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THE FEMINISATION OF CLERICAL WORK 1870-1914

Ph.D THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF
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ABSTRACT

The following thesis has five main objectives:-

1. To describe the role and position of women in clerical work in the period circa 1870 to 1914.
2. To understand the origins of the role and position of women in clerical work hierarchies and to offer reasons for this role and position.
3. To use and link theoretical perspectives which are useful in helping us to understand the origins of the role and position of women in clerical work.
4. To consider the impact of wider social structure upon the roles and position of women in clerical work.
5. To develop an overall framework for understanding the role and position of women in society and in work.

These objectives will now be briefly expanded.

1. To describe the role and position of women in clerical work in the period circa 1870 to 1914.

Throughout the thesis considerable space is given to describing the actual work, status and market situations of female clerks. This descriptive element is the background against which the theoretical framework is developed and tested. It also offers us some appreciation of what work was actually like for female clerks in the 1870 to 1914 period, and allows us to compare their conditions with late twentieth century clerks.

2. To understand the origins of the role and position of women, in clerical work hierarchies and to offer reasons for this role and position

The thesis seeks to investigate the historical process through which females entered clerical work over the period 1870 to 1914. It seeks to assess the role of economic environment in drawing women into clerical work, and the changing 'status' of those women who become clerks. The thesis notes the 'status' of clerical work in the 1870-1914 period and how the perception of such work was changing.

3. To utilise and link theoretical perspectives which are useful in helping us to understand the origins of the role and position of women in clerical work

The central objective of the thesis is to offer a theoretical framework for the analysis and comprehension of women's role and position within clerical work. In order to achieve this two approaches to the study of historical development are drawn on. Firstly, the concept of patriarchy; secondly elements of the labour process debate. It is argued throughout the thesis, but particularly in chapters six to eight, that within the context of clerical work, the 'gender dimension' is of crucial significance in determining the nature of female office work; their pay and conditions of work; their job prospects and opportunities; the determination of 'skill' in the office; control within the office. In short, the existence of a Patriarchal frame of reference has contributed to the structuration of and divisions within the clerical labour force.

4. To consider the impact of wider social structure upon the role and position of women in clerical work

Intimately linked to objective three, the thesis aims to consider the impact of wider social structure and values on the role and position of women in clerical work. The importance of wider social values concerning the role and position of women within society is considered and related to the structuration of employment. The thesis argues that wider social structure and values are of crucial importance in determining the role and position of women within clerical work.

5. To develop an overall framework for understanding the role and position of women in society and in work

The overall objective of this thesis is to contribute to the body of literature which seeks to understand the manner in which female employment patterns are determined, in part, by patriarchal social relations; that is, relations between men and women. It offers no assessment of how to overcome this problem, but, through recognition of the interrelationship between economic or capitalist development and patriarchal social relations in the clerical work context, the thesis aims to inform and educate on the subtlety and insidiousness of this relationship.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

A debt of gratitude needs to be paid to all those resource centres who helped me to undertake the research, and who will probably never get to read the thesis.

Special thanks to Bob Price, supervisor and mate, and to my mum and dad.

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P A R T I

ARGUMENT AND BACKGROUND

CHAPTER ONE : ARGUMENT

Patriarchy

A most useful theoretical and methodological tool developed within feminism, in spite of the arguments of some writers (see Rowbotham, 1979), has been the concept of patriarchy. There have been and continues to be lively debate concerning the origins and utility of the concept (Alexander and Taylor, 1980; Beechey, 1979; Eisenstein (ed), 1979; Gamarnikow et al (eds), 1983; Knights and Willmott(eds), 1986; Kuhn and Wolpe (eds), 1978; Sargent (ed), 1981). However, for present purposes the significance of patriarchy does not lie in its epistemological genesis but in its usefulness as an explanatory mechanism. This is not to suggest that the question of the origins of patriarchy are unimportant, on the contrary, this question is the most important philosophical and epistemological issue confronting the 'feminist method'. Nevertheless, the point should be made that in its present state of intellectual development, patriarchy, like many features of Marxist philosophy and theory, is not only a controversy per se, but is also a method for the comprehension of history and an explanation, either in itself, or in conjunction with other 'tools', of historical conjunctures.

Within the present context the significance of patriarchy lies in its relationship with capital, which at the level of operationalising research, becomes a problem of utilising patriarchy as a concept and Marxist tools of analysis together as a means of understanding certain developments within the relations of production. Thompson noted "three perspectives" as "representative of the range of conceptions of the parameters of relations between patriarchy and capital". (1983;pp.201-9) Firstly, there is Hartmann's notion of 'sex-blind' marxism which required a separate

analysis of sexual divisions (Hartmann, 1979a:1979b). Secondly, writers such as Eisenstein (1979) and Phillips and Taylor (1978) argue that separation in this fashion is not helpful, primarily because Marxism thus becomes almost wholly an economic theory unable to incorporate other possible relations and divisions. They argue that the Marxist interpretation of capitalist development can be broadened to offer a more complete picture of the 'partnership' between patriarchy and capital "in which the latter consistently develops through existing patterns of social domination and subordination, reinforcing them in the process". (Thompson, op cit: p200). Thirdly, Thompson identifies a more 'orthodox' approach in Beechey's work (1977). The 'orthodoxy' here is that the employment of women "is situated in the context of Marx's theory of capital accumulation, which posits the necessity for employers to search out ways of lowering the value of labour power to counteract the competitive pressures on their rate of profit" (Thompson, *ibid*: p200). In a later paper, however, Beechey looks more closely at the relationship between patriarchy and capital (1979). Here she argues that whether feminists have defined the social relations of reproduction as material relations deriving, for example, from male control of women's labour, or as ideological or cultural creations, the idea of separating such relations from the social relations of production is unhelpful. Thus, she suggests that it is impossible to have a notion of production which does not also involve reproduction. The interrelationships between, for example, capitalist development and the development of the family must be understood to provide a complete representation of the position of women within capitalist work and society.

These and other conceptualisations have informed the work of many writers who have undertaken empirical historical research around the issues of women and work. Judy Löwn (1983) in her analysis of a Courtauld's silk mill, sought to avoid "the deterministic and sometimes reductionist

tendencies of some models" by arguing that patriarchy could be "posited on the possibility of economic and familial relations being a single process with no causal variable lying beyond these privileges and advantages accruing to those who benefit from such a process". She argues that patriarchal relations ought to be recognised as a pivotal organising principle of society and not just a feature of one particular historical formation. Lown believes that when this is recognised there will be no need to distinguish, at a conceptual level, between 'the economy' and 'the family'.

The theoretical significance of Lown's work lies in the extent to which she proposes a deconstruction of familiar concepts. She seeks, in effect, to show that "relationships of male supremacy are located in the socio-cultural significance of familial relations as an organising principle of society". Ginnie Smith (1983) has suggested that the processes of deconstruction and reconstruction could have a more profound ambition. By "deconstructing and reconstructing the meaning of words, symbols, images, patterns of logic by investigating logic and those who wrote them", Smith argues that the origins of patriarchy could be discovered. Returning to Lown, it is vitally important to recognise, as much feminist study has done, the need to refrain from treating gender relations as secondary and subsidiary to "a pre-defined system of class relations". It is of crucial importance to analyse "processes of distinctively male interests and privileges". In doing so the tendency to examine "the processes whereby gender and class are constructed simultaneously" will hopefully make itself clear.

The theoretical framework outlined above constitutes Lown's framework for her analysis of patriarchy and paternalism, and their relevance as organising principles of workplace relations in the silk mill. From her

research she concludes that patriarchal interests were realigned within the development of the Courtauld's silk mill to create a "gender and occupational hierarchy which structurally marginalised women's economic status". Moreover, it restructured them ideologically to the 'domestic' arena. Lown argues further that patriarchal interests were maintained "even in the face of the fact of women's employment outside the home".

Whereas Lown sought to interoscuate as a "single process" the social relations of production and reproduction, Eva Gamarnikow (1978) emphasised juxtaposition, perhaps even the complete separation of patriarchy from Marxist tools and concepts. She argues that to be materialist a theory must locate the sexual division of labour within social rather than biological categories. In tracing the origins and development of women's oppression Gamarnikow feels that Marxist tools of analysis, with its emphasis on the capitalist relations of production and its perception of women's oppression as understandable only within this context, are inappropriate. Analysis, of this problem, she suggests, must be located "within an analysis of patriarchy". To bear out her emphasis on the social rather than biological features of the sexual division of labour Gamarnikow defines patriarchy as "an autonomous system of social relations between men and women in which men are dominant". From this base she argues that all women are thus identified as a separate category of worker whether they are under the direct dominance of men, within marriage, or not. As a result of this overwhelming, this hegemony, of patriarchal exploitation, the sexual division of labour becomes also a form of work organisation. Jobs are designated as 'male' or 'female' according to ideological criteria; or as Gamarnikow puts it, "in the ideological identification and distribution of tasks".

The extent to which it is useful to perceive of patriarchy as an autonomous

system of social relations in the context of the capitalist labour process is controversial. There may be other important and significant features within the development of nursing (of which Gamarnikow is writing) which require analysis and which intermingle more definitely with capitalist development. While the main thrust of Gamarnikow's argument is persuasive the relationship between patriarchy and capitalist development as it affected nursing is underexplored in this context. It is not entirely clear that emphasising the autonomy of patriarchal relations when discussing issues arising from the development of capitalism and the capitalist labour process is useful. The extent to which nursing, or relationships within the medical 'profession' generally, can be viewed as analogous with "patriarchal marital relations", aside from the influence of other social relations, must be recognised, for all its apparent persuasiveness, as only a partially satisfactory analysis. It may be correct, as Gamarnikow argues, that "technological determinism, the ideological representation of the capitalist division of labour, was less crucial than the ideology of naturalism, in situating nursing within health care", however, historical consideration of capitalist development and the capitalist labour process should, indeed must, involve an appreciation of a wide range of possible inputs related to both the social relations of production and reproduction. All of these possible inputs would affect the situational aspects of nursing within health care, and, in the more general sense, the situational aspects of women within capitalist labour processes. Furthermore, and to conclude, in the sense that Gamarnikow stresses the autonomy of patriarchal relations and fails to link them adequately to the social relations of production, her approach moves away from, rather than develops, attempts to bring together analysis of the labour process and women's position within the capitalist labour processes.

Another writer who sought to understand the process of feminisation is

Dee Garrison (1974) who studied the development of librarianship in America. While Garrison does not explicitly address patriarchal or Marxist theoretical issues her paper remains very useful as an investigation of the relationship between the values which prevailed in the nineteenth century concerning 'women's role' and the acceptance of those values by female librarians. This argument is the one which fundamentally differentiates her, in theoretical terms, from Gamarnikow, because, in essence, like Gamarnikow, she accepts that librarianship became feminised ideologically and autonomously of any developments within capitalism. In brief, Garrison's point is that women, in entering librarianship, "supported the traditional feminine concern for altruism and high-mindedness. They invoked the Victorian definition of proper female endeavours at the same time as they were widening it". In doing so they contributed to the justification of the nineteenth century woman's advance "in terms of the good they could do, rather than of their human right to equality". And in doing so their advance "became conditional in nature".

The significance of Garrison's argument lies in its realisation that patriarchy is not only an analytical tool which allows insights for the development of historical understanding, but patriarchy was, and is, also a lived experience for all women at any given historical conjuncture, and, importantly, it is something against which it is difficult to fight. This is a point to which we shall return in the conclusion.

As indicators of an adequate utilisation of patriarchy for use in a study of clerical work each of the above historical cases studies offer guidelines. But for one reason or another all of them are rather inadequate. Lown's work on the Courtauld's silk mill is probably too concerned with paternalism in an industrial setting to be readily accepted for the clerical work context. Moreover, the notion of a 'single process' of economic

and familial relations fits only with great difficulty where paternalistic innovations of the kind Lown analyses were non-existent. Gamarnikow's work, though limited, is useful in directing attention to patriarchal relations themselves, particularly to the 'value-laden' social sources which categorised women in the public mind. It is to this area also that Garrison's work contributes.

While accepting the partial utility of Lown's, Gamarnikow's and Garrison's historical research for this thesis, and while accepting also Beechey's emphasis on the need for an "understanding of the interrelationships between production and reproduction as a single process", the content of this study will require a definition of the research process more concretely suited to its own objectives. As part of this definition - and 'part of' should be stressed - patriarchy must be perceived as the way men, in the context of the clerical labour process within capitalism, have managed to maintain the traditional division of labour between the sexes, and/or how they have developed techniques of organisation and control within indirect, impersonal situations (see Hartman, 1979b) to maintain this division of labour.

Labour Process Theory

Since the mid 1970's a great number of theorists have undertaken research on the labour process. The mass of work which has flowed from this school of thought, and continues to flow, indicates that the fashion for work in this area remains as 'hip' as ever. This is not to suggest that the work is meaningless, on the contrary, most new contributions build usefully on those which have gone before.⁽¹⁾

To put this study into its proper theoretical context it is of some importance

to outline the main thrust, or perhaps thrusts, of the labour process debate before considering its utility in analysing the feminisation of clerical work. In terms of generalised theoretical constructions Braverman's work stimulated Burawoy (1979), Edwards (1979), and Friedman (1977), to consider the development of the capitalist labour process. Aside from these total approaches there have been a large number of particularistic studies (Baxandall et al 1976; Berg 1979; Gorz 1976; Knights et al (eds), 1985; Knights and Willmott (eds), 1986a and 1986b; Wood (ed) 1982; Zimbalist (ed), 1979). Thompson (1983 : p.72) argues that Braverman emphasised three aspects of the labour process. Firstly, "the necessity for capital to realise the potential of purchased labour power by transforming it into labour under its own control, thereby creating the basis for alienation". Secondly, the genesis of management per se resides in the struggle to develop the most potent way of forcing the employers' will upon a situation of "new social relations of production different in kind and scope to what had existed before". Thirdly, "that a division of labour based on a systematic subdivision of work, rather than simple distribution of crafts, is generalised only within the capitalist mode of production". In emphasising these three aspects of the labour process, Braverman, Thompson argues, is revitalising the original Marx and applying it to "subsequent historical development", particularly around the concepts of deskilling and managerial control.

Braverman, then, is concerned with recollecting the origins of management and organisational hierarchies at and in work in relation to the need of work organisations for accumulation and control, rather than in relation to the imperatives of technology and efficiency. In retraining these developments Braverman notes the centrality of the ideas of F.W. Taylor (taylorism), which were able to "render conscious and systematic the formerly unconscious tendency of capitalist production". (Braverman;

p.121). For Braverman, Taylorism offered capital the opportunity to systematically control the labour process by providing methods of control which were applicable in any technological environment. This control was based upon a series of three principles which Braverman summed up as firstly "the gathering together and development of knowledge of the labour process", secondly, "the concentration of this knowledge as the exclusive preserve of management", and thirdly, "the use of this monopoly of knowledge to control each step of the labour process and its mode of execution". (Braverman, 1974 : p.119). Through the application of these principles management were in a position to organise work tasks around their own needs and objectives, separating conception from execution, mental from manual labour. In doing so management continually enhanced their control over the labour process by the sub-division of tasks and the deskilling of work. Moreover, the increased administrative and office work which developed as a result of stripping mental labour from manual work was itself subject to transformation, sub-division and degradation, and control and measurement, an issue to which we shall return below.

The amount of study and comment which Braverman's work has produced indicates that his thesis was in need of some modification and development. Salaman (1981 : pp.171-2), for example, argued that he overemphasised the importance of Taylorism, and did not deal adequately with "working-class consciousness and resistance". In some senses the modifications and criticisms of Braverman have emanated from this direction. What is clear, however, is that increased deskilling and managerial control have developed as the two main issues for debate in labour process theory.

For Braverman and other writers (Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977; Zimbalist (ed) 1979) deskilling is an inherent tendency of the capitalist labour process. In such studies the stress has been on craft workers,

and the key theme that general skills are reduced to job-specific ones, primarily as a consequence of mechanisation. This emphasis on craft skills has been criticised because of its too idealised conception of traditional craft workers (see Littler, 1982; Thompson, 1983). Moreover, and returning to the criticism levelled at Braverman by Salaman, worker resistance is likely to have a major impact on the process of deskilling by severely restricting and resisting managerial attempts to gain control of the labour process, and secondly, by excluding non-craft workers who might threaten the position of craft workers. (Friedman, 1977; Penn, 1982). There is also the question of the extent to which unskilled workers can exercise control over the labour process. Thompson, (1983 : pp.107-8) cites evidence which suggests that "workers can exercise the power to determine elements of working conditions and rewards, after deskilling has taken place". These are clearly questions of great importance, however, while they are of some significance and relevance to this study, the notion of 'skill' in the clerical work context, particularly the 1870 to 1914 clerical work context, requires further thought. The following section will discuss these points further.

Along with the issue of deskilling the other main element of labour-process theory is managerial control, and the two concepts are intimately linked to each other in Braverman's seminal work. As Knights and Willmott (1986a p.3) point out "Braverman regards Taylor's principles of 'Scientific Management' as the most developed and pervasive technology of management control wherein the valorisation and the impotence of labour is secured through a purposive programme of intensification, fragmentation and deskilling of work". To turn labour power into profitable, productive labour "requires systematic control by capital of the labour process" (Thompson, 1983 : p.123). However, subsequent criticisms of Braverman have stressed that his analysis of control suffers from being a "conspiratorial, one-dimensional conception of management and the means of management control"

(Knights and Willmott (eds), 1986b) and that correctives to his analysis need to be applied to take account of worker opposition and resistance and the impact of this on managerial control strategies (Burawoy 1981; Edwards 1979; Friedman 1977). Furthermore, the management of the labour process itself, needs to be analysed as Knights and Willmott's collection of readings argue, "it should not be assumed that management is, or ever could become, a homogeneous, unambiguous phenomenon whose actions are programmed by any single, well-defined objective - such as that of achieving profitable growth" (1986a : p.6).

Deskilling and managerial control in the context of labour process theory have been considered in great depth since Braverman's work. Indeed, the complexity and extent of the argument continues to unfold and develop. An increasing feature of these debates is a concern for the relationship between gender and the labour process, a relationship which the next section considers.

Gender, Labour Process Theory and the Clerical Labour Process

Criticisms of Braverman's treatment of gender in 'Labor and Monopoly Capital' were swift to arrive. Baxandall et al (1976 : pp.1-9) argued that Braverman ignored "one of the most pernicious aspects of the division of labour" - unpaid work, and its significance for the capitalist mode of production. Weinbaum and Bridges (1976 : pp.88-103) argue that the family is a unit of consumption within monopoly capitalism and they assess the effects of the family's consumption role upon the housewife. They also believe that Braverman inadequately analyses the role of the housewife. Jackie West (1978) criticises Braverman from a different angle. She discusses the class position of white-collar workers with particular reference to female white-collar labour, and challenges Braverman's analysis

on three points. Firstly, West considers it questionable that the office is analogous to a factory operating under continuous-flow production methods, and that the 'total' clerical worker has been replaced by subdivided detail labour. Secondly, like other critics, she feels Braverman underestimates the extent of differentiation within the working class. Thirdly, West criticises Braverman for arguing that women have only been drawn into deskilled labour because they constitute a reserve army of labour readily available to fill the new mass occupations.

Veronica Beechey (1982) in her critique of Braverman suggests that his work contains three sets of problems relating to the universal market; skill and deskilling; and the industrial reserve army of labour. Beechey's central point in relation to the universal market is that Braverman underestimates the role of the family in capitalist society. She suggests that it has a "multi-faceted relationship to production", in that "some use values are still produced within the domestic economy; labour power is reproduced both generationally and on a daily basis within the family; one aspect of the reproduction of labour power involves consumption; the family is one source of the industrial reserve army of labour". In respect of skills and deskilling Beechey suggests that Braverman's conceptualisation of skill is unclear, while she believes that a simple 'degradation of work' thesis is inadequate and over-simplified. "It is important to recognise that as capital has introduced new forms of machinery in order to simplify tasks and thereby to increase the rate of extraction of surplus value, it has also created new skills." In specific relation to the employment of women as wage labourers, Beechey argues that the concept of deskilling might usefully be employed in analysing situations in which unskilled or semi-skilled females have replaced forms of skilled labour, for example, during the First World War. Furthermore, deskilling could usefully be linked with processes of 'feminisation' of certain

occupations in order to gain a more meaningful insight into this phenomenon. Finally, Beechey argues that Braverman's conception of the industrial reserve army "is not able to explain why women have been drawn into wage labour in the service industries and occupations in preference to men". Furthermore, "the introduction of female labour on a fairly long-term or permanent basis into particular branches of industry can more usefully be seen in terms of capital's attempts to employ forms of labour power which have a lower value and in terms of the process of deskilling". This does not mean that women never constitute part of the industrial reserve army of labour, "or that the concept is not useful, but rather that the concept should be much more precisely and empirically delimited than it is within 'Labor and Monopoly Capital'."

Whether situated explicitly within the labour process debate or not there has been a considerable amount of work undertaken which has sought to bring patriarchy and the notion of a sex/gender system into the discussion around female employment (for example, Barker and Allen 1976; Cavendish 1982; Cockburn 1983; Crompton and Jones 1984; Gamarnikow (ed) 1983; Knights and Willmott (eds), 1986b; Pollert, 1981; West (ed), 1982; Whitelegg et al (eds), 1982). In the above discussion around the concept of patriarchy three relevant case studies in the mould of these works were considered and criticised as offering inadequate conceptualisations of patriarchy and its relationship with capitalist development for use in this research. More recent works have begun to consider more fully the relationship between gender and the labour process. A development to which this study hopes to contribute.

Studies of clerical work in the nineteenth century, and specifically theoretical and empirical work on the development of the clerical labour process in this period are rather hard to come by. Indeed, until the

1970's work on the history of clerical work and clerical workers in general was virtually non-existent. There was, of course, Klingender's important chapter on the late nineteenth-early twentieth century clerical work situation, discussed within the context of a proletarianisation thesis (1935 : pp.1-25); there were also a number of books on the history of the civil service (Cohen 1961; Martindale 1938); plus Lockwood's (1958) important contribution which included a brief chapter on the Victorian clerk. However, in summarising the dearth of work in this area Anderson (1976a : p.4) argued that "no sociologist (or anyone else) has tried to recreate the work experience of clerks in that period". This statement is even more true of the study of female clerical workers in the period circa 1870 to 1914. Klingender does recognise a process of feminisation of clerical work statistically, and also appreciates the cheapness of female labour. However, he largely subsumes these factors beneath his desire to emphasise proletarianisation and he fails, within his explicitly Marxist perspective, to develop the profundity of his argument in relation to women. Similarly Lockwood realises the increasing number of female clerks but offers no historical analysis.

It needs to be stated that while Anderson's (1976a) work constitutes a largely descriptive approach to the study of the Victorian clerk it is of considerable importance given the lack of substantive research in this area. What he does is to offer a comprehensive empirical study of the clerk in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century. He uses primary sources to tease out how clerks were recruited in this period, the nature of their work and the conditions under which it was performed, and the extent of their social mobility. He also assesses the relationships between clerks and their employers and how they were changing over this period; he looks at the gradually declining social and economic status of the clerk, and points out the impact female clerks had on this; and considers

how clerks attempted to resist these developments through forming voluntary associations, trade unions, or resorting to commercial education to improve their qualifications. He concludes (Anderson, 1976a : p.133) that the problems clerks faced "were related to the routine nature of clerical work, the changing structure of British society and the expansion of the white-collar stratum".

As a source of comparison and critical comment Anderson's work will be referred to throughout this dissertation. However, his study clearly lacks an appreciation of labour process theory in relation to clerical work, although he does recognise, superficially, the significant structural developments occurring within British society which are indicative of the capitalist development taking place in the late nineteenth century, and which induced developments within the clerical labour process. Thus, while accepting the considerable utility of Anderson's research, a more theoretically critical approach to clerical work needs to be developed, and this is where we must return to Braverman.

Braverman's chapter on clerical work and workers in his 'Labor and Monopoly Capital' is of central importance to the development of the following argument on the clerical labour process. Although he is not entirely specific, his analysis of clerical work begins in the late nineteenth century with the evolution of the period of monopoly capitalism (as Braverman sees it). Included among those workers he classifies as clerical are "only such occupations as book keeper (generally speaking the highest occupation in this group), secretary, stenographer, cashier, bank-teller, file clerk, telephone operator, office machine operator, pay-roll and time-keeping clerk, postal clerk, receptionist, stock-clerk, typist, and the like - and it includes these clerical workers no matter where they are employed, in private or in government offices, in manufacturing, trade,

banking, insurance, etc". (Braverman, 1974 : pp.295-6). According to Braverman, the growth of clerical work and its status as a labour process has occurred because of the development of monopoly capitalism. Three types of growth are discernible. Firstly, in the factory office from the rudimentary functions of which has grown "the modern cost, planning and scheduling, purchasing, and engineering and design sections". Secondly, in commercial concerns "which deal only with the purchase and resale of commodities". Thirdly, in the purely clerical industries, i.e. banking, insurance.

Braverman argued that with this rapid growth of offices in the last decades of the nineteenth century, "and the change of office work from something merely incidental to management into a labour process in its own right", capital sought to "systematise and control it". The informal, small-scale office of the pre-monopoly capitalism period needed no such systematisation because it was "self-supervising, clerical expenses were small and incidental before the era of mass merchandising, 'consumer' banking, and group insurance. None of these enterprises could yet feel that its success was significantly dependent upon the efficiency of the clerical labour process", (Ibid : pp.304-5). Eventually, however, with the development of monopoly capitalism, this situation changed, "the intimate associations, the atmosphere of mutual obligation, and the degree of loyalty which characterised the small office became transformed from a prime desideratum into a positive liability, and management began to cut those ties and substitute the impersonal discipline of a so-called modern organisation". (Ibid : p.305). Work in the large-scale office became subject to the control of a hierarchy of management, bureaucratised control became a feature of the office situation. The need for rationalisation and systematisation was compounded by the requirement for economy as "the management was confronted with a new condition in which it was impossible

to determine whether or not the employees were living up to the standard of a fair day's work", (Ibid : p.306).

To solve these problems Braverman suggested that the employer sought to develop a technical division of labour. He argues that just as in manufacturing labour processes, office work becomes subdivided and detailed, and as a result, office workers lose all comprehension and control over the clerical labour process, "each of the activities requiring interpretation of policy or contact beyond the department or section becomes the province of a higher functionary". (Ibid : p.314). A consequence of this subdivision of labour is that the extent of the mental work involved in clerical work becomes small; "with the transformation of management into an administrative labour process, manual work spreads to the office and soon becomes characteristic of the tasks of the mass of clerical workers", (Ibid : p.316). Moreover, and in discussing the work of Charles Babbage, Braverman argues that by separating conception and execution in this way capitalism can systematise the use of labour to the degree that "educated or better paid persons should never be 'wasted' on matters that can be accomplished for them by others of lesser training". Secondly, those employees who have had little or no special training" are superior for the performance of routine work, in the first place because 'they can always be purchased at an easy rate'; and in the second place because, undistracted by too much in their brains, they will perform routine work more correctly and faithfully". (Ibid : p.318).

Despite the inadequacies of Braverman's thesis, some of which have been noted above, his overall argument with regard to the clerical labour process is a solid foundation upon which to build a more comprehensive understanding of the clerical labour process per se, and more specifically, the position of women within clerical work, and the theoretical relation-

ship between the concept of gender and labour process theory. For example, particular features of Braverman's analysis of clerical work which need to be modified by the gender dimension are the very processes of capital accumulation, deskilling, and control. The search for routinisation, rationalisation, efficiency, and economy of and in clerical work in the era of monopoly capitalism was, for Braverman, brought about through a process of deskilling and control which entailed the subdivision of labour on a technical basis. However, the concept of a technical division of labour is inadequate for the provision of a total explanation of those processes without some conception of a sexual division of labour being introduced into the theoretical discussion. For a comprehensive understanding of the clerical labour process both capitalist and patriarchal developments need to be recognised as relevant to the development of clerical work itself. This approach equates with that adopted by Cockburn in her analysis of the printing industry (1983 : pp.191-209). In short, this argument suggests that the gender dimension, or patriarchy, was centrally implicated in the process by which clerical work changed in the face of capitalist development, and in the manner in which a division of labour was achieved in clerical work. By drawing together in a more explicit fashion the developmental/conceptual processes of capitalism and patriarchy labour process theory is able to make a considerable contribution to a more total appreciation of the role of the gender dimension in its relationship with capitalism (Knights and Willmott (eds) 1986b; Barker and Downing 1980).

A Framework for the Analysis of the Feminisation of the Clerical Labour Process

The fundamental objective of this research is to understand and contribute to the debate on the feminisation of clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. In terms of research methodology the work is based upon the consid-

eration and reconsideration of primary historical sources, mostly in the British Library, but also throughout University and other public libraries in England. A comprehensive listing of these sources can be found in the bibliography. In theoretical terms the thesis aims to use, for the purpose of analysis, those arguments which have been outlined above and which are framed in the context of labour process theory. It aims also to contribute to our understanding of this process by linking capitalist and patriarchal concepts and developments within the labour process debate.

Recent attempts to consider the introduction of women into clerical work in particular, have been especially devoid of theoretical perception while describing the process quite ably (Holcombe 1973; Silverstone 1976).

Silverstone concentrates largely on the Civil service and the information which can be gleaned from nineteenth century journals such as the 'Englishwoman's Journal', and its successor the 'Englishwoman's Review'. Jane Lewis (1981 : p.59) has usefully criticised Holcombe's work, arguing that while she posits the view that "economic, demographic and organisational factors had more to do with the expansion of women's employment than the women's movement", she does not, in fact, relate the development of clerical work, as an employment for women, to these factors, "and the opening of the professions is explained chiefly in terms of greater educational opportunities for women". Anderson (1976a : p.3) argues that Holcombe provides a useful synthesis of the available material on nineteenth century female clerks, but she has "little of value to say regarding the methods of recruitment of female clerks, the nature of the paternal relationship of female clerks or of clerks with their employers, or the extent of income and job mobility".

Both of these criticisms of Holcombe's work raise salient points which do need to be confronted. Anderson is arguing for a more concrete

appraisal of the contextual elements of female clerical work in the period circa 1870 to 1914 - what, in short, were their market, work and status situations. The following chapters will discuss these features of the work environment of the female clerk. Secondly, the following chapters will also assess the importance of educational, economic, demographic and organisational factors in the expansion of the employment of females as clerks, because clearly the expansion of education and the rapid rise in population in the UK towards the end of the nineteenth century are relevant to this discussion. Economic and organisational factors should be evaluated, however, within an overarching labour process approach to the development of clerical work, i.e. they must be understood within the overall framework of capitalist development in the 1870 to 1914 period, and the specific impact that this had on the office and clerical work. This in turn should be linked to the development of the clerical labour process per se, and the social division of labour which was an essential part both of the feminisation of clerical work as an historical fact, and of the technical division of labour as a feature of the labour process within offices. In short, capitalist development leading to an expanded management and administrative element within capitalism, induced a clerical labour process to cheapen and control this development.

This thesis attempts to answer the above questions and place the answers within the context of labour process theory while, simultaneously, contributing to this theory and its development. Chapter Two will outline the economic background to the development of clerical work and the growth of clerical work itself. Chapter Three will consider the Victorian 'middle class' woman and women's movement. The objective of this chapter is to provide some background on the notion of the 'ideology of domesticity', Chapter Four will discuss the social status of the females who were entering clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. The chapter will note

the educational, social, and demogrâphic features which were affecting the social status of those female clerks entering office work over the period. It will also discuss the changing status of clerical work itself over the relevant period, and give some consideration to the idea of the industrial reserve army of labour. Chapter Five will attend to the process of recruiting female clerks. It will attempt to isolate periods of recruitment and relate them once again to the industrial reserve army argument. Chapters Six to Eight will deal with specific labour process theory issues. Chapter Six will assess the nature of female clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. It will address the issues of deskilling and reskilling in clerical work, and the impact of 'new technology' and 'new skills' and relate them to the gender dimension. Chapter Seven will evaluate the pay and working conditions of female clerks. It will discuss the emphasis in and impetus for employing women as clerical workers and will relate these factors to shifting ideology (see Thompson 1983 : p.202). The relationship between capital accumulation and/or expenditure reduction and the sexual division of labour will be considered. Chapter eight will look at the job mobility and promotion prospects of female clerks. It will relate these issues to the subdivision of labour based upon gender, and will consider issues of control and stability within the workforce. All three of these chapters will give consideration, where appropriate, to cross-industry/sectoral differences in employment strategies in relation to female clerks. They will also, where appropriate, link the sexual division of labour/gender dimension in clerical work with the role and position of women in wider society. Primarily, however, they will seek to throw light on the gender dimension of the clerical labour process.

