and milk. I have a terrible diet.

Social Life

Four unmarried women complained that they were so drained when they left work, they did not have the energy to do much in the way of recreation or socializing. Carol found it hard to relax when she got off the job. She described a "perfect evening" as one where she did "nothing":

You have a real hard day and you're in a bad mood and you don't want to go anywhere and have to make chit-chat. You just want to go home and sit down and have a drink and relax. A girlfriend sells cars at another dealership and we've become very close. On Saturday night we were supposed to go to Ravinia. We sat there and we looked at each other and it's like, "Oh, no.!" We picked up a bottle of wine and went over to her house and just sat there and did nothing. And it was good. It was a perfect evening. We didn't do anything.

Wendy found being alone and watching TV a good time.

I love to go home and not have to make dinner for somebody else, or be up for somebody else if I want to go home and just lay

on the couch and watch tv. With the hours I work, I need to do that, to sit and not talk to anybody.

Denise gave up her friends for work:

I really hate to schedule anything for my time because it is so valuable. It's hard to psych yourself up to go out on a date or go see a girlfriend or go see a movie. I fall asleep. A lot of my friends have suffered. I used to be a very social person. A lot of people you have seen in the past, you just put them off. You know, this is my life and I only have two hours. That's how you think about it. You don't think, "Oh, they've been my friends for years." You think, "Oh, I need some space. I need some time away from people."

Cathy limited herself to one girlfriend and an occasional dinner together:

Making small talk is real hard after you've put in a long day. I need to be alone. If I do anything, I'll visit my one girlfriend. I'll have a salad with her and go home.

This was one of the ways in which car sales work intruded into personal life. Stress from jobs was brought home and women found it hard to separate themselves from it.

Dating

Twelve of the eighteen unmarried women said they did not go out with men very often. They did not have the time or opportunity to meet men, and men didn't like their hours. Evelyn did not date:

I don't date. Nobody asks me out. I don't go anywhere to meet anybody, and I sometimes wish I would. Everybody's lonely sometimes, but right now it's like I'm too busy to be lonely. A lot of people are worried about me. They say, "What are you going to do when you're a thousand years old and there's nobody to talk to?" But the hours I work, I really have to say I give 100% to my job.

Sally concluded if she had started out single, she probably would

have remained that way:

If you're single in the car business, and you're trying to date, there's no time. Your social life, it's sort of not there. People get fed up with the hours, even the guys.

Although the salesmen also got fed up with the hours, Harvey said they had a social life of sorts, which consisted of going to local bars after work and rehashing the day, like janitors who dropped into neighborhood taverns to 'find some relaxation and to tell each other their tenant troubles' (Gold,1964:32). Gold suggested janitors used each other as "sympathetic listeners to release tensions" arising from work (1964:33). Harvey said salesmen used each other similarly:

What you'll find in the business, because of the hours, is a lot of individuals that are not married or that their marriage is not real important to them, so there is a big social thing after work for a lot of people. They go to neighborhood bars and complain to each other, even if they are not close friends. They unwind.

Generally, salesmen did not have to do housework or care for families, and so were more able to separate themselves from work. Single women who wanted to join in after work socializing risked acquiring a reputation as loose or irresponsible among salesmen and saleswomen. Men's reputations in the car business did not suffer when they went drinking. Women, however, could not assume male prerogatives without risking deviant status (Henly and Freeman, 1989). According to Arlene, one woman she worked with hung out with the men after work:

She was divorced and wanted to hang out with the guys and go out to drink afterwards with the guys. That's a big thing in this business. It is very common, going out after work and having a drink and everybody runs around with everybody else. This business is notorious for that. You are popular because there are few women.

Women who do this are not very well liked by salesmen or other women.

Many women did date men in the car business, some even at their own dealership, because, as Ida, 29 and single, pointed out, it was the only way they could have a boyfriend under the conditions of their work:

My boyfriend is in the business. He works at this dealership. You have to have a boyfriend in the business. I've had other boyfriends before and it doesn't work out because of the hours and the fact that you're extremely independent. It's hard on a relationship if they don't understand. If you're doing the same thing the other person is you don't feel as if you're missing out on something. You spend most of your waking hours with these people that you're working with. My boss was worried about it. I kept telling him to "stick it up his ass" because he was bothering me and there was no reason for his concern. I said, "You've got nothing to worry about. It doesn't interfere. It never has, never will. I can handle it."

