



**Clio**

Women, Gender, History

**39 | 2014**

**Gendered laws of war**

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## The gender of happiness (France, 1945-1970s)

*Le genre du bonheur (France, 1945-années 1970)*

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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/cliowgh/578>

DOI: 10.4000/cliowgh.578

ISSN: 2554-3822

**Publisher**

Belin

**Electronic reference**

Rémy Pawin, « The gender of happiness (France, 1945-1970s) », *Clio* [Online], 39 | 2014, Online since 10 April 2015, connection on 20 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/cliowgh/578> ; DOI : 10.4000/cliowgh.578

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## The gender of happiness (France, 1945-1970s)

Rémy PAWIN

“For women, fame [*la gloire*] is but the dazzling mourning of happiness”.<sup>1</sup> Mme de Staël’s celebrated observation that women must choose between happiness and worldly success, shows that happiness has long been a theme related to gender. Without subscribing to any assumption that there is a natural connection between happiness and women, this article will start by exploring the evolution of this socio-cultural configuration in France in, broadly, the third quarter of the twentieth century: in post-war French society, the significance of happiness varied depending on gender. This characteristic has age-old roots, but it is important to emphasize the *hysteresis* [backstory] of representations as well as the extreme variations in discourse and in the influence of happiness, as an idea, on women and men in France after 1945: is happiness gendered?<sup>2</sup> And, if so, more specifically, does this relationship to gender lessen towards the end of the twentieth century? Did women interiorize the specific variation on happiness offered them?

Subsequently, this study of normative discourses and how they were received in that period will lead to a series of questions about women’s experiences in terms of a happy life. The interaction between beliefs and feelings is currently being explored in the social

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<sup>1</sup> De Staël 1810: *La gloire est, pour les femmes, le deuil éclatant du bonheur*. This phrase is well-known (in French) in modern times: four anthologies of quotations published between 1945 and 1980 include it, and Beauvoir, clearly bothered by the opposition between fame and happiness, makes repeated references to it in her autobiography.

<sup>2</sup> Bard 2004. Just as it is necessary to study the “gender of territories”, it is possible to consider the gender of ideas.

sciences, and happiness constitutes a suitable vantage point for this investigation. So the idea is to study what is felt in both the private and professional spheres: to what extent have women been happy in these domains? Have they been so as much as men? Can the evolution of social norms be related to these experiences?

In order to answer the question, this article will employ a varied body of documentation. Representations of happiness and of social norms will be analyzed based on published documents: the full range of books whose titles include the word *happiness* or other words in its semantic field – that is to say more than 3,500 volumes – will allow for a quantitative study; out of this huge mass, I have analyzed a few hundred volumes for qualitative study, in addition to a few other particularly significant books. Since historians only have access to stated feelings, I will use surveys to analyze how discourses have been received, alongside women's experiences in all their diversity: even though pollsters contribute amply to constructing the opinions that they claim to reflect, surveys of representative samples of the studied population are particularly helpful for this approach, because the answers stem both from social norms and from individual experiences. As the categories are not sufficiently specific, and the raw data is not available, it is often impossible to distinguish precisely between the various groups of women surveyed and how each woman's sensibilities have been constructed. In order to compensate for this limitation, which is inherent to the type of source material used, I will also include research providing individual information: in this way, it is possible to approach the full diversity of women's experiences and to achieve the scale necessary for a historical demonstration.

### **Female happiness: norms and how they are interiorized**

When the subject of happiness is raised, women are generally the target audience. Out of all the books analyzed, most were intended for women or referred to them. Novels that include the word *happiness* in their titles are often romantic love stories, with main characters who are female, like their intended readership.<sup>3</sup> From 1945

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<sup>3</sup> Pawin 2011: 24.

to 1948, the titles of six novels pair the word *happiness* with a female name, while not a single one appends a male one.<sup>4</sup> Along the same lines, most self-help guides about happiness focus on women, and on marital and family issues.<sup>5</sup> Finally, many of the books written *for* women are also written *by* women: the proportion of female authors in my corpus is much higher than average.<sup>6</sup> So representations of happiness focalize on women's issues, and their target audience is essentially female.