Chapter Eight will also consider the more personal relationships between male and female office workers in the 1870 to 1914 period to the extent that they can be discovered. In effect, it will consider what might be

called 'explicit' or 'naked' patriarchal control at the workplace. Chapter Nine will assess the extent and nature of the resistance of female office workers, and consider the impact of patriarchal ideology upon this resistance, i.e. within trade union structures. A concluding Chapter will say something about the relationship between labour process theory and the gender dimension in the 1870 to 1914 period with specific reference to clerical work. It will also consider some aspects of social stratification in the light of the findings.

The Research Process and Methodology

One of the most interesting and stimulating developments to have taken place in the study of history in recent years has been the idea of 'historiography', a term used to refer to "the study of history as an intellectual practice distinct from the 'movement of history' itself" (Johnson et al, 1982 : p.8). The notion of historiography is extremely complex and is by no means able to be concretely defined. However, it can be stated that historiography prioritises the relationship between theory and history, between theoreticism and empiricism, between generalisation and specificity in historical analysis.

One concern of historiography has been with the significant contribution Marxist theoretical insights and theoretical tools can make to historical research, and more specifically to the questioning of the 'political credentials' of traditional (conservative) approaches to history. Moreover, historiography is able to incorporate other radical and progressive movements, both in the construction of theory and in the understanding of concrete historical conjunctures. Johnson et al remark for example that, "the development of feminism, of oral history, and the resurrection of 'people's history' in a radical idiom all combined to scuffle the

complacency of much academic history" (Ibid : p.10). Furthermore, although the complex debates over Marxism as method, and as philosophy, does not concern us here (see MacLennan, 1982) the theoretical and methodological tools as they have developed within Marxist analysis can be supplemented by the recently developed theoretical and methodological tools of feminism (i.e. the concept of patriarchy) and can be used, either juxtaposed or interosculated, for a re-evaluation of history.

This broad position provides the point of departure for the theoretical and empirical analysis developed in the following thesis. The approach adopted here is rather concisely summarised by Jane Lewis (1981 : pp.57-58) who argued that "the most successful woman-centred studies combine an understanding of theoretical concepts with careful research". She goes on to state that "the record of women's experience in the past can all too easily become a backwater", however, "a strong theoretical framework which relates women's experience to that of men has the potential to make the consideration of gender as automatic as consideration of class".

A process of historical research requires, primarily, the availability of sources and materials which will, of course, provide the empirical evidence for the theoretical argument and discussion. Within the context of a thesis on the feminisation of clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period the materials, if available, are clearly primary sources in the form of documentation. The initial task for the research project, therefore, was to discover whether or not such materials were available, and if so, were they adequate for a comprehensive consideration of clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. It soon became apparent that they were.

The British Library held an enormous amount of nineteenth century material on the subject of clerical work, and of women and clerical work. Moreover, the data had been, up to 1983, largely untapped; research in this area

having been limited.

Given the availability of the historical data in some quantity it appeared realistic and useful to pursue the project, particularly as, at the beginning of the research in 1983, little historiographic work had been undertaken in Britain to act as a solid historical basis for much of the work which was being carried out on the clerical labour process in the present day. Furthermore, female domination, in a numerical sense, of contemporary clerical work had to have an early historical development, and it was felt important that this process should be 'rediscovered'.

In the early stages of thesis development it was decided to link together an historical analysis of the feminisation of clerical work with concepts derived from labour process theory and from feminist analyses of work and the labour process. The idea was to link the position of women in wider society in the 1870 to 1914 period with a specific and detailed analysis of one area of work, to discuss how women entered that particular type of work, and how their position within such work took shape through the period in question. To do this adequately it was essential, as part of the research process, to develop some understanding of the position of women in late nineteenth and early twentieth century society, and to become sensitive to the differences which existed between women of distinct classes, strata, and groupings. Consequently, secondary sources were consulted in addition to a relatively comprehensive perusal of nineteenth century sources, to recreate a picture of the social position and role of women in the 1870 to 1914 period as it existed in 'reality', and as it was created ideologically.⁽³⁾

Once this had been achieved, and some appreciation of capitalist development in the period 1870 to 1914 had been gathered through secondary

sources (Chapter Two), it was necessary to construct an organised approach to the consideration of the large body of material which existed on clerical work generally, and female clerical work in particular, for the relevant period. A number of questions needed to be addressed. Firstly, should the research concentrate on the private sector, or should it address both the private and public sectors and draw ~~out~~ similarities and make comparisons? It was concluded that it would be of benefit to consider both private and public sector clerical employment. The bureaucratic nature of employment within the civil service lent itself most readily to analysis utilising labour process concepts. Secondly, to what extent should attempts be made to seek out and use relevant historical records kept by private companies? Data on public employment, and especially the civil service, was easily exploitable in the Public Records Office. While the British Library held a mass of relevant nineteenth century data in the form of books, journals and newspapers. There were likely to be, however, considerable difficulties in attempting to utilise company records. To begin with one was never in a position to tell, prior to perusing manuscripts and documents, just how useful they might be. Company archivists often had little idea of what they held relating to females and clerical work, and indexes were often of limited help and guidance.

Despite such problems a number of companies in the private sector were approached by mail and telephone requesting access to company records and archives. The vast majority were of great help. Companies in the banking and insurance sector did much of the work on behalf of the research, and discovered relevant documentation which was photocopied and returned for use in the study. Manufacturing companies allowed access to archives; the usefulness of the data perused and gathered varying in degree. County record offices and libraries which held business and company records were approached and/or visited for information; again the utility of the data

varied in degree. Trade unions were also approached and were helpful in their advice and aid.

The overwhelming majority of the primary materials used for this thesis, however, were discovered at the British Library. There is undoubtedly much more data located in inaccessible and accessible libraries, record offices, company archives, and personal libraries throughout the UK. However, this researcher believes that the usefulness of discovering such data would lie in its support for the arguments put forward in the following chapters, rather than in contradicting or disputing the analysis. The overall thrust of what was happening in clerical work in the crucial 1870 to 1914 period is relatively clear, it was expanding and it was becoming feminised; the historical evidence on this is indisputable. What was required to understand these developments more fully was a theoretical approach which asks why this was so, and what were the specific implications for various aspects of the clerical labour process? The following chapters aim to develop such a relationship between theory and history, between theoreticism and empiricism, and between generalisation and specificity.

NOTES

1. Braverman's (1974) seminal work, of course, stimulated the rediscovery of the Marxian idea of the labour process. Subsequently there have been an array of developments, criticisms and extensions of his work too numerous to list. In the course of this section, however, many of these works will be referred to.
2. There appear to be increasing amounts of work in this area. See Barker and Downing, 1980; Davies, 1979; Holcombe, 1973; Martindale, 1938; Silverstone, 1976; Walby, 1986; Zimmeck 1986.
3. For a discussion of 'ideology' in this context, see Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO : THE ECONOMIC BACKGROUND TO THE GROWTH OF CLERICAL WORK

It is now an accepted feature of neo-Marxist writings that towards the end of the nineteenth century in the most developed capitalist countries a new stage of the capitalist mode of production emerged; monopoly capitalism (Baran and Sweezy 1966; Friedman 1977)⁽¹⁾ As distinct from the phase of the capitalist mode of production preceeding it, (modern industry), monopoly capitalism is characterised by a few large firms who dominate production in a large number of industries, whereas the modern industry mode of production was a period of competitive capitalism among small-scale firms. These large firms are run by senior executives or managers who usually do not own the firm itself.

Attendant with the notion of monopoly capitalism is the idea of monopoly power. Within the era of monopoly capitalism large firms, in broad terms, are protected from the pressures of competition because their size prevents potential competitors from entering the field, and because their size plus their financial strength increases their power to retaliate against competitive initiatives from those already in the industry. A number of factors were involved in the tendency towards large-scale business. Firstly, there were economies of scale related to the unit-cost reductions derived from large accumulations of capital equipment; advanced and expensive technology: specialisation of function; bulk purchasing and distribution. Secondly, financial considerations induced amalgamation based on the anticipated profitability of such merger and flotation. Finally, "market vicissitudes and ambitions" influenced the tendency towards large-scale business; that is the desire to protect market shares and investments, the ambition to secure market control and stability of sales, and the pressure to mitigate competition and to expand sales and profit margins. Amalgamation was, in effect, a quick and effective way of achieving market-

ing objectives; of eliminating over capacity and too much competition, of rationalising output, meeting overseas competition or responding to a change in demand, enlarging a product range or attaining greater geographical coverage. Moreover, the growth of the large-scale firm or corporate enterprise had an ultimately important implication; it produced the division between ownership and control which is generally considered to distinguish the capitalist structure of modern industrial society (Friedman, Ibid : p.24; Supple, 1977 : pp.19-23).

Marxist interpretations of monopoly capitalism began in the early decades of the twentieth century. Lenin considered Imperialism to be the highest stage of capitalism. Imperialism for Lenin consisted of five trends in capitalist development. Firstly, a concentration of capital and production resulting in the creation of cartels as one of the bases of economic life. Secondly, the rapid concentration of the financial sector resulting in a fusion of top bankers and industrialists into a 'financial oligarchy'. Thirdly, capital exports became more important than commodity exports. Fourthly, international monopolies were created or multinational companies formed. Fifthly, the world was divided by the advanced capitalist countries. Lenin's interpretation has been criticised by more recent theories of monopoly capitalism. Particular criticism has been made of his interpretation of the relationship between developed and under-developed countries. (Friedman, ibid : pp.26-28).

It has been suggested that the crucial distinction between monopoly capitalism and competitive capitalism is that the corporate enterprises of monopoly capitalism are "price makers rather than price takers". Such enterprises are able to choose the prices they charge, they are not restricted by the externally determined market price. It is the general effect of monopoly capitalism that the surplus enjoyed by firms rises rather

than for profits to fall when costs are reduced. As Friedman recognises, Baran and Sweezy's (1966) major analytic change to Marx's framework is the replacement of the law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall by the law of the tendency for the surplus to rise. There are three problems with this analysis. Firstly, Baran and Sweezy identify that there are certain socially necessary costs of production but it is technically difficult to define what these are objectively. Secondly, Baran and Sweezy inadequately analyse the relationship between large corporations and small businesses. Thirdly, and for Friedman the most significant defect in Baran and Sweezy's analysis, they neglect the labour process.

In discussing the historical development of monopoly power in Britain, it is useful to divide the period from the 1780's to the present day into five segments. The 1780's to 1840's; the 1850's to 1870's which corresponds to the transition to modern industry and the modern industry period proper. The 1870's to 1914 which represents the transition to monopoly capitalism. The 1914 to 1945 period, which is also a transitional period; and 1945 to 1970 which represents monopoly capitalism proper. The first of these stages is that in which workers were required to be concentrated in a single place and the factory became the central feature of modern industry. This development continued into the 1850's to 1870's period wherein evolved "the extremely decentralised and disintegrated business structure" of nineteenth century British industry. The 1870's to 1914 period represented the transitional era from modern industry to monopoly capitalism. Within this period capitalism began to draw increasingly on scientific developments in order to stimulate new industries, and to technical progress across a wide range of industries. While such developments in Britain occurred more slowly than the transitions to monopoly capitalism in either America or Germany, the changes which took place between the 1870's and 1914 were nonetheless significant in terms of size

of enterprises and concentration of capital. (Friedman, *ibid* : pp.30-44; Hobsbawm, 1969 : pp.64-65).

The Growth of Clerical Work

Those who have written in the area of the growth of clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period have noted, though not explicitly, the importance of the emergence of monopoly capitalism for the development of clerical work (Holcombe, 1973; Anderson, 1976a; Crossick, 1976). These writers, and particularly Anderson, have suggested that there are three elements of particular significance related to capitalist development which account for the growth of clerical work. Firstly, the expansion of foreign trade; secondly, the position of London as the fulcrum of international finance; and thirdly, changes of scale, structure and organisation in British business. While these writers are correct in identifying the importance of these factors for the growth of clerical work, there is also a need to critically evaluate the interrelatedness of these developments to provide a more theoretically sound appreciation of capitalism, particularly within the context of the evolving national and international economy, within which Britain, and especially London, was playing a crucial role. (Hobsbawm, 1969: Chapters six and seven). In their discussion of foreign trade, Harley and McCloskey (1981), note this interconnectedness of economic developments. They suggest that the staple production for industrialised European and North American markets increased the demand for a variety of mercantile and financial services. They had to be marketed, financed, insured and transported.

The development of foreign trade and investment as reasons for the growth of clerical work are closely linked, as Lenin recognised, with the growth of the imperialist and international economy in the late nineteenth and

early twentieth centuries. The increasingly threatening competitiveness of the rapidly industrialising USA and Germany meant that Britain needed to extend its potential markets to maintain and increase its external trade. This it did through the "economic (and increasingly political) conquest of hitherto unexploited areas of the world, in other words, imperialism". (Hobsbawm, *ibid* : p.131). Moreover, the development commercially of previously neglected parts of the world, in response to the needs of industrial areas, provided abundant and lucrative opportunities for investment. This, in turn, led to the growth of London's incassately important position as the world's financial centre. The financial system as a whole was also characterised by the features of monopoly capitalism; there was a movement towards greater size, stability and cohesion. The reasoning of the banking system followed the logic that larger and more secure banks would muster and mobilise ever increasing amounts of Britain's cash balances to serve as a base for credit. Such credit would be extended not only to those manufacturers, traders, builders who required short-term finance in Britain, but also to those other countries who required such loans through the discount market. Consequently, Britain's external dealings became ever more dependant on the supply of capital and services. Britain "as financier, carrier, insurer and commercial agent, had a direct stake in the trade of half the world beside - and more". No country had ever had so massive an influence or interest in the world-wide growth of commerce, and the maintenance of the free movement and security of capital everywhere. (Hobsbawm, *ibid*; Ashworth 1965, Chapters six and seven).

The overall development of monopoly capitalism, therefore in the 1870 to 1914 period had clear implications for the growth of clerical work. It is in the context of this international economy, with the increasing financial, commercial and administrative development that Europe's salaried, 'white-collar' employees emerged. Moreover, the geographical

distribution of clerical workers in 1891 emphasises the importance of overseas and coastal trading links in creating centres of growth for clerical work. Crossick (ibid : pp.19-20) for example, using statistics from the 1891 census, has discovered that while white-collar employees were rarely apparent in large numbers in the overwhelmingly rural counties, their presence was very prominent as a percentage of all occupied males in government and trading centres. For example, in Edinburgh it was 10.9%, in London 10.1%, Aberdeen 8.6%, Bristol 8.3%, Liverpool 8.1%, Newcastle 8.0%, Cardiff 7.9%, Glasgow 7.8% and Hull 7.3%.

Although Friedman (ibid) clearly outlines in a broad sense the emergence of monopoly capitalism, his brief historical assessment does not give a complete flavour as to what was happening between sectors of the economy. This is particularly so in relation to the scale, structure and organisation of British business and government. In general terms there are three distinct areas of internal development which should be considered. Firstly, the internal service sector, i.e. banking, insurance, retailing. In banking, particularly after 1870, the concentration of capital became very clear; private banks continued to disappear, mostly through absorption into joint-stock banks. From 1862 to 1902 some two hundred private banks amalgamated; while between 1892 and 1902 amalgamation increased to such an extent that fifty-one joint-stock banks and sixty-four private banks were absorbed by other joint-stock banks. Thus, by the early twentieth century, a banking system had come into existence which tapped a larger proportion of the national cash resources, and which was dominated by a small number of firms whose interests were dispersed throughout the country. During this period the increase in bank officials and clerks was considerable. Male bank clerks numbered 15,966 in 1881, 20,793 in 1891, 30,069 in 1901 and 39,903 in 1911. The elitism of the banking industry was highly successful in excluding women; in 1881

there were only 89 banking officials/clerks registered as female; in 1891, 92; in 1901, 223; and in 1911, 476.⁽²⁾ Similarly with retailing in the same period. Though by no means in the majority (some four-fifths of all retail sales in 1915 were made by small firms), there were clear developments towards increasing size of firms, multiple shops and department stores. (Ashworth, *ibid* : pp.129-137).

The second area of internal development concerns the growth of public service, both national and local. The course of capitalist development had brought with it the problems of urbanisation, technological innovation and the complex organisation of business and society. Increasingly liberals such as T.H. Green argued for increasing government intervention in the economy and society to ameliorate the worst excesses of capitalist development. In a range of activities around 1870 and beyond, i.e. education, public health, factories, governments became more inclined to 'interfere'. Furthermore, and importantly, to "set limits to freedom of individual action in such multifarious ways and to make them reasonably effective required an increase in inspection and a steady growth of administrative and clerical staff, with provision for their accommodation" (Ashworth, *ibid* : pp.224-4). This is exactly what happened. While in 1881 there were 46,132 male and 4,353 female civil servants in total, by 1911 there were 61,213 male and 22,034 female Post Office and civil service officers and clerks alone; this excludes postmen and women, postal messengers and other civil service messengers.⁽³⁾ In local government, in 1881 there were 17,968 male and 3,017 female Poor Law or Local officers. By 1891 this had increased to 19,765 and 5,165 respectively; to 26,444 and 10,426 by 1901; and to 54,650 and 19,437 in 1911.

Thirdly, there was the process of the commercialisation and bureaucratisation of the secondary sector; the process which largely concerned

Friedman (ibid) in his assessment of the historical development of monopoly capitalism. The important point to be made here is that the degree of concentration varied between industries. Between 1894 and 1902 there were a number of very large amalgamations which transformed the structure of the sewing-cotton, textile-dyeing and finishing, cement, wallpaper and tobacco industries. There were, however, rather less significant amalgamations in the chemical and brewing and one or two other industries. All of these internal developments had important consequences for the growth of clerical labour. (Crossick, ibid : p.20, Ashworth, ibid : p.98).

The Growth of Clerical Work : Some Vital Statistics

The discussion and analysis of the feminisation of clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period pursued in subsequent chapters will concentrate predominantly on two categories of clerical worker. Primarily it will relate something of the position of the census category 'commercial and business clerk'. A precise definition of this clerk is not possible simply because of the diversity of situations, offices, firms etc in which such clerks worked (see table 4). In short, the subdivision 'commercial and business clerk' homogenizes what was, in effect, a very heterogeneous grouping and includes all clerks, typists and shorthand typists who were not law clerks, bank clerks, insurance clerks, or railway clerks. The importance of the female commercial and business clerk for an analysis of the feminisation of clerical work is quite clearly indicated in the fact that in 1911 some 93.8 per cent of all female clerks, outside of the civil service, were categorised as such.

The second grouping of female clerical workers to which a large proportion of attention will be paid are civil servants. The particular attraction of considering female civil service clerks in some depth lies in part

in the fact of the vast bureaucracy within which they worked. Moreover, the often individualised and small scale hierarchical offices which still existed in the private and commercial and business sector, (and still do), in the early monopoly capitalist era, can be contrasted with the large-scale civil service bureaucracy. In contrasting the two sectors in this way the impact on, and interrelationship between, gender and the clerical labour process can be more clearly understood in all its contexts.

The remainder of this chapter will outline two further introductory and relatively uncontroversial aspects of the growth of clerical work in the late nineteenth century. Firstly, it will provide some statistics against which the subsequent discussion must be set. Secondly, this chapter will briefly outline the nature of clerical work in the pre-monopoly capitalist period. As this does not constitute a central feature of the following analysis it relies heavily on secondary sources for information.

As a process in itself the feminisation of clerical work implies that during the years 1870 to 1914 an increasing number of women and girls were employed in offices: table one indicates the extent of this increase, while table two shows the percentage of increase. In terms of the aggregate numbers of increase it is clear that the period 1891 to 1911 is of particular significance. Table three indicates the distribution of female clerks in the various sectors of clerical work employment, excluding the civil service; while table four offers a breakdown of the category "commercial and business clerks" by industrial sector for both female and male clerks. Table five shows the increase in civil service clerks between 1901 and 1911.

Table four makes particularly interesting reading and requires some comment.

Year	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	
	Number	% of All Clerks Employed	Number	% of All Clerks Employed
1861	91,733	99.7	279	0.3
1871	129,271	98.9	1,446	1.1
1881	229,705	97.3	6,420	2.7
1891	351,486	94.9	18,947	5.1
1901	461,164	88.9	57,736	11.1
1911	561,155	81.9	124,843	18.1

Sources: Holcombe 1973: p.210 and Census of England and Wales 1911, Volume X : pp.540-3

Years	Total	Men	Women
1861 - 1871	42.1	40.9	418.3
1871 - 1881	80.6	77.7	344.0
1881 - 1891	56.9	52.8	195.2
1891 - 1901	40.1	31.2	204.7
1901 - 1911	32.2	21.7	116.2
1861 - 1911	645.6	511.7	44,646.6

Source: Holcombe, ibid : p.210

Category	Number	% of Female Clerks Employed
Commercial or Business Clerks	117,057	93.8
Law Clerks	2,159	1.8
Bank Clerks	476	0.4
Insurance Clerks	4,031	3.2
Railway Clerks	1,120	0.8
Total	124,843	100.0

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1911, Volume X : pp.540-1

Almost one half (48.3 per cent) of male commercial and business clerks were employed in three industries or services; commercial occupations; metal, machines, implements, and conveyances; food, tobacco, drink, and lodging. A high proportion of female clerks were also employed in these areas (41.8 per cent). However, there were some interestingly high concentrations of female clerks in some industries or services where the proportions of male clerks was relatively lower, for example, domestic offices or services; precious metals etc; paper, print etc, textile fabrics; dress; as well as food, tobacco, drink and lodging. In some senses this could reflect the high numbers, both relatively and absolutely, of women who were occupied in total in these industries or services (table 6).

Within each industry or service there were many sub-groups, and the 1911 Census data is sufficiently detailed to indicate high concentrations of clerks within particular industries or services. In the 'Professional Occupations etc' category over fifty percent of male clerks were employed by engineers and surveyors. Although a substantial number of female clerks were also employed by engineers and surveyors, most female clerks in the 'Professional Occupations etc' category were employed by photographers. In the 'Domestic Offices or Services' category, the vast majority of both male and female clerks were employed in laundering operations. Four 'Commercial Occupations' accounted for the considerable number of male clerks employed in this area; merchants; brokers, agents, and factors; accountants; auctioneers, appraisers, valuers, house agents. This is equally so of the women who worked as clerks in the 'Commercial Occupations' category, although 812, over 10 per cent, were categorised as working for typing etc. businesses.

Over one half of male commercial clerks employed in the 'Conveyance of Men, Goods and Messages' service were employed in the shipping and

Table 4 : Male and Female Commercial and Business Clerks by Industry or Service, 1911				
Industry or Service (a)	Male	% of All Male Commercial and Business Clerks	Female	% of All Female Commercial and Business Clerks
Professional Occupations and their subordinate services	3,123	1.0	1,736	1.7
Domestic offices or services	471	0.1	2,013	2.0
Commercial occupations (excluding total number of commercial clerks)	56,150	17.0	7,584	7.6
Conveyance of men, goods messages	15,995	4.9	865	0.9
Agriculture	767	0.2	182	0.2
Fishing	244	0.1	10	-
In and about and working and dealing in the products of mines and quarries	17,793	5.4	1,167	1.2
Metal, machines, implements and conveyances	54,871	16.6	13,010	13.1
Precious metals, jewels, watches, instruments and games	4,449	1.4	4,215	4.2
Building and works of construction	9,746	3.0	1,408	1.4
Wood, furniture, fittings and decorations	9,456	2.9	2,617	2.6
Brick, cement, pottery and glass	4,712	1.4	876	0.9
Chemicals, oil, grease, soap, resin etc.	17,242	5.2	5,117	5.1
Skins, leather, hair and feathers	3,101	0.9	1,163	1.2
Paper, print, books and stationery	24,574	7.5	12,460	12.5
Textile fabrics	30,406	9.2	11,708	11.8
Dress	9,864	3.0	6,928	7.0
Food, tobacco, drink and lodging	48,387	14.7	21,052	21.1
Gas, water, electricity supply and sanitation service	6,312	1.9	166	0.2
Other, general and undefined works and dealers	12,145	3.7	5,382	5.4

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1911 Volume X : pp.560-589

Note (a) The 'Industry or Service' classification is that used in the 1911 Census

<u>Table 5 : Male and Female Clerks Employed in the Post Office and Civil Service, 1901 and 1911</u>		
	1901	1911
Males	42,475	61,313
Females	14,316	22,034
Source: Census of England and Wales, 1911, Volume X : p.540		

<u>Table 6 : Numbers of Men and Women Employed in Selected Industries or Services</u>		
Industry or Service	Males	Females
Domestic Offices or Services	387,677	1,734,040
Precious metals etc.	99,931	23,663
Paper, print etc.	219,651	121,309
Textile fabrics	571,411	746,154
Dress	439,115	755,964
Food, tobacco etc.	913,565	474,683
Source: Census of England and Wales, 1911, Volume X: pp.2-5		

navigation service and the harbour, dock, wharf, lighthouse service. Most of the small number of female clerks employed in this area were likewise employed in the harbour, dock, wharf, lighthouse service. In mining and quarrying, another traditionally male-dominated industry, the overwhelming majority of clerks were employed at coal and shale mines, or by coal dealers. Interestingly, of the small number of female clerks located in this industry, very few worked at the mines, the majority (76.1 per cent) working for dealers.

Of the clerks working in 'Metals, Machines, Implements, and Conveyances', 31 per cent of male clerks were employed in engineering and machine making. Of female clerks in this industry 23.5 per cent were employed in this area. Dealers in metals also employed clerks in some numbers; 13 per cent of male and 16.8 per cent of female clerks were employed thus.

In the 'Precious Metals, Jewels, Watches, Instruments and Games' category the distribution of clerks across sub-categories was fairly even, although goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewellers, lapidaries etc employed 18.1 per cent of male and 41.2 per cent of female clerks. It is not easy to fathom as to why female clerks should have been preferred by such employers, although it is likely to have had something to do with the 'feminisation' of precious metals etc in the form of personal decoration. In short, it is possibly derived from the prevailing conceptions of and about women and the reflection of this in occupational segregation. This is not a debate, however, on which we will linger here.

Male clerks in the 'Wood, Furniture, Fittings and Decorations' industry were concentrated in the offices of timber, wood etc dealers (46 per cent). Female clerks, however, were largely to be found in the offices of furniture dealers (43.2 per cent), only 13.7 per cent were employed by timber, wood etc dealers. In 'Chemicals, Oil, Grease, Soap, Resin etc' 17.7 per cent of male clerks were employed in chemical manufacturing establishments, as against 21.7 per cent of female clerks in this industry. The other substantial area of employment for female clerks in this industrial sector was chemists and druggists; 31.7 per cent. This compares with only 13.6 per cent of male clerks.

For both male and female clerks in the 'Paper, Prints, Books and Stationery' industry, four sub-groups provided the majority of clerical jobs; in stationers, printing and lithography businesses, various stationery manufacturing etc businesses, and book publishers and sellers. The majority of clerks in the 'Textile Fabrics' industry were employed by dealers in textiles and fabrics. Where clerks were required by textile manufacturers, particularly cotton manufacturers, male clerks were preferred. In the 'Dress' industry three sub-groups employed the majority of both male and

female clerks; tailors, clothiers and outfitters, and boot and shoe etc manufacturers. In areas dealing specifically with female dress it is unsurprising to discover that the majority of clerks employed were female.

The broadly defined 'Food, Tobacco, Drink and Lodging' industry provides a number of interesting figures. The largest proportion of male clerks here were employed by brewers (18.3 per cent); the figure for females employed by brewers as clerks was under 1 per cent. Tea, coffee, and chocolate dealers employed 14.9 per cent of male clerks in the 'Food etc' industry, and 22.6 per cent of female clerks, making this the sub-group employing most female clerks in this industry. The substantial numbers of female clerks in this industry as a whole, and particularly their concentration in relatively small retail outlets and in coffee/eating houses or hotels and inns, suggests that many of them may have been a daughter or wife in a family business. This is entirely speculation, and it should be remembered that only a very small proportion of female clerks were married (see Chapter Five). However, the family connection remains a plausible explanation for this concentration of female clerks.

The importance of retailing as a growth area for clerical employment is indicated within the 'Other, General, and Undefined Workers and Dealers' category. Of the clerks employed in this grouping 75.3 per cent of females and 65.6 per cent of males were employed by multiple shops/stores or general dealers; the forerunners of the modern department stores and supermarkets.

An assessment of where female clerks were employed by industrial or service sub-categories indicates that most were employed at the dealing, trading or retailing end of the industry or service in which they worked. Very

few were to be found at the manufacturing or mining end, suggesting that the employment of female clerks was more readily acceptable in a 'more refined', 'less masculine' environment. Of course, it may equally be associated with the relative cheapness of female clerks in a highly competitive market. These are issues addressed in the following chapters.

Two further tables are produced as background to the following chapters. Firstly, table seven emphasises the large proportions of both male and female commercial and business clerks who worked in London in comparison with selected other regions. Table eight shows that the increase in the numbers of females employed as clerks in the 1861 to 1911 period in England and Wales was paralleled by increases, though of a lower order, in the numbers of females employed in other 'white-collar' occupations.

Table 7 : Numbers of Clerks Employed in Selected Localities, 1911		
Locality	Male	Female
London	82,027	32,893
Yorkshire	32,986	8,322
Lancashire and Cheshire	69,989	14,533
North and West Midlands (a)	50,804	21,188
South Midland and Eastern (b)	61,353	19,931
Wales	12,577	2,027

Source: Census of England and Wales, Volume X : p.629

Notes (a) Includes Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Herefordshire, Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire, Rutlandshire

(b) Includes Northants, Oxon, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hunts, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Middlesex

The Pre-Monopoly Capitalist Office

It would be a considerable oversimplification to argue that the progress of the clerical labour process into the monopoly capitalist era signalled a

<u>Table 8 : Numbers of Teachers, Nurses, Shop Assistants, Clerks and Civil Servants Employed in England and Wales, 1861 - 1911</u>				
Year	<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>	
	Number	% of All Teachers : etc. Employed	Number	% of All Teachers : etc. Employed
1861	551,548	73.9	194,438	26.1
1871	705,410	73.8	250,604	26.2
1881	851,574	72.9	316,001	27.1
1891	1,107,715	71.3	445,624	28.7
1901	1,345,312	70.5	561,985	29.5
1911	1,612,478	67.1	791,242	32.9

Source: Holcombe, *ibid* : p.214

development from the small-scale office to large-scale bureaucracies. While it seems clear that in the mid-nineteenth century most clerks worked in the small counting-house, particularly those engaged in commerce, by the first world war most clerks continued to work in small offices, even though the large-scale departmentalised office was very much a reality. Consequently, the changes which were taking place in the clerical labour process in the 1870 to 1914 period cannot be understood in terms of changes in the sizes of offices per se, but in the nature and organisation of the work, the increasing size of the clerical labour force, and the inter-relationships between clerical and administrative workers. As Braverman suggested, there was a move away from the "intimate associations, the atmosphere of mutual obligation, and the degree of loyalty which characterised the small office". It has also been argued that until the emergence of monopoly capitalism there was little need to restructure, reorganise and redevelop the clerical labour process on the part of employers. (Anderson, *ibid*: p.9; Klingender, 1935: p.2).