Twenty-four women I spoke to agreed that it was hard to meet or marry anyone but people in the car business because of the hours put in at work. Wendy's ex-husband was in the business as was her current boyfriend:

I came in single and I married another person in the car business. We got divorced. My new boyfriend is in the car business. Most of my friends are also in the car business. I never have time to meet anyone else.

Married Life

Eighteen women said married life was difficult even when they married people in the business. Kate, 32 and married, blamed the business for her first divorce, because the long hours and stress "played havoc" with her family life:

Marriages are very short-lived in this business. I think

the hours have something to do with the fact that marriages don't have longevity. The business plays havoc with your family life. My first marriage only lasted a year. My first husband was a service manager and his hours were shorter than mine. When I would come home late, he would get upset. My second husband is a sales manager and he had this job at one point. He knows if he calls here and they page me and they can't reach me that I'm busy. He understands the business. And, my kids are grown now, so they don't need me. So, I think we have a better chance.

Lorber (1984) reports similar tensions in marriages between co-workers in high pressure occupations such as medicine. Medicine and car sales are "greedy occupations". A mate who understands the long hours involved in the work alleviates some of the conflicts between work and private life.

On the other hand, selling cars also offers an opportunity to make new social contacts. Two saleswomen told me they dated their customers. Fran was dating a lawyer at the time we talked and Marilyn was dating a doctor. She claimed:

Mostly I date people I meet here. I don't go anywhere else to meet anybody. I never go to bars. The man I've been dating for the past year I sold a car to, and then I just met another man that's taking me out to dinner tonight. He's a lawyer. I have gone out to dinner. No serious things. If they're nice, or really fun and if they want to take me out to dinner and I think they're nice, like this man. He's been in several times and everybody here knows him. He's somebody I trust. I don't just go out with anybody.

Fran brought up the issue of trust, and how important it was for her in dating. She did not want a reputation as "loose"; she had to use careful judgment concerning who she dated. Marilyn also was careful before deciding to go out with a customer. But, she felt she made a good decision:

At first I was afraid to go out with him because I didn't

trust his motives. But he persisted and I thought, "One time couldn't hurt." He's a doctor. The reason we get along so well is because my hours are so compatible to his. When I first started to date him, he called me up and he asked me out for Saturday. We close at six and I never get out of here before 7:30. He called me up and he said, "Let's go to dinner at 7:00." I thought, "That's a joke." I said, "Would you mind going about 10:00?" He said, "Oh, 10:00?" Now he is totally adjusted to it. He thinks nothing of 10:00 for dinner. His hours are crazy too.

In recent years the number of crucial decisions women face has increased as lifestyle alternatives open to them have become more varied and complex, especially regarding the choice of work and family roles. According to Gerson (1985), this has produced "decision overload", where women experience more stress and identity crisis now than their mothers and grandmothers did during the same stages of life. As Gerstel and Gross (1989) point out, parenting and domestic life are a source of satisfaction women do not want to give up and, as seen in the data, women continue to voice philosophies of child-centeredness. Yet, they must put most of their time into the workplace if they are to make a living and succeed at car sales.

CHAPTER X

WHAT THIS WORLD IS ABOUT

Distrust, Competition and Success

This chapter is a summation of the findings derived from the exploration of the dynamics of the system of car sales. It points out the significance of the gendering of occupations. It addresses the transformation of work as well as the transformation of workers. Most importantly it elaborates on the basic social relationship processes that shape the identities of car saleswomen.

Symbolic interactionists argue that socialization is an ongoing interactional process and that we can only see ourselves in relation to our community. Furthermore, our selves are continually being constructed and reconstructed in interaction and negotiation in this community (Mills, 1959;Denzin, 1978). The courses of action these women take are another way of talking about their identities that are being shaped through interaction in their workplace. Each career path taken, such as going into management, leaving the field, or moving to a new dealership, is a type of individual in the world of car sales. And, each of these types is seen differently by each individual as well as by others in their environment. The major issue here, of course, is trust.