What's more, discourses about happiness highlight the greater importance of a happy life for women; the hierarchy of values being different depending on gender. In the words of Henry de Montherlant, the author of *Les Jeunes Filles* [*The Girls*] a best-selling novel,<sup>7</sup> "the idea of happiness is so strong in woman that happiness is all she sees".<sup>8</sup> The author goes on to emphasize "how high women's expectations are in this regard".<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, for men, happiness is a "negative, literally insipid condition"<sup>10</sup> and "the man who admits to respect for happiness" is "suspect".<sup>11</sup> While "most men have no conception of happiness," "woman, on the contrary,

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<sup>4</sup> H. Champly, *Le Bonheur de Josie* ("Josie's Happiness"), Paris, Gedalge, 1946, 236 p.; E.H. Porter, *Pollyanna* (N.B. If one were to translate the title of the first French edition of *Pollyanna* into English, it would be *Pollyanna and the Secret of Happiness*) (1913), Paris, Jeheber, 1946; J. Mesnil, *Marianne ou la Volonté du bonheur* ("Marianne or the Will to Be Happy"), Paris, Éditions "Claudine", 1946, 19 p.; P. Ramber, (*Janine's Happiness*), Paris, les Éditions du Hublot, 1946, 32 p.; J. Sveinsson, *Comment Nonni trouva le bonheur* ("How Nonni Found Happiness"), Paris, Éditions Alsatia, 1946, 176 p.; Y. Prost, *Le Bonheur de Madame Alpbée* ("Madame Alpbée's Happiness"), Paris, Dumas, 1948, 192 p.

<sup>5</sup> Y. Trouard Riolle, *Pour préparer le bonheur de votre foyer* ("Preparing for a Happy Home"), Savennières, Maine-et-Loire, 1947 or *Le Bonheur à la maison. Le conseiller pratique de la femme* ("The Happy Home: A Practical Guide for Women"), periodical, 1947-1951.

<sup>6</sup> Sauvy 1991: 269-282.

<sup>7</sup> For information about the print run of the French edition of *Les jeunes filles*, see Boschetti 1991: 561 and 563.

<sup>8</sup> *Romans I, Les jeunes filles*, I, 1936.

<sup>9</sup> Montherlant 1959: 1006 and 1007.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: 1003.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*.

has a positive idea of happiness":<sup>12</sup> "for woman, happiness is a clearly defined state, equipped with a personality and a particularity, a substantial reality that is extremely lively, powerful and sensitive". As for men, they see happiness only as "satisfying their vanity";<sup>13</sup> "for them, a day of happiness soon becomes a day in which they made a great number of telephone calls".<sup>14</sup> Montherlant is not an isolated case. I presented him here because of his broad readership and because he makes the connection between happiness and gender explicit. Most authors of the same period do in fact consider that women's happiness and men's have distinct natures, and they describe it differently depending on the gender.

Everything during these years seemed to contribute to happiness being more significant for women than for men: this norm applied less to public life than to private life, to which women are still too often relegated. It is as if women were more likely to feel the influence of the norm of a happy life. For them, since the nineteenth century, "the construction of individuality has depended first and foremost on the search for happiness,"<sup>15</sup> whereas men have had other scales of value at their disposal – fame and worldly success offer other yardsticks. In addition, the social construction of men's virility bars them from paying too much attention to their own moods. In this context, happiness is no more than a useless and debilitating cultural artefact.

Of course, men did have the right to be happy and to be concerned with being so, as can be seen in the 1947 book *Aviation, école de Bonheur* [*Aviation, School of Happiness*]. Written by an officer of the French Air Force, it used the appeal of happiness to attract recruits.<sup>16</sup> Despite this exception, books about happiness in our sample were addressed essentially to women, and women were the ones who are advised to be happy: for women, happiness was a compensatory idea that arose from "the state of dissatisfaction that is

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 1003 and 1005.