The small-scale pre-monopoly capitalist office engendered employer/employee relationships which were almost feudal; the relationship was more

akin to master and servant than capitalist and wage labourer. The association was a strongly paternal one in which clerks, in return for loyal service, expected protection and security from their employer. While it would be an oversimplification to suggest that all clerks enjoyed such close relationships with their employers, it is reasonable to propose that most mid-nineteenth century clerks enjoyed a relatively privileged employment situation, certainly relative to manual workers in the same period. Although as both Anderson (ibid : passim) and Klingender (ibid : Chapter two) point out, the pay, security of employment, and prospects of clerks, even in the 1840 to 1860 period were by no means universally privileged; and there were considerable variations between firms (Anderson, ibid : pp.13-15). Overall, however, John Stuart Mill's mid-nineteenth century assessment of the social and economic position of the clerk holds good; "his (sic) work is not one tenth part as hard (of a bricklayer's labourer), it is quite easy to learn, and his condition is less precarious, a clerk's place being generally a place for life". The relatively better pay of the clerk was due, in Mill's opinion, to educational monopoly, "the small degree of education required being not so generally diffused as to call forth the natural number of competitors"; and partly "to the remaining influences of an ancient custom, which required that clerks should maintain the dress and appearance of a more highly paid class" (quoted in Kingender, ibid : p.3).

The relatively privileged position of clerks in the pre-monopoly capitalist period, the fact that they were largely from 'well-to-do' backgrounds, and the nature of employer/employee relationships... together with the prevailing work related values of Victorian society, i.e. self-help, personal success, contributed considerably to the development of the idea of the 'gospel of success' among clerks. This 'gospel of success' promoted the notion that all clerks could themselves one day become

employers - and most clerks believed it. Indeed, it appears that such was the strength of this belief that it persisted amongst clerks well into the 1870 to 1914 period and beyond (Anderson, *ibid* : pp.41-9). Despite this an increasing number of clerks did begin to doubt the 'inevitability' of becoming employers as the clerical labour process developed in the late nineteenth century. The changes which were occurring within clerical work, the demand for clerical labour, changes in employer/employee relationships, changes to the structure and organisation of office work, new forms of bureaucratic controls over clerks, were affecting the status of clerical work per se. Increasingly clerks began to question whether personal success was possible within such developments. Thus clerks, particularly after 1870, sought ways of restoring their 'privileged' position, or of ameliorating the effects of their status decline, through the formation of voluntary associations (such as the Liverpool Clerks Association), through the use of commercial education, or through trade unionism (the National Union of Clerks). Moreover, in their perceptions of the causes for their declining opportunities and status male clerks considered the entry of females into clerical work as a significant factor (Anderson, *ibid* : pp.52-65).⁽⁵⁾

Developments in the clerical labour process after 1870 were intimately linked with the rise of monopoly capitalism. There were also necessarily other developments which needed to occur in order that the increasing demand for clerical workers could be satisfied. For example, a supply needed to be available and they would require a certain level of literacy and numeracy. These questions are particularly relevant in the context of the entry of females into clerical work.

NOTES

1. See also Hannah, 1965 and Payne, 1967 for considerations of the rise of the large-scale company.
2. Census of England and Wales 1911, Volume X, Occupations and Industries : p.541
3. Ibid : p.540
4. Table four shows the industrial sectors in which the census category "commercial and business clerks" were working for the 1911 census. Some comments on these figures are made.
5. See Chapter Nine.

CHAPTER THREE : THE VICTORIAN 'MIDDLE-CLASS WOMAN AND WORK : CONTEXT
AND VALUES

The question of where women stand in relation to issues of class position and social stratification is an enduring one. Traditionally theorists have built their assumptions about social stratification on the argument that it is men's occupations which ultimately determine the relationship between the family and the class structure of society. Some such theorists (Parkin, 1971) have considered sexual stratification to be irrelevant to social stratification theorisations. Others (Giddens, 1973) believe that for women to be fully integrated into a wider ranging social stratification theory they must be liberated from the family. Until this is achieved their relevance to an analysis of class structure will remain peripheral. Thirdly, writers such as Westergaard and Resler (1975) suggest that the differences between women employed in higher status jobs and those in lower status jobs, in terms of income, contributes to the accentuation of class inequalities. Thus, sexual inequality increases the extent of class inequality.

Feminist writings in recent years have questioned these assumptions (Acker, 1973; Cockburn, 1983; Crompton and Mann (eds), 1986; Gamarnikow et al (eds), 1983; Garnsey, 1978; West, 1978), and have sought to develop a better understanding of firstly, the relationship of women in employment to the class structure, and secondly, the interrelationship between patriarchal social relations and class relations, in short, between gender and class. These are issues which, as chapter one argued, can only adequately be confronted within the dynamics of labour process theory, and the fluidity of class positions and the impact of the 'gender dimension' on them, over time.

While the important issue of the stratification question in relation to

female clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period will be considered in the following chapters, the notion of 'middle-class' women is extremely pertinent in the overall context of the nineteenth century. The subtitle of Lee Holcombe's (1973) work on 'Victorian Ladies at Work', for example, is 'Middle Class Working Women in England and Wales 1850-1914', but she offers no definition of or explanation for this usage. Similarly Jane Lewis (1984) separates her analysis of women in England into two parts; working class women and middle class women, but short of mentioning that "divisions between social classes have been broadly drawn", and adding the qualification that it "cannot always be assumed that the housewife shares her husband's socio-economic class", she fails to expand. (Lewis, 1984 : p.xiii).

In relation to class, of course, a person must have some relationship to the economic relations of production to have a class position. This much, at this stage, must be taken for granted. If it is taken for granted, however, the 'middle class' woman in the mid-nineteenth century could not possibly have had a personal class position because only a minute proportion of them, as far as we can tell, actually worked, or if they did work, many worked for and within the family or family business, perhaps as bookkeepers. These women were working in the economic sphere, to be sure, but were working privately, and indirectly. In this period, therefore, which might be dated no more precisely than the mid-nineteenth century, the socio-economic position of the 'middle-class' woman, as determined by the relationship between an individual and the capitalist relations of production, was defined by her father's/husband's occupation and social status. Therefore, in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly in the period up to the increasing entry of these women into employment, their socio-economic position derived from the fact that their father or husband was an officer in the army or navy, a landowner, clergy-

man, banker, a substantially large merchant or wholesale dealer, a member of the stock exchange, a professional man, viz medical man, lawyer, artist or a purely literary man, a manager or company secretary, or a clerk in the Houses of Parliament. Thane (1981) has suggested that "it was a small group comprising until 1871c 17,000 merchants and bankers, about 1,700 shipowners, 15,000 doctors, 3,500 barristers, and 7,000 architects, among others". This is not to suggest that a traditional assumption is being made about the class structure of mid-nineteenth century society, i.e. that women, and 'middle class' women in particular, were peripheral to it. There are clearly a set of patriarchal social relations, or a sexual stratification of society, which interconnects with the social stratification to bring about the exclusion of 'middle class' women from work, and therefore, from class relations. Thus, 'middle-class' women are not peripheral to an analysis of social stratification in this historical period, or in any other, but the existence of another form of social stratification based upon gender renders their involvement within the economic relations of production, at this point in history, unlikely.⁽¹⁾ Furthermore, when they do enter paid work from circa 1870 onwards the sexual stratification factor does not become secondary, in relation to social stratification, but continues to interact with it in ways which are important for stratification theory overall. Thus, as the labour process develops, and in particular the clerical labour process in the 1870 to 1914 period, the relationship between social and sexual stratification becomes more apparent at the point of work, but is no more important than it was at the point where 'middle-class' women were not working. Stratification by gender and stratification by class are in continuous states of flux as the labour process develops.

A further point, which will be explored more fully in the following chapter, is the significance, particularly after circa 1870, of the

"socially mobile lower middle class" woman in the context of clerical work. (Hammerton, 1977 : p.54). Such females were the daughters of small and medium sized merchants and manufacturers. For the moment the issues to be confronted relate to the historical separation of the home and the workplace, and how it affected the role and position of the 'middle class' woman in nineteenth century Britain.

The Ideology of Domesticity : Education and the Notion of Sexual Identity

Patriarchal social relations and capitalist social relations are intimately linked within the development of labour processes; this much the following chapters will make clear. However, in Victorian society, and particularly 'middle-class' Victorian society, despite what was to occur in clerical work with the onset of monopoly capitalism after 1870, a set of values prevailed which stressed that women should not undertake paid employment. According to Hall (1976 : p.51) these values were a relatively autonomous ideological feature of the nineteenth century social formation. She believes that in the context of women's entry into work two sets of considerations defined what was 'proper' work for them. Firstly, what it is on the whole thought right and proper for women to do; and secondly, what was, given the circumstances of production at the time, available for women to do. As will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, in the clerical work context, the impetus for the widespread employment of women was their cheapness rather than ideological shifts concerning 'right and proper work'. Furthermore, Hall does not make it clear that the changing circumstances of production was a most significant economic feature drawing women into work, particularly clerical work. It appears that the changing requirements of capital induced ideological shifts of great significance. To be sure, as the following chapter will indicate, there was some ideological shift prior to the massive expansion of clerical work, to make

such work acceptable for women. However, by and large, the development of capitalism was the singular most important factor in instigating such change.

While Hall overexaggerates the ideological in her assessment of the development of certain kinds of work for women, she provides a useful analysis of the historical separation of the home and workplace. Within capitalism, she argues, women gradually become defined ideologically as secondary. She does not make it clear who defines women as such, presumably men. However, as a result of this secondary position women, within capitalism, have developed two main functions; firstly, "the organisation of a household which is no longer the central unit of production", and, secondly, "the provision of a cheap supply of labour". Hall concludes that since the early nineteenth century the key to the sexual division of labour as we know it is the ideology of domesticity, "which ties women into the home and stresses their role as wife and mother". She goes on "the fact that a woman's place is in the home justifies the definition of her work outside the home as secondary - and, therefore, typically low paid and unskilled" (Hall, *ibid* : p.69). This is not, however, a natural phenomenon, but a cultural creation.

The ideology of domesticity of which Hall writes is of central importance for an understanding of the sexual division of labour within the capitalist mode of production. Indeed, it was a creation of the changes which the development of capitalism induced. As capitalism emerged and developed the economic, social, and ideological position of the family changed. The emergence of capitalism "led to extensive changes in the organisation and function of the family", it "started to be less important in production but at the same time far more important in the creation of the relations of capitalist production" (*ibid* : p.52). Moreover, these changes had

a considerable influence on the position of the housewife. As the separation of commodity production from domestic labour occurred "a new set of values for the wives of the successful bourgeoisie" developed, which over time formulated themselves into an ideology of domesticity.

It seems clear that the conceptualisation of ideology being developed by Hall in the context of the notion of the 'ideology of domesticity' is one which suggests that this particularistic ideology became part of the total-dominant ideology of the capitalist mode of production. It became a part of the "total structure of the mind" (Mannheim, 1970 : p.50). In this sense, dominant ideology in its totality, which legitimated the economic and social structure of capitalism in a gradual and developing way as the capitalist mode of production emerged, also incorporated a particular, though within its own sphere, a total, 'ideology' of domesticity. This ideological construction, specific to the capitalist mode of production, but also drawing on features of patriarchal ideology from pre-capitalist modes for its internal totality and unity, becomes a lived experience. It is not merely a body of ideas but is "a necessary component of everyday social practice" (Bernardes, 1985 : p.277). Thus, relationships of domination and subordination are constantly expressed in people's "daily, subjective experiences in these structures" from within which these relationships derive (Stewart, 1981 : p.301). The 'ideas' of a human subject are thus anything but 'false':

"The imaginary does not represent anything other than what it is, and it cannot be false since it is not an idea or conception of things, but it is part of social relations which has a definite effect. In living 'as if', subjects do not live in illusion, this 'as if' is the reality of their existence as subjects"

(Hirst quoted in Strawbridge, 1982 : p.132)

Thus, as Althusser argues, an ideological apparatus has a material existence, an individual's ideas exist in his/her actions, and "these actions are inserted into practices, which are governed by rituals in which the practices are inscribed, within the material existence of an ideological apparatus". (Strawbridge, *ibid* : p.133).

The implications of this for individuals as subjects are crucial to Althusser's thesis (1971 : pp.123-173). The notion of ideology which Althusser develops, stressing that ideas are the lived experiences of individuals, suggests that even before birth every individual has a personal identity; "you and I are always already subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects". The emergence of the ideology of domesticity within capitalism, therefore, will, after its emergence interpellate, or hail, individuals as subjects according to an individual's pre-determined position within the social totality, as any number of ideological apparatuses may have constituted this position. The operation of the ideological apparatus of domesticity, thus interpellates certain kinds of women in such a way that they recognise their designated role within the social totality. This recognition of this ideology is in fact the 'consciousness' of those women (and men) who will live and experience it as 'reality'. The ideology of domesticity is therefore held to be a 'real' and 'true' aspect of social totality; a 'natural' and enduring feature of the social structure. Viewed in this way ideology is not merely a system of beliefs to be challenged by an alternative, objectively constructed belief system, but is at the very root of human consciousness and subjective experience.

To return to Hall's arguments, they have been reiterated and reinforced by Hilary Wainwright (1978). She argues that the industrial changes of

the early nineteenth century left the labour involved in the reproduction and maintenance of the family outside of wage labour and exchange relations: "this aspect of production remained within the private sphere of the sexual division of labour, to be carried out on the basis of the sexual division of labour in which the man - because of a pre-existing sexual division - was the main wage earner and the woman the housewife". Wainwright is arguing, in effect, that sexual divisions pre-exist the capitalist mode of production (CMP). That what capitalism does is to reshape the nature of these divisions, and thus these patriarchal relations, within the capitalist context; thereby delimiting their degree of autonomy, but is at the same time unable, for obvious reasons, to totally eradicate the fact that such sexual divisions pre-existed the capitalist mode of production, therefore accepting their relatively autonomous nature. As well as creating its own set of context specific sexual relations, capitalist patriarchy, as a social formation, ultimately underpins the form which the sexual division takes. It must also reproduce itself within the newly evolving capitalist society. Wainwright argues that in considering the question of the reproduction of capitalist patriarchy four factors should be appreciated. Firstly, "the way in which familial relations based on this sexual division give men and women a sexual identity, an interpretation of their own biology around a sharp polarisation between masculinity and femininity". Secondly, "the way that the education system prepares the majority of women for the future job market on the assumption that 'homemaking' will be their primary obligation". Thirdly, "there is the dependence of employers on a secondary labour force, a reserve force". And, fourthly, "there is no impetus for the state or for employers to concern themselves with domestic labour beyond ensuring that a sufficient supply of labour power reaches the market".

From this point the discussion will consider the first two of Wainwright's

factors, and pose the question, to what extent and how did, the sexual division of labour manifest itself and thus reproduce itself in the expressed attitudes and beliefs of the Victorian middle classes? Carol Dyhouse (1981 : p.21) suggests that "if one searches for some dominant theme in the understanding about femininity mothers of all social levels passed on to their daughters, it can probably best be found in the ideas of service and self-sacrifice. Women were expected to occupy themselves in providing an environment - a context in which men could live and work". This point is made no more visible than in the nineteenth century periodicals for the 'thinking' section of the population. James Hogg, writing in 'Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine', constructed the following peroration:

"Man may for wealth or glory roam,
But woman must be blest at home.
To this her efforts ever tend,
'Tis her great object and her end"(2)

Woman's role, it was argued, was;

"not to make laws, not to lead armies, not to govern empires, but to form those by whom laws are made, and armies led, and empires governed; to guard from the slightest taint of possible infirmity the frail and as yet spotless creature whose moral, no less than his physical, being must be derived from her; to inspire those principles, to inculcate those doctrines, to animate those sentiments, which generations yet unborn, and nation's yet uncivilised, shall learn to bless; to soften firmness into mercy, to chasten honour into refinement, to exalt generosity into virtue; by her soothing cares allay the anguish of the body, and the far worst anguish of the mind; by

her tenderness to disarm passion, by her purity to triumph over sense; to cheer the scholar sinking under his toil; to console the statesman for the ingratitude of a mistaken people; to be the compensation for hopes that are blighted, for friends that are perfidious, for happiness that has passed away".⁽³⁾

Furthermore:

"The proper destiny of woman is to be married and to bear children; to regulate the affairs of the household; and to be an aid and companion to her husband. That is also the doctrine of Christianity and civilisation; and, beyond all doubt, the highest amount of human happiness is to be found in such arrangement ... The functions of the wife, except among the poorer class, are or ought to be exclusively domestic".⁽⁴⁾

Dyhouse (ibid) suggested in the quotation above that it was not only amongst the middle classes that such attitudes existed, while Sally Mitchell (1977) argues that although "the female redundancy caused by male emigration probably hit hardest at the ambitious working class", the family magazines of the period did not depict alternatives to the role of mother and wife for those women of this social category who remained unmarried. Instead they fed "the fantasy that love and marriage would eventually come, bringing in train emotional fulfilment, legal and economic protection, and a satisfactory place in the social system". (Mitchell, 1977).

The ideology of domesticity, as created by the development of capitalist patriarchy, pervaded the thinking, the psyche, in fact, of men and women. It was (indeed is) in many respects, a patriarchal hegemony which infiltrated and infected every feature of social, economic, and political life.

It manifests itself not only in the structure and organisation of society, but in the psychological construction of an 'ideal' woman. Jill Conway (1972) proposes, for example, that nineteenth century Spencerian sociology argued that certain mental and emotional characteristics were acquired by women through their prolonged existence in a male dominated environment; "one such trait bound to be environmentally acquired was the desire for approval and the capacity to deceive" (Conway, 1972). Conway also discusses the sexism implicit in the work of the socio-biologist Patrick Geddes who in 1889 published his 'The Evolution of Sex'. She suggests that Geddes "by making sperm and ovum exhibit the qualities of male katabolism or female anabolism was able to deduce a dichotomy between the temperaments of the sexes which was easily accommodated to the romantic ideal of male rationality and female intuition". Geddes, in short, proposed a biologically determinist view of sex role differentiation, neither political nor technological change could overcome this natural arrangement. Indeed, "to free women from their passivity and to open areas of social activity to them which placed them in competition with men would be socially dangerous". Woman's role in society was a product of natural laws which operated beyond the frontiers of human control (see Lewis, 1984 : pp.81-106 for a summary of these arguments). And, although such biologism was challenged in the early twentieth century, and in particular by Hobhousian social psychology (See Hobson and Ginsberg, 1931), the tendency continues within traditional sociological perspectives (and in some radical perspectives) to invoke biologism hidden beneath "irrelevant ponderosity". (See Parsons, 1959 for an example of this biologism; Beechey, 1978 for a critique; and C. Wright Mills, 1977 on "irrelevant ponderosity".)

As the sexual division of labour became recognised as a normative aspect of nineteenth century capitalist society, scientists sought to explain it, and in so doing maintained and perpetuated it, i.e. Patrick Geddes.

A preoccupation with an ideal of womanhood is also to be found "as a most striking characteristic" of Victorian literature (Christ, 1977). In assessing Tennyson's 'The Princess' and Coventry Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House' Christ argues that "feminist critics such as Kate Millett and Katharine Rogers see in 'The Princess' an attempt to preserve true womanhood in reaction to the threat of feminine emancipation. Such a reading of the poem is correct, but Tennyson seems equally concerned with the feminisation of men and the feminisation of women. His concern suggests that, like Patmore, he idealises certain feminine postures, not merely because he wants to keep women in their place, but because he finds such postures so attractive himself".

Familial relations then, based on a sexual division of labour specific to the CMP, but not created by capitalism, induced the development of sexual identities for men and women of the middle classes in Victorian society. These identities gave men and women "an interpretation of their own biology around a sharp polarisation between masculinity and femininity". (Christ, 1977), which was to determine, in part, the extent and nature of women's involvement in the evolving clerical labour process.

The second issue raised by Wainwright concerns the role of education in socialising females for their 'natural' role and position within society. Holcombe (1973 : p.20) felt that nineteenth century developments in the education of middle class women "were of the greatest importance to the women's movement, for the poor education which middle class women received in the mid-nineteenth century largely explained their sad plight when they were forced to find work, and improvement in their education was the necessary basis of women's progress in all fields". Despite the partial truth of this argument (it ignores the development of capitalism and the nature of work available to middle class women, as important

factors in the entry of females into work, particularly clerical work), what is significant about the evolution of education for middle class women in the nineteenth century, in the present context, is that it was crucially implicated in perpetuating the sexual division of labour. According to Delamont (1978a) by 1850 a movement had developed in England which attacked the useless and expensive education (aimed at enhancing marriage opportunities) which was all that was available to well off middle class women. The frustration and anger suffered by the victims of such education were expressed by Charlotte Bronte in *Jane Eyre*, published in 1847:

"Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do. They suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow minded of their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing the piano and embroidering bands. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex".

Despite Bronte's plea for a "less rigid restraint" on upper middle class women, there were rather more fundamental demographic reasons as to why the education of 'ladies' needed to be improved; the so-called "surplus of women". As table nine shows between 1871 and 1911 there was a considerable and increasing number of 'excess' women, although the percentage of 'excess' for the 15 to 44 age group is particularly skewed in 1871. The main factors contributing to the predominance of females were the higher death-rates of males and the greater number of male emigrants

Table 9 : 'Excess' Women in Selected Years			
Year	'Excess' Women (000's)		
	(1) All Ages	(2) Ages 15-44	2 as % of 1
1871	594	382	64.3
1881	694	369	53.2
1891	882	479	54.3
1901	1070	613	57.3
1911	1178	664	56.4

Source: Lewis, 1984 : p.3

(Marsh, 1977 : p.20). Moreover, "the 'excess' of women caused considerable anguish, particularly in the nineteenth century, because it became inevitable that some women would not be able to fulfil their 'natural destiny' of marriage and motherhood". Also, the "problem was considered particularly vexing because, as the research of contemporaries showed, it affected middle class women most". (Lewis, *ibid* : p.4).

Two solutions were offered to these problems. Firstly, the 'excess' women of the nineteenth century could also go to the colonies, or secondly, women should be educated to enhance their prospects of finding employment. While Delamont (1978a) believes the idea of emigration was largely viewed as impracticable by contemporaries, Hammerton (1977) feels the two solutions coexisted; education as a long term campaign, emigration as a short term palliative. Nevertheless, it is clear that education for middle class women did develop as a long term objective, but its form and shape were inevitably constructed by the pervasive hegemony of the ideology of domesticity. Thus, "the educational pioneers were ladies, had to act like ladies, and ensure that the institutions they founded had good reputations" (Delamont, 1978a : p.152). Inevitably questions were raised concerning the propriety of women's education; were women capable, physically and mentally, of undertaking serious learning, would

they remain feminine; would it affect their prospects of marriage? Furthermore, should women be educated as completely as men, or should they be taught to fulfil their roles as mothers, nurses, and teachers? In short, the pioneers of women's education were "inexorably caught in the trap of double conformity". They and "their students were forced to adhere strictly to both the norms of ladylike behaviour and to the minutest demands of male scholarship, exams and all". (Delamont, 1978a : p.159).

In a second paper Delamont (1978b) develops these arguments to include the domestic ideology and the inevitable class based nature of the agitation for female education. She argues that "the pioneer's educational ideology was class based, concentrated on the two problems highlighted ... of providing ladylike education equal to men's and was not designed to establish a sexually uniform curriculum for the working class" (Delamont, 1978b pp.166-7). Not only were the pioneers concerned with establishing a distinction in educational provision between the middle and working classes from the later nineteenth century on, but they were also keen to maintain a subtle series of intra-class distinctions within their campaign (Delamont, 1978b : pp.173-7). More importantly there was a strong belief throughout the nineteenth century that women and men should occupy separate spheres of activity. "The strength, pervasiveness, and contradictions of this belief were central to the educational debates of the nineteenth century". The "domestic dream" remained unchallenged by these developments, indeed, only by glorifying the domestic ideal could the educational pioneers make any progress; "women's education could only progress if the family was not threatened". Thus, as Delamont concludes (1978b : p.184), the educational ideas of the pioneers "were hidebound by Victorian convention and by educational theory and practice of the times, and it is not surprising that they were not ready to plan a feminist education for the less able and the working class who later came to be educated."

Work and the 'Middle-Class' Victorian Woman

Holcombe (1973) argued essentially that it was the expansion of education among 'middle-class' women in the second half of the nineteenth century which led to their increased employment opportunities in this period. This is only partially correct, certainly education increased women's 'human capital', but the opportunities for employment were not opened up by education, rather they were opened up by capitalist development. However, while material changes within the economy were to be the prime motors for the employment of greater numbers of 'genteel' women (coupled, as we shall discover, with a particular use of the gender dimension to solve certain problems thrown up by the development of the clerical labour process), pre-dating the large-scale entry of 'middle-class' women into work, and in some senses an indicator, though not an instigator of the forthcoming changes in the demand for female workers in 'white-collar' areas, was a reconsideration of the relationship between the 'middle class' woman and paid employment.

Of some importance within the framework of this 'reconsideration' was the Victorian women's movement, a group of middle class women operating out of Langham Place in London who included Barbara Leigh-Smith, the daughter of a radical MP, Bessie Rayner-Parkes, whose father was a radical lawyer, Adelaide Procter the daughter of a poet, and Jessie Boucherett a Lincolnshire squire's daughter. They drew their philosophy from Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, and believed that the liberal rights of man were the liberal rights of women also. As a group they wrote copiously on all manner of important nineteenth century topics, education, employment, politics etc. They articulated the problems of many thousands of 'decayed' middle class women and their need for employment. Rayner-Parkes, writing in 1860, felt that the immediate cause of the

women's movement was economic.

"The emigration of men, the creation of the factory system, the disruption from numerous causes of the simple old life—simple, kindly, and in many instances coarse, threw numbers of women on their own resources. Then began the cry for equal advantages, equal education. The slow process of natural development was too tardy for the pressing need".

(Quoted in Crow, 1971 : p.148)

In her book, Holcombe (ibid: Chapter 1) exaggerates the radical implications of the nineteenth century women's movement, while recognising its essentially class based nature and philosophy. It was not, as she suggests, "an attack on the 'patriarchal ideal' of Victorian society and the special role of domesticity and dependence, of subjection which it assigned to the perfect woman". (ibid : p.3). This is because, as Holcombe herself makes clear, "the patriarchal ideal of society was inextricably bound up with the ideal of the home", which the Victorian feminists were hardly prepared to challenge; a fact which she recognises (ibid : p.8). It is more reasonable to suggest that the nineteenth century feminist movement was forced to accept, as a prerequisite for acceptance of their movement in male dominated society, the patriarchal organisation of society. Moreover, these women were absolutely determined not to threaten the class structure of society as well as not to threaten patriarchal relations.

"The leaders of the movement were, as we have remarked, exceptional women, but they were women of one class and with one outlook in life; they fought against what they felt cramped their own individuality, and they did not fully realise the solidarity

of their sex. Behind them they had practically women of a single type - cultured women of the middle class, who were restless at the old restrictions, eager for self-development and a more intellectually active life. For a time it seemed as if the chief result of the movement would be to produce and to some extent find work for, an intellectual proletariat among middle class women - numerous as compared to the posts which could be found for it, insignificantly small as compared with the bulk of womanhood ... For them 'equality of opportunity' seemed to solve the problem of women's emancipation. With this sort of solution - increased power of self-realisation in a narrow class of picked women, chiefly unmarried women of the middle class - the movement would have to culminate were equality of opportunity to remain its watchword".⁽⁵⁾

Eleanor Marx Aveling and Edward Aveling argued similarly that the women's movement "make no suggestion that is outside the limits of the society of today".⁽⁶⁾ The hegemony of, patriarchal capitalism, in effect, neutered the potency of the Victorian women's movement which accepted the quintessential features of nineteenth century society. Within this social formation, such middle class women strove to improve the position of women of equal social position to their own in response to specific contemporary conjunctures, i.e. the shortage of men, the tendency of men to marry later etc.

While it would be easy to overstate the significance of the Victorian women's movement in opening up areas of employment for women, it did have some impact, though a minor one, on societal perceptions of the role of middle class females. In short, it was not a major impetus for the increasing employment of females in clerical or other work. Nevertheless,

this ideological shift does deserve attention. As early as 1841 middle class commentators recognised the breadth of the 'excess' females problem:

"Necessity will in all probability soon remove some of the impediments to female industry. It is becoming everyday more difficult to provide for daughters as mere ladies; and as opinion quickly conforms to necessity, to have nothing to do, and to do nothing, will cease to be considered essentially ladylike".⁽⁷⁾

However, despite the increasingly vociferous nature of the 'anti-accomplishments' lobby (those who opposed the frivolous and useless life most upper middle class women lived), the prevailing values remained that for women of such social status to contemplate anything other than economic idleness was "an affront against nature". Such, indeed, was the dominance of this attitude that the expanding bourgeois class began to ape the lifestyle of the aristocracy and the upper middle class. The economic idleness of women became an important element indicating social status (Crow, 1971 : Chapter 3; cf Branca, 1974 and 1975). Moreover, as suggested above, much scientific and literary work of the period reflected and thus perpetuated this conception of woman's role. It was simply unnatural for women to perform any other role in society because they were, by nature, morally and intellectually the inferior of men. A contributor to the 'Edinburgh Review' lists these moral and intellectual characteristics:

"Firstly, women have less of active, and more of passive courage than men. Secondly, women have more excitability of nerve; and with it, all those qualities which such excitability tends

to produce. Thirdly, women are more enthusiastic. Fourthly, women have a nicer perception of minute circumstances. Fifthly, women are not superior to man in those powers of association which produce wit. Sixthly, women are inferior in the power of close and logical reasoning. Seventhly, they are less dispassionate -- less able to place their feelings in subjection to their judgement, and to bring themselves to a conclusion which is at variance with their prepossessions. Eighthly, women have less power of combination and generalisation. Finally, women are less capable of steady and concentrated attention and though their patience is equal, if not greater their perseverance is less".⁽⁸⁾

It is interesting to note that as women were increasingly employed on clerical work these 'characteristics' were often used to justify the nature of the work they performed.

Women, then, so the prevailing attitudes went, were inferior, unable to tackle the important moral and intellectual questions which were fundamental to the maintenance of a civilised society. Moreover, women were believed to be naturally inferior; their role within the domestic sphere was naturally circumscribed.

"The true happiness and well-being of women is to be found in their performance of domestic duties. Whatever lends to that is wise, meritorious and good. But to make women wholly independent, which is the real object of the recent agitation, implies an inversion of the laws of nature, which is simply impossible and absurd."⁽⁹⁾

The agitation of which this writer speaks was an articulation by middle class women of the problems faced by 'decayed' middle class women. Part of this articulation of the problem was a redefinition of the type and nature of the work which middle class women could undertake. There was an attempt by the women's movement to subtly shift, within the framework of the hegemony of patriarchy, perceptions of women from that of being naturally inferior in the eyes of men, to being naturally different and in so doing delimit certain kinds of paid employment for females, i.e. to segregate or section off areas of work..

Certainly it is clear that employment opportunities for middle class women up to circa 1870 were few and far between; their only real opportunities existing in the position of governess. As Peterson (1972 : p.6) argues the "availability of 'ladies' to teach the children of the middle classes depended on the one exception to the rule that a well bred woman did not earn her own living - if a woman of birth and education found herself in financial distress and had no relatives who could support her or give her a home, she was justified in seeking the only employment that would not cause her to lose her status. She could find work as a governess". The governess, however, was often the lucky one. There existed an 'imposing minority' of women who were unable or unwilling to consider family life.