Who are these reconstructed women? Can they be counted on to take others interests into account? Who are they willing to be responsible to? The new identities they have taken on can now only be truly understood from within themselves.

Entering a Man's Land

In virtually every society men and women traditionally perform different types of work. This segregation of the work culture is generally built on myths of the suitability of some work for women and some for men. Whatever the particular nature of the tasks involved, gender typing continues to prevail (Bradley, 1989). Of the 30 women I interviewed, more than two-thirds entered car sales without ever having worked in an occupation heavily populated by men. Fifteen held pink-collar jobs such as waitress, secretary, beautician and sales clerk. Five were in women's traditional professions such as teaching and social work. Two were college students. The women were not a homogeneous group. They did not have the same work experiences or common backgrounds. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that there is no particular type of woman who chooses to sell cars. Still, there are common grievances related to the sexual division of labor and women's employment that bring women into the occupation.

Most women entered car sales because they were unable to make a living wage at their previous work. All were searching for ways to make more money and to gain greater autonomy and mobility. The professional women were willing to forego the higher prestige of their previous

careers to pay their bills and give up moonlighting. The college business majors preferred sales to a corporate work because it paid better and gave them more autonomy. Advantages such as these encouraged informants to consider car sales work a serious career and to think of themselves as professionals in the business. This may have implications for why Steve Shapiro, the Director of Education and Training Programs for the Greater New York Automobile Dealers Association claims, "The top salesperson at most dealers is now a woman" (Shapiro, 1990). Probably women work harder because this is the best opportunity for success many of them have had. The five men interviewed, on the other hand, were used to making more money in male fields. Four of the men had been in car sales a long time. Three had been managers at other dealerships and one of these had recently quit to open his own business in a related field. Four of these men considered car sales a job. Only John, an ex-air comptroller, thought of himself as a professional. He was trying to save enough money ("at least \$50,000") to buy into partnership with an existing dealer.

Both men and women informants were pulled into the field by male family members or friends who were familiar with the business. But what is most interesting is that managers and owners were glad to hire women. Women say this is because they relate better to other women who are now buying their own cars. However, it could also be because the industry is doing badly and women will work for less and do more work in similar positions as I discuss later on.

Handling Co-Worker Relations

A key problem for all car sales workers is how to be a successful salesperson in a treacherous and shifting environment such as car sales, where salespersons often stay only a few months at one job. The horizontal mobility which is structured into the job has a consequence for the way that salespersons build alliances or pursue their interests. Distrust is the overriding emotional tone of car sales. It teaches caution and promotes self-interest over cooperation. Men as well as women resist intimate connections with newcomers. New men are also marginalized. Nevertheless, acceptance is different for women. Gender affects the way salespersons approach the acquisition of the inevitable contacts they must make among colleagues when entering the field. Men are eventually accepted as part of the dealership team even though they compete and distrust each other. Women are not. They are excluded from male cliques, ridiculed as failures if they don't sell and called overly aggressive "bitches" when they do well. This harassment begins in training.

Formal training through seminars and workshops is the same for men and women. However, less formal in-house management training or apprenticeship differs according to gender, because women face harassment when they depend on management or co-workers to teach them the job. Token women are highly visible, easily singled out and used as examples if they come in five minutes late, ask technical questions

about the vehicles, or need assistance in closing a sale. They are often sent home for the day, provoked to tears, and the butts of practical jokes. Saleswomen learn at the beginning of their careers that they are not part of the male team at the dealership; they are forced to work alone. In dealerships that sell high-as well as medium-priced cars, women are generally intentionally seated in areas next to the lower-priced vehicles. Because of this they are not as likely to get customers who purchase more expensive makes. This makes learning the job and succeeding at it even harder for them.