<sup>13</sup> Montherlant 1959: 1004.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: 1005.

<sup>15</sup> Sohn 1996: 1007.

<sup>16</sup> Paquier 1947.

their lot”<sup>17</sup>. Because “a woman can never be completely fulfilled: she is too dependent on man” and “marriage is the only key to [her] happiness”.<sup>18</sup> So, as in Mme de Staël’s time, happiness in post-war France was still making it possible to regulate gendered social relationships: presented – and often instrumentalized – in its family-oriented version, it contributed to confining women to their traditional role. A consoling notion, happiness partially compensated for women’s exclusion from the public sphere and could act as one of the mechanisms that procured their consent.

Over the course of the years 1950 to 1980, the gender of happiness becomes less identifiable, without disappearing entirely. The corpus of book titles containing *happiness* offers several indications of this: from 1975 onwards, titles pairing happiness and a male first name become acceptable, as in *Frédéric ou le Bonheur des autres* [*Frédéric or Other People’s Happiness*] and *Et le Bonheur, Aurélien ?* [*What About Happiness, Aurélien?*]<sup>19</sup> The plot of the latter, described in *Le Monde* as “a novel with a courtly façade, a juicy writing style, and occasionally loose morals”<sup>20</sup> makes it indistinguishable from the romances pairing the word happiness with a female first name: the gender of happiness has been partially diluted. Incidentally, a decrease in the number of titles pairing a woman’s name and happiness can be observed: six in the 1950s, five in the 1960s, two in the 1970s. While the theme did retain a feminine slant, some women were demanding access to public life and refusing to consider that happiness in the private sphere compensated for their exclusion from it. Men, on the other hand, started aspiring to happiness more and more

Nevertheless, a happy life still came in different models. André Maurois portrayed the contrast in his popular 1951 radio play, *Cours du Bonheur conjugal* [*Lessons in Marital Bliss*].<sup>21</sup> It offers a series of short scenes about crucial moments in a marriage: the first meeting, the

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<sup>17</sup> Montherlant 1959: 1007.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: 1008 and 1009.

<sup>19</sup> Darras 1977; Meunier 1978.

<sup>20</sup> *Le Monde*, 8 December 1978: 15.

<sup>21</sup> Maurois 1951.

honeymoon, faithfulness, marital spats... Maryse, the heroine, blames her husband, Philippe, for having ruined their honeymoon:

You're a man, you have your profession [...] you are proud of being good at it. As for me, I'm not lucky enough to be creative, I have my profession as a woman, and I would have liked to perform it marvelously well. But you make me feel like a failure every minute of the day. *Voilà*, Philippe, what has happened to me; and it's very sad.<sup>22</sup>

This work of fiction is based entirely on the opposition between two different paths to happiness, one for women, the other for men. Yet this two-sided representation of a happy life is not just the object of normative discourse, it also contributes to modeling genders: although some women were challenging the gender hierarchy, a significant proportion of French people, both male and female, had internalized the *habitus* specific to each sex.

Successive surveys carried out on representative samples of the population attest to this. In 1946, in reply to the open question: "Can you tell me in precise terms what you mean by 'being happy'?", 16% of women spoke of love and family, while only 9% of men mentioned them.<sup>23</sup> In 1955, the people being polled were asked to choose the photograph that best matched their idea of happiness: 49% of women chose "the joys of family life" versus 21% of men.<sup>24</sup> In 1957, a representative sampling of young adults aged 18 to 30 was questioned about what they would like to know about their own future – a question that reflects the hierarchy of different spheres of life. 34% of men and 16% of women wanted to know more about their future career. Conversely, 35% of women wanted information about their family life, as opposed to 11% of men.<sup>25</sup> In 1961, a survey of 16-to-24 year olds asked the following question: "Many people believe that they cannot be happy because something is missing from their lives. In your opinion, of the following, which three items is it most problematic to be deprived of?" Their answers also reflect differentiated representations depending on gender: 32% of men aged

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*: 52.

<sup>23</sup> *Sondages*, 16/7/1946: 168.