"There are helpless orphans cast upon the world; there are girls with sick and aged mothers to look after; there are widows with young families wholly destitute - what are these poor people to do."(10)

As governessing could not in itself satiate such a demand the women's movement formed to develop other solutions (see Holcombe 1974: chapter one; Lewis, 1984; Strachey, 1928). The promotion of emigration and education,

and pressing to open up employment opportunities. In their attempts to broaden employment opportunities the women's movement argued on two fronts. Firstly, that extending the employment available to middle class women would be of economic value to the employer. Secondly, that by extending employment in this way the structure and order of society, both patriarchal and class based, would not be upset. In arguing the first they accepted and perpetuated the notion of the cheapness of female labour (Boucherett, 1865; Boyd-Kinnear, 1869) (see chapter six). In arguing the second they couched their approach in such a way as not to suggest or threaten the destabilisation of the capitalist patriarchal social formation. Indeed, revolutionary change of this order was in any case not part of their agenda, they simply sought to relieve some of the degradation into which a number of middle class women had fallen. And, to this end, they received a degree of male support from the periodicals of the time:

"as women cannot all be artists, writers, or teachers, must not be either save they have natural aptitudes; and moreover, as these channels of labour would soon in such case overflow, it seems to us that they must have moral purpose enough, erect bearing sufficient, individually to seek work they may perform with less injury to their natures and to society, as clerks, travellers etc, always fitting themselves for what they undertake that a thorough discharge of duty may win them a real position with their comrades and employers"⁽¹¹⁾

Overall, however, it was both expedient and inherently acceptable to the women's movement and its supporters to emphasise the fact that extending the opportunities of employment for middle class women did not signify or indicate the moral breakdown of society. On the contrary, extending opportunities for employment would in fact strengthen the social fabric:

"Whenever helping work is to be done, there woman is in her place. Motherly and sisterly care are often most needed when they cannot be had within the sphere of domestic life."⁽¹²⁾

And again:

"To be of the highest economic value, a woman must either be a mother or must so choose her line of work that in the care of others she finds scope for her maternal instinct, and works upon, and not across, the lines laid down by nature."⁽¹³⁾

Anna Brownwell Jameson (1859 : p.xxx) argued that in all "public institutions, charitable, educational, sanitary, in which numbers of women and children are congregated, and have to be managed and otherwise cared for, some part of the government should be in the hands of able and intelligent women; that the maternal as well as the paternal element should be made available, on the principle which I believe is now generally acknowledged, that the more you can carry out the family law, the 'communion of labour', into all social institutions, the more harmonious and more perfect they will be". The introduction of middle class women into certain employments, then, in short, would be to the advantage of society as long as the work they performed did not contravene natural laws; natural laws which circumscribed women's role as maternal, and thus more gentle, kind and generous, passive, trustworthy and caring.

"There is no natural competition between the two sexes, whatever artificial forms may create. Each supplies what the other lacks. And a wise community would do its uttermost to avoid any antagonism in industries, some of which might be profitably earmarked for women, and some (the great majority) for men. But even when they do happen to compete in the same areas, friction and unplea-

santness might readily be neutralised by agreement and mutual concessions. At the same time trade and commerce should be improved, softened and civilised, with a distinct alleviation of ugly asperities, by a certain infusion of the feminine element."⁽¹⁴⁾

Furthermore, these natural laws in no way implied women's inferiority, but their difference:

"I should not complain if it could be proved, if it could even be imagined, that the chances of remunerative labour could be for all women what they are for all men; and that nature has adapted them for equal efforts in the race of competition. But the contrary is so evident as to render argument useless ... It is not on the grounds of any inferiority; but on that of the finer and more delicate organisation of body and brain".⁽¹⁵⁾

As well as describing the kinds of work that 'nature allows' women to perform, the above arguments contribute to the separation of women's work and men's work in accordance with the ideology of capitalist patriarchy. And although around the turn of the century and into the Edwardian era, more and more contributors to periodicals questioned such determinism, the tendency to segregate remained and was constantly perpetuated by the sexual division of labour rooted in consciousness in the ideology of domesticity. In short, the 'natural' role women fulfilled in society led to their horizontal segregation in employment, i.e. segregation by job. Women's work was not only related to the ideology of domesticity and the reproduction of the sexual division of labour, psychologically and structurally, it was also a natural consequence of the weaker physical constit-

ution of women of the middle classes:

"The law of natural selection will operate here (in employment) as throughout creation, and what they (women) are fitted for they will perform; if they do not perform it, they will soon be replaced by the fitter instrument for that particular work but in the new order of things we have never yet had fair trial. It still remains to be seen if they cannot fulfil the offices of doctors, of preachers, of educators, of clerks, of poor law administrators, of printers, of reporters, of shop keepers, of bookkeepers, as well as these offices have been filled already ... It will be noticed that in the spheres of work I have indicated for women, I have not mentioned any that can be objected to in the physiological ground that long continued muscular exertion is injurious to them."⁽¹⁶⁾

In the context of emigration Boucherett (1869 : p.34) argues that in "new countries there is an unlimited amount of rough work which men only are capable of executing: in old countries there is a limited amount of easy work which either men or women are capable of performing. The men ought to go to the new countries in such a proportion as to leave easy work enough to employ the women". Boyd-Kinnear (1869 : p.342) combines the inherent physical and domestic characteristics of women in delimiting their employment opportunities. "Whatever needs delicacy", he argues, "task, accuracy, what can be done indoors, by the fireside, or in suitable workshops, and what does not need a great deal of manual strength, can, as we all know, be done as well by women as by men."

The case for extending the employment opportunities of middle class women

was being made so as not to threaten the ideology of domesticity, but indeed, to reproduce it; secondly, by specifying exactly where women were to be employed, in what fields and performing what tasks; and thirdly, by emphasising the economic viability of employing women for the employer. Continually it was argued that the family, domestic life "the acknowledged foundation of all social life, has settled by a natural law the work of the man and the work of the woman. The man governs, sustains, and defends the family; the woman cherishes, regulates, and purifies it, but though distinct, the relative work is inseparable, - sometimes exchanged, sometimes shared; so that from the beginning, we have, even in a primitive household, not the division, but the 'communion of labour'". (Jameson, 1859 : p.12) The subordination of women through the sexual division of labour is, according to Jameson, not a relationship of power involving men and women, but an equal relationship, a sharing situation.

The horizontal segregation of work in this way was aided also by features of Victorian sexuality and the idea of marriage as a property relation, both of which were tied up with capitalist patriarchy. (On Victorian attitudes to sex see Banks, 1964 : Chapter 4; on property see Holcombe, 1977; generally see Lewis, 1984 : pp.112-141). Victorian middle class parents were loath to allow their daughters into paid employment unless their chastity could be guaranteed; the future status of daughters and their marriage prospects depended upon their virginity. Fathers in particular were extremely anxious in case temptation ruined their daughters chances of marriage, and, thus, forced them to continue to maintain them. As Rayner-Parkes stated, if "lack of capital prevents grown up daughters from leaving home and starting for themselves, lack of what they consider due and proper protection certainly weighs heavily with parents against parting with young girls, allowing them to be apprenticed to a trade or hired as clerks." (1865 : p.157). She goes on to say that (1865: pp.157-8)

"in the minds of many men, this is an objection never to be got over, and no one who has any experience of life will wonder at it. It is evident that the conditions of business life can, therefore, never be identical for men and for women; no same person will tolerate the notion of flinging girls into those very temptations and dangers which we lament and regret for boys".

Because of this, she suggests, a little commonsense should be applied in the arrangement of workshops and offices in which girls work and "we should invariably associate them with older women; they should in all cases work in companies together, and not intermixed with men, and so long as they are young they must be under some definite charge".

Summary

The objective of this chapter has been to outline some of the prevailing attitudes concerning the role of women in society (particularly middle class women) which existed in the nineteenth century. It has also reflected upon the relationship between the creation of this role and the development of capitalism. Equally importantly this chapter has sought to describe the relevance of the nineteenth century women's movement to the opening of new employment opportunities for middle class women. In relation to clerical work this discussion will be pursued in the following chapter. At this juncture, however, a number of points can be made.

Firstly, it can be suggested that although the Victorian women's movement was of some minor significance in articulating the need to extend employment opportunities in the face of the prevailing circumstances of middle class women, the major impetus for the employment of women in occupations such as clerical work was capitalist development. The reasons for this

are considered in the following chapters. Secondly, such demands as were made by the women's movement for increased employment opportunities were in no way revolutionary. They were very much constrained by capitalist patriarchy, which, as in the struggle for widening the educational opportunities of middle class women, predetermined the degree of advance which could be made. It is clear from contemporary literature that when and if women of the 'genteel' class were allowed to work, the jobs they would be permitted to undertake would be closely allied to prevailing conceptions of women and of their role in society, i.e. maternal, physically light, mentally easy and routine. As the century progressed and the gathering impetus for employing women in 'white-collar' occupations developed conceptions of females, once used to 'prove' their inferiority, were used to justify their employment in certain types of work. The vertical and horizontal segregation of women in employment is linked crucially to the separation of home and workplace within capitalist development. As will become clear in the context of clerical work, patriarchal relations operated within the development of the clerical labour process to ghettoise and peripheralise women.

There is one final and important point to make before concluding this chapter. While it has been the issue of this chapter to discuss the all-engulfing, all-enveloping nature of the ideology of domesticity among the nineteenth century middle class, it should be remembered that this ideology was the lived experience of the majority of middle class women. It was their reality, and as such, the job of childrearing, the question of chastity, and the repression of sexuality, were 'natural' aspects of the social structure. There was no alternative construction available to them, thus women's apparent passivity in the face of such constraints, or their apparent collusion in their own oppression, is not necessarily indicative of an acceptance of their situation, but simply a recognition, in the Althusserian sense,

of reality as they perceived it and as it existed within their specific conditions of existence. If, for example, the reality of the situation was that women had to rear the children because alternative forms of childrearing were not available, or because they were financially dependent upon men, then to attack the nineteenth century middle class woman because of her lack of revolutionary potential is rather shallow. The 'naturalness' with which the bonds of dependency tied middle class women to middle class men in nineteenth century society had their reality in the daily, subjective experiences of such women. Under such conditions the challenge to their situation which they did mount becomes a more significant act of defiance.

Notes

1. Chapter Four considers why it was 'unlikely'.
2. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, volume 26, June-July 1829
3. Ibid, Volume 54, 1843
4. Ibid, Volume 92, 1862
5. Fortnightly Review, Volume 61, May 1894
6. Westminster Review, Volume 125, January 1886
7. Ibid, Volume 35, January 1841
8. Edinburgh Review, Volume 73, 1841
9. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Volume 92, 1862
10. Ibid, Volume 82, 1857
11. Westminster Review, Volume 52, January 1850
12. Quarterly Review, Volume 108, 1860
13. Ibid Volume 83, Jan-June 1905
14. Westminster Review, Volume 173, February 1910
15. Rayner-Parkes, 1865 : p.217
16. Fortnightly Review, Volume 15, January 1871

P A R T I I

WOMEN AND CLERICAL WORK

1870 - 1914

CHAPTER FOUR : THE SOCIAL STATUS OF FEMALE CLERICAL WORKERS AND OF
CLERICAL WORK c1870 to 1914

A major feature of nineteenth century Britain was the tremendous increase in population which occurred from 1801. Between 1851 and 1901, for example, the absolute increase in numbers amounted to 14,600,000, an 81 per cent increase, while between 1861 and 1911 the absolute increase in numbers was 16,004,000, a percentage increase of 80 (Marsh, 1977 : p.6). These statistics are important insofar as they clearly indicate that throughout the 1870 to 1914 period there would be an increasing number of persons seeking employment. In the context of clerical work the relationship between population growth and employment relates more to the development of significant social strata within the overall growth of the population. Moreover, such demographic features interconnect with developments in education policy, and, of course, the economic changes which underpinned changes in employment. Thus, this chapter places the social status of female clerical workers, and of clerical work per se, in its social, demographic and educational context.

The Social Status of Early Female Clerical Workers (c1860-1875)

Nineteenth century British society was characterised, among other things, by a clearly visible class structure, and more importantly, by a desire of those in the aristocracy and upper middle classes to differentiate themselves from the evolving bourgeoisie of industrial England. In a broad sense the Victorian women's movement was essentially a movement created by women of these strata to help women of such strata, although there is a large degree of overlap between such women and elements of the middle class who were from 'professional' backgrounds. This was recognised by the body within the Victorian women's movement which dealt with employment. The Society for Promoting and Employment of Women (SPEW) suggested

that:

"Those then, who seemed most to need help, were middle class women, daughters of professional men, merchants and shopkeepers, whose parents, from straitened means or other causes, have not afforded them the advantage of systematic training, and who have grown up in a home of more or less comfort, and perhaps reach middle age without having learned a single thing thoroughly".⁽¹⁾

However, the Victorian women's movement did recognise a distinct difference between this heterogeneous grouping and a further group, the daughters of the smaller manufacturers and merchants, who were less suited to governing and should find work more "suited to their sensible Anglo-Saxon characteristics". (Rayner-Parkes, 1865 : pp.141-2). One of the problems for the women's movement in their early days was that they could only find employment for such women. Hammerton (1977 :p.54) has argued that Rayner-Parkes estimated in 1860 that these 'less refined' women constituted one-third of the middle class female workforce. "She added that most of the 'semi-mechanical' employments so assiduously promoted by the feminist employment societies were only suitable for this class; the salary of a telegraph clerk, after all, hardly allowed her to look and live like a lady." The first wave of 'new' employment opportunities, therefore, did little for the 'distressed' gentlewoman and most continued to be forced back into some form of underpaid teaching.

While, around 1860, the expansion of clerical work was still some years off, those opportunities for office work which were being opened up by SPEW were clearly defined for 'superior' middle class women. They were certainly not so numerous as to allow all 'distressed' women the opport-

unity for such work. As Hammerton (1977 : p.55) reports "office work provided one of the few new outlets that would not compromise a lady's gentility, and significantly it was the overwhelming demand for such employment among gentlewomen that led to feminists to promote emigration". The Victorian women's movement did not only articulate the needs of 'distressed' gentlewomen, but also sought to establish offices of their own to which clerical work could be subcontracted. Maria Rye, a leading figure in the women's movement established a law-copying office in Lincoln's Inn Fields where women could be trained in the skills of copying legal documents. Recruiting women "was a simple matter". Rye was inundated with applications and on one occasion 810 women applied for a single position paying only £15 a year" (Hammerton, 1977 : p.55). Giving evidence to the 1875 Playfair Commission on the Civil Service SPEW's representative, Miss Gertrude Proctor, was at pains to stress the problems of getting employments for women of a 'higher rank'. The Society tended to deal with middle ranking women "who had homes until their parents die, and then, at 30 or 35, they are thrown upon the world"⁽²⁾ The Civil Service itself was only just beginning to recruit women of a 'higher rank' on clerical duties, as distinct from the work of a telegraphist for example. The process of recruitment will be considered in the next chapter, as for their status, all were "gentlewomen of limited means", such as the daughters of army and navy officers, of civil servants and of professional and literary men.

In the insurance industry the Prudential were the first to employ 'lady clerks'. From the company minutes dated October 10, 1872 it is considered that "the social status of the Lady clerks forms a great element in the success of the system", consequently, it was resolved "that they be selected from the following classes".

"Officers of the Army and Navy, Clergymen, Bankers, Merchants

and Wholesale dealers, Members of the Stock Exchange,
Professional men, viz, Medical men, Lawyers, Artists and
purely literary men, Managers and Secretaries of Companies
and Chief Officers of same, Clerks in the Houses of
Parliament"⁽³⁾

The directors of the Prudential Assurance Company were clear that any system of employing women depended for its success on such women being of 'higher rank'.

During the early development of clerical work as an occupation for women the emphasis among potential employers, few as they were, was on recruiting women of some social status. For those employers who wished to take advantage of this available reserve army of 'gentlewomen', there was an 'excess' of such women (see chapter three), and they did have the necessary requirements, i.e. they were literate and numerate. There were, of course, other reasons; for example, they were cheap (see chapter seven). However, it was to be a number of years before the impetus for the employment of women on clerical tasks was to be manifested within monopoly capitalism. As this development was taking place there were, occurring simultaneously, extremely significant demographic and social stratification features emerging in British society.

The Lower Middle Class from 1870

According to Geoffrey Crossick (1976 : p.12) the lower middle class in Britain in the 1870 to 1914 period "can be divided into two main groups. On the one hand was the classic petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers and small businessmen, on the other the new white collar salaried occupations, most notably clerks but also managers, commercial travellers, school teachers

and certain shop assistants". He goes on to argue that in addition "there were probably the minor professional people, too frequently categorised as members of the established middle class, but probably containing amongst lesser solicitors and the like a range of small operators acting on the margins of their profession". The heterogeneity of this stratum, as indicated by Crossick's definition, defies any attempt to categorise by class the lower middle grouping as a totality. Nevertheless, Crossick does suggest that their ambiguous class position in relation to the classical bourgeois/proletariat framework, allows the heterogeneity of the potential members of the lower middle class to be in some degree overridden by a mutual sense of marginality to traditional class groupings, and thus a common identity. The groups included in his definition were "emphatically not working class, and felt stridently conscious of the fact". They also "shared a similar position of marginality to the established bourgeoisie". Moreover, they "both supported the broad features of the property-owning capitalist economy and what they saw as its traditional ideology, whilst also suffering in distinctive ways from the main trends towards economic concentration during the period". (Ibid : pp.13-14).

The growth of this lower middle class is related in part to the growth of clerical work. As capitalism developed, and as the population, in aggregate terms, continued to increase dramatically, shifts took place in the structuration of society which affected, in status terms, those recruited to undertake clerical work, and in relation to the job of clerk itself, the status of the work. Crossick noted that in the period before females were entering clerical work in any numbers, the 1870's, the growing stratum of the lower middle class were largely recruited through a process of upward mobility; "male clerical workers were recruited more specifically from amongst non-manual strata in the 1870's than they had been in the 1850's, with a lower proportion the sons of skilled workers, and a very

small number with unskilled fathers in either period". (Ibid : p.36).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth the origins of the new salaried employees became increasingly working class but this had little impact upon the life-style and culture of the lower middle class "except to the extent that the marginality of the new stratum seems to have produced a vigorous rejection of the main features of working class culture". To what extent, however, are these arguments true of those females who were entering clerical work in large numbers after 1891? To what degree was the status of females recruited to undertake clerical work different in this period than it had been in the circa 1870's period?

The Social Status of Female Clerks (1875 onwards)

Holcombe (1973 : pp.148-9) argues that, contrary to a good deal of contemporary opinion, and "as a conference on commercial education sponsored by the London Chamber of Commerce in 1898 reports", the great mass of all clerks entered business directly from the elementary schools at about the age of fourteen. Thus, Holcombe is suggesting that by the end of the nineteenth century the majority of clerks were from working class backgrounds, supporting Crossick's argument. Is this borne out by the available evidence?

It has been suggested above that in the very early stages of employers recruiting females as clerks the women employed were 'middle-class' and 'well-bred'. The availability of such women, literate and numerate, was not equally matched by a demand for their clerical services. Very few employers in the 1870's felt a need to utilise the reserve of 'gentlewomen' to meet their clerical requirements, particularly as offices and the administrative and clerical costs of such had not as yet become substantial. However, it does appear from the evidence available that with the transition to monopoly capitalism and the attendant slow but sure increase

in clerical workload, there developed an impetus⁽⁴⁾ amongst employers to consider the employment of females. Furthermore, because of the considerable growth of the lower middle class in the years after circa 1870, by the 1890's the lower middle class had firmly entrenched itself within the social formation. As a consequence potential employers of female clerical workers had a much wider and larger reserve army from which to choose in the 1890's than in the 1860's and 1870's, a reserve army of lower middle class females (and males) who had arisen with the growth of these socio-economic strata in the years after 1870. Moreover, it is likely that these girls and women had the required human capital, i.e. they were literate and numerate. Even given that the education of females in the nineteenth century had always been palpably different from that given to boys, amongst the lower middle class and 'respectable' working class in particular literacy and numeracy among children of both sexes was likely to be high. It is also significant that the impact of the 1870 Education Act on the supply of clerks was negligible. While it did improve the basic education of working class children generally, it was unlikely to have enabled them to enter clerical work (Anderson 1976b : p.126).

It should be made clear that some evidence does suggest that in certain sectors of the economy employers were utilising the 'less refined' reserve army of females on clerical work as early as the 1870's, although it is not totally clear exactly what their socio-economic background was apart from that they were not 'genteel'. The London and North-Western Railway Company, for example, employed females on clerical duties, as distinct from ticket sellers, in 1875. These were "fairly educated girls whose parents do not wish to send them into shops and factories"⁽⁵⁾. Given that most male railway clerks were the sons of artisans (Crossick : p.36) it might be suggested that such female clerks were also from the 'respectable' working class. However, comments made in the same article are suggestive

of a higher social status, for example, that it had "been found that the work is done much more accurately (by female) than by male clerks, to say nothing of the greater neatness which is also displayed".⁽⁶⁾ They may have been recruited from the relatives of the employers and/or managers for example. Messrs Kelly, of Kelly's Directories, also began employing "steady and well-conducted" girls as office workers from the mid-1870's⁽⁷⁾ They were admitted through "private introduction" only and were likely to have been relatives of existing employees.

There is little doubt that as more and more employers sought to utilise the reserve army of females for clerical work, in the face of expanding administrative and clerical functions and costs, the social status of such women and girls was different from those women who had been initially recruited in the 1870's. This reflected nothing more than the changing pattern of social stratification as it developed within nineteenth century capitalism. A clear example of sequential change presents itself within the civil service, where originally females recruited for clerkships in the Post Office were "gentlewomen of limited means, daughters of officers in the Army and Navy, of civil officers of the Crown, of those engaged in the clerical, legal, and medical professions, of literary men and artists".⁽⁸⁾ Those ladies from such backgrounds who were nominated for clerkships,

"had to pass a competitive examination by the Civil Service Commission for the limited number of appointments to be filled up. The nominations were given, as far as possible, to gentlewomen of the class for whom they were intended, it being felt that, in the existing constitution of society, ladies are practically excluded from many occupations which women of the middle class and of lower social station enter

as a matter of course".⁽⁹⁾

The Civil Service Commissioners, then, clearly wished to recruit women from the highest possible social status, and were likely to have been influenced in their decision by the evidence given to the Playfair Commission by Miss Gertrude Proctor who represented SPEW.⁽¹⁰⁾ The social status of these women necessitated absolutely, their complete separation from other Post Office employees of a lower social station:

"The examiners Branch of the Savings Bank, in which ladies are employed, occupies a floor of the new building in Queen Victoria Street, and the staff numbers 130 ladies. A private staircase leads up to this part of the building, and a dining room and kitchen are attached to it, in order that no communication need be carried on with the other floors".⁽¹¹⁾

As far as the quality of their work was concerned "the authorities say that the women are more conscientious, and take a greater interest in their occupation". This, according to one contemporary, "is perhaps only too easily accounted for when it is remembered what is the class of women who are here employed".⁽¹²⁾

In 1881, however, primarily through the Postmaster-General, Mr Henry Fawcett, the appointments to female clerkships in the Civil Service were thrown open to public competition.⁽¹³⁾ The history of open competition in the Civil Service dates back to somewhat earlier in the nineteenth century (see Cohen, 1961; Hart, 1972; Richards, 1963). Of particular importance is the Northcote-Trevelyan Report on the Civil Service, conducted in the years 1848 to 1853, and which reflects a bourgeois conception of how the public service should be run. As Hart has argued the "Northcote-Trevelyan

Report was the product primarily of Trevelyan's desire for a more efficient public service and of Gladstone's desire for a purer and more strenuous ethic in public life". (Hart, 1972). The dominant, though not always successful, desire to introduce recruitment and promotion through merit had important consequences for the status of females who were, as a result of Fawcett's decision in 1881, likely to come forward for Post Office Clerkships. Upper middle class writers were particularly critical of this decision:

"The daughter of the butler may be quite as excellent as the daughter of the bishop; but we believe there would be a slight awkwardness, according to the ideas at present prevailing as to social order, if they associated and worked at the same desk ... We fear, however, that, until public opinion in England has undergone a complete revision, friends of young gentlewomen will shrink from allowing them to work in offices that will practically be open to women of all classes".⁽¹⁴⁾

It would be easy to make too much of these developments in the Post Office. Certainly there was likely to be a decreasing number of 'ladies' employed as clerks as the increase in demand for women grew, but, as contemporaries acknowledged, the entrance examination which accompanied the introduction of open competition was so difficult that those who passed it would be of such quality that ladies "need have nothing to fear from their future companions".⁽¹⁵⁾

Despite such shifts in recruitment policy in relation to the social status of those female clerical workers engaged there did appear, in the early 1880's, to be some evidence of a growing differentiation in standards of clerk recruited between the public service and the traditionally 'superior'

sections of the private services, i.e. insurance, and those other private sector areas which were needing to expand their clerical workforce, i.e. private industry. It is likely that these differences, which became more marked towards the end of the century and into the twentieth, reflected the extent and intensity of competition in private industry. The need to keep costs down inevitably influenced the standards of clerks recruited, among other things, as employers sought merely to recruit cheaply on the open market. Thus, the Civil Service, while ostensibly operating 'open' competition restricted entry by applying stringent tests of educational ability. Similarly in the Insurance industry. By 1883 the Prudential Assurance Company, while requiring "no special qualifications beyond an ordinary English education,"⁽¹⁶⁾ of their female clerks, were still recruiting women who were the daughters of professional men. Meanwhile, Kelly's Directories, who had been recruiting only through 'private introduction' in the mid 1870's, were by 1883 taking "girls from the age of 14, and the only necessary qualifications are reading and perfectly legible writing".⁽¹⁷⁾

Into the 1880's then, there were discernible movements away from the employment of 'gentlewomen' on clerical work, and movements towards the employment of young women, and indeed girls, who had no qualifications other than an ability to read and write legibly. The social status of those females entering clerical work in the 1880's was qualitatively different from those who were entering it a decade before. The necessary skills required were not, however, different. From the first, females entering clerical work required only an ability to read and write. Moreover, it was not the 1870 Education Act which had extended these abilities, most of the females who were to be considered for clerical work, i.e. the lower middle class, 'respectable' working class, would have held basic numeric and literary skills. Rather, the increasing consideration given by employers to the recruitment of females to undertake clerical work had made it clear

to them that large numbers of women and girls did, in fact, already possess these abilities. It seems likely that the inevitable growth of administration within firms, with its attendant increase in administrative and clerical costs, saw to it that considering the employment of females to undertake clerical tasks became an important factor in the minds of employers of clerical labour, particularly into the 1890's.

It was around the end of the 1880's and into the 1890's that the implications of the use of advanced machinery for female clerical work became apparent. The details of this are left for another chapter.⁽¹⁸⁾

However, it is important to note that the invention and utilisation of the typewriter (in particular) in the office had a significant effect on the nature of the work that many female clerks performed. The feminisation of typing⁽¹⁹⁾ was a boon for women seeking employment in the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. Much of the training of typists was undertaken in typewriting offices often run by well-to-do women of good family. Such offices were keen to maintain a status for typewriting by recruiting females of refined social status. "The great difficulty," Madame Monchablon, "experienced in finding the right sort of girl to manufacture into a typist clerk caused her much anxiety."⁽²⁰⁾ However, "slowly, yet surely educated girls began to see that here was a better opening than the done to death 'governess' field".⁽²¹⁾ The same journal dissuades both men and women from learning to type unless:

"they have had a thoroughly good education and have taken every advantage of it. It is appalling to see the number of half-educated and generally ill-bred persons of both sexes who daily haunt the appointment bureaux of London, and strike despair into the hearts of those who have to interview them".⁽²²⁾

There was a general feeling also developing at about this time (c1890), although male clerks had felt under pressure for some time in relation to a perceived declining status position (see Anderson, 1976a : chapter 4), that the status of clerical work per se was declining considerably. Amongst those involved in the training, recruitment and employment of clerks, as well as amongst clerks themselves, the feeling was that the rapid expansion of clerical work was attracting too many incompetent workers, i.e. the upwardly mobile 'respectable' working class boys and girls, as well as the children of the by now well established lower middle class. On the whole this was not attributed to the increasing numbers of female clerks. Indeed, for many women involved in the training of typists protecting the status of typing as an occupation required the maintenance of a standard for those entering the 'profession'. Miss Reynolds wrote that:

"it cannot be too strongly argued that educated girls only are likely to prove successful. The acquisition of typewriting in itself is easy. It is not, however, the mere mechanical manipulation of the keyboard by the fingers, but the practical application of this mechanical dexterity, and its combination with the intellectual faculties, which constitute the difficulty".⁽²³⁾

She goes on to say that the "idea of typewriting being an easy and lucrative business offering boundless advantages to ordinary girls, and of shorthand being an indispensable but tiresome appendage, is responsible for much of the carelessness and indifference with which the work is often undertaken". Miss Ashworth of the Westminster Typewriting and Shorthand Offices believed that the girls who make the best typists are:

"those who have had a wide and thorough education, and are acquainted with the literature and current topics of the

day, much of our work consisting of articles filled with classical quotations and allusions to mythology and other sciences". (24)

Another writer argued that:

"Typewriters require a good knowledge of history, not to say of general literature also, and acquaintance not only with scientific terms, but with many words and phrases belonging to foreign languages, which though in common use among persons of cultivation are unintelligible to the uneducated". (25)

Despite such attempts to protect typing from what was occurring in clerical work as a whole an ever increasing number of young women and girls, from all social strata, sought work as typists. A letter to the 'Manchester Weekly Times' concluded:

"My experience teaches me that there is still a field open to educated women to earn a decent income as typists. In every new business one finds crowds going in just to have a try at it, but the incompetents soon drop out and leave room for those who are fitted". (26)

For such writers what differentiated the 'typewriter girl' from those of a lower social status was her background, relatively well-bred, educated and middle class. While she was not 'genteel', she was neither a 'shop-girl' nor a 'sewing-machine girl'. (27)

"First and foremost; the girls who are employed as clerks in

Typewriting Offices and by Private Firms, are recruited from the class that not many years ago mainly supplied the 'teaching' market. Well-educated and well-bred."(28)

And again:

"To be well qualified to undertake the study (of typewriting) one must be a good speller, a good grammarian, and have a correct knowledge of the use of capitals and punctuation. Without these qualifications failure is certain. A common school education is not sufficient for the work."(29)

While the typing world was seeking to protect its subjectively perceived status by maintaining the standards of entry and of entrants, other, traditional and institutional areas of clerical employment were considering the employment of females. After some months of deliberation, which essentially revolved around whether the benefits to be gained financially outweighed the logistical problems of employing women, the Bank of England in June 13th 1893, accepted the principle of employing women:

"We are of the opinion that it would be well, in the first instance, to engage, under some temporary arrangement, 2 women of superior class, one as a Superintendent and another as an Assistant, in order that they may thoroughly grasp the nature and objects of the system of dealing with cancelled Bank Notes which they would have to carry out; and that subsequently, when they are prepared to commence operations, a few Assistants, probably not more than 3 or 4 at first, - should be added, so that the work may be taken in hand gradually."(30)

The first two females employed by the Bank were Miss Janet Hogarth, who was to be the senior woman clerk, and Miss Elsee. Miss Hogarth was a graduate of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford and was aged 27; Miss Elsee had graduated from Girton College, Cambridge and was aged 22. Both women had previously been employed on the Royal Commission on Labour.⁽³¹⁾

On February 19, 1894 Miss Hogarth made some suggestions to the Bank on the appropriate status of women who should be employed therein:

"Owing to the novelty of the employment of women clerks by the Bank and the present experimental character of the proposed women's department I would suggest that personal knowledge of the candidates selected on the part of the directors or officials of the Bank is of the most importance. I should myself attach more weight to such testimony than to statements of qualifications....

At the same time I should suggest that a proportion of the candidates selected should be daughters of clerks in the Bank and that a further proportion should be ladies recommended by directors."⁽³²⁾

For the four further posts to be opened up to women there were some 500 applications; 30 were from persons recommended by directors, 20 from daughters of clerks, while the rest were general applications. In a memorandum dated June 15, 1894 it was proposed that:

"as regards the Nomination of Candidates. It is proposed that three fourths of the number to be employed should be nominated by Directors, and that one fourth should be

chosen from the daughters of Clerks."

Such a process of recruitment continued until 1914. The significance of such a recruitment policy is clear, women recruited as clerks to the Bank of England were, at least in the sense that three quarters were selected via the nominations of directors, likely to have been of considerable social status. Similarly in other public sector bureaucratic operations, i.e. the administrative Civil Service, and the prestigious private insurance service.

