

University of Wollongong
Research Online

Faculty of Arts - Papers (Archive)


Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities

1-1-2008

Book Review: "Assembling Women: The Feminization of Global Manufacturing". By Teri L. Caraway

Vicki D. Crinis
University of Wollongong, vcrinis@uow.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/artspapers>

 Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Crinis, Vicki D., Book Review: "Assembling Women: The Feminization of Global Manufacturing". By Teri L. Caraway 2008, 653-655.
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/artspapers/1898>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au



Book Reviews

Assembling Women: The Feminization of Global Manufacturing. By Teri L. Caraway. New York: Cornell University Press. 2007. 207 pp. \$55.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

doi:10.1017/S1743923X08000536

Vicki Crinis

University of Wollongong, Australia

Teri Caraway's study of Indonesian labor in workplaces such as the garment, textile, electronics, timber, tobacco, and automobile industries is a contribution to the literature on the feminization of factory work in Southeast Asia. Overall, the book, presented in six chapters, questions why female inequality in the workforce continues. Why do women outnumber male workers in export-processing industries while the same numbers of women are not represented in capital-intensive industries? According to Caraway, political economists believe that once women entered the paid labor force, they would eventually equal male workers in number, but political economy analysis has not been able to explain why this did not occur. Her analysis takes a gendered and multilevel methodological approach and uses gender as a category of political economic analysis (p. 5) in order to explain women's continued inequality in the workforce.

This book is an important study because it shows how introducing gender into political economy analysis, as well as poststructural discourse analysis, enables the researcher to see the ways that women workers are relegated to jobs considered suitable to their femininity and male workers to jobs suited to their masculinity. Caraway also highlights the fact that emphasizing the masculinity of industrial labor has been both a means of survival in exploitative class relations and a means of asserting superiority over women for both male workers and their mediating institutions.

Caraway's work enforces the notion that gender is constantly produced and renegotiated, rather than being a fixed category in the workplace and, as the author has demonstrated, Marxist/socialist conceptions of the term need redefining in light of her analysis. First, she challenges previous studies of industrial feminization in Southeast Asia, which argued that the feminization of the industrial workforce was based on women's cheap labor. Second, she points out that women's cheap labor is only part of the equation.

Theoretically, the feminization process rests on four key areas: labor/capital intensity, labor supply, mediating institutions, and gendered discourses of work (p. 32). Women workers become available for work in labor-intensive industries at certain times in a nation's development because of government policies, such as family planning and mass education programs. In addition, skilled male workplaces in capital-intensive industries are protected from being undermined by cheap female labor by mediating institutions, such as trade unions. Caraway has demonstrated, however, that this did not occur to the same extent in some countries like Indonesia, because trade unions were weakened by the state, and, as a result, women workers replaced male workers in some male-dominated industries, especially in instances where heavy machinery was replaced with more technologically advanced machinery.

Scholars take different positions when examining gender and the workforce. Some believe that gender socialization during childhood is the key to the division of labor in the workforce, while others argue that construction of gender takes place in the workplace. Caraway recognizes that it is necessary to question the manner in which gender is constructed in order to understand women's continued inequality in the workforce. She looks beyond debates about the essential, biological, or socially constructed female body to gendered discourses of work, meaning the specific beliefs in Indonesia about males, females, and work. As she points out: "integrating gendered discourses of work into political economy brings gender into the heart of the market and allows for a truly gendered analysis of labor markets." Factory managers link "gendered discourses of work" to particular jobs and particular machine operations that suit male and female workers (p. 130). While Caraway highlights how different regimes of work for men and women produce gendered bodies, she also provides interesting observations of male and female employment in labor-intensive industries and capital-intensive industries.

As the industrialization process develops and the nation's economy moves to capital-intensive industrialization, employers prefer to hire male workers because female workers, for various reasons of reproduction, are supposedly unreliable for the longer-term skilled jobs. In sum, "the gendered cost benefit analysis that managers engaged in is far more complex than is conveyed by current theorizing of feminization" (p. 131). Her analysis points to the ways in which employers continue to employ male workers even though women may be cheaper to hire because of the discourses of masculinity and femininity in terms of light/heavy or clean/dirty. As feminist scholar Betsy Wearing points out, in the white goods industry there is nothing inherently different in the quality of the work; it is the meaning given to it by employers and by men and women themselves that results in men's work being perceived as superior ("Ways of Living," in Anne Cranny Francis et al., as being, *Gender Studies Terms and Debates*, 2003, 226). Caraway's study illustrates the wide potential of gender as a lens through which to examine a vast variety of work practices. It also suggests that the gendered politics of labor remains a significant analytical site in any consideration of the political economy of work.

Why Separate Is Not Equal in Sports: Playing with the Boys.
By Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano. New York: Oxford
University Press. 2007. 349 pp. \$28.00 cloth.

doi:10.1017/S1743923X08000548

Shirley Castelnovo
Northeastern Illinois University
Sharon R. Guthrie
California State University, Long Beach

In their book, Eileen McDonagh and Laura Pappano emphasize the importance of eliminating gender inequality in sport by highlighting the benefits of athletic participation for females. Their main focus, however, is on what they believe is the most negative consequence of this inequity, that is, the promotion of women's secondary status in other valued social realms, such as politics and business. According to the authors, three key