<sup>24</sup> *Réalités*, December 1955: 80-88.

<sup>25</sup> *Sondages*, 1957/3: 38-42.

16 to 18 and 46% of men aged 22 to 24 mention love in their three answers, as opposed to 51% of women aged 16 to 18 and 56% of women aged 22 to 24. Here again, the variation is significant.<sup>26</sup>

A survey from June 1970 – ten years later – allows us to highlight the fact that evolution had been slow: it was aimed at students at Nanterre University who lived in Paris or the affluent western suburbs. They belonged to a population tuned in to social change, particularly as regards women's role: younger, more politicized, more urban and wealthier than a representative sample of the French population. One might, therefore, expect the gap between men's and women's replies to be smaller. In fact, the actual outcome was more contrasted. On the one hand, in reply to the question: "Among the following items, which seems to you to be the one that should give you the most satisfaction?", 49% of women versus 29% of men mention "family relations". The difference is significant, even though the sample was more limited. On the other hand, women (26%) mention their careers more than men (21%), who prefer "leisure or creative activities" (29%) and "civil or political participation in the affairs of the country" (12% of men as opposed to 3% of women).<sup>27</sup> By the same token, if one takes a look at the full set of answers – the survey asked respondents to choose three priorities – the rise in the importance of the professional sphere for women is striking: 89% (versus 77% of men) mention it among their chosen three, showing that although work is not the chief priority, it has nevertheless taken on greater significance. In fact, it is the option that gets the greatest number of votes, because "family relations" obtains just 87% (73% among men). Thirteen percent of female students in Nanterre did not mention family among the three main priorities in life. A likely interpretation could be that a large proportion of these 13% were feminist activists unwilling to acknowledge – publicly, in the context of a survey – the importance of family life.<sup>28</sup> Whatever the case may be, change is perceptible, but the process was slow: even amongst female students in Nanterre, who were at the vanguard of this social

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<sup>26</sup> Duquesne 1963: 206.

<sup>27</sup> *Sondages*, 1970/1 and 2, p. 149.

<sup>28</sup> Chaperon 2000; Picq 1993.



transformation, it does not seem to have been fully achieved, because they were still, in 1970, referring to the primacy of family relationships more often than male students.

### **Women's happiness: the influence of gender**

On the scale of all the measurements taken around the world, “subjective well-being”<sup>29</sup> correlates only weakly to gender. But in France, sample populations of young women have been slightly more likely to describe themselves as happy than those of young men, as a meta-study of the data in the *World Database of Happiness* from 1946 to 1984 shows.<sup>30</sup> Because the answers were derived both from experience and from self-presentation bias, it is difficult to know if these results stem from greater happiness among young women or from a greater impact of the happiness norm on them.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the case, the variation is not very substantial, and the overall appreciation is not strongly determined by gender. This factor is, however, more influential when we look at studies concentrating on the private or professional spheres.

A 1959 survey about Frenchwomen and love provides information about happiness in their private lives and how it was constructed. The researchers highlighted the continuity between social norms – particularly those transmitted in literary models – and aspirations: “marriage is the goal to which most women aspire. It appears to those surveyed to be the way for women to achieve

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<sup>29</sup> Subjective well-being is evaluated based on individuals' replies to questions along the lines of “Would you describe yourself as basically happy, very happy, unhappy or very unhappy?” (For information about the various scales of measurement, see Diener 1984: 542-575).

<sup>30</sup> Veenhoven 1984: 178 and 261.