While the very large organisations of the public sector and private sector insurance were able to recruit women of high social status on the basis of contacts within the organisation, or, by setting particularly tough entrance examinations, the smaller employers of clerical labour, especially manufacturing companies, were more likely to recruit on the open market, often employing the cheapest labour available. As the demand for clerical workers grew in proportion to the development of monopoly capitalism the inadequately trained or untrained typist often received a good deal of work, either as an employee, or a private typist. At a conference on women workers in 1893 Muss Hubbard said:

"There is a great demand which is more than supplied, but very often by a semi-educated unsatisfactory practitioner, who disappoints the public, and lowers the rate of payment by work much below the standard which should satisfy the typists themselves, or can really answer the purposes of the public". (33)

As the 1890's progressed the problems of oversupply in typing in particular became acute. Typing, already taught in Typewriting Offices and in Commer-

cial Education institutions⁽³⁴⁾ was also included in the curricula of many Board schools, a fact which angered the leadership of the National Union of Typists.⁽³⁵⁾ Speaker after speaker on shorthand and typewriting at the International Congress of Women emphasised that clerks and secretaries "must be drawn not from the semi-educated, but from the thoroughly educated class".⁽³⁶⁾ Such exertions on the part of leading figures in the typewriting world could not halt the spread of employment in typewriting among inadequately trained girls and young women. An Interim Report of an inquiry into the conditions of the typing profession published in 1898 clearly showed that the social status and vocational training of those employed as typists varied considerably.⁽³⁷⁾ Three grades of typist were identified by the investigators. Firstly, there were:

"The superior girls who are both well-educated and intelligent, probably know a foreign language, and have good all-round information. They usually train in a typing office but the poor conditions therein soon force them to leave ...

The second grade consists of girls who may or may not have had a good education, but are fairly intelligent and capable ... These form the staff of the better class typing offices, and also work in second rate posts in commercial houses ...

Third come the inferior grade of girls, whom all agree should be otherwise employed. These lack the education or intelligence necessary to fit them for the typing profession ... There is apparently a certain demand for their labour where the employer does not mind slovenly work, as long as he can save 10s on his clerk's salary."⁽³⁸⁾

By the turn of the century, then, it is clear that females were entering typing work in particular, from a variety of social backgrounds; their levels of education and typewriter training varied greatly. This is also true of other forms of office work, although there were pockets of clerical work which were able to protect themselves from the vagaries and necessity of seeking labour on the open market, for example, the 'lady clerks' employed by the Prudential, and those employed in the Civil Service and in the Bank of England. Specific information on females employed as clerks in business and commerce is scarce, but from the available literature certain tendencies are clear. Between the mid-1880's and the turn of the century an increasing number of lower middle class girls (and boys), and probably large numbers of the same from the 'respectable' working class, were entering clerical work in some capacity. They did so, in the wake of an increasing demand for clerical work (see chapter two), to maintain or improve their social status. While the middle classes saw the entry of such employees into clerical work as contributing to the degradation of the work, the lower middle class, and particularly the 'respectable' working class, perceived it as a palpable personal move upwards. For example, Theresa Davy (1980 : p.11) in her oral history of shorthand typists argued that "the mothers often served as a strong force, either because they had worked in service and wanted their daughters to rise in social status, or, as in the case of one of my respondents, the mother had come from a family of civil servants, but had married beneath her". There is an interesting point here. The declining status of clerical work, or the degradation of the work, may not have been so much a fact to be discovered in the nature of the work itself (see chapter six), but may have been simply the response of a section of the clerical world to developments in clerical work, who were seeking to maintain and protect their status against the influx of 'uneducated' lower order girls and boys. Equally, these new recruits saw entering clerical work as an upward move. The expansion in

the demand for clerical workers after 1890, and the satiation of this demand by the reserve army of lower middle class and 'respectable' working class girls and boys reflects, not so much a degradation of clerical work in terms of the skills required to undertake it but simply reflects the utilisation of a reserve army by employers in the face of the expansion of clerical work within monopoly capitalism. To be sure there appears to have been a high number of new recruits to clerical work who were uneducated and ill-trained, but the manifestation of this fact only represents the increasingly high profile the expanding demand for clerical labour had given office work. One only has to read the Northcote-Trevelyan Report to appreciate that incompetent, uneducated, and ill-trained clerical workers existed long before the rise of the lower middle class, and the use of them, and the 'respectable' working class, to undertake clerical work.

The beginning of the twentieth century brought with it little change to the arguments being used by those keen to protect the 'image' perhaps even the 'myth', of clerical work, and its status. Writers continued to extol the virtues of the 'educated' clerk as the only way to protect the status of the job. The personal status of the clerk, in educational terms, and the status of the job per se were intimately linked.

"If all the typists in London - boys, girls and men were to march through the City they would form a solid division nearly 15,000 strong. There would be one column of 5,000 well educated experts, and two columns of ill-educated inexpert performers. There is not only in London, but all over the country, a lack of well-educated, well-trained typists, and a glut of what may justly be called 'duffers'. While there is, as the Daily Mail recorded recently, an unprecedented scarcity of Clerks and office boys, there is no end, so a

Daily Mail report was assured by well-informed City people, to the stream of half-educated girls who have learned to tap a typewriter, but are only equal to the commonest forms of typing, such as copying circulars."⁽³⁹⁾

The commentator 'Experto Crede' who from February 1901 onwards undertook an "intermittent perusal" of the advertisements for typists and clerks which appeared in the Daily Telegraph felt that the "conditions of supply and demand had been and were changing".⁽⁴⁰⁾ He felt that the standard of female shorthand typists had decreased so much that "it seems to me that now not so many girls and ladies are being called for". Meanwhile, the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women endeavouring, as always, to help "well-educated women only", continued to emphasise that first class secretaries, typists, and clerks were always in great demand:

"Commercial clerks generally are required to know shorthand and typing, many must know bookkeeping, while those seeking engagements as secretaries, either to private individuals, professional men, or in good commercial offices, need a very liberal education with an accurate knowledge of one or two foreign languages, in which they can correspond."⁽⁴¹⁾

The Typist's Review quoted a report from the Hull Daily News:

"There is a general impression that the market for female typewriters is completely overstocked, and this deters many intelligent girls, who would really be most suited to this kind of employment, from undergoing the necessary training. But the general impression is by no means strictly accurate, according to the most authentic information, such as that collected by the Women's Industrial

Council. It is true that the lower ranks of typists are much overcrowded ... but (they) have nothing more than a mechanical knowledge of shorthand and typing, and are quite incapable of doing work which calls for good English composition, or some acquaintance with one or two foreign languages, to say nothing of an understanding of business methods."⁽⁴²⁾

Thus, to reach the top of the secretarial ladder two general qualifications were required. A sound liberal education, including knowledge of foreign languages, and sound training in business methods as well as excellence at shorthand and typing. The cost and length of such an education and training immediately restricted the numbers of those who would be able to attain it. Only well-to-do, well educated middle class girls, therefore, could aspire to the better jobs in the public and private sectors, for example, personal secretaries to top businessmen and employers. Naturally, the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women were keen to sponsor such women.

"The mere shorthand clerk whose general education has lasted only until she was 14 or 15 years of age, and who has learnt shorthand and typing at a school, is a drug in the market, and frequently finds it impossible to get an engagement. Still, if a really efficient secretary is wanted, at a good salary, it is often difficult to find a woman to fill the post. The Committee, therefore, endeavour to help well-educated women only, to get the necessary technical training."⁽⁴³⁾

Certainly one of the most sought after posts for such women would be the position of private secretary:

"Many clever clerks obtain more lucrative positions as Private Secretary to an author, or as secretary to a school, to a club, hotel, or a philanthropic society. These appointments are sometimes advertised in the Press and sometimes they are obtained by influence. It is very necessary that the aspirant for such a congenial post should be cultured and well trained in the technical work of a secretary. A courteous demeanour and a liberal education are absolutely essential to success."⁽⁴⁴⁾

Mary Petherbridge⁽⁴⁵⁾ outlines the distinction between the ordinary clerk and the private secretary:

"The duties of the former are mainly those of routine, her chief characteristic should be self-effacement; the latter requires to have initiative and a gift of organising allied to the power of self-subordination. The training of a clerk comprises a thorough knowledge of shorthand, typewriting, elementary bookkeeping and letter-filing, based on a good all-round education."

A private secretary, however, requires a more substantial education:

"For preference a sound classical education - ancient and modern classics, and in the modern, foreign as well as English - a thorough knowledge of some special subject and a correct, if superficial, acquaintance with general topics, the whole producing a culture and mental calibre that enables a secretary to grasp easily any given point of view."

What was becoming clear into the first decade of the twentieth century was that there was a developing hierarchy within female clerical work which was reflecting the desires of those keen to protect the status of clerical work. Clerical work per se could not be shut off from the lower middle and 'respectable' working classes, but certain levels of the work could. The ongoing analysis and reanalysis of the structure and organisation of the Civil Service, Playfair 1875, Ridley 1888, and MacDonnell 1912-15 reflected, in the public service, the new and developing hierarchy of female clerical work that the Women's Industrial News had reported existed in the private sector in 1898. In evidence to the MacDonnell Commission, Miss Oldham, on behalf of the Association of Headmistresses submitted that:

"Those lower branches of the civil service which, with a few exceptions, alone are open to women, do not supply posts of enough responsibility and administrative power to prove attractive to able women of secondary school and university education, many of whom, in the opinion of the Headmistresses are fitted, both by their education and by their natural ability, to fill positions of equal responsibility with their brothers."⁽⁴⁶⁾

The Commission, however, was not yet convinced that women were capable of more responsible work.

The period from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1914 continued the developments that had begun in earnest during the 1890's. There was a considerable increase in the number of females employed as clerical workers between 1901 and 1911, and particularly from the lower middle and 'respectable' working classes. Importantly this period also saw the increasingly sophisticated organisation of clerical work, both within and between areas

of employment. Those females who had had the benefits of a liberal education and sound business training were able, relative to other female office workers, to enjoy first class clerical appointments, i.e. in commerce and business as supervisors of female clerks; as private secretaries for individuals, within companies, or for social clubs. Some women with good personal connections, enjoyed clerical work in insurance and banking. The rest of the girls and women who sought clerical appointments without a liberal education and with little business training had to take their chance on the oversupplied open market.

Summary and Analysis

This chapter has considered two interconnected features of clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. Firstly, it has described the changing social status of the female workers who were entering clerical work in this period, and secondly, it has considered the status, but not the nature (see chapter six), of clerical work; in this sense the status of the work is assessed as it was subjectively perceived by clerical workers in the period, as far as we can tell.

The altering social status of females entering clerical work between 1870 and 1914 is intimately related to the development of capitalism in this period and the fashion in which it affected the social constitution of strata. The development of monopoly capitalism and within it, the rise of a lower middle class, created an army of potential clerks who were, in most respects, tailor made to fill the enormous number of clerical jobs emerging within monopoly capitalism. Gradually, through the period 1870 to 1914, in the face of capitalist development and an attendant increase in the demand for clerical workers, the social status of the females entering clerical work changed. Initially, as the evidence in this chapter shows,

clerical work was considered a particularly suitable employment for the so-called 'distressed gentlewoman' of the middle nineteenth century. However, as the demand for clerical workers grew (both for boys and girls, men and women) in the last decade of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, and as a relatively new and exploitable social strata was available to satiate it, increasingly clerical workers were lower middle class, or respectably working class origins. In these terms it could be stated that the social status of females entering clerical work, in particular, declined over the period 1870 to 1914.

However, the situation is much more complex. To begin with the notion of status is perhaps less important in relation to the changing socio-economic origins of female clerical workers, and more important in regard to the status of the work per se. The evidence suggests that those entering clerical work, after 1891 especially, considered it a move upwards in terms of social status. For them the work itself had a status which their entry would not effect. Secondly, the status of clerical work prior to 1870 may have rested, not on the skills attendant with the job, but on the scarcity of the job itself. As clerical work expanded the basic skills involved seemed to be largely numeracy and literacy, but these always seemed to have been the only requirements, even prior to the expansion of clerical work. Therefore, for middle class writers of the period to constantly claim that the entry of 'uneducated' girls into clerical work was degrading the work, and to relate this to some class based argument, was a distortion of the facts. What the expansion of clerical work did in the years after 1891 was to emphasise the relatively low levels of education required of clerks, and how many hundreds of thousands of females and males had these abilities - to read and write, and do simple arithmetic.

In response to what was becoming the all too obvious fact that most clerical

work had always required only a basic education, representatives of the 'better educated', 'well-bred' woman argued for giving such women more responsibility over the less 'well-educated' woman clerk.⁽⁴⁷⁾ In short, they attempted to utilise the growing hierarchical nature of clerical work⁽⁴⁸⁾ to protect their personal status, and the status of their jobs. The kind of woman for whom clerical work was initially opened up, (the 'distressed' middle class, sometimes upper middle class gentlewoman, and for whom organisations such as the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women existed), protected their position, once established in clerical work, by using the orderly hierarchical structure of Victorian and Edwardian England as a way of structuring female office work. The nature of English society in this period, the superstructural cultural, social, and educational features which had evolved through economic development, throughout the nineteenth century, effectively enabled certain middle-class women, and importantly, male employers, to order female clerical workers into positions within clerical work hierarchies based upon; firstly, their situation within the class structure of society and its attendant social status. And, secondly, the cultural and educational benefits which derived from their class position.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Thus, by 1914, while the bulk of the female clerical labour force (and males) was of lower middle class origins, there was a distinct grouping among female clerks who were from a 'Superior' social strata and were characterised by those such as Miss Elsee and Miss Hogarth at the Bank of England. Miss M.C. Smith at the Post Office; Miss Mason at the Poor Law Board; Dame Adelaide Anderson at the Royal Commission on Labour.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Under such women were those females of 'lesser' abilities who were employed as clerks in the Post Office and other Civil Service departments, as well as typists and shorthand typists. In private industry, organisations such as the Prudential continued their policy of recruiting from the 'professional

classes' only; while the Women's Industrial Council Interim Report of 1898 showed that a hierarchy existed in typing based upon girls being "well-educated and intelligent".⁽⁵¹⁾ There was likely to have been a similar class based hierarchy among male clerks also, although as chapter eight discusses, the relative opportunities for 'lesser' male clerks were enhanced by the presence of women generally in clerical work hierarchies.

At the bottom of the clerical work hierarchy were the comparatively uneducated, ill-trained females, probably largely girls with a basic board school education, and/or very limited 'commercial education'. Not only did the development of the clerical labour process effect the need amongst employers of clerical labour to subdivide and rationalise clerical work (see chapters six and eight), but among female clerical workers themselves, those in a position to influence the organisation of segregated female clerical work hierarchies did so (or attempted to do so), in such a way as to protect, as they perceived it, the overall declining status of clerical work by protecting the position of 'middle-class' women within it. While this intra-female clerical work struggle was being carried on, however, the general pattern of clerical work was developing in such a way as to have a doubly significant effect on women office workers.

Notes

1. Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, Annual Report 1871
2. Evidence to the Playfair Commission, 1875 : p.72
3. Extract from the Minutes of the Prudential Assurance Company Ltd, 10 October 1872
4. The exact nature of this 'impetus' is considered in the following chapters.
5. Englishwoman's Review, August 1878
6. Ibid.
7. SPEW, Annual Report, 1880
8. 'Employment of Women in Public Service', Quarterly Review, Volume 151, 1881
9. Ibid.
10. Evidence to the Playfair Commission, 1875 : p.72
11. Nineteenth Century, Volume 10, September 1881
12. Ibid.
13. See Martindale, 1938 : p.28; 27th Report of Postmaster-General, 1881
14. Quarterly Review, ibid.
15. Nineteenth Century, ibid.
16. Mercy Grogan, 'How Women May Earn a Living', 1883
17. Ibid.
18. Chapter six
19. See Chapter six
20. The London Phonographer, June 1891
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid, September 1891
25. The Counting House and Merchants Office, February 1892

26. The London Phonographer, April 1892
27. Ibid, January 1893
28. Ibid, February 1893
29. Ibid, July 1893
30. Bank of England, Committee of Treasury Memorandum, 13 June 1893
31. Ibid, 11 October 1893
32. Bank of England archive - notes on the appointment of women clerks in the Bank of England, February 19 1894
33. Women Workers. A conference convened by the Bristol and Clifton Ladies Association for the Care of Girls, 1893
34. On Commercial Education see Anderson, 1976a : chapter 6
35. Shorthand and Typewriting, December 1898. A discussion of the National Union of Typists is included in chapter ten.
36. Report on the International Congress of Women, Shorthand and Typewriting, September 1899
37. Women's Industrial News. Interim Report of an Inquiry into the Conditions of the Typing Profession, June 1898
38. Ibid.
39. Shorthand and Typewriting, August - September 1900
40. Ibid, February 1901
41. Annual Report, Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, 1902
42. The Typist's Review, April 1904
43. Annual Report of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, 1906
44. T.W. Berry, Professions for Girls, 1909
45. In 'The Fingerpost : A guide to the professions and occupations of educated women', 1910
46. Edith J. Morley, 'Women Workers in 7 Professions', 1914
47. See Edith J. Morley, *ibid.*
48. See Chapters six and eight.

- 49 On inter and intra-class distinctions within the campaign for educational provision for women, see Delamont, 1978b : pp.173-7
50. See Hilda Martindale, 1938 : pp.176-187
51. Women's Industrial News, *ibid.*

CHAPTER FIVE : THE METHODS OF RECRUITMENT OF FEMALE CLERICAL LABOUR

CIRCA 1870 to 1914

The intention of this chapter is to outline in largely descriptive terms the ways in which females were recruited to clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. It does not aim to offer explanations as to why they were recruited; this is the subject of a later chapter.

For male clerks there were essentially three ways in which they entered the labour market; the openly competitive appointment columns of the newspapers; the informal 'network of patronage'; and through private employment agencies. For females entering clerical work such processes of recruitment were also prominent. The earliest agency for women was that provided by SPEW through whose services "18 young women have obtained situations as clerks and bookkeepers" in 1877⁽¹⁾. In earlier years the Society had performed similar work as part of their scheme to aid distressed "daughters of professional men, merchants and shopkeepers".⁽²⁾ In 1870 seventeen women had been found work as temporary copyists; in 1873, of 59 permanent situations found by the Society for 'decayed gentlewomen' ten were as bookkeepers and three as clerks. This in a period when the census of 1871 had recorded only 1,500 female clerks.⁽³⁾ Of 124 temporary situations found in the same year one was as a secretary, eight as clerks, sixty-two as copyists and one bookkeeper.⁽⁴⁾ Before the existence of the Society's recruitment agency, and doubtless after its creation, evidence suggests that some females were employed as bookkeepers, particularly in small family businesses and shops. Such females were usually the wives or daughters of the owner of the business and thus the process of recruitment was very much informal.

In other sectors where females were employed on clerical work the 'network

of patronage' as a recruitment policy was clearly evident from the early 1870's. As chapter four noted, this was the case at the Prudential Assurance Company, and initially so at Kelly's Directories. It was also the procedure for clerkships within the Civil Service during the 1870's. In the early days of the telephone, its use "for business purposes in London", afforded "excellent employment for the daughters of professional men". To gain such employment "private introduction is necessary".⁽⁵⁾ To some extent SPEW, dealing, as it did exclusively with the 'distressed gentlewoman', acted as both an agency and as part of a 'network of patronage', by restricting its services to a very small proportion of the female population. Thus, although personal introduction was necessary at Kelly's directories, for example, the "majority of the girls working for Mr Kelly have been introduced by the Society".⁽⁶⁾ The 'Junior Army and Navy Stores' employed "ladies as clerks" through personal introduction, preference being given "to daughters of military or naval officers".⁽⁷⁾

Into the 1890's the more elitist employers of female clerks were keen to persist with the 'network of patronage'. They seemed keen both to exploit the cheapness of female labour, particularly to reduce expenditure on labour, and maintain their status, as employers, within the hierarchy of clerical work. Thus, the first women employed by the Bank of England, for example, were recruited from the Royal Commission on Labour through intra-departmental recommendation.⁽⁸⁾ Chapter four notes the social status of these women. Such recruitment through patronage did not preclude the use of examinations to differentiate between those nominated for women clerkships in the Bank of England - "they should pass an examination in writing and arithmetic, and that they should each give security for £200".⁽⁹⁾ While examinations suggest some semblance of egalitarianism in selection, the 'network of patronage' governing nominations and the £200 security clearly delineated the status of those women likely to be employed as

clerks by the Bank of England.

The rapid expansion of clerical work generally and female clerical work in particular between 1891 and 1914 obviously led to more direct methods of recruitment, which relied rather less on sophisticated networks of patronage and rather more on the 'laws' of supply and demand. This was especially the case in the smaller offices of smaller manufacturers and traders, and also as increasing use was made of the typewriter in offices.⁽¹⁰⁾ Consequently, as the demand for female clerical workers grew and as the supply of such increased, the appointment columns of newspapers and journals became significant methods of recruitment for prospective employers of female clerical labour, while, for women seeking clerical work, the placing of an advertisement in the newspaper or journal became commonplace. Thus, the Writing Machine News carried advertisements from prospective employers wanting:

"FEMALE - From 20 to 30 years of age, of nice manners and a good appearance, wanted to assist in the office of a high class Hotel in the City of London. Must be expert Shorthand Writer and Operator of the Yost machine, and have a knowledge of Accounts. Board and Lodging provided. Salary 10s per week".⁽¹¹⁾

Among newspapers the appointments column of the Daily Telegraph was particularly important in carrying advertisements for clerical work and from clerical workers. It was commonplace to read the following:

"Shorthand-typist; young lady desires engagement. Speeds 100-45 respectively."

"Lady seeks re-engagement, as shorthand-typist preferred;

age 17."

"Young lady desires engagement as shorthand-typist; speeds 120-50 respectively; could arrange for own machine; excellent references; small salary."

"Young lady desires position as shorthand-typist and office work; experienced."⁽¹²⁾

It is likely that a great number of young women during the 1890's and particularly in the first decade of the 1900's sought their first position through advertisements such as those above. However, as Anderson has pointed out "situations thus obtained through the newspapers were not usually highly paid". (1976a : pp.11-12) And contemporary observers noted that the process of obtaining employment through advertisement was often "haphazard and unsatisfactory".⁽¹³⁾ According to others recourse to advertisements was often the last resort.⁽¹⁴⁾

The third method of recruiting clerical labour, or of obtaining clerical work, was through private employment agencies. Such agencies appeared to be of particular use to the unemployed female clerical worker, as well as to her male counterpart. There were a number of such agencies; the Central Bureau for the Employment of Women, the YWCA bureau, the Society for Promoting the Training and Employment of Women, the Liverpool Union of Women Workers, the Gentlewoman's Employment Association and Ladies' Work Society (based in Manchester), the Edinburgh Bureau, and the business agency of the Girls' Friendly Society.⁽¹⁵⁾ All were established in the 1890's clearly to meet the needs of the growing demand for and supply of clerical work.

The Central Bureau for the Employment of Women (CBEW) was established in

1897 as an agency for meeting the "supply and demand for female labour". The CBEW organised female workers into three classes, A, B and C. Those in class A were considered as workers ready for work; those in class B as "applicants efficient, but temporarily unsuited for class A"; class C was made up of "unprepared (new clients)".⁽¹⁶⁾ The Committee of Aid and Reference of the Girls' Friendly Society, after agreeing to the establishment of an Employment Bureau, suggested that it "should work for servants and for Governesses, matrons, secretaries, clerks, typists and other professional women, and in the course of time, if found practicable, also for those in business".⁽¹⁷⁾ From 1899 the Board of Trade Labour Department analysed the information on supply and demand for clerical work provided by the women's employment bureaux. Table 10 indicates their findings. It is clear from table 10 that there was an increasing trend throughout the period in both the demand for and supply of clerical labour. It is also clear that the number of applicants for clerical work who were left unplaced through the services of the agencies appears to have been considerable.

While the private sector industries relied variously on 'networks of patronage', placing advertisements or responding to private advertisers who sought work, or resorting to employment agencies; the method of recruitment in the public sector was largely through some kind of 'network of patronage' followed by examination, and latterly through 'open competition'. The Bank of England has already been cited as an example of the former,⁽¹⁹⁾ while the same chapter noted the reaction of some commentators to the introduction of 'open competition' for female Post Office clerkships, and the demise of recruitment through limited competition (see Martindale, 1938 : p.28). After 1881 "all appointments are thrown open to competition, and anyone within the limits of age (18 to 20) who can pass the not very severe entrance examination is eligible for a vacancy".⁽²⁰⁾

Table 10: Analysis of Information (Provided by Women's Employment Bureaux)
by Board of Trade Labour Department, 1899-1913. ⁽¹⁸⁾

	Number of Fresh situations offered by employers	Number of Fresh applications of workpeople seeking situations	Number of Workpeople engaged by employers		
			P ^a	T ^b	Total
1899	279	638	205		205
1900	300	590	72	207	279
1901	337	586	68	214	282
1902	320	704	72	197	269
1903	312	768	84	216	300
1904	348	744	72	204	276
1905	216	600	84	72	156
1906	252	684	72	72	144
1907	300	756	96	96	192
1908	288	852	96	84	180
1909	336	948	108	108	216
1910	384	984	132	120	252
1911	408	948	132	120	252
1912	480	996	168	120	288
1913	516	1248	168	120	288

Source : Derived from Board of Trade Labour Department, Abstract of Labour Statistics, 1899 - 1913.

Notes: (a) Permanent

(b) Temporary

The concept of 'open competition', however, did have important qualifications in and between Civil Service departments; in the Post Office, for example:

"In all cases candidates must be unmarried or widows, and be duly qualified in respect of health and character. A competitive examination has to be passed by candidates for any of the above posts; the number of candidates selected at each examination is fixed from time to time by the Postmaster-General. Counter women are chosen from the general staff of telegraphists. Sorters and telegraph learners in provincial towns require a nomination from the Postmaster-General; candidates must be between the ages of 14 and 25."⁽²¹⁾

Being 'unmarried' was a particular 'qualification' that was stressed by virtually all employers of female clerical labour with very few, if any, exceptions. No employer and virtually all were men, would even hint at compromising the 'primary' and 'natural' role of the married woman in the home by offering her employment outside of it. It is also clear from the 1911 census that clerical work engaged a smaller proportion of married women than any other type of work. And it is significantly true of all the employments of females that were generally considered 'respectable', that they had lower participation rates among married women (table 11). This fact is a reflection of the patriarchal ideology assessed in chapter three. The separation of the home and paid work as it had evolved within capitalist patriarchy, and the pervasiveness of the ideology of domesticity amongst those who were employed as female clerks (the 'respectable' working class, lower-middle class etc) meant that only females who were not married were eligible for office work. Employers, as men, also had this feature foremost in their minds when recruiting female clerks. Moreover, as later

Table 1D: Females (Unmarried, Married, Widowed) per 10,000 Living Aged 10 and upwards in selected occupations in the Aggregates of Urban Districts

Occupations	Unmarried	Married	Widowed
Shopkeepers, Dealers and Others Engaged in Commercial Pursuits (including Assistants):			
Dealers in Dress	165	27	50
Dealers in Food	137	111	185
Others	135	72	165
Sick Nurses, Midwives and Invalid Attendants	84	18	124
Teaching	244	15	27
Other Professional Occupations (including General or Local Government)	155	27	64
Domestic Indoor Service	1,653	62	461
Commercial, Bank, Insurance and Law Clerks	211	3	8
Workers in Metals, Machines, Implements, and Conveyances	130	28	31
Laundry and Washing Service	134	77	235
Workers in Textile Fabrics	830	265	216
Workers in Dress	944	157	380

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1911, Volume X : p.cxxxix

chapters will discuss, recruiting single women facilitated the development of internal labour markets in the office, specifically the division of labour and the career development of clerks. The bourgeois origins of the ideology of domesticity made it certain that it was among the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie that it was to be most keenly pursued and maintained. For working class women in 'working class' occupations, of course, the situation was to be considerably more complex, the 'immorality' of undertaking a 'dual role' as mother and paid worker being less important than in the bourgeoisie, whose offspring required an ordered and stable background in order to be appropriately shaped for

their more responsible role within society. The ideology of domesticity and the family which had been created by the bourgeoisie through capitalist patriarchy, clearly required that they live by its dictates.

To return to forms of recruitment it should be noted that at the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, a government department, open competition was not the accepted method of recruitment even by around 1912. In giving evidence to the MacDonnell Commission Sir Thomas Elliot, of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, had the following exchange with the Commissioners:

"How are the typists admitted; must they receive nomination, and who nominates them? - They are nominated by the Board. A certain number of candidates are presented, who submit themselves to a limited examination."

"Is there any particular object in having them nominated; why is the competition not open? - I think it is rather useful, where women are employed, to have a guarantee of perfect respectability. As a matter of fact, two of our typists are daughters of old members of the department."⁽²²⁾

Given the virtual autonomy of government departments, other than in matters of finance, it is hardly surprising that while open competition was officially the recruitment policy, the reality was that some departments continued to recruit through networks of patronage, often motivated by a desire to 'maintain respectability'.

A further point which should be mentioned in relation to females recruited to clerical work concerns the ages of those recruited (table 12). Of male clerks between the ages of 15 and 65 no fewer than 72 per cent in 1911

Table 12: The Ages of Male and Female Commercial Clerks, 1901 and 1911										
	Total	10-	15-	20-	25-	35-	45-	55-	65-	75+
Males 1901	307,889	9,888	76,706	65,436	77,168	40,650	22,718	11,402	3,429	492
1911	360,478	6,856	87,824	72,321	90,374	52,898	29,598	25,016	4,982	609
Female 1901	55,784	1,339	19,187	17,997	12,921	3,088	894	284	64	10
1911	117,057	2,114	39,549	36,824	29,096	7,040	1,866	482	81	5

Source: Census of England and Wales, 1911, Volume X : p.xxiv

and 75 per cent in 1901 were under 35 years of age. Of females, in 1901 92 per cent of commercial clerks were under 35 years of age, and 69 per cent under 25; in 1911 the figures were 92 per cent and 67 per cent respectively. Indeed, in 1911 65 per cent of all female commercial clerks were aged between 15 and 24. Clerical work, therefore, in the first decade of the twentieth century was undertaken by a very young workforce. The characteristics of the female clerk recruited in this period were that she was likely to be between 15 and 34 years of age, and unmarried. Clearly these characteristics were related. The male clerk was also likely to be unmarried and under 34, although it is important to note that the larger percentage of male clerks (relatively to female clerks) who were over 34 were probably those whose seniority had enabled them to reach the more responsible clerical and administrative positions. The problems of upward mobility for the female clerk are considered in chapter eight.

Summary

This chapter has described how female clerks were recruited to clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. Firstly, there was the 'network of patronage', popular in the so-called elitist clerical occupations, i.e. banking and finance, the Bank of England and the Civil Service. The reason

for the popularity of this method of recruitment in these sectors is clear. Firstly, it was one way of ensuring 'respectable' clerical workers; secondly, the size of the clerical bureaucracies enabled 'aggravation free' recruitment in the sense that using existing employees as a way of recruiting new staff reduced the need to resort to advertising appointments, or contacting employment bureaux.

Recruitment through agencies or employment bureaux, phenomena which developed, particularly in the later years of the nineteenth century, in an attempt to rationalise the increasingly chaotic problems of an oversupplied clerical labour market (for males as well as females), as well as to meet the needs of employers, was a second method of recruitment. Thirdly, there existed the process of advertisement, by both prospective employers and employees. This method of recruitment often led to the recruitment of those who sought the least remuneration in a buyer's market.

Up to 1914 all three of these recruitment methods were employed to varying degrees by differing sectors of the economy to recruit female clerical labour. While the booming banking and financial sector was able to recruit informally its relatively few female clerical staff, and while the public service sector was able to enforce a coherent and rationalised system of 'open competition' (based on examination), or maintained 'limited competition' after 'nomination', the private sector of small to midling, and sometimes large manufacturers and services, recruited female clerical staff and shorthand typists and typists on the 'open market'. They usually followed the 'laws' of supply and demand, and purchased the cheapest labour available through the columns of newspapers and journals. Much of the low pay of female clerical labour was, at the time, explained by the oversupplied labour market:

The demand for clerks who can write shorthand and can type is

considerable, but the supply far exceeds the demand and consequently the salary offered to an ordinary shorthand clerk is very moderate."⁽²³⁾

Such was the problem of oversupply that female employment bureaux were created to meet the "supply and demand for female labour", in an attempt to stabilise the market. Other organisations, such as the National Union of Typists, not only operated an employment bureau of their own, but also sought to introduce "the holding of examinations and granting of certificates of efficiency"⁽²⁴⁾ which would act as the basis for competitive and coherent recruitment policies.