In order to negotiate this hostile environment many women resort to taking on gender roles familiar and non-threatening to their male colleagues, roles such as mother and kid sister. They listen to men's personal problems or act silly and innocent. These roles help them to cope and gain acceptance yet such behavior forces them into feigned dependence and subordination. Experienced women often become 'tough'. They stop relying on co-workers for help or friendship and drop the role playing behavior which encourages these ties. They come to understand their situation as one in which they must protect themselves from the lying and deception of other parties, particularly managers who try to cheat them out of commissions and co-workers who want to steal their customer. They concern themselves with sales and do not socialize. During slow times they feel lonely and alienated. Men also get their commissions and customers stolen. But they depend on each other to break the boredom during slow times. They get together in groups and complain about customers, tell each other how well they are doing, or

share "dirty jokes" to pass the time.

"Attack Nicely"

Most newcomers have difficulty closing sales. Newcomer women blame it on lack of technical knowledge. They are concerned that they don't know enough about cars, because male customers ask them questions such as how to take the engine out of a van. Salesmen, on the other hand, say they do not need to be mechanics to sell cars and are rarely asked these questions. If they were, they say they would just ask a service manager or co-worker what they needed to know. Women can not get such help easily. Women also have more difficulty than in dealing with certain types of customers. For example, older men become rude or walk away. Saleswomen say they probably feel uncomfortable because they are not used to bargaining over cars with women, and do not know what to expect. It is likely they do not want to answer questions about their income or credit rating with a lower status person. Such customers do not feel women have the intelligence or experience necessary to sell them a car. Their snap judgments and instant disrespect echo those of male colleagues, reinforcing saleswomen's insecurity and isolation in the workplace. Women again often turn to gender roles such as "innocent young thing who would not cheat anyone" to overcome these problems, degrading themselves, yet making the sales. On the other hand, saleswomen say that other women and first time buyers like dealing with them more than men. This is because women have difficulty buying from men who do not take them seriously as buyers, and new buyers are

intimidated by highly aggressive salesmen.

At first new saleswomen are concerned with selling at lower prices to meet customer's stated needs. Later they develop a more competitive attitude and profit goals similar to those of men. Yet, I have found that saleswomen have a different and fresh perspective when dealing with customers. First, they do not have preconceived ideas about who buys and who does not according to how they look or act. Some say they learned in previous fields that even the most shabbily dressed people can turn out to be doctors or lawyers; when they go shopping on their own days off, they say, they are also shabbily dressed. Male informants had more defined ideas in this area and saleswomen say men judge prospective customers more quickly. Secondly, women often see time differently than men. They are willing to spend more time trying to make a sale. They do not count the minutes they spend as wasted but believe customers will return if they are not ready to buy at that moment. I found this to be true in cases where women had built up a repeat clientele. Women work at nurturing customers during this time. They offer coffee and attempt to relax the customer. This is one of the ways saleswomen keep a grip on the customer while the customer does not feel the sales push as much as with traditional approaches. Spending time is pushing, but these women push differently, like a fisher(wo)man working to catch a fish: slowly, with confidence and patience, letting out and tightening the line according to the moves the fish makes. They call this approach "attack nicely". As they become better at selling in their own way, the definition of fair business practice used by

experienced saleswomen becomes "making a large profit" from "good customers" who make the interactions easier by "accepting prices" given them "without bargaining" with salespersons. Eventually saleswomen feel freer to say, "It's fun to make money." They modify then rationalize the practices of the sales community and use these activities for enhancing the image of their occupation. Greed is not something any salesperson seems ashamed of in American culture of the 80s and 90s where greediness has been and still is encouraged as a positive attribute.

Carving Career Niches

Both men and women are concerned with the instability of the field. But many women seem to try harder to stay with one dealer. They say they dislike change and want repeaters and referrals. Perhaps resisting change is part of their upbringing. Women have always been encouraged to be stable and make the home while men have been encouraged to go out into the work force and the larger world. However, if they find they are not treated well at their dealership, as with men, they move.

Many women have carved a path from sales into finance management. They say they are more readily accepted in this area because there is a lot of paperwork and customers and management think of them as secretaries or bookkeepers, positions traditionally held by women. They also say they like this area even though the hours are especially long. Finance manager pays more than sales and people in this position do not

have to pressure buyers as much because the car has already been sold. However, I have found that although men and women have the same titles in management positions, tasks are divided up unevenly. Male finance managers have female assistants who do the paperwork and fill in for them so they can get time off. Most women do their own paperwork, have no assistants, and are paid less than men. They agree to this because they say they want the experience.