<sup>31</sup> The self-presentation effect is the tendency that people being surveyed have to adapt their statements in order to conform to the survey-taker's expectations and to legitimate social norms: in the context of opinion polls about happiness, this effect is particularly penetrating insofar as describing oneself as unhappy means making a difficult confession of failure, all the more so if the person being surveyed believes that happiness is his or her main goal. As has been shown, that is more often the case for women. Consequently, this effect is undoubtedly stronger for them.

happiness”.<sup>32</sup> In the commentators’ words, “The condition of French women is neither idyllic, nor dramatic”: “51% of married women say that their marriage brings them satisfaction in some way (13% mention love and happiness – 11% a husband and lovely children – and 27% overall satisfaction). In addition, 66% of married women say they have never envied the fate of single women. Which allows us to say that, taken as a whole, the overall effect of marriage is positive”.<sup>33</sup>

Irrespective of the fact that the stated level of marital happiness might vary inversely to the length of the marriage, or that it might be lower when the woman worked outside the home, the point is to highlight the influence of norms – the discourse of liberation – on experience – women’s marital happiness – and to understand that the discourse in favor of greater openness was increasing the complexity of the social world. In 1959, many women could still fairly easily alienate themselves for the sake of their spouse and/or children, and live for their respective satisfactions. In the late 1960s, 1967-1968, freely granted dependency often caused identity conflicts, but could still lead to happiness.<sup>34</sup> By the 1970s, with the “remodeling of inter-individual relationships”, the traditional attitude of self-abnegation was frequently coming under attack, while the more modern approach was glorified. The point here is not to present a new avatar of the traditional anti-feminist argument that says that women have been the victims of feminism, but simply to recognize that the process was not without negative effects on the satisfaction of certain traditional women, who became aware of the feminist alternative and felt uncomfortable, as is shown by this letter sent in 1976 by a 23-year-old stay-at-home mother in Picardy, in northern France:

I refuse to be seen as some kind of throwback by women themselves just because I have chosen to stay home and raise my child. Believe me, it isn’t that easy, and there are days when, like everybody else I suppose, I daydream about a different life, when the walls of my house seem suffocating and I worry about that “stagnation” that stalks women.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Sondages*, 1961/1: 45.

<sup>33</sup> *Sondages*, 1961/1: 46.

<sup>34</sup> Sohn 2000: 197.

<sup>35</sup> Arbois & Schidlow 1978: 186.

This woman was experiencing a conflict between, on the one hand, her desire to be a mother, and on the other, her “daydream about a different life”. That latter desire had existed before then for many women, but it was largely repressed by traditional norms; legitimized by a new ethic, it gained strength in the late 1960s. In her letter, the writer goes on to say that she wants to have more children, and will continue to stay at home. This decision leads to the following reflections, which allow her to hold at bay a certain psychological conflict that has clearly been aggravated by the widespread diffusion of feminist notions:

Now that makes some people scream with indignation. How many times have I heard: “So you’re just going to sacrifice yourself for 15 years to raise your children? What a waste...” Sacrifice myself? [...] I don’t feel like I’m sacrificing myself; I’m watching my son grow up, day after day, and trying to make his life a pleasant one. On the contrary, having children makes both me and my husband, their adoring father, happy.<sup>36</sup>

Thus incomplete liberation does not appear to have always been a joyful process in those years, but could instead reveal itself to be painful: many women still put a lot of effort into their home and family, but they also aspired to other types of satisfaction. These multiple desires often conflicted with each other, and the situation was far from easy: those who worked outside the home, the majority, were a little less likely than the others to be happy in their marriage and to experience a contradiction with what they were raised to believe, i.e. the ideal of a happy homemaker; the home-making minority ran the risk of feeling guilty about their choice and needing to justify it.<sup>37</sup> In both cases, when these women described their private lives, when they evaluated its level of happiness, they employed highly gendered narrative conventions. Their expectations in terms of their family lives (higher than men’s),<sup>38</sup> their view of other people’s marriages (often negative), their perceptions of how to balance the different parts of their life (undergoing a profound evolution), and the existence or absence of positive role models for

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<sup>36</sup> Arbois & Schidlow 1978: 186.

<sup>37</sup> About the proportion of working women, see Schweitzer 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Jaffré 1978: 190.

independence and autonomy all constitute normative parameters affecting their perception of their own experiences. In the professional sphere, the tone of their accounts is also connected to norms, and consequently, to gender.