Despite the efforts of the employment bureaux and the National Union of Typists the general trend was for employers, who were recruiting from advertisements, to discover that many female clerks and/or shorthand typists were simply not up to the jobs required of them. One contemporary employer who sought a shorthand typists found that none of the nine young ladies' to whose advertisements he had replied were suitable for the post.⁽²⁵⁾

In short, the employment bureaux and the National Union of Typists' idea of introducing competitive examinations failed to stabilise the extremely volatile nature of the clerical labour market for women in the face of an increasing supply. Thus, many girls and young women in particular, were recruited through the columns of newspapers and journals. This is especially so since most of these jobs were routine, low status clerkships, the type of clerical work most girls and women undertook.⁽²⁶⁾

The predominant method of recruiting both female and male clerks was through the press. This can largely be explained by the increasing demand for clerical labour brought about by the expansion of office work. As this

demand grew, and as the supply increased, the only real method of recruitment available to both prospective employer and job-seeking employee was the medium of the press. Here employers, particularly outside of the public service sector and the so-called elitist clerical occupations (banking and finance), sought the cheapest labour possible to perform the often mundane and routine clerical and typing duties required to be done. It was only as the problems of such a 'market place' became evident that organisations emerged seeking to rationalise, stabilise, and control the recruiting process; they met with little success.

Notes

1. Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, Annual Report 1877
2. Ibid, 1867
3. See Chapter Two
4. SPEW, Annual Reports 1870 and 1873
5. Ibid, 1881
6. Ibid, 1882
7. Mercy Grogan, 1883 : p.86
8. Bank of England, memorandum 11/10/1893
9. Bank of England, memorandum Committee of Treasury 4/4/1894
10. See Chapter Six
11. Writing Machine News, March 1900
12. Quoted in Shorthand & Typewriting, January 1901
13. Edith Morley, 1914 : p.283
14. C. Chisholm and D. Walton, 1916 : p.3
15. Information from Board of Trade Labour Department, Abstract of Labour Statistics, 1899
16. Information from CBEW, 9th Annual Report, 1906
17. Committee of Aid and Reference : Department for Registry Work, minutes 14/12/1903. In fact the GFS Bureau was not established until the 30/10/1905
18. There is some discrepancy in the statistics published in the Board of Trade's Abstract of Labour Statistics. Thus, those figures given must be treated with caution.
19. See chapter four
20. A. Bulley and M. Whitley, 1894 : pp.43-44
21. L. Phillips, 1898 : p.111
22. Evidence of Sir Thomas Elliott (Board of Agriculture and Fisheries) to the MacDonnell Commission, evidence, p.387

23. SPEW Annual Report 1899
24. Shorthand and Typewriting, September 1898
25. Shorthand and Typewriting, January 1901
26. See Chapter six

CHAPTER SIX : THE NATURE OF WOMEN'S OFFICE WORK CIRCA 1870 to 1914

As the opening chapter indicated chapters six to eight will confront the major elements of the labour process debate. This chapter will consider the nature of female clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period under three sub-headings, shorthand and typing, the concept of service, and routine work. It will attempt to place these features of the work of female clerks within the context of the debate around skills, deskilling and reskilling, and relate it specifically to the gender dimension. Chapter seven confronts the issue of the pay and working conditions of female clerical workers in the 1870 to 1914 period, and is particularly concerned with addressing the issues of the emphasis in and the impetus for the employment of women as clerks in the context of pay. Chapter eight is concerned with the job mobility and promotion prospects of female clerks. These issues are viewed in relation to the subdivision of labour based upon gender, and will confront the labour process theory issues of control and stability of the workforce.

Shorthand and Typing

The utility of shorthand in business practice was first perceived, so he himself claimed, by Sir Edward Watkin (see Holcombe, 1973 : p.143) as general manager of the Manchester Sheffield and Lincolnshire Railway in 1853, which was sometime before the dramatic increase in the numbers of women entering office work. Holcombe argues that the use of shorthand in business spread quickly "as businessmen everywhere discovered that shorthand 'was to writing what the jenny was to the loom and the train to the coach'". She suggests that by the end of the century there was hardly an office in any sector which did not employ shorthand clerks. For businessmen the skill of shorthand, and it was very much a skill, was a particularly useful addition

in the carrying out of clerical work. Even in the early stages of its introduction it affected improved economy and efficiency. It allowed businessmen to parcel out their correspondence to clerks who would take shorthand notes from dictation before proceeding to construct a letter in longhand.

As women began to enter the office in slowly increasing numbers after 1870⁽¹⁾ it became clear that their opportunities for work would be greatly enhanced if they had a knowledge of shorthand. SPEW, representing the distressed middle class woman, recognised this and were keen to usurp shorthand as work for such women:

"Though there is at present great difficulty in obtaining employment for women in shorthand writing, experience proves it is an art in which they may acquire considerable skill, and which must ultimately secure them employment."⁽²⁾

By 1882 the development of the clerical labour process had not been such that shorthand as a specific office skill had been feminised. Moreover, the demand for clerical workers, and for clerical workers with a knowledge of shorthand, was not so great as to induce redefinitions of the skill involved in shorthand. SPEW, nevertheless, persisted in its attempts to emphasise to female clerks the usefulness of acquiring the skill:

"A knowledge of shorthand is a most useful addition to the qualifications of a clerk, and one the acquisition of which the committee strongly recommend. It is not an art which can be acquired hurriedly, or without constant practise. Unless considerable time can be devoted to it, a year at least will be needed before proficiency and speed can be attained."⁽³⁾

The invention of the typewriter and its introduction to and application in the office was to contribute palpably to the redefinition of the nature of shorthand in the clerical work context. As with shorthand the utility of the typewriter in the office only became clear with the expansion of business, and of office work generally. As Margery Davies (1979) argues, "changes in the structure of capitalist enterprises brought about changes in technology: no one was interested in making the typewriter a workable or manufacturable machine until its utility became clear". Unlike shorthand, however, which already had a long and essentially male-dominated history before it was employed in the office, typing was a new occupation and thus 'sex-neutral'. The subsequent process of the feminisation of typing was to be of great financial advantage to employers of typists, but more importantly for this chapter, as we will discuss later, it says something about definitions of skill and the relationship between such definitions and gender. For the moment, however, it is enough to note, as Davies (ibid) notes, that the 'sex-neutrality' of typing was certainly unlikely to stimulate male resistance to female competition, since "it had not been identified as a masculine job, women who were employed as typists did not encounter the criticism that they were taking over 'men's work'." Despite this, typing still had to be 'wōn' for women. To be sure, unless this was achieved the advantages accruing from the introduction of typewriters into the office would be diminished. More efficient, perhaps, and the more speedy production of work definitely, but not necessarily more economic. A major impetus for the employment of women in any type of clerical work was their cheapness relative to male clerks (see the following chapter). There may indeed be a correlation between the rapid expansion in the use of the typewriter towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, and the fact that it was by then a feminised occupation and thus able to provide employers with labour cost savings, as well as improved efficiency and increased production.

Where an occupation is sex-neutral therefore, prospective employers of typists clearly had a vested interest in feminising rather than masculinising the new occupation.⁽⁴⁾

As the utility of the typewriter in offices became clearer SPEW was keen to identify it as 'women's work', and more particularly work for middle class women. Moreover, they sought to develop the idea that women could acquire the skills required more easily as a result of their "lithe and nimble" fingers.

"In the Report last year the Committee expressed it as their opinion that Type-writing would afford profitable employment for educated women, and a special appeal was made for funds to start an office to give it a fair trial ... It has been found that it is very difficult for ladies above 25 or 26 years of age to acquire sufficient speed with the typewriter to make the work remunerative; and those who are accustomed to play on the pianoforte and whose fingers are lithe and nimble are most successful."⁽⁵⁾

Indeed, the Society was so anxious to delineate the new occupation of typing as 'women's work' that it willingly and consistently perpetuated the myth that there was a relationship between playing the pianoforte well and being able to type; reasoning which presumably and conveniently forgot that men also played the pianoforte. This contrived interconnection was taken up and emphasised by countless contemporaries, including employers of clerical labour who were keen to reap the benefits of employing women.

It is remarkable what efficiency has been attained by women in the manipulation of the typewriter - and I may say super-

iority over men - probably owing to their superior patience and natural delicacy of touch. These qualities peculiar to the sex, have made themselves conspicuous in both type-writing and shorthand, and have enabled women to create a new calling for themselves and to compete with the opposite sex, not so much on account of the cheapness of women's work as because of women's intrinsic value in this particular sphere of work."⁽⁶⁾

Another writer argued:

"Women certainly have good reason to bless it, for by its means many thousands have found employment which would otherwise have been beyond their reach. So long as the pen held the field they had but little chance. Few of them write a good business hand, and fewer still can stand the strain upon nerves and muscles of scampering over the paper from morning till night. But the typewriter suits them exactly. They easily learn to use it, the more easily if they have been accustomed to play the piano."⁽⁷⁾

Strand Magazine remarked some years later in 1897, in an article on the evolution of the typewriter that the "delicacy of touch" apparently required to operate the typewriter, was "almost exclusively the prerogative of the fair sex".

Novels and short stories of the period also contributed to the persistent feminisation of typing, in the public mind. Olive Pratt-Rayner's, 'The Typewriter Girl' (1897), and Robert Barr's short story of the same title

in Strand Magazine⁽⁸⁾ emphasised not only the growing synonymity of 'typist' and 'woman' or 'girl' at this time, but also developed images of employer (male)/employee (female) relationships. Poetic witticisms were also used, in part, to emphasise the unity of the typewriting machine and its female operator:

"Whenever I see your pretty face
Low o'er the keyboard bending,
And watch your winning, girlish grace,
To this old office lending -
A brighter gleam of sun and light,
I can't think I declare,
That you're the girl with whom I fight
About my work and swear.
And as I watch your fingers pink
Fast flying o'er the keys,
Half-tenderly I sit and think
Of what my fancy sees
And at the end of everyday
When you, with whom I've battled,
Have gone to your machine, I say,
'No wonder it gets rattled'."⁽⁹⁾

Another journal remarked that: "we speak of the typewriter as the 'machine', but the truth is that the typist is also a machine, and usually not in good working order", and emphasised the domination of typing work by young women.⁽¹⁰⁾

The introduction and subsequent widespread use of the typewriter in the office contributed considerably to the decline in status of shorthand as

it became apparent that shorthand and typing were related skills. But this decline in status had little to do with an intrinsic change in the skill content of shorthand, rather it had more to do with the increasing use of shorthand as a business skill and its association with the newly feminised occupation of typing. Male practitioners of shorthand often sought desperately to protect its more abstractly defined skill:

"Mr Needell, in alluding to the status of Shorthand Writers, referred to the art of phonography as an accomplishment rather than a means of livelihood."⁽¹¹⁾

By about 1890, although precise timings are not possible, according to one contemporary journal, the feminisation of typing appeared complete.

"For the special requirements of the typewriting column we have engaged a young lady who has the art both figuratively and literally at her finger's ends. Typewriting, after all, belongs more to the department of the lady clerk than to that of the pen-man, and we thought it only fair to our lady readers that a department which they have made to a great extent their own should be looked after by one of themselves."⁽¹²⁾

The feminisation of shorthand, however, was to be a somewhat slower process, in part perhaps, because of the considerable skills involved in its practice:

"As typewriting was more extensively used, women found that an ability to write shorthand was desirable in connection with the machine, and therefore many of them included it in their studies. Subsequently they recognised that stenographic capability was a necessity, and not an advantage ... And so

women typists have been forced into the stenographic field by force of circumstances, and have not, with few exceptions, entered it from choice."⁽¹³⁾

To return to the point made by Davies (1979) only as clerical work expanded did the utility of shorthand and typing become clear. Firstly, to capital the usefulness of shorthand and typing in the office related to increased efficiency, productivity, and with the feminisation of the skills, economy and thus profitability (see chapter seven). Secondly, men benefitted as clerks, particularly as the process of the ghettoisation of shorthand typing took shape, which was in part due to their feminisation, thus excluding female shorthand typists from the main clerical work hierarchies and jobs. We will return to these points at the end of this chapter.

It also seems clear that the process of the feminisation of typing, in particular, was aided by the type of arguments developed and used by SPEW. Clearly prospective users of typewriters and typists needed proof of its advantages to them before they would adopt the new technology. However, having decided, as so many employers so obviously did, towards the end of the nineteenth century, to introduce the typewriter the pre-expansion in clerical work belief that typing was 'women's work' was an added bonus for the capitalist and for the state as employer (the Civil Service). Using the typewriter would not only be more efficient and productive than the pen, but because it had been 'feminised' it would be cheaper, and as it turned out, the job itself would become deskilled as a consequence of its 'feminisation'.

The kind of arguments used to usurp typing as 'women's work', and to claim that dexterity was a particularly feminine 'skill', have their roots in the ideological beliefs which developed from patriarchal social relations.

As Chapter three showed, in one of its most important manifestations this ideology classified women as 'inferior' to, or 'different' from, men in various physical and mental characteristics. That females had a natural 'delicacy of touch' which made them better typists fitted logically within this ideological framework. Patriarchal ideology, in this sense, combined usefully with capital to provide advantages for capital.

The Concept of Service

As Anderson (1976 : p.30) recognised the relationship between an employer and his clerks up to the late nineteenth century was predominantly a paternalistic one in which "while clerks served loyally employers were expected to provide protection and security". As the clerical labour process developed, however, the nature of this relationship altered as offices became increasingly more bureaucratised and departmentalised with their increasing size.⁽¹⁴⁾ Furthermore, the growing number of females in clerical work contributed significantly to the changing nature of the paternalistic relationship. For example, paternalism as a concept based on the classic master/servant relationship was transformed, in respect of women, into a distinctive paternalism based on the sexual divisions extant within wider society. Daviés (1979) noted that "the sexual division of labour in the office - where men hold the majority of management positions and women fill the majority of low-level, clerical jobs - is strengthened by the positions men and women hold outside the office". Previous chapters have indicated the nature of this division of labour outside of the office. A woman's duty was to serve men;

"to cheer the scholar under his toil; to console the statesman for the ingratitude of a mistaken people; to be the compensation for hopes that are blighted, for friends that

are perfidious, for happiness that has passed away."⁽¹⁵⁾

And to rear his children.

To be sure, the female clerk was also restricted by the 'old' paternalism:

"(She) does not make anything for us, nor does she distribute what others have made. She serves us but she does not serve our bodily needs. She is at the service of the mind, the wits of her employer ... The successful secretary flings herself with zest into her employers affairs, whatever they may be, enjoying as it were, a vicarious career. Her work is never finished."⁽¹⁶⁾

Unlike most male clerks, however, who could aspire to success in their own right, as an employer, or more probably within a career structure, the female clerk was prevented from aspiring by her 'natural', biologically determined role as wife and mother.⁽¹⁷⁾ The female clerk's office career was often 'vicarious', experienced through her male employer; in the same way that a middle and lower middle class woman's life was experienced outside of the office, publicly and privately through men. Moreover, the idea of service in the office, based upon the sexual division of labour, was strengthened by the use of domestic metaphors for office situations:

"Somehow they seem to carry their homely instincts with them into the office, and, as a rule, are never tired of putting things in order, and giving the office a neat and orderly-looking appearance."⁽¹⁸⁾

And again,

"At the present day she has forced her way into almost all offices by her steady perseverance. She has brought with her the mirror and the clothes brush; she has reduced the chaos of debris that seemed inevitable wherever the correspondence was large to some degree of order; and, lastly, she has brought a general refinement and elevation of tone into every house she has become connected with."⁽¹⁹⁾

The concept of service based upon the sexual division of labour in the office was an aspect of the ideology of domesticity which imposed limits upon what women could do in the office. The concept of service combined with the manifestations of the ideology of domesticity to shape vertical segregation in office hierarchies (see the next section on 'routine work'). Fundamentally, the notion of service rested on the belief that it was the duty of woman, not to be man's equal, or to aspire to such, but to be his servant. This was not in the sense of a domestic servant to a social 'superior', or as a male clerk to his employer, but as a woman performing her 'natural' role, fulfilling her maternal and domestic instincts within the office. To be sure, as more and more women entered clerical work their resistance to such stereotyping grew, but this is the subject of a later chapter.⁽²⁰⁾

Routine Work

The feminisation of typing and the concept of service were ultimately underpinned by patriarchal ideology manifesting itself in many different forms, and shifting in the context of changing material circumstances. More specifically, in relation to clerical work, the developing clerical labour process had, as part of its development, brought about the increased employment of women and girls (as well as boys and men). This increasing employment

of females stimulated initially, some discontent among male clerks, many of whom felt that women clerks were the cause of their decreasing opportunities. To overcome such discontent employers of female clerical labour needed to devise ways of organising clerical work in such a way as to continue to reap the financial benefits of employing females, while retaining control of clerical workers more generally. To do this they needed to maintain women and girls as low paid office workers, while restructuring office hierarchies to enhance their control over clerical labour. In this task employers were aided considerably by the existence of patriarchal social relations mediated through the ideology of domesticity. The overtly conspiratorial nature of the restructuring of office hierarchies should not, therefore, be overstated. As we shall discover, as the sexual division of labour within the social relations of nineteenth century Britain were regarded as 'natural', the sexual division of labour within clerical work specifically, while related of course, to wider patriarchal social relations, was also perceived as 'natural'. Thus, the notion that employers of office workers conspired to separate males and females in order to rationalise, restructure, and control office hierarchies, does not take into account the fact that such segregation and separation was an integral feature of the total social formation. To be sure, employers of clerks did use the sexual division of labour to facilitate reorganisation, but such strategies were related to prevailing bourgeois beliefs concerning a structured and ordered society, rather than a distinctly capitalistic managerial strategy. Thus, patriarchal social relations are not only an organising principle of society, but are an organising principle in the workplace. In this sense it becomes clear as to why the use of female labour was not extended to office work involving greater responsibility. With the absolute numbers of male clerks still much greater than females, the instability within offices that would have resulted from female managers would not have been offset by the financial gains made through lower salaries. Moreover,

patriarchal social relations had not yet developed to a stage where men could accept and promote the idea of females managing/controlling males.

Two questions are in need of further consideration. Firstly, how was the position of male clerks protected, and, secondly, and interrelatedly, how could employers restructure and rationalise office work, thus diminishing the overall cost of clerical labour, and increase efficiency, productivity and their control over the clerical labour process? These issues are of considerable importance because it is clear that by the end of the nineteenth century significant and identifiable changes were apparent in offices. The sense of ill-will towards female clerks from male clerks had diminished. Anderson (ibid : p.60) has argued that this "earlier hostility was tempered by the fact that although their numbers were increasing" female clerks "formed a fairly distinct group within the clerical labour market". He suggests that "for the most part female clerks did not directly threaten the position and prospects of the well placed male career clerks". The employment of female clerks was largely associated with the increasing use of shorthand and typewriting, which, although it had earlier been hoped that they might revolutionise the status of clerks, were in fact little more than additional office work skills. Contemporary evidence supports this argument. The Shorthand Writer wrote of the female clerk:

"She cannot be called a pirate on male employment. She is fitted for the position she occupies, is entitled to it, and her intrusion into commercial life, if it can be called such does not in any serious manner trespass upon, nor affect the standing and prospects of the male clerk".⁽²¹⁾

Some fourteen years later the same journal repeated this opinion:

"... the complaints as to the indifference of women did not

come from the ambitious and pushful male clerk. He recognised that he had nothing to fear from the competition of the other sex, who came into an office and relieved him of the simpler and more mechanical portions of his work, thus enabling him to qualify for higher posts".(22)

As early as 1869 the clerical work on which women were employed was characterised by a sexual division of labour:

"I have been told that there is a law-copying office in London where men are employed in one room doing the difficult work and women are employed in another room in doing the easy work."(23)

By the end of the century and into the twentieth such divisions had become much more sophisticated, as clerical work was subject to restructuring, expansion, sub-division, and reorganisation. Such restructuring of clerical work in the wake of its expansion, clearly impacted upon female clerks in a specific fashion.

"now as women clerks we have to face the fact that ours is one of the most cramping of all forms of labour. Could any task be more narrowing than that of a mere writing and counting machine."(24)

The processes by which women clerks were to find themselves undertaking the most routine of clerical jobs, ghettoised and vertically segregated, relates specifically to developments within the clerical labour process and its interrelationship with patriarchal social relations. As offices

expanded in both the private and public sectors the extent of routine work undertaken within them increased substantially. It is to these developments which we now turn for the 1870 to 1914 period.

a) The Public Sector : The Civil Service

As early as the late eighteenth century it was clear to some contemporary observers that the system of state administration operating in Britain left much to be desired. Cohen (1961 : chapter 1) has argued that the period 1780 to 1848 was dominated by the ideas brought forward by the various Commissioners who inquired into public offices at the end of the eighteenth century. He suggests that this period saw new standards of financial integrity, and that successful efforts were made to put an end to the peculations which had been rife in earlier times; that in this period effective methods of audit were introduced which protected the public from being defrauded by its servants; and that in this period attempts were made to increase efficiency by abolishing sinecures, and doing away with many ancient formalities which had outlived their purpose and "hampered the prompt execution of public business". (Cohen, *ibid* : p.20)

Despite these early reforms corruption within public life continued, though perhaps on a decreasing scale, (see Cohen : chapter 5; Richards, 1963 : chapter 3) into the nineteenth century. Then, at about this time, revolutionary upheaval in Europe created anxiety within the British establishment. In retrospect, Sir Charles Trevelyan stated in 1875:

"The revolutionary period of 1848 gave us a shake, and created a disposition to put our house in order, and one of the consequences was a remarkable series of investigations into public offices which lasted for five years."

Consequently, between 1849 and 1854, the Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service, the Northcote-Trevelyan Report, sought a means of restructuring the administration of the British state as a way of stabilising society and maintaining the social order.

In essence, the Report made eight key recommendations which reflected the changing economic and social values of mid-nineteenth century society. These were, that competitive examinations open to all and conducted by an independent central board should be introduced; Secondly, for the higher positions, a competitive examination on a level with the highest description of education in the country. Thirdly, two divisions of clerks for the two types of work done, intellectual and mechanical. Fourthly, a probation period for successful candidates. Fifthly, a system of transfer between offices to broaden the clerk's experience. Sixthly, the grading of all officers to break barriers between departments and to encourage the free flow of promotion throughout the civil service. Seventhly, promotion through merit. Finally, an annual increment and a consistent pension system.⁽²⁵⁾ Northcote and Trevelyan envisaged an efficiently, economically and effectively administered state based upon a rationally ordered civil service. Cohen (ibid : pp.102-103) has summarised the Report in the following way:

"In their report they envisaged a transformation of the British Civil Service into a profession, capable of attracting the best brains in the country, and organised in accordance with the highest contemporary standards of efficiency. They tolerated no compromise with the existing practice of subordinating the Service to the exigencies of party policy. Throughout the report they concentrated on making the administrative machine efficient

for the purposes for which it existed. Their scheme reflected the influence of contemporary reforms and experiments in other fields."

Within the framework of a discussion of 'routine work', it seems clear that the Northcote-Trevelyan Report sought to reorganise the civil service on a restructured hierarchical basis. At the top they were keen to develop an elite corps of male civil servants:

"occupying a position duly subordinate to that of the Ministers who are directly responsible to the Crown and to Parliament, yet possessing sufficient independence, character, ability, and experience to be able to advise, assist, and to some extent influence those who are from time to time set over them"

(Quoted in Ryan, 1972 : pp.59-60)

Below the elite corps Northcote and Trevelyan imagined further rationalisations of the structure of the civil service through the division of civil service clerks based upon the tasks that they performed. It was their belief that much of the inefficiency with which Civil Service work was undertaken derived from the lack of a detailed division of labour. Thus they proposed that the work should be recognised as 'intellectual' or 'mechanical' and organised accordingly.

Overall, the Northcote-Trevelyan Report looked forward to an organic and unified Civil Service. It promoted and proposed the creation of a rationalised hierarchical and bureaucratic structure for the Civil Service to break down the vested interests inherent within individual government departments. This, it was assumed, would lead to greater efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the administration of the state, and would

act, furthermore, to stabilise the state and social order.

The initial impact of the Northcote-Trevelyan Report, however, was minimal. Indeed, to begin with the Report met with considerable opposition (Cohen pp.104-9). It became clear, though, that the recommendations contained within the Report were the only way of reducing public expenditure on the Civil Service, as well as making the whole machine more efficient and productive. Throughout the 1850's and 1860's there was some tightening up of recruitment and grading procedures (see Richards, 1965: chapter 3), although the extent of such changes varied between government departments. Increasingly, the "gradual reorganisation in the departments created uneasiness and dissatisfaction, and fear of what future changes might mean in terms of security, pay and prestige". (Humphreys, 1958: p.22). An anonymous pamphlet published in 1867 described the extent of discontent:

"Storms of discontent have raged in one department or other of the Civil Service for years past. In some departments the discontent is chronic, in others it has been temporarily or intermittent. It has irritated the chiefs, perplexed the Treasury, disturbed the minds of the officials, distracted them from their proper duties, and in many instances demoralised large branches of the public service."

(In Humphreys, *ibid* : p.22)

The problems of reorganisation of the Civil Service were compounded by the expansion of public business and "the increase in copying and record keeping". As Humphreys (*ibid* : p.24) argues, beginning in the 1840's and 1850's it became necessary to add substantially to staffs in all government departments. However, in some ways this contradicted the general tendency which was towards reducing waste and inefficiency, and towards creating

an attitude of economy within public service. The expansion of public business continued dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, education which cost the State only £250,000 in 1853, cost £1,400,000 for the years 1873-74; the Local Government Board, which first appeared in the estimates for 1869, had doubled its expenditure by 1873-74. Furthermore, the State intervened increasingly in social and economic life through the Board of Trade and the Home Office (Cohen, 1961 : p.124). In association with these developments was the evolution of a more sophisticated division of labour which, it was hoped, would achieve greater efficiency and economy of administration, while shifting the increasingly vociferous disaffection among clerks (see Humphreys : passim). In the Home Office, for example, the expansion and sub-division of work is reflected in figures which show that between 1877 and 1914, while the new lower division increased by almost seven times, from a staff of 21 to 144, the upper division increased by only two and one half times, from 13 to 32 (Pellew, 1982 : p.93).

It was within this framework of an expanding Civil Service with its ever developing division of labour that women entered its employ, though not initially, as a deliberate recruitment policy. The Telegraph Act of 1869 gave the "Postmaster General a monopoly of inland telegraph business, while he, on his part, became obliged, if so required, to purchase any existing telegraph companies. He was thus obliged to purchase the services of the women operators". (Martindale, 1938 : p.16). Martindale, (p.17) goes on:

"The reorganisation of the telegraph system was in astute hands. Mr Scudamore, a Post Office official of eminence, realised at once that in the services of women there was an asset which might prove extremely useful in the task he had in front of him. The telegraph companies had employed

women as operators, but he conceived the idea of entrusting clerical work also to them."

One of these assets, according to Mr Scudamore, reporting on the reorganisation of the telegraph system in 1871, was that women

"take more kindly than men or boys do to sedentary employment, and are more patient during long confinement to one place".

It is clear from the historical evidence that the work females performed in the civil service was of an extremely routine nature. At the General Post Office in London, for example, where every telegram sent throughout the United Kingdom was forwarded, females were employed "to see that the number of words was reckoned correctly and the requisite stamps affixed". (Martindale : p.18). Mr Scudamore considered this to be appropriate work for women:

"The work which consists chiefly of fault finding, is well within the capacity of the female staff and has been performed in a very satisfactory manner".

(Quoted in Martindale : p.19)

The Report of the Playfair Commission of 1875 suggested that the "experience of the Post Office, as will be seen by the evidence, shows that women are well qualified for clerical work of a less important character".⁽²⁶⁾ In evidence to the Playfair Commission, Mr George Richard Smith of the Returned Letter Office, replied to the question - "What general result have you found from the employment of female clerks there; has it been successful, or otherwise?" - by stating:

"So far as it has gone I consider that it has been a perfect success. We have various grades of work in the department, and the special work to which the females have been attached has been a simple sort of work which we call returning work. It means the returning of ordinary correspondence to the persons who write it."⁽²⁷⁾

Mr Thomas Grinsdale, a first class clerk of the upper section in the Telegraph Account Branch of the Receiver and Accountant-General's Office, argued that "work of a non-preparatory kind" could certainly be handed over to female clerks.⁽²⁸⁾ Mr Patrick J. Comyns, a first class clerk in the Returned Letter Office offered in evidence:

"So far as female returners are concerned, as long as the work is simple and straightforward, the mere returning of a letter for instance, which involves merely copying the address from the inside to the official cover, they get through it ... as long as the duty is simple and straightforward, they can get through their work very well, unless some difficulty arises."⁽²⁹⁾

Harkness⁽³⁰⁾ describes women's work in the Telegram Clearing House:

"The work here has to do with telegrams, and every telegram sent throughout the UK is forwarded here from the GPO for examination. In the press section on the ground floor all unpaid telegrams are received which are sent by those papers, agencies clubs, exchanges, and news-rooms, which have made arrangements with the Postmaster-General for the transmission of news. The telegrams are sorted, their

words counted, and the number entered to the names of the senders whose franks they bear, and then they are put away on the shelves round the walls."

While in the Examiners' Branch of the Savings Bank;

"This work is in 3 sections, and a 4th has been added by the Act for Investments in Government Stock. The post-offices of the kingdom are separated into 96 divisions, and each division is the work of a separate clerk. The work consists in examining the signatures of depositors who withdraw money from the Savings Bank; in initially them if found correct; and in entering the amount of the withdrawals on remittance sheets for the Receiver and Accountant-General."⁽³¹⁾

Harkness goes on to outline the work of female clerks in other Post Office sections; the Daily Balance Section, the Allowance and Adjustment Section, the section for Investments in Government Stock, the Postal Orders Examining Branch where:

"The work consists in checking the receipt of postmasters' dockets in a book kept for the purpose; in examining each order to see that it is signed by the payee; in entering the amount of any postage stamps affixed in their proper book; in examining the signatures of the postmasters and the stamps specifying the day on which they were issued or cancelled; and in initialling the dockets if found correct. The numbers are entered on a Division sheet, to be sent to the Cash Accountant Branch, that the amount

of each paymaster's payments may be compared with the amount claimed in his cash account. The orders are then tied up in packets and laid in the pigeon-holes of their respective divisions in the labyrinths of cupboards at the top of the house."⁽³²⁾

Though the work was clearly of a most mundane kind Harkness seeks to raise its intellectual significance:

"It will be seen from the above that the work in which these women are engaged is not mere manual labour, but requires careful application as well as skill of hand. One careless mistake involves endless trouble, for the accounts are kept with such precision that one penny miscalculated has to be searched for through numberless papers until it is checked."⁽³³⁾

Another writer emphasised this point:

"We must lay emphasis on the fact, that their labour is mental, and not merely mechanical, and much of it is really exhausting mental labour."⁽³⁴⁾

Other writers, however, were less enamoured with the 'mental' aspects of Post Office work undertaken by females:

"... and, the routine of the business once mastered, there is a regularity and freedom from worry about PO work ... the defect of monotony is counterbalanced by regularity of employment and the prospect of a pension in later life."⁽³⁵⁾

This situation persisted into the twentieth century:

"... we think that it is a very bad thing for them, as well as for the Service, that at the present time they are condemned to dull and monotonous employments such as men have rejected, for it really comes to that."⁽³⁶⁾

While it is important to note the generally routine nature of women's clerical work within the Civil Service, it is, of course, also important to identify the relationship of this work to that being undertaken by male civil servants. Again, it is important to stress that the 1870 to 1914 period was very much a genesis, a formative era for these developments. However, certain general trends do appear. The first point to make is that it seems clear, in evidence given to the Playfair Commission (1875), that men who found themselves employed on the more routine clerical tasks were more likely to resent the employment of females than those males performing more responsible tasks. For example, in answer to the question "is there much jealousy as to the employment of female clerks in your department?" Mr George Richard Smith of the Returned Letter Office replied:

"There is some jealousy. I have not heard it so much expressed on the part of the clerks themselves who are doing actual clerical duties as on the part of men who are doing a kind of intermediate duty, and who are a class termed 'assistants'; they do not like the females coming in at all."⁽³⁷⁾

By the time of the MacDonnell Commission 1912-1915 these problems had still to be completely revolved. Increasingly departments of government were finding it more beneficial, within a framework of a division of labour,

to give women civil servants the routine clerical duties. The arguments supporting this were founded, in part, on a need to reduce the number of permanent civil service staff in order to decrease the need to offer promotion opportunities. Mr Bernard Mallet, Registrar-General, gave the following evidence to the MacDonnell Commission:

"The difficulty is that routine labour, if it is to be done cheaply, must be done by people to whom you can offer insufficient prospects? - Yes.