Each of the women sales managers in my study shared her position with a man. He is the controlling member of the team, usually receiving more money and dealing with supervising salespersons. The woman handles customer complaints and more relational aspects of the job.

Making Family Life Possible

Eleven of the informants had children school age or younger. Six of these were single parent families. Twelve women over all were married. Twelve respondents had no husbands or children resulting in reduced family responsibilities. Yet none of the respondents left the field because of family problems. Although some spoke of difficulty in this area for other women, these women had worked out successful ways of combining work and family. Many married men in the business who understood its demands. Others used family, neighbors or hired help for assistance. In comparison, four of the male respondents had wives at home who took care of their children. Two of these wives worked in part-time positions and the other two were full-time housewives. One man was single. Although the married men expressed concern over the

long hours in regard to family, they were satisfied that their wives were giving the children adequate care and were proud that they could make enough money so their wives did not have to do full-time work.

Succeeding

Some women are not successful. After a while they leave the field. Other women struggle with the ethics of capitalist economics, but eventually embrace the masculine role and become successful sales men. Most women are somewhere in between. They reject parts of the masculine model of sales, such as hard aggressive selling techniques while preserving the goal of making money, using relational and nurturing skills to reach this goal. Twenty-five women in my sample were successful at car sales. Although these women experienced stress from the lack of a support system, the unstable structure of the field, and the difficulties of adapting to sales ideology and to family pressures, they remained in the field for an extended period of time and made a better than living wage. Many constructed viable career paths into management even when they had to relocate to new dealerships. My study shows that women are achieving success in car sales and are carving a substantial niche for themselves.

Remanufactured Morals

The remanufacturing of morals is considered mandatory for success in high commission sales. Car saleswomen enter the field with a system of values which they eventually reconstruct as they learn their way in

the industry. The consequences of this manipulation of self result in more hollow, shallow and deceptive forms of interaction. Car saleswomen were different from women I have interviewed in other jobs. Their interests were confined to material things. Their talk was guarded or based on how much money they were making. They did not cover up greed. The sales talk they offered to customers: the constructed vocabulary and expressions appeared a script and disingenuous. Salespeople wore the smile and positive attitude of actors in a play. Because of this behavior the new identity or end product of the remanufacturing of self wore like a cheaply constructed wig or ill fitting toupee. Furthermore the new identity was not easily shed when the worker left the workplace as data I gathered from interviews at restaurants showed.

Eventually this value system and code of conduct leads to an identity which can only be appreciated from within the worker. Consumers think of car salespersons as persons with power to hurt who can not be counted on to take others interests into account. Co-workers see them as people out to cheat. Yet, car saleswomen see themselves as professionals providing a needed service. The formation of this divided identity, with its mixture of values both within car saleswomen and in their interaction with customers and co-workers, can be seen clearly through the stories of new saleswomen as they become socialized into the field. It is common to many workers in sales and other service occupations, but is not spoken of directly and has no agreed upon name to designate it.

Gender and Capitalism

What does all this mean? On one hand it means that we can look critically at the notion that all women are unified in their approach to sales or any kind of work for that matter. This study shows that some women have morals based more on servicing people's needs than on making a profit for the dealership. These beliefs interfere with their ability to sell cars. They are the failures. Other women struggle with the ethics of capitalist economics, but eventually embrace the masculine role and become successful sales(wo)men. Most women are somewhere in between. They reject parts of the masculine model of sales, such as hard, aggressive selling techniques, but keep profit goals. They use relational and nurturing skills to reach these goals. Feminist theorists such as Nancy Chodorow (1978) and Carol Gilligan (1982) would explain this behavior by claiming women have been socialized to embody certain values such as care and concern for others in a culture where the division of labor relegates women to unpaid caretaking, while men who must survive in the paid competitive labor market, are socialized to be aggressive, independent and individualistic.