In 1971, a study of Frenchwomen was carried out by the sociologist Évelyne Sullerot – one of the founders in 1956 of “La Maternité heureuse” (later the French branch of Planned Parenthood), and subsequently a consultant to the EEC and a pioneering scholar of Women’s Studies. Her survey, published in 1973, provides some indicators of women’s happiness in the professional sphere.<sup>39</sup> The book was written from a feminist point of view, but the information it provides is reliable: carried out by IFOP (the leading French polling institute) and with support from the National Planning Commission, the study was based on a 1,300-person representative sample of the 6.6 million French women in waged work.<sup>40</sup> These respondents were asked 126 questions: most of them referred to objective working conditions – schedules, type of job, income, etc. – but some of them did address their work’s subjective aspects.

In order to explore to what extent access to work was good for women, Évelyne Sullerot asked the following question: “All told, are you glad that you have a job?”<sup>41</sup> There is no equivalent question in general surveys of the time written with male workers in mind, as they were not considered to be concerned by the work/homemaking choice. Dissatisfaction seems relatively rare, as only 12% of those surveyed answered “no”. An additional 15% didn’t answer: this high rate of non-reply results from the addition of those who didn’t want to reply (fairly few, based on other satisfaction polls) and those who chose that option as a neutral answer, which was not offered for this closed question. These latter probably represented over 10%. Finally, 73% of the women polled said they were “glad” to participate in the world of work.

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<sup>39</sup> Sullerot 1973.

<sup>40</sup> Sullerot 1973: 13; Bard 2001; Schweitzer 2002. For a comparison with the structure of the active population, Marchand & Thélot 1991.

<sup>41</sup> Sullerot 1973: 234.

Later in the questionnaire, women were asked, not if they were “glad to have a job”, but if they were happy with the specific job they had: “All told, are you happy or unhappy with the job you currently hold?” Women were more likely to give a positive reply than men: 89% were happy, including 34% “very happy”; only 10% said they were unhappy, of whom 2% were “very unhappy” (1% didn’t answer).<sup>42</sup> In order to confirm the accuracy of the information gathered in this question, Évelyne Sullerot tested the correlation with absenteeism, the classic objective indicator of job satisfaction. The variables are not independent: women who said they were very happy with their job rarely took time off, and those who were very unhappy took a lot; in between the proportion decreased steadily.<sup>43</sup> Thus the satisfaction scores can be considered as relevant indicators that are congruent with observable behaviors: the subjective indicators corresponded to a reality that the agent experienced, and were not simply determined by a social norm of desirability.

In 1971, women’s greater satisfaction at work didn’t result from variables related to objective elements of their job or of the income it provided: for the most part, they held lower-ranking jobs than men and were paid considerably less.<sup>44</sup> Everything points to the idea that their greater happiness at work stemmed from the influence of new feminist biographical ideals: thus Sullerot quotes numerous excerpts from interviews in which women stated that it wasn’t so much that they were happy with their job but that they were happy *not to be at home*. Admittedly, these excerpts were selected to prove a feminist point, which they illustrate perfectly. They are undoubtedly presented disproportionately in the book, but be that as it may, those statements were made. Several of the respondents referred to a housewife’s “restricted vision”, insisting on their own “independence” or on the fact that they “would be bored if they were home all the time”.<sup>45</sup> By the same token, some commented that it was

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<sup>42</sup> Sullerot 1973: 233.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*: 157.

<sup>44</sup> Status and income are the two most important factors affecting work satisfaction: see Baudelot & Gollac 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Sullerot 1973: 251, 254, 244.