"For that purpose is it an advantage that some labour should be used that has a large natural wastage? - yes

"And for that purpose is it an advantage to employ the labour of women, a large number of whom for natural reasons leave the service, and which produces a smaller permanent element than the labour of boys who do not leave the service? - That is the case; that is why we rather largely employ women and girls temporarily.

"The evil of blind-alley occupation is in their case less? - Yes, that was the idea."

Miss Cale, the representative of the Association of Post Office Women Clerks, recognised this general sexual division of labour in the Post Office:

"... the tendency also is to give women more than their fair share of the routine work, because the department finds it more convenient, as it were, to divide the work up in blocks; so that the men find in many cases that they are doing the more difficult work in some offices and the women are given the routine work."⁽³⁸⁾

The evidence in the public sector indicates that a very clear sexual division of labour was taking root in the 1870 to 1914 period. The nature of this division was compounded in this period by other features of separation. For example, until the First World War female civil servants were physically segregated from males:

"The Examiners' Branch of the Savings Bank, in which ladies are employed, occupies a floor of the new building in Queen Victoria Street, and the staff numbers 130 ladies. A private staircase leads up to this part of the building, and a dining-room and kitchen are attached to it, in order that no communication need be carried on with the other floors."(39)

Mrs Arundel-Colliver, a superintendent of female clerks, and Mr Chetwynd, the Receiver and Accountant-General, both gave evidence to the Playfair Commission suggesting that segregation should be maintained in the public services. The Ridley Commission subscribed to the overall view of the Playfair Report : Victorian sexuality and morality persisted.

"We agree with the views of the Playfair Commission that there is no reason why the employment of female clerks should not be extended to other Departments where the circumstances will admit of it; but there are obvious difficulties as pointed out by the Commission, in employing them, unless they can be placed in separate rooms under proper female supervision."(40)

This continued to be the case at the time of the MacDonnell Commission despite the ever increasing employment of female civil servants; although the lobby to end segregation was becoming more voluble and vociferous.

Miss B. Oldham, headmistress of Streatham High School, in answer to the question - "Do you mean that the ladies should rise in grades of their own, or should become part of the general organisation of the service?" replied:

"I think, very strongly, that they should become part of the general organisation of the service."⁽⁴¹⁾

While there was this small, but noticeable shift in opinion, towards the nature of women's clerical work in the civil service taking place around 1914, the prevailing attitudes concerning where women should work persisted. These attitudes were rooted in a set of patriarchal social relations which emphasised the natural inferiority and/or difference of women vis a vis men. It was these patriarchal social relations which served, ultimately, to associate women and girls with the more monotonous and routine tasks within the civil service. In doing so, it enabled the civil service, as the administrative system of the capitalist state, to extend again the degree of sophistication of its division of labour, this time basing it upon sexual divisions within society. This crucial period in civil service development now included; for the creation of an efficient, economic and stable bureaucracy, a technical division of labour based upon gender. It was, at this point, vestigial in its form, but very important in its future implications. Furthermore, while this additional sexual division of labour was beginning to contribute to the rationalisation of the structure of the civil service, it was also advantageous to men in that it marked the genesis of some methodisation and delimitation of access to responsible posts.⁽⁴²⁾

b) The Private Sector

A major problem in considering the notion of 'routine work' in the private

sector is the very diversity of that sector. As a consequence, the task is primarily one of identifying general trends as they appear within the historical evidence, and ultimately to relate such trends to the framework of the clerical labour process. It has been suggested above that even from a relatively early date clerical work was characterised by a sexual division of labour, men performing the 'difficult' work while females undertook the more 'routine'. As capitalism developed, and with it the clerical labour process, a sexual division of labour in offices became an important feature of efficient, effective, and cheap control. An article in 'The Clerk's Journal' assessed the threat posed to male clerks by the entry of females:

"At the outset, it does not seem probable that the commercial clerk has anything to fear (at least for some time) from this invasion of his domain by the ladies, as whatever positions they may occupy in the future they only appear at the present to perform duties of a mechanical nature."⁽⁴³⁾

Janet Hogarth argued that:

"The superior posts open to women are proportionately very few, and they are not infrequently supplied from the ranks of women with university training."⁽⁴⁴⁾

The Westminster Review, carrying a 'Plea for Women', spoke of the "confining life of the office clerk".⁽⁴⁵⁾ An article in 'The Shorthand Writer' suggests that:

"In many offices her presence is welcomed by the male shorthand clerk, as she usually performs the drudgery part of correspondence."⁽⁴⁶⁾

One writer proposed that virtually all of the work undertaken by 'business girls' - that is, "telegraphists, Post Office clerks, telephonists, typewriters, and the ordinary business clerks may all be called drudges, if you will, as they go through hour after hour of the same often deadly monotonous routine."⁽⁴⁷⁾ While, 'Maude', writing a column for female typists in 'The Office' argues:

"The heads of large business houses, MPs, authors, journalists, theatrical managers, company directors, and others would find it beyond their power to carry on their various undertakings in the present day without the assistance of the shorthand writer and the typewriter. Where the brain is so much occupied in originating, organising, and directing, there is neither the time nor energy to spare for the more mechanical work of the hand. Doubtless many undertakings which are now prospering in our large cities, but for shorthand and typewriting could never have reached their present proportions."⁽⁴⁸⁾

In the Bank of England, where women were first employed in 1893, the Chief Accountant issued a memorandum on the employment of women in the Bank which proposed an extension of their duties from typing and the sorting and listing of old Bank notes into four other areas, originally contemplated as possible areas for the employment of women in 1893. These other duties were the posting and checking of the Bank note ledgers, a job performed by mechanics,⁽⁴⁹⁾ the counting of Postal note and India note paper, on its receipt from the Mills; the addressing of envelopes for Postal dividend warrants; the sorting of cancelled warrants.⁽⁵⁰⁾ The Court of Directors, however, considered that:

"it has been found that the work must be limited to the sorting and listing of cancelled Bank Notes, and, in the

case of a few clerks, to typewriting. Apart from this latter, the work is of a monotonous and unintellectual character, and it is on this that a Woman Clerk will be employed so long as she remains in the service of the Bank."⁽⁵¹⁾

In other areas of private sector clerical work women were increasingly employed on relatively routine tasks. On the railways, for example:

"It may not be generally known that an experiment, first tried at Birmingham, in the way of employing women for some parts of the bookkeeping connected with the railway goods traffic is being extensively carried out all over the London and North Western Railway Company's system. A little over 3 years ago, Mr Nichols, the traffic manager at the Curzon Street Station, commenced to employ women to make abstracts from invoices for the ledger accounts of credit customers, and for forwarding to the railway clearing house. The work is not difficult, but requires to be performed with care and accuracy."⁽⁵²⁾

Not until the end of the Edwardian era, however, were female clerks beginning to enter the railway service in anything other than very small numbers. This late recruitment of females probably reflects the quintessentially masculine ethos of railway work generally. Nevertheless, their entry into railway clerical work in the later years of the first decade of the twentieth century is likely to have had something to do with the desire of railway companies to reorganise clerical work in order to reduce labour costs and increase efficiency and productivity through the intensification of work. This development is described by a contemporary:

"It is, of course, true that the increase in railway business

has been accompanied by a numerical increase in the clerical staff, but the quantity and quality of work demanded from the individual railway clerk of today exceeds that of the railway clerk of 20 or 30 years ago. The sub-division of labour, the sectionalising of railway work, has not reduced the amount of work expected from the individual... Twenty years ago the commissions which now visit stations and compile the work were as rare as the unit statistics they use or the 'redundant' clerks whom they discover. It is quite unusual for a commission to find that a clerk is doing too much work; indeed, reductions of staff and consequent increased pressure and overtime almost always follow the visit to a station of these commissions, and where staffs cannot be reduced the tendency is to cut down the maxima of salaries."⁽⁵³⁾

The restructuring and reorganisation of clerical work certainly appears to have been considered by railway companies as a means of reducing overall railway labour costs, the problem of which was increasing. Irving⁽⁵⁴⁾

has argued that the wages of the North Eastern Railway rose from 18.2 per cent of gross revenue in 1870 to 28.8 per cent in 1900.

He goes on:

"Rising labour costs were therefore one of the North Eastern Railway's most pressing problems after 1870, and that company was not exceptional in this respect. The London and North Western Railway, for example, saw 19.1 per cent of its gross revenue consumed by wage payments in 1870. In 1880 the figure was 22.3 per cent, and in 1900 27.9 per cent.

On the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway the proportion of revenue so taken similarly rose from 21.1 per cent in 1870 to 28.8 per cent in 1900, and on the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire system the figures were from 22.1 per cent to 36.5 per cent for the same period. The Great Western also exhibited the trend, with wages taking 19.8 per cent of gross receipts in 1870, 21.5 per cent in 1885, and 25.5 per cent in 1890."

The implications of the restructuring and intensification of railway clerical work were outlined in 'The Railway Clerk'⁽⁵⁵⁾:

"Besides reducing the clerical staff through curtailing the senseless and wasteful competition which has hitherto prevailed, the companies are turning their efforts to the abolition of useless office routine and the simplification of accounts work. This will tend not only to lessen the number of clerks, but to call for a lower standard of ability to perform the work. Thus, we may expect a larger proportion of junior clerks, and perhaps an increased number of women clerks."

In the insurance industry increased business also brought structural and organisational change to the office:

"Conditions of work changed; old skills adapted themselves or disappeared; novel techniques brought new occupations into existence. Such changes were bound to have their effects on the staff at the Royal Exchange Assurance. For example, there was both a substantial increase in employment and a change in the struct-

ure of that employment as the Corporation developed new activities and constructed a nation-wide and a world-wide organisation. By the early twentieth century the staff were working within a much larger, more competitive and structurally more specialised institution than had been known before 1870."

(Supple : 1970, p.374)

The "tensions of expansion" which must have accompanied these developments "must have been absorbed or abated by the structural stratification of the staff: the effective unit of organisation was increasingly departmental." (Supple, *ibid* : p.395)

Female clerks did not feature in the insurance industry to any significant degree until the First World War. However, where they did they were very much separated from the male staff, and undertaking routine policy-writing or copying work (Cockerell, 1982). As early as 1874, at the Prudential Insurance Company, female clerks were employed on the most routine clerical tasks without impinging upon the position of men:

"With reference to the lady clerks; they would not in any way prevent a fair development of the employment of male clerks. There had been an unusually large number of male clerks appointed last year, and the lady clerks were doing a class of work that they could not get satisfactorily done by the male clerks. There was no intention so to increase the lady clerks as to entrench upon the employment of male clerks, but in a proper manner the Board would go on increasing them."(56)

It was not only in the great clerical bureaucracies developing in the 1870

to 1914 period that clerical work was becoming sub-divided. A contemporary observer noted that "even comparatively small businesses are split up into a large number of petty departments".⁽⁵⁷⁾ An American study from 1916 quotes the United States Commissioner of Labour in 1910 on the relationship between the bureaucratisation of, and technical innovation in, clerical work, and the simultaneous process of feminisation:⁽⁵⁸⁾

"As industries have expanded and commerce has grown, the tendency towards concentration and the adoption of labor-saving devices in trade as well as in manufacturing have created a great demand for stenographers, typewriters, clerks, copyists for ordinary business work - a demand largely filled by girls."

Eaton and Stevens conclude:

"It is obviously true that women in offices now are doing most of the subordinate and mechanical work while men hold the majority of responsible executive and highly paid positions."⁽⁵⁹⁾

There also appears to be little doubt that the technical changes which were taking place at this time developed a special relationship to and with female clerks within clerical hierarchies probably based on cost-savings. Eaton and Stevens, for example, interestingly point to this connection. They report on the comptometer, a kind of calculating machine:

"The efficiency of this machine may be illustrated by the comment of one employer who uses it. He said his company introduced the machine at a time when they needed more

service. They secured 3 comptometer machines with 3 operators, and these girls replace the work of two expert clerks who would have to be paid twice the salary, and who would even then accomplish less."⁽⁶⁰⁾

Of the Hollerith tabulating machine they note:

"All the mental calculation required of the operator is practically reduced to accurate copying from the original papers to cards, and to taking the total from the disc on the counting machine. The efficiency of the machine is almost limitless and saves hours of the most tiresome calculation on the part of expert mathematicians. The machine can be operated by girls capable of ordinarily intelligent work."⁽⁶¹⁾

The extent of this process of 'deskilling' was also increasing in proportion to the increasing volume of clerical work:

"The evidence seems to be that they have been introduced gradually during the last 10 years (1905-1915) in an attempt to cope with the ever-increasing volume of office work. The office staff was kept quiet and almost intact and either new people were employed to operate the machines, or the employees already at work were taught to operate them in order to increase their original output."⁽⁶²⁾

In the British context Chisholm and Walton note the same tendencies:

"You must remember that the work of this office which you

have entered has been going on for years. Clever men have experimented and tested until they have found the quickest and easiest way of doing things. So gradually there has been planned out a method to be followed in even the finest details."⁽⁶³⁾

These authors also offer a word of warning to the 'business girl' concerning the process of deskilling:

"In time every automatic office task may be done automatically. The office will be like a factory. This is both a danger and a delight to the office assistant. You must avoid becoming an automaton; you must learn to control the automatic processes. You must do the one job well, but you should qualify yourself to do any one of the jobs."⁽⁶⁴⁾

It is also interesting to note that by 1911 the feminised enclave, which was shorthand typing, was itself subject to sub-division on the basis of education and skill factors. These divisions did not suggest an escape from the ghetto of routine typing work for most women; on the contrary, it suggests that women, whether of high or low skill and intelligence levels, performed typing at various degrees of difficulty from the same position at the bottom of clerical hierarchies. Although there was scope for promotion within the ghetto.

"Female typists may be roughly divided into 3 classes. At the top of the scale are to be found the girls who have had a superior education and have acquired a distinct proficiency in shorthand and typewriting; they can generally also read and translate a foreign language. These girls are usually

trained in a regular typewriting office. Some of them remain in these offices and form the skilled staff, able to undertake the most difficult work and also the higher branches of secretarial duties, but they may enter business houses, both legal and commercial...

The second class consists of fairly intelligent and capable girls proficient in ordinary typewriting and copying, but they are often employed on bookkeeping and general clerical work ...

The third class is a grade without much intelligence or education. The girls who compose this class are, for the most part, drawn into the occupation because they think it a higher class of employment than that provided by domestic service or the workshop."⁽⁶⁵⁾

In the same way that shorthand and typewriting were eventually feminised by the utilisation of patriarchal ideology in the context of the developing office, so the largely routine work which female clerks performed was also, ideologically, linked to their 'natural' capabilities and deficiencies. As late as the MacDonnell Commission 1912-15 the Civil Service view of females was that:

"in power of sustained work, in the continuity of service, and in adaptability to varying service conditions, the advantage lies with the men."⁽⁶⁶⁾

Mr W.P. Herrington, Vice Chancellor of London University, argued, in evidence to the MacDonnell Commission, that:

"My only point was that, taking a girl of 21 and a boy of

21, the girl's intellect is as a rule not so strong as the boy's."(67)

While Mrs W.L. Courtney, giving evidence on behalf of a council of representative women, suggested, in arguing for more varied clerical tasks for women, that

"She is more patient, and does not mind spending so long on the more detailed and duller aspects of the work, provided she is doing it for someone else and not for herself."(68)

Of the work undertaken by women in the Bank of England it was argued that it:

"can be performed as well by women as by youths. The women work much more steadily and quietly than the youths, and may perhaps be expected to get through more work in the course of the year, but the youths have more energy and endurance, and can, it is thought, be relied on to respond more efficiently to the pressure of a very heavy days work."(69)

In other areas of the private sector 'trade' journals similar arguments were offered to justify the new gender-based structural division of labour now appearing within office situations where the presence of women was now ideologically acceptable. Thus we have the London Phonographer in 1892:

"As far as shorthand and typewriting are concerned experience

shows that women are, as a rule, equal to men in adaptability and capacity, but as regards power of ensurance and maturity of judgement, women have to give place to men."(70)

The same journal argues:

"In a general way women may be on an equality to a certain extent in some ordinary matters, such as shorthand, typewriting, and bookkeeping, but as to the higher branches of work, and in general administration, men remain unrivalled."(71)

In effect it was argued, as commonsense, that women lacked the mental qualities required to break free from the more routine work of the office.

As clerks they are:

"comparatively deficient in the power of origination. Told what to do, they are never at a loss. In work that can be reduced to rule, women are probably more reliable than men. It is in the discharge of duties involving the application of original thought that I find my own women clerks deficient."(72)

This employer goes on:

"On the other hand, women have a greater capacity for detail than men. They carry out a piece of work to the minutiae, whereas men are apt to get tired of trivialities. For correspondence involving a great amount of detail, I

would rather have a woman clerk than a man."

The numerous clerical, shorthand and typing journals of the period are replete with similar arguments; usually promulgated by men, but often accepted and supported by women writers keen not to question patriarchal ideology, or, more pragmatically, the advances they had made within it. The 'natural' differences perceived are rather less immanent, and rather more the opportunistic use of patriarchal values to justify the position of females in the office and the tasks they performed therein.

Summary and Analysis

Braverman (1974 : p.293) argued that "the clerical employees of the early nineteenth century enterprise may, on the whole, more properly appear as the ancestors of modern professional management than of the present classification of clerical workers". Moreover, as he continued, "while it is probable that some of the clerks of that time corresponded roughly to the modern clerical worker in function and status, it is for various reasons more accurate to see the clerical workers of the present monopoly capitalist era as virtually a new stratum, created in the last decades of the nineteenth century and tremendously enlarged since then". In this sense, clerical work in the pre-monopoly capitalist era could be considered as a craft (Braverman, *ibid* : p.298-9), with its own tools (pen, ink), and system of apprenticeship. It was a "total occupation" involving both conception and execution.⁽⁷³⁾ However, with the development of the modern corporation the total occupation of the 'clerk craftsman' becomes separated and departmentalised. The office becomes the "factory office" in which work is divided and sub-divided into the "modern cost, planning and scheduling, purchasing and engineering and design sections". All other aspects of the office are equally expanded and separated, sales, marketing, accounting,

advertising et al. Furthermore, as these elements of the modern corporation grew they were subject to further rationalisation and routinisation, a technical division of labour and mechanisation (ibid : chapter 15). Importantly, the functions of conception and execution became separated; "all that is required is that the scale of the work be large enough to make this subdivision economical for the corporation". (ibid : p.316)

It is at this point that Braverman enters into some consideration of 'skill' in the clerical work context inasmuch as he argues that the "progressive elimination of thought from the work of the office worker thus takes the form, at first, of reducing mental labour to a repetitious performance of the same small set of functions. The work is still performed in the brain, but the brain is used as the equivalent of the hand of the detail worker in production, grasping and releasing a single piece of 'data' over and over again". He suggests that the "next step is the elimination of the thought process completely - or at least insofar as it is ever removed from human labour - and the increase of clerical categories in which nothing but manual labour is performed" (ibid : p.319). In routine office work there is always some degree of "brain work", as there is in manual work, however, such brain work is rendered repetitious and routine, or is "reduced to so small a factor in the work process that the speed and dexterity with which the manual portion of the operation can be performed dominates the labour process as a whole". (ibid : p.325) The final stage of this process began with the mechanisation of the office, and the replacement of the last vestiges of human control and manipulation over aspects of clerical work (ibid : pp.326-348).

Braverman's essential point on the relationship between the clerical worker in the pre-modern corporation office, and the 'new' clerical worker of the late nineteenth century, is that they were distinct from each other.

In short, the early nineteenth century clerical workers' 'craft' skills were not degraded per se, but became subject to development as a result of the development of the clerical labour process. These developments created a 'new' and specialised clerical worker, whose specialised functions did not necessarily deskill the 'old' clerical work, but was rather qualitatively different within particular specialisations. It must be said that Braverman is not too clear on the exact nature of the distinction between the 'old' and 'new' clerical work which he perceived to exist within the nineteenth century. The point should be made that the qualitatively different and specialised clerical functions that developed within the modern corporation in the later years of the nineteenth century were not only different but new, a creation of the modern corporation. In this sense the skills that attended them were also new. Of use here is Georges Friedmann's concept of the specialised worker discussed in Littler (1982 pp.7-8). In discussing Friedmann Littler argues that "some types of change in the labour process, namely specialisation, can create high status specialists with considerable discretion" (Littler, *ibid* : pp.7-8). Thus, the 'skill' of the 'new' clerical worker is, although more specific and less general than that of the 'old' clerical worker, no less skilled because of it, if we accept Braverman's argument that with the development of the modern corporation clerical functions became specialised within subdivision.

For Littler the importance of the 'specialised worker' in terms of skill was that they maintained a degree of discretionary-content. In the context of clerical work 'skills' which had, in the pre-monopoly capitalist era been embodied in one clerk, were now separated into departments and had become specialised in the modern corporation (Braverman : p.299). The performance of these separated skills, however, still required some job-discretion as an aspect of objectively defined skill.

Before considering the clerical labour process in the 1870 to 1914 period further it is useful to ponder conceptualisations of skill per se. As indicated above, Littler (1982) considered that the distinction between the specialist as retainer of the knowledge of a total occupation, and the specialised worker whose skills were job specific, in terms of the objective definition of 'skill', may underestimate aspects of 'skill' which are contained in specialised work. One such measure, as has already been noted, is the degree of discretion a worker has within a job. A second conception of 'skill' is skill as job autonomy, or the amount of control a person has over the total performance of a job. These are apparently objective definitions of 'skill', but in practice, of course as Littler says "it proves difficult to find an objective basis for the labour quality of jobs" (ibid : p.9). There is also a third conception of 'skill' which Littler (p.9) suggests is skill as social status. In this sense skill is socially constructed, or at least it is theoretically possible to do so, "through the artificial delimitation of certain work as skilled". Veronica Beechey's (1982 : pp.62-7) discussion of skill and deskilling conceptualises 'skill' in much the same way. Firstly, she suggests that the concept of skill can refer "to complex competencies which are developed within a particular set of social relations of production and are objective competencies". Secondly, "the concept of skill can refer to control over the labour process". Thirdly, it can refer to traditional or conventional definitions of occupational status.

It is the problem with Braverman's conceptualisation of skill that he "tends to oversimplify the problem of defining the concept of skill". And it is "extremely important to clarify what is meant by skill, since the adoption of different criteria of skill has different theoretical and political implications". (Beechey, ibid : p.64) For example, it is of particular significance to clarify the concept of skill if an investigation

is being conducted into the reasons why certain categories of labour are excluded from skilled occupations (i.e. women, blacks). Furthermore, an oversimplified conceptualisation of skill, as with Braverman, tends to ignore the fact that changes in the labour process might result in reskilling, or new skills (Littler, *ibid*; Beechey, *ibid* : p.65). As Beechey stated, "the history of capitalist production must be seen as the history of the destruction and the recomposition of skills".

The point on which Beechey touched briefly concerning the exclusion of certain categories of labour from skilled occupations is analysed more substantially by Cockburn (1983 : pp.112-122). Like other writers she begins by "unravelling" the notion of skill. She suggests that 'skill' itself consists of at least three things, the skill that resides in the person him or herself, "accumulated over time, each new experience adding something to a total ability"; there is the skill demanded by the job - "which may or may not match the skill of the worker"; there is "the political definition of skill, "that which a group of workers or a trade union can successfully defend against the challenge of employers and of other groups of workers" (*ibid* : p.113). The significance of Cockburn's consideration of skill, however, in the present context, relates to her proposition that 'skill' is a "sex/gender weapon" (*ibid* : p.116). She argues that it plays an important part in power relations between men and women. Patriarchal relations over a very long time period have defined women's particular abilities, and work processes in which they are involved, as of a lower value than those of men. She suggests that a two-way process has operated; "women's inferiority has rubbed off on their activities and the imputed mindlessness of the activities has reflected on women". Furthermore, it is not difficult to see that men had and have much to gain, "materially and ideologically, from such an overestimate of the skill of men's work and the underestimate of the skill of women's work" (*ibid* :

pp.116-7). This point is pursued by Wood (1985), who argues like Beechey, that to propose, as Cockburn does, that gender differences play a crucial role in job definitions, is to question the notion of a "simple, unilinear deskilling model and the assumed homogenisation of the working class". The categories of 'men's work' and 'women's work' "ensure a differentiation ... on a basis which is relatively independent of the skill content of the various tasks concerned, whereas they may be based on an association of physical strength with men and other qualities (such as dexterity) with women". (ibid : p.88) In relation to the question of skilled and unskilled work in regard to women Phillips' and Taylor's (1980) question becomes pertinent; are jobs female because they are unskilled, or unskilled because they are female?

Before returning to the clerical labour process, and the gender dimension within it, in the 1870 to 1914 period, there is one more recent conceptualisation of skill which should be mentioned. This is the concept of 'tacit skills' which relates to the idea of working knowledge. Working knowledge "does not in and of itself refute the deskilling thesis, but it does provide a different vantage point, one in which the central notion is that work is both degrading and constructive, both crippling and enriching".

(Manwaring and Wood, 1985 : pp.171-196). There are three main features to tacit skills. Firstly, "that the performance of 'routine' tasks involves a process of learning by which skills are acquired through experience". Secondly, the idea that there "are different degrees of awareness required to perform certain activities"; this, for example, includes things like the 'tricks of the trade'. Thirdly, that within a collective labour process workers develop co-operative skills, i.e. congeniality, 'mucking in', time-keeping and obedience. Manwaring and Wood, through the concept of 'tacit skills', are making the complex philosophical point that "associating skill with conscious thought and of treating consciousness as an absolute" is

dangerous because no matter how degraded work may become it always retains an element of conscious action. Such an argument implies that a job cannot be judged "simply by its title or superficial characteristics. Formal training times, whilst important, will not tell the whole picture, since much of the acquisition of knowledge is done on the job". (Wood, 1985 : p.87) All of these conceptualisations of skill have implications for an analysis of female clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period.

Female Clerical Work, Sex/Gender, and Skill : 1870 to 1914

In discussing the skill content of female clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period it is necessary to return briefly to the discussion of the specialisation and departmentalisation of clerical work within the monopoly capitalist era. As Braverman noted the expansion of clerical work towards the end of the nineteenth century led to its specialisation of job, and of workers. This fits neatly with Littler's conceptualisation of the specialised worker who retains 'skill' in an objective sense in that some degree of job-discretion is inherent in the specialised work performed. However, it is an historical fact that the specialisation of clerical work within the modern corporation, i.e. the separation of accounting, from record keeping, from planning and scheduling and so on; and the departmentalisation of clerical work in purely clerical industries, i.e. banking and insurance, and in the Civil Service, created, as part of an overall expansion of clerical work, other tasks that were not 'specialised' but 'routine'. To use Littler's (1982 : pp.7-8) framework these tasks are 'fragmented', that is tasks that involve only one or two jobs with "prescribed low discretion". Our discussion of 'routine' work above indicates the nature of such tasks within clerical work.

'Routine' clerical work is considered in more detail below, at this stage

it is necessary to assess the position of typing and shorthand within the framework of the conceptualisations of 'skill' outlined above. The first point to make is that both typing and shorthand are specialised skills, they are in some senses complex competencies, and they are tasks in which the skills reside in the person. Thus, on these objective tests typing and shorthand constitute 'skilled' work. Secondly, there is the question of job-autonomy, as Littler puts it, or control over the labour process to use Beechey's (ibid) words. There appears to be little in the work of a shorthand typist, typist, or shorthand writer which suggests that such a worker has a large degree of control over the labour process. For the most part the use of shorthand and typing in business and the office was simply a means of processing, more efficiently and economically, the production of documents from a wider labour process. In their own right typing, or shorthand, or both, can hardly be conceived of as total jobs or complete tasks. Indeed, while there is an undeniable technical skill involved in the tasks and their performance, the lack of job-autonomy attendant with the skills might lead to a better understanding of shorthand and typing as 'facit skills'. This is the argument put forward by Wood (1985 : p.86); "the learning of dance routines, typing, operating presses, for example", (and we might include shorthand), "all involve a relation between the mind and body, enabling the actions to be successfully repeated without full awareness".

Whatever the relationship of typing and shorthand to the whole clerical labour process, the fact of the matter is that as clerical tasks they were peripheralised and ghettoised within offices regardless of their objectively defined skill content in the 1870 to 1914 period. This suggests that some other conceptualisation of skill impinged upon, indeed, helped to shape, the position of such skills within offices. Using Cockburn's (ibid) notion of 'skill' as a sex/gender weapon it is argued here that it was the use of this weapon which underestimated the skill involved in shorthand and

typing when it became clear that both were linked, and more importantly, that one of the catalysts linking them, was that they were tasks predominantly performed by women. While there were specialised, and tacit skills, inherent in the actual tasks of shorthand and typing, they were not perceived as significant enough, within the totality of clerical work, to achieve status as occupations (Anderson, 1976a : pp.101-4). Therefore, the conceptualisation of skill which became important in relation to shorthand and typing was not that which recognised an 'objective' skill, but rather was that which 'socially constructed' skill. The ghettoisation and peripheralisation of shorthand and typing in offices, while in part related to its use within clerical work as a whole, was also related to the belief among male clerks that it was of no use to them within the framework of a career as clerks. When this was recognised shorthand and typing were open to feminisation. In this sense, clerical tasks which were, in and of themselves, 'skilled', were constructed socially as unskilled. Men did not 'exclude' women from shorthand and typing, but instead 'excluded' the tasks of shorthand and typing from the repertoire of clerical skills they felt they needed to acquire, and in short, 'left it for the women and girls'. Thus, shorthand and typing as office skills were socially constructed as 'unskilled' because they were rejected by male clerks and accepted by females.

Of relevance once again, in a consideration of 'routine' clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period is the concept of tacit skills. As the historical discussion above indicates, there was little about the clerical work being performed by female clerks in the 1870 to 1914 period which suggested skill in any objective sense; relating to discretion or autonomy. Some writers did attempt to highlight the 'mental' aspects of the work (see notes 33 and 34), but most recognised its largely tedious and mundane nature. Indeed, even those who sought to raise its intellectual characteristics

emphasised facets of the work which were suggestive of 'tacit' rather than a more 'intellectual' definition of skill. A most important point in relation to routine clerical work and females is the extent to which the differentiation of work on the basis of gender⁽⁷⁴⁾ was taking root in the period up to 1914, and more importantly, how this differentiation was made through definitions of 'skill' and 'ability' which were related to the social construction of gender, and beliefs about the 'natural' roles of women and men. This process is equally relevant to shorthand and typing as well as to 'routine' clerical work such as that outlined above.

In essence, the process of excluding females from more responsible clerical work, at the level of 'skill' and 'ability',⁽⁷⁵⁾ relates to the manner in which patriarchal social relations had constructed the 'natural' deficiencies and abilities of women and, through the activities and thoughts of men, had been utilised within the burgeoning offices of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries to delimit the kinds of clerical work undertaken by female labour. The historical evidence reported above emphasises the extent to which such arguments were used. The evidence also suggests reasons as to why such an approach was adopted. Clearly, it was believed by men that women were simply not up to performing the more responsible clerical and managerial tasks. Such an argument facilitated differentiation in offices based on conceptualisations of skill which were sex/gender specific. In this sense, the gender based construction of skill/ability differentiation within offices is very much undertaken through the use of 'skill' as a sex gender phenomenon. The construction of 'skill' in this fashion is obviously to the material and ideological advantage of men in maintaining their position at the top of clerical work hierarchies, in the face of the increasing numbers of female clerks, while also perpetuating, ideologically, the power relations between men and women, relations of domination and oppression.