That some women embrace stereotypical exaggerated gender roles such as "mother" and "sister" to negotiate the environment shows that women turn these sexist conventions to their benefit. That other women become sales "men" shows that we can look critically at the notion that the cultural construction of feminine characteristics gives women a more relational and care centered morality despite changes in their

situation. When women are placed in a new situation like car sales, they adapt to the prevailing practices. But women also create new ways of being successful such as spending more time with customers who are not yet ready to buy and remaining with dealerships for longer periods in order to get repeat and referral sales. They also use softer sales approaches to close deals. And, they create new career patterns such as apprenticing themselves to managers, in order to gain mobility. Many move off the sales floor into finance management where they do especially well.

Although women's practice in the sales profession highlights how gender identity is socially constructed locally, it fails to force change in a patriarchal system. Saleswomen may succeed at their jobs and change them according to individual needs, such as getting part-time work, but the culture of the workplace remains essentially the same. This explains the empathy I felt for women who left the field. They reveal the problems and appressions of capitalism and the competitiveness, aggressiveness and morality of greed and profit over service.

EPILOGUE

Where Are They Now?

ANN

Ann has remained with the same dealership for 12 years. The original owner recently retired and his son is now running the agency. This causes Ann some uneasiness, but she says she will stay. At her request, she recently became a part-time employee. She has been put on salary. She makes less money, but says the trade off is worth it because she can spend more time with family and grandchildren.

ARLENE

Arlene has been in car sales for 12 years. She has stayed with the same owner for most of this time. She sold on the floor for 18 months while helping out in finance and then was made finance manager. Once she tried working for another dealer in order to get shorter hours, but was unhappy there and returned to her original agency. When I called back in April, 1990, I was told, "She is still with us, but was transferred to another of our dealerships".

BARBARA

Barbara was at the dealership less than a year when I interviewed her. When I called back a year later, she was no longer with the agency. She had been fired from her previous job after a similar amount of time.

Ann said Barbara was fired shortly after our interview and went to work at a third dealership where she is also doing poorly.

BERNICE

Bernice had been in car sales for 30 years. She stayed with the same manufacturer for 18 years, even though she moved to different agencies. She had been at her dealership for nine years at the time of our interview. At my call back in April, 1990, I was told, "She no longer works here".

CAROL

Carol remained at her dealership for four years. She was promoted to finance manager approximately one year after our interview. Although she complained of work overload, she was glad to get experience in management. However, she left the agency shortly after ownership passed from father to son. Higher pay and shorter hours promised by the father never materialized. Ann said Carol has found conditions more to her liking at her new dealership.

CATHY

Cathy had worked in car sales for two years at the time of our interview. She had left her first dealer after a year to move to a dealer in a higher-class neighborhood. At my call back in April, 1990, I was told she was "no longer here".

DENISE

Denise still remains with the same dealership where she has worked for five years, and is happy with her situation.

EDITH

Edith had worked in sales for six months at the time of our interview. At my call back in April, 1990, I was told she had "moved to Florida".

EVELYN

Evelyn, Denise's mother, has remained at her dealership for seven years. She is more contented now that the agency is hiring other women. However, she says she is still looking forward to paying off her mortgage and retiring.

FLORENCE

Florence had worked in sales at her dealership for less than a year at the time of our interview. At the time of my call back in April, 1990, I was told by a co-worker that she had "moved to Arizona" and was "working at a dealer there".

FRAN

Fran had been fired from her previous dealership after three years and replaced by Gina. She had been at her new agency for six months at the time of our interview. At my call back in April, 1990,, I was told she was "not with our firm any longer".

GINA

Gina left her first dealership after working there less than two years. She has remained at her current dealership for three years, and is happy with the fast growing agency and her situation there.

GRACE

Grace had worked at her dealership for two weeks at the time of our interview. When I called her a few months after our interview, she

said she was considering going back to waitressing. At the time of my call back in April, 1990, I was told, "She no longer works here".

HELEN

Helen has run her own dealership successfully for seven years and has succeeded in opening a second agency in an adjacent county.

HOLLY

Holly had worked in sales for ten months at the time of our interview. I called her a few months after our interview and she told me she was "considering going into real estate". At the time of my call back in April, 1990, I was told she was "no longer here".