“rewarding to do something other than cooking and cleaning”:<sup>46</sup> many of them felt that “housework is stultifying”, they experienced a positive “rebound effect”<sup>47</sup> when they worked outside the house, even if they were “always rushing” and they’d “rather have a job that paid better”.<sup>48</sup>

This irruption of feminist narrative schemas crops up repeatedly in the excerpts quoted, and the better-paid women are not the only ones to refer to feminist themes. On the contrary, these new schemas allow some women who hold essentially unsatisfying jobs to frame their experience in a positive light, like this study-hall supervisor who was asked if she was happy with her job: “The bottom line is yes, I am. I work because I need the money and also because working means broadening your horizons, even if the job is poorly paid and not very rewarding”.<sup>49</sup> In her case, mobilizing a feminist norm – “broadening your horizons” – allows the woman to feel satisfied with her job. In fact, feminist themes actually function as rationalizations, in the psychological sense of the term. In response to the question about job satisfaction, one woman starts by saying, “Yes, I quite like working, I wouldn’t want to be home all day,” before hastily adding, “although money is the main reason I work of course”.<sup>50</sup> This allows us to grasp the impact and effectiveness of the line of thought that says that women have to work in order to be happy: essentializing a necessary situation, it is the first thing that crops up in the excerpt quoted. And it casts the job in a cheerful light. This happy aspect would undoubtedly have been less present in a description made by a man who was working *just* for the money. In this way, the development of feminist narratives at that time reinforced the more objective effect of improvements in women’s jobs – higher levels of education obtained, and the expansion of the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*: 245.

<sup>47</sup> Hirschman 1983: 140.

<sup>48</sup> All three excerpts come from the same interview, Sullerot 1973: 248.

<sup>49</sup> Sullerot 1973: 252.

<sup>50</sup> Sullerot 1973: 246-247.

service sector<sup>51</sup> – to slant women’s personal narratives about work in a positive way.

A sign of the interaction between norms and experiences, those of a remarkable number of women surveyed in 1971 show the mark of modern representations of female virtue, which, by that point in time, included working outside the house: a positive portrayal of their working lives flowed from the fulfillment of their desire and/or respect for this new duty. So this survey bears witness to the transformation of the personal narratives of certain women, who integrated the world of work into their life stories. In that sense, it may also be possible that the satisfaction of some women who had been working for a long time increased, as a result of feminist discourse. Contrary to those reactionary thinkers who say that feminists have made housewives feel guilty and that women have been “victims of feminism,”<sup>52</sup> this survey revealed that, on the contrary, the feminist discourse might brighten the daily lives of some women who used to see their work as a curse.

This analysis reveals that happiness was still gender-related in France in the latter part of twentieth century France: women remained the principal targets of happiness, even though happiness’s feminine nature was being attenuated; variations on the theme were widely internalized, and, statistically speaking, personal aspirations were determined by gender. Happiness was used as a weapon by both sides in this re-configuration: it justified the proposed ideal, whether that ideal was traditional or more innovative, and it invalidated the rejected model. Thus happiness can be included both in the mechanisms for obtaining consent and amongst the factors of social change.

The conflicts and divisions surrounding happiness reverberated in the lives of those concerned. In the private sphere, the existence of two antagonistic models created a tension that was felt by large groups of women during those years. They were subjected to the

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<sup>51</sup> About the debate concerning the objective improvement of women’s work, cf. Lagrave 1991: 443 *sqq.*

<sup>52</sup> Bard 1999: 329.

influence of competing biographical ideals and conflicting narrative conventions: it became more difficult for them to glorify the model of living vicariously or via the alienation of their egos; as they became more integrated into society at large, they needed to find a way to balance the public and private spheres. Now that they were being urged to be independent from increasing quarters, they viewed their professional activities more favorably than men did: feminist encouragement toward greater autonomy could sometimes act as a rationalization of an earlier situation by casting it in a more positive light. Having worked for a long time in France, and feeling proud rather than guilty not to be housewives, some women were able to find happiness about participating, like men, in the productive sphere. That is why their declared well-being at work was higher than men's, despite their generally lower status there. This is where the influence of social norms reveals itself: they channel the gaze bestowed on/directed at the objective world and potentialize experiences; when they attract support, they may inform the ideals by which agents – both male and female – measure their own achievements. Along with the ideal of the modern woman, as conveyed by the new female ethics emerging in the latter part of the twentieth century, the range of possible forms of happiness was broadened: this new freedom multiplied the pathways to happiness, and women had now to find their way in a social world that had become more complex, but also more open.

*Translated by Regan KRAMER*

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