These points are similarly applicable to typing. The historical discussion above showed that, while increasingly men regarded typing as a skill they could do without in their careers as clerks, the 'skill' in typing became a particularly female 'skill', not, of course, in any objective sense, but in terms of apparently gender-based 'abilities', i.e. dexterity. Therefore, in answer to the question posed by Phillips and Taylor - are jobs female because they are unskilled, or unskilled because they are female? - the clerical work context up to 1914 has examples of both. The relatively skilled tasks of typing and shorthand became unskilled as they were rejected by men as being of little use to them within the framework of a career in the office. The tasks were ghettoised and peripheralised within the office and lost any 'skilled' status that they might previously have enjoyed. Secondly, the 'routine', relatively unskilled clerical work which was a creation of the specialisation and departmentalisation within offices as they expanded, began to become feminised in this period in part precisely because they were routine and mundane and offered little hope of promotion (see chapter eight), or high salaries (see chapter seven). In this context the existence of patriarchal social relations, and their ideological constructions, facilitated the differentiation of clerical work on the basis of sex/gender which was to the advantage of men in that it protected, relatively, their position within the clerical labour market; and also acted to the advantage of capital by allowing a more efficient and economic division of labour in offices. Tentatively, therefore, it is suggested that up to 1914 the notion of 'deskilling' in any sense related to an objective definition of 'skill' is unhelpful in the clerical work context. A rather more helpful approach is to recognise the beginnings of a process of feminisation in which 'skill' and 'ability' have been socially constructed around gender.

One final point on this subject. It would be wrong to overemphasise the

extent to which men as employers or as clerks, contrived to construct 'skill' in this way. The fact of occupational segregation within clerical work, and the related definitions of 'skill' around such segregation, were the products of patriarchal social relations which were embedded in the social formation. As this chapter has attempted to show there was a link between the dominant ideological notion that women had a 'natural' role to perform within the social formation, and the nature of the clerical work they undertook. The exclusion, marginalisation, peripheralisation, and ghettoisation of the female clerk derived from an established framework of patriarchal social relations. The advantages accruing to male clerks from this were not so much purposively contrived, as circumstantially fortuitous.

Braverman argues (ibid : p.305-348) that it was not until around 1917 that the application of scientific management to the office and clerical work was really under way; while the mechanisation of the office, apart from specialised tasks such as typing, did not take place also until well into the twentieth century. Evidence collected for this study indicates that Braverman was correct in his chronology. Increasingly in the literature in the 1910 to 1915 period are reported cases of work intensification and office mechanisation which shows that the continuing feminisation of clerical work became linked with mechanisation and 'deskilling' (see note 60); while there is also evidence of the increasing fragmentation of clerical work tasks (see notes 63 and 64). For Littler (ibid : p.7) such fragmentation in terms of skill is indicative of a development of a labour process towards tasks which involve only one or a few tasks and has "prescribed low discretion". However, like typing and other such office tasks involving mechanical aids, or simply reflecting an intensification of work, there may be a degree of tacit skills involved within such operations which deflect from a simple "unilinear deskilling model". Nevertheless, the

central objective of this chapter has been to indicate the great significance of 'skill' as a sex/gender phenomenon in the process of defining 'skill' and 'ability' within the clerical labour process in the 1870 to 1914 period. Moreover, the importance of patriarchal social relations as a material base for the gendered construction of 'skill' in clerical work, was equalled by its significance and influence in relation to the relationship between gender and the labour process issues of control and profit.

Notes

1. The impetus for this growth is considered in greater detail in Chapter seven.
2. SPEW, Annual Report, 1876
3. Ibid, 1883
4. There are no census or other available statistics which indicate the extent to which men were occupied as typists, although it is clear that in the very early days of the use of the typewriter, and throughout the 1870 to 1914 period, there were some. Unfortunately this is as precise as one can be. However, the feminisation of the 'sex-neutral' occupation of typing is a process which is clearly identifiable from the contemporary literature.
5. SPEW, Annual Report, 1885
6. The Office, December 6, 1890
7. Mrs H.C. Davidson, 'What Our Daughters Can Do For Themselves' p.292
8. Robert Barr, 'The Typewriter Girl' in Strand Magazine, Volume 2 1900
9. The London Phonographer, July 1891
10. The Typist's Gazette, September 10, 1896
11. Report of the Proceedings of the London Shorthand Writers Association, 1884-1885
12. The Quill, November 1890
13. The London Phonographer, June 1891
14. This process is considered in greater depth in the section on 'routine work'.
15. The London Phonographer, June 1891
16. W. Mostyn Bird, quoted in Delgado, 1979 : p.38
17. See the following section on routine work and chapter nine
18. Writing Machine News, November-December 1903
19. W. Mostyn Bird, quoted in Delgado, ibid : p.38

20. Chapter ten
21. Shorthand Writer, February 1897
22. Ibid, January 1911
23. Jessie Boucherett, 'How to provide for superfluous women', in Butler (ed), 1869 : pp.39-40
24. The Clerk's Journal, July 1890
25. See Humphreys, 1958 : p.13. Also Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service, Parliamentary Papers 1854, xxvii; pp.8-21
26. Report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service (Playfair), 1874-75 : p.18
27. Evidence to the Playfair Commission, pp.153-4
28. Ibid : p.169
29. Ibid : p.154
30. Margaret E. Harkness, 'Women as Civil Servants', Nineteenth Century, Volume 10, September 1881
31. Ibid
32. Ibid
33. Ibid
34. 'Employment of Women in the Public Service', Quarterly Review, Volume 151, 1881
35. A. Bulley and M. Whitley, 'Women's Work' : p.44
36. Miss B. Oldham, headmistress, Streatham High School in evidence to MacDonnell Commission 1912-15 : p.192
37. Evidence to the Playfair Commission : p.153
38. Miss Cale, Evidence to the MacDonnell Commission : p.208
39. Margaret E. Harkness, ibid
40. Report of the Royal Commission on the Civil Service (Ridley) 1886-1890 : p.xix
41. Evidence to the MacDonnell Commission : p.193
42. See chapter eight

43. The Clerk's Journal, Number 8 Volume 1, October 1st 1888
44. Janet Hogarth, 'The Monstrous Regiment of Women', in Fortnightly Review, Volume 68, April 1898
45. Westminster Review, Volume 139, March 1893
46. Shorthand Writer, February 1897
47. The Typist's Gazette, August 6th, 1896
48. The Office, December 6th, 1890
49. 'Mechanics' refers to a sub-group of the working-class; see Shapin and Barnes, 1979
50. Memorandum from Chief Accountant on the employment of female clerks in the Bank of England, November 29, 1895
51. Report on the Court of Directors, Bank of England, March 11, 1903
52. Englishwoman's Review, August 1878
53. The Life of the Railway Clerk, December 1911 : pp.4-5
54. R J Irving, 'The Profitability and Performance of British Railways', 1879-1914, Journal of Economic History Volume 13, 1953
55. The Railway Clerk, October-November 1908
56. Post Magazine, March 14, 1874
57. The Clerk, 'The Girl Clerk in a Retail House', April 1913
58. Eaton and Stevens, 1915 : p.183
59. Ibid : p.198
60. Ibid : p.204
61. Ibid : p.208
62. Ibid : p.217
63. Chisholm and Walton, 1916 : pp.15-16
64. Ibid : p.81
65. Report on the Hours and Conditions of Work in Typewriting Offices, 1911 : p.198
66. Quoted in Martindale, ibid : p.72

67. Evidence to the MacDonnell Commission, 1912-1915 : p.370
68. Ibid : p.376
69. Memorandum from the Chief Accountant on the employment of female clerks in the Bank of England, November 29, 1895
70. The London Phonographer, September 1892
71. Ibid, November 1892
72. Ibid, March 1893
73. To a large degree Anderson's (1976a) historical account disputes this argument. It is not entirely correct to suggest that all, or even most, clerks in the early nineteenth century enterprise enjoyed 'craft' status.
74. It should be remembered that the vast majority of clerks in 1914 were still male, and, therefore, a large number of male clerks were also performing 'routine' clerical work. The important statistical point to make is that of the aggregate numbers of men and women in clerical occupations proportionately more females than males were performing 'routine' work.
75. The exclusion of women on the basis of control arguments is considered in Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER SEVEN : THE PAY AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF THE FEMALE CLERK CIRCA

1870 to 1914

The objective of this chapter is to look more closely at the impetus for and the emphasis on the employment of females in clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. As will already be clear from the title of this chapter such impetus and emphasis was crucially related to issues of pay and salaries. By way of background, however, it should be noted that there is some difficulty in pinning down the great variety of clerical pay which existed in this period. Anderson (1976a : p.20) has reported that such variety was a characteristic of nineteenth century clerical work, and was associated with "different job functions". He goes on to argue that although "many clerks earned less or no more than skilled manual workers", those holding high positions in leading firms were able to command excellent salaries. Figures for the 1913-14 period support this argument (table 13). Table 13 also shows the extremely poor average pay of female clerks in relation to all other occupational classes with the exception of women employed in manual occupations, and even here their position is significantly better than only unskilled workers.

Table 13 : Average Earnings for Selected Occupational Classes, 1913-14		
Occupation	Men £ pa	Women £ pa
Managers	200	80 ^(a)
Clerks	99	45
Skilled Manual	106	44
Semi-skilled	69	50
Unskilled	63	28

Source: Routh, 1980 : pp.120-1

Notes (a) This figure is a weighted average which indicates the small numbers of female managers

Klingender (1935 : pp.1-24) has argued that the increasing numbers of

clerical workers on poor salaries throughout the 1840 to 1914 period is one factor indicative of the proletarianisation of clerical workers. Despite the usefulness of his study, it is not adequately broad enough to appreciate the full significance of the process of the feminisation of clerical work, although, he does reproduce some useful statistics on clerical salaries for 1909-10 which show variations across industrial and commercial sectors (Table 14). Table 14 supports Anderson's (ibid : p.21)

<u>Table 14 : Clerical Salaries in 1909-10 : Percentages of Clerks in Salary</u>						
<u>Groups</u>						
Salary	Commerce and Industry	Banks	Insurance	Railways	Civil Service	Local Government
<u>Men</u>						
Above 160	23	44	46	10	37	28
Less than 160	5	10	7	5	8	11
Less than 140	6	8	6	7	11	11
Less than 120	11	8	8	13	11	15
Less than 100	15	8	7	20	10	12
Less than 80	16	7	7	24	9	9
Less than 60	10	7	10	12	9	6
Less than 40	14	8	11	9	5	8
<u>Women</u>						
Less than 160	0	-	0	-	1	2
Less than 140	1	-	0	-	3	3
Less than 120	2	-	3	-	4	3
Less than 100	3	-	7	-	10	13
Less than 80	11	-	46	-	26	12
Less than 60	32	-	31	-	29	22
Less than 40	51	-	13	-	27	44
Source : Klingender, 1935 : p.20						

argument that there were considerable variations in clerical salaries within and between sectors.

Female Clerks

There is a mass of data in a whole range of nineteenth century sources

which identify the pay levels and working conditions of female clerical workers in the 1870 to 1914 period. A number of writers have already, to some degree, drawn this material together (Martindale, 1938; Humphreys, 1958; Holcombe, 1973; Silverstone, 1976). Holcombe's work is the most comprehensive, and she argues that there was some degree of variation in pay and salary levels among female clerks, varying from 8s a week to 78s 6d a week in London. Variations were often the result of length of service and/or experience; a woman with less than five years experience averaged about 26s, while those with fifteen years experience or more about 45s per week (Holcombe, *ibid* : p.151). In the public sector, where pay systems were subject to greater rationalisation and the entire employment package (including working hours, provisions for sick leave and for annual holidays, and for pensions) was regularised, Holcombe argues that a great attraction of Civil Service employment for both women and men "was the security which it offered". Moreover, "unaffected by the fluctuations and vagaries of the business world outside, civil servants were assured of steady employment at regular rates of pay". (*ibid* : p.172) Nevertheless, regular rates of pay meant low pay for female civil servants (Holcombe : *ibid* : p.173)

"for while male Second Division clerks received salaries of £80-350, women clerks, at the time of their establishment, received only £65-150. Also, women typists were paid at much lower rates than the men and boy copyists they replaced. By 1914 women typists received 20-26s weekly or roughly £52-68 yearly, and shorthand typists 28-30s a week or about £72-78 a year."

The remainder of this chapter proposes to look again at the salaries and wages, and the working conditions of female clerical workers in the 1870

to 1914 period before explaining them within the framework of labour process theory and patriarchal social relations.

The Private Sector

It is clear from Anderson (pp.52-73) that during the second half of the nineteenth century the pay and employment package for many clerks in the private sector of the economy deteriorated in proportion to their increasing numbers, although, he argues, the position of 'clerk' still offered, overall, more security than other occupations (ibid : p.66). Within such a context of deteriorating pay and conditions the future for females entering offices looked decidedly grim, even though the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, in the very early days of female employment as clerks, were relatively optimistic, arguing that 'reasonable' salaries were possible.

"The salaries received by the bookkeepers vary from £15 to £40 a year with board and lodging and from 10s to 25s or 30s a week without, according to their age, capability, or experience."⁽¹⁾

The 'reasonableness' of such salaries related more to the position of those women who took such jobs who were without financial support, than to any notion of 'reasonableness' in relation to male clerks.

Working conditions in this early period appeared 'acceptable'. At Kelly's Directories, for example, the 28 girls employed as clerks in 1880 worked in a "large well-ventilated workroom".⁽²⁾ Another contemporary expanded on the position at Kelly's:

"they will take girls from the age of 14, and the only nec-

essary qualifications are reading and perfectly legible writing. The pay commences at 8s a week, and increases 2s a week every year until it reaches a pound. The hours are from half past nine until half past five, excepting on Saturdays, when they leave off working at 4 o'clock. An hour is allowed for dinner, which must be eaten on the premises. The duties are decidedly easy and the hours light."⁽³⁾

At the Junior Army and Navy Stores the hours were from 9 to 6 "with an hour's interval for dinner. The salaries commence at £40 a year".⁽⁴⁾ The Prudential Life Assurance at this time employed some 160 'ladies':

"... they require no special qualifications beyond an ordinary English education. The hours of work are from a quarter to 10 to 5 o'clock; on Saturdays until 2. The comfort of the lady clerks has been studied to a very great extent, an excellent library and piano are provided for their use, and a refreshment room, where they can obtain luncheon (for which an hour is allowed) at a moderate price. The flat roof has been converted into terraces, where they may take exercise during their luncheon hour, and they have a separate entrance and staircase to that used by the male clerks".⁽⁵⁾

As for pay:

"They are paid £32 the first year, £42 the second, and £52 the third; after that time their salaries increase according to the value of their services."⁽⁶⁾

In banking, widely considered the aristocracy of the clerical profession (Anderson : p.16) very few women were employed up to 1914. However, where they were the pay levels were hardly 'aristocratic', even in relation to other commercial sectors.

"Many bankers employ ladies; among others may be named Messrs Rothschild and Messrs Baring. The hours of work are from 10am to 5pm; the salaries vary from 15/- to 25/- weekly and upwards."(7)

The same writer also outlines one of the less widely recognised female clerical occupations, law copying:

"Law copying is a work specially suitable to those who having a home, or some means, simply desire to add to their incomes. Daughters of a large family, who wish to contribute towards the expenses of their own maintenance, cannot do better than learn it ... The work is paid for by the piece, at the rate of 1½d per folio (72 words), and a skilful writer can earn from £1 to £3 a week."(8)

Vanderbilt also expands on the employment of female clerks at the Prudential:

"This company is the largest Life Assurance Institution in the world. In it, the lives of ⅓ of the entire population of Great Britain and Ireland are assured. The correspondence alone, in an office of this magnitude, must therefore necessarily be a very serious affair. On an average 4000 letters are received daily, and for answering these a staff of ladies is employed. They are about 170 in number; all are the daughters or orphans of professional men, and vary in age

from 17 to 25. The office hours are from 10am to 5pm. They have a separate entrance, are directly distinct from the male employees, and are under the motherly care of an efficient Lady Superintendent. They neither see, nor are seen by the public, and every possible arrangement is made for their comfort. A well-cooked, hot or cold luncheon, is provided for them at a very moderate tariff, and served in a room set apart for that purpose. A good library of over 200 well-chosen volumes is also at their service, and they may take the books home for perusal if they think fit; in fact all arrangements, including salaries, are on a most liberal and kindly scale."⁽⁹⁾

Females were also employed in large numbers in typewriting offices. These were offices, which were usually owned by women, who employed a number of typists to undertake work on behalf of clients from a range of sectors and on a range of subjects, both personal and business.

"Typists cannot count on making more than from £1 to £1.5s a week all the year round in typewriting offices; appointments are to be had now and then where a mixed salary is given, ranging from 30s to £2, and even more, but these can only be filled by really good shorthand writers and typists who have a knowledge of one or more languages in addition to English."⁽¹⁰⁾

Working conditions appeared to vary greatly between offices. One contemporary journal describes the scene in the typewriting office of Miss Ethel Dickens, granddaughter of the novelist:

"If it were not for the business like appointments in it,

one might easily think it to be the boudoir in some private house or sitting room. The floor is stained a dark colour, and carpeted with rugs. The doors, the one by which we entered and another leading to one of the rooms occupied by the clerks, are painted a dark green, which accords admirably with the colour of the distemper on the walls. The window curtains are of a deep terra cota. Immediately opposite the entrance is a window beneath which is a low, wide, and most comfortable window seat. To the right is another window, and across the corner between these two is the ~~pretty~~ curtained fireplace. Above the fireplace are shelves of various sizes, holding a variety of knick-knacks, quaint and original as well as artistic and pretty; and to the left, facing the second window is an old, picturesque but most business-like looking, 8 day clock in a fall oak case."⁽¹¹⁾

In Miss Ashworth's office the work was undertaken in "a pleasant room, unusually well-lighted and ventilated for a London office".⁽¹²⁾ However, as Miss Ashworth pointed out when interviewed there were drawbacks associated with work in a typewriting office, for example, "the long hours and the uncertain nature of the work".

"A great deal of overtime is sometimes necessary in order to deliver work at the moment promised, and in the case of legal copying, we are often called upon to deliver what is brought in at 6pm by 10am next morning."⁽¹³⁾

Personal perceptions about the work undertaken by female clerks are not easy to discover in the mass of literature. However, a reporter for one

contemporary journal conducted an interview with a female clerk working at the Prudential.

"In reply to my question as to how she liked the work, she said it was just like being at school again, only without the horrid lessons in the evening. 'We come at 10, and leave at 5; and our time is well occupied, so the hours pass quickly. Sometimes on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, we have a rush of work. They are 'policy days', and the week's policies must all be finished and posted by Friday at the latest. We are divided into 24 divisions, 12 being called 'transcript' and 12 'corresponding'. The divisions are topographical. The London one is very large, so also is the Scotch, but the Irish division is quite small.'"(14)

As for her overall view of life at the Prudential the clerk says that clerks "can gradually work their way up to a salary of £100 a year, which, when compared with pay in other fields of work, to say nothing of vicious atmosphere and disagreeable surroundings, is - well I think, as much as we can hope for, even after years of service".(15)

The growing association between typewriting and shorthand towards the end of the nineteenth century added, it appears, to the salaries that female clerks could command

"I will only add that typewriting clerks and amanuenses will command a higher salary when possessing a knowledge of shorthand. The remuneration to girl typists in business houses, without shorthand, is 15s to 20s per week, and with shorthand, 30s and upwards."(16)

Homework was also a feature of typing at this time. One writer considered that women could earn between 15s and 25s a week from such work⁽¹⁷⁾. While conditions in typewriting offices, though 'pleasant' in most were far from pleasant in others. An Interim Report of an inquiry into the conditions of the typing profession was reported in the Woman's Industrial News, which stated by way of introduction:

"This enquiry was undertaken in response to a letter from a typist, giving a description of serious overwork and lack of sanitary accommodation in a city typing office."⁽¹⁸⁾

The Report was based upon 64 interviews which were conducted with employers of typists and typists themselves. It concluded on hours of work that:

"Average hours appear to be from 9.30am to 6pm, but overtime is a frequent occurrence ... A certain number of exceptional cases of long hours was met with; as for instance (a) worked sometimes till 12pm; (b) had occasionally come in at 7am and stayed till 9, 10 or 11pm; (c) once worked from 9.30am till 10pm next day, with an interval for a wash, meals being taken at the machine."

On wages:

"they vary from 10s per week for beginners or incompetent workers to 50s for first rate workers. The average is between 20s and 30s per week... Overtime pay varies from 6d to 1s, and in three cases none."

As for sanitary accommodation:

"In seven cases (five commercial and two typing offices) no accommodation was provided, while in ten cases the accommodation was shared, and in 34 cases (three commercial houses and 31 typing offices) separate accommodation was provided."

At the Bank of England a memorandum from the Committee of the Treasury outlined the scale of salaries.⁽¹⁹⁾ The Superintendent of female clerks was to be paid £157 per annum, rising by £10.10s per annum to a maximum of £210; the Deputy Superintendent was to be paid £105 rising to £157.10s; Assistants would earn £73.10s rising to £105; and other clerks £54.12s to £85.16s. They were to work 9.30am until 4pm five days a week, and from 9.30am to 2pm on Saturdays; they would have half an hour for lunch, and three weeks holiday a year.⁽²⁰⁾

In 1900 the Central Bureau for the Employment of Women undertook a survey to discover various aspects of the work and market situations of female office workers in a number of localities based upon reports from their employment bureaux. Table 15 reproduces those aspects of this survey of relevance to this chapter, and though it should be treated with caution it does give an insight into the variations of pay and working conditions which existed throughout the country at the turn of the century. Most of the information in the table speaks for itself, however, the notions of 'premium paid' and 'appointment and terms' require some explanation. Some typewriting offices had a training as well as a purely working function, thus many new females entering such an office would pay a 'premium' and receive training. The benefits for the office in terms of cheap labour are clear.

Other contemporary commentators reported intermittently on the working conditions and the pay of female clerks.

TABLE 15 : A SYNOPSIS OF REPORTS PRINTED IN WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT OF APRIL 12 AND MAY 11 1900

	AREA								
	LONDON	LONDON	LONDON	LONDON	LONDON	EDINBURGH	LIVERPOOL	MANCHESTER	LEEDS
<u>HOURS</u>									
Usual Office		Clerks 9.30 to 5.30 or 6 to 10		Inferior 9 or 10 hours a day. Superior 10 to 6	9.30 to 6	9 or 9.30 to 6	9 to 5 or 6 to 6	8.30 to 7 (commercial) 9.30 to 6 (insurance)	9.30 to 4 to 5
Overtime					Is per hour or more in good offices	Rarely Paid	Same rate		
<u>SALARY</u>									
Premium Paid					Typewriting premium 20 to 30 guineas a year				
Appointment and terms					Two years work for tuition with 5s per week in second	Small salary in second year	Schools charge 6 or 7 guineas. Pupils give time		
Commencing		Begin at 14s rise to 25s			15s to 20s or 20s to 25s with languages	8s to 10s in schools. £40-50 in good offices	6s		10s
Minimum/Maximum and Average	Secs £100 to 200 Clerks £50 to 100 Typists £30 to 80 in government	Inferior typists 10s to 15s	Inferior 15s to 20s Superior 30s to 50s		Minimum 10s Maximum 60s Average 35s	Minimum 10s Maximum £100 Average 20s	Inferior 12s to 20s Superior 17s to 30s	Minimum 10s Maximum 50s Average 20s to 25s	Minimum 10s Maximum £25 to £80 or £100
<u>CONDITIONS</u>									
General		Good in every way				Fair	Variable		Good
Accommodation					Very fair	Good	Some old offices bad		
Crowding					Only in bad offices	Never crowded			
Light					Very fair				
Separation from men					Generally separate	Almost always separate			

Source : Women's Employment, May 11 1900

"The conditions under which some young girls work in London is disgraceful. Almost every building in the City has now its quota of girl clerks, and but few offices are adapted for the proper housing of girls during a working day."⁽²¹⁾

This writer continues:

Some of the worst offenders are typewriting offices, where may often be seen girls packed facing the walls of small rooms (often badly-lighted basements), sitting elbow to elbow, eternally tapping the lettering keys."

In 1905-6 the Association of typists and Shorthand Writers carried out a study into the salaries and hours of work of typists and shorthand writers.⁽²²⁾ They received 216 replies to their questions, 7 of these were from those who classified themselves as typists only, and 209 from shorthand typists. The results of the survey are reproduced in tables 16, 17 and 18.

Hutchins survey shows clearly that overall pay among typists and shorthand writers increased with experience. However, 35s per week, or £91 per year was the peak point for most female shorthand typists. Evidence from a number of other sources suggests that these figures accurately indicate the salaries of shorthand typists across a range of work situations.⁽²³⁾

"For the junior or the inefficient the pay may be as low as 15s to 20s a week, and here the competition is keenest; for the average and more reliable typists about 30s, while the well educated lady shorthand-typist, who is well-trained and shows that she can assimilate the details of a business and

Period of Experience	Percentages earning (per week)						
	Less Than 20/-	20/-	25/-	30/-	35/-	40/-	45/-
Less than one year	57.1	21.4	-	14.3	-	7.2	-
One year and less than	11.3	27.4	27.4	13.0	6.4	14.5	-
Four years and less than seven	1.6	12.5	32.8	18.8	15.6	15.6	3.1
Seven years and less than ten	-	-	14.0	23.2	23.3	18.6	20.9
Ten and over	-	3.7	11.1	22.2	25.9	18.5	18.5

	Daily period of employment (hours)					
	Less than 6	6	7	8	9	Uncertain
Numbers Working	2	2	35	114	49	13

	Frequency of Overtime		
	None	Little	Frequent
Numbers Working	43	98	19

Source for all tables : B.L. Hutchins, 1906

discharge responsible duties, the salary reaches £100 to £150, and cases are known to the writer in which £200 is paid."⁽²⁴⁾

One writer, writing in 1914, argued that:

"The salary of the woman secretary of the best class, whether working privately or for a firm, seems to be £100 to £150 a

year. Generally speaking, this is exactly what it was 20 years ago."⁽²⁵⁾

Furthermore:

"Well paid posts seem to be exceptional. A woman with an intimate knowledge of City conditions, who was chief accountant to an important firm for 16 years, informs me that £175 is the highest salary she has ever known a woman clerk to receive. The lowest on record seems to be 5s a week. There is a woman running a typing office in the City who hires out shorthand typists at this figure to business firms."⁽²⁶⁾

While, in the railway service, where women were beginning to undertake clerical duties, their pay was equally poor. The North Eastern railway, for example, just prior to the outbreak of World War One, was employing "no less than eleven ladies" at 6s11d per week, nine ladies at 9s2d per week, two at 18s5d, one at 20s9d, a further two at 23s, one at 30s2d, and another at 34s6d.⁽²⁷⁾

The Public Sector

Holcombe (ibid : pp.173-6) has comprehensively noted the relative position of female to male pay in the Civil Service, and table 14 indicates the relative pay differences. Other writers have also described women's pay levels in the Civil Service.⁽²⁸⁾ Consequently, there would be little point in reiterating figures which are easily available elsewhere. However, it is interesting to note the range of strategies, in addition to low pay and the employment of female clerks, which the Civil Service used in order

to maintain control of the clerical labour process in the 1870 to 1914 period. In many ways these features relate to both chapter six and eight as much as to this chapter, as will become clear.

Firstly, there was the 'downgrading' strategy. The notion of 'downgrading' relates to the reduction of the status of some clerical work by introducing new grades of clerical worker to perform at lower salaries some of the duties of higher grades. In this sense work is becoming increasingly fragmented and degraded to reduce the labour costs of undertaking it. Secondly, large numbers of 'unestablished' workers were employed by government. In essence the 'unestablished' civil servant is a temporary worker who does not benefit from the prospect of higher salaries or a pension. Thirdly, 'substitution' was a strategy adopted by the Civil Service. This again was a form of temporary work in which civil servants were employed 'temporarily on supervisory duties "appropriate to the higher grade or class but were not promoted to the higher position and were not given sufficient extra pay for performing the higher duties."' Finally, government resorted to work intensification in the form of 'speeding-up', that is the work of civil servants was "becoming increasingly complex and arduous, but they were not receiving compensatory pay increases". (Holcombe, *ibid* : pp.173-6). All of these measures amount to a restructuring and reorganising of the clerical labour process within the Civil Service to bring about primarily, savings in financial terms, but which, in doing so, effected the degradation of some clerical tasks and the intensification of clerical work. The effects of such restructuring on control issues are likely to have been ambiguous. Certainly all the strategies could have created discontent among clerks, but, alternatively, they may in some senses have divided civil servants within and between grades and secured greater managerial control.

In the present context, however, the low pay of female clerks was not based

primarily upon some kind of relationship with these managerial strategies. To be sure, women's grades in the Civil Service, were subjected to 'downgrading', 'substitution', and 'speeding-up'; and certainly also some women were employed as 'unestablished' civil servants, but these strategies do not explain why "women in nearly every grade of the Civil Service and in nearly every government department received less pay than men." (ibid : p.175). The sheer fact of which was easily recognisable to those responsible for reducing public expenditure.

"It is therefore evident that, whatever benefit the system confers on the ladies themselves the public reap a large economical advantage; seeing that the very same work, which formerly occupied clerks at salaries from £80 to £240, is now equally well done by female clerks at salaries from £40 to £75 and so in proportion with the other classes."⁽²⁹⁾

Because of the nature of the Civil Service and in particular its hierarchic and bureaucratic structure, and furthermore, because the female and male staff were segregated within departments of government, and subjected to a separate process of recruitment, there were 'responsible' positions available for a few women over other female civil servants. These positions and opportunities will be considered in greater detail in the following chapter, for present purposes it is enough to mention that such supervisory roles did offer better pay to women, although only in relation to female clerks as a whole, and not specifically in relation to men. (Holcombe, ibid : pp.177-8).

"When one considers the very wide disparity existing between the salaries for similar work of women and of men, one realises to what an enormous extent the Exchequer, and, con-

sequently, the taxpayer, has benefited by the economies practised at the expense of the women civil servants ever since their introduction in the early 1870's.

There is not a shadow of doubt that economy was the motive for their employment, but even economy would not have justified the continued increase in their numbers, had they not exhibited what has been called by a high official, 'remarkable efficiency', and also the very considerable qualities of docility, patience and conscientiousness."⁽³⁰⁾

Summary and Analysis

While much of the debate within labour process theory has revolved around the issues of deskilling and managerial control, it should be noted that for Marx the "central problem of capitalist management" was not control but the "pursuit of profit". (Wood and Kelly, 1982) In this sense a primary managerial task will clearly be to reduce, wherever possible, and perhaps in the starkest possible way, the aggregate costs of labour. Such an argument would provide the impetus for and the emphasis in the employment of women by employers of clerical labour in the 1870 to 1914 period, but how does this square with the historical evidence at our disposal? Moreover, if females were employed as clerks etc and were low paid why was this so?

The historical evidence reproduced in this chapter indicates without a shadow of doubt that female clerks suffered from low pay in relation to male clerks in the 1870 to 1914 period; this much is fact. This pay differential was considered by the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women in 1888 as being related to the oversupplied state of the clerical labour

market:

"It remains unfortunately true that women work for lower wages than men, the value of everything being regulated by the supply. While there are such multitudes of women in England who must support themselves, the price paid for their services is necessarily lower than it would be if there were fewer candidates for employment."⁽³¹⁾

In a novel of the period, the author, through the leading female character observes:

"I did not then know that every girl in London can write shorthand, and that typewriting as an accomplishment is as diffused as the piano; else I might have turned my hand to some honest trade instead, such as millinery or cake-making."⁽³²⁾

A city businessman also utilised the supply and demand argument:

"Nowadays, when the lady clerk, shorthand writer, and typist is becoming quite a power in the mercantile world, and when many a City merchant, crippled by continued depression of trade, finds it imperative that he should cut down expenses and buy his labour in the cheapest market, a little account of a busy businessman's experience in that direction may be read with interest."⁽³³⁾

While the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women reiterated constantly the oversupplied state of the market. In 1899 it reported:

"The demand for clerks who can write shorthand and can type is considerable, but the supply far exceeds the demand and consequently the salary offered to an ordinary shorthand clerk is very moderate."⁽³⁴⁾

Such arguments were also used to explain and justify the low pay of female clerks employed in the Civil Service:

"The market is overcrowded, and while this remains the case all arguments in favour of an increase of wages fall pointless ... The employment of women is certainly a great saving to the service, but when they were admitted it was for the express purpose of economising by cheap labour."⁽³⁵⁾

This commentator also notes that:

"The present rate of payment is not low, when it is measured with the remuneration received in other places by women, and only appears small when contrasted