IDA

Ida was at her dealership for less than a year at the time of our interview. During the second year she was promoted to finance manager. Because I bought my car from Ida, I enjoyed visiting the agency and watching her progress. However, when I called the agency in January of 1990, the dealership had been taken over by new owners. I was told, "No one by that name works here." Ida's boyfriend Bill was also gone.

JUNE

When I first interviewed June, it was by phone at her home. She was between jobs and was painting a friend's house, after 13 years of being in the car sales business. Shortly after our conversation, she returned to car sales at a dealership where her friend Kate worked. When I called there in April, 1990, I was told, "She is not with our firm any longer".

KATE

Kate had been in the business for seven years, and had worked at five different agencies during this time. At the time of our interview she had just started (one month) at a new dealership as finance manager. When I called in April, 1990, she, similar to June, was "no longer here".

LEAH

Leah had been in the business for eighteen months at the time of our interview. She had sold at an adjacent agency operated by the same owner of the dealership she was currently working at. She had been transferred because business was bad at the first dealership. When I first met Leah, she had just left sales to try her hand at office work in the billing department of the agency. At our second meeting, she was working in a public relations position, calling people to inquire about their satisfaction with service. When I visited the dealership a few months later, a new woman was in her office and the dealership said Leah was "no longer with us". The dealership has since changed hands.

MARILYN

Marilyn has been in the business for 19 years. She sold on the floor for the first six years and has been a finance manager for the last 13. Her first job lasted for two years until the agency closed. She worked the next four years at a dealer who moved her into finance. Then she married a part-owner of another dealership and worked there for five years until her divorce, when she left. She has worked at the agency where I interviewed her for the past eight years and is still doing well there.

MARTHA

Martha had been finance manager for over five years, four of them at a previous agency where she was fired after a change in management. At the time of our interview she had been at her new dealership for over a year. At my call back in April, 1990, I was told she "is no longer here".

NINA

Nina has been selling for nine years. She spent over a year at her first job and then left to sell more expensive cars. She stayed at her new dealership for two years until the agency was taken over by new ownership. The new owner convinced her to stay and she has remained for the past five years, not doing as well as in the past, but satisfied.

OPRAH

Oprah has been with the same owner for 15 years, but hmoved from one of his agencies to another when the first agency closed. She became finance manager after her first year of selling. Her current husband is partners with the owner in a newly opened agency, but she will remain at her current dealership.

PATSY

Patsy has worked at the same one owner agency for 15 years and intends to remain there. She has been sales manager for the past six years.

RITA

Rita had been at her agency for three years and was just made finance manager at the time of our interview. At my call back in April,

1990, I was told she was "no longer with the dealership".

SALLY

Sally had been working at the dealership for three years at the time of our interview. She was married to the owner's son and did many quasi-administrative jobs aside from finance manager. At my call back in April, 1990, I was told, "She only comes in part-time on Saturdays".

TERESA

Teresa has remained in finance management at her dealership for four years and is satisfied.

VITA

Vita was at her dealership for more than two years at the time of our interview. She had been promoted to finance manager after a year. In 1989, I called the agency to speak with Wendy, the sales manager. Wendy said there was a big "shake-up" going on and Vita was "gone". Wendy had been asked to "step down" as sales manager and "take over Vita's job".

WENDY

Wendy had been at the dealership for three years at the time of our interview. She sold on the floor for nine months, was finance manager for nine months, and then was made sales manager. When I spoke with her a year later, she told me about the "shake-up" previously mentioned. At a second call back in April, 1990, I was told the dealership had been "bought out". No one knew the whereabouts of Wendy or her manager, John. In May, I saw a write-up on Wendy in a local paper. She was working at a higher-volume dealership as sales manager.

YOLANDA

Yolanda had been selling cars for six years at the time of our interview, but had only recently taken the job at her new dealership where they were training her for finance management. When I called back in April, 1990, I was told, "There is no one here by that name".

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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Helene M. Lawson has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Judith G. Wittner, Director
Associate Professor, Sociology, Loyola

Dr. Helene Z. Lopata
Professor, Sociology, Loyola

Dr. Philip W. Nyden
Associate Professor, Sociology, Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

7/23/90
Date

Judith G. Wittner
Director's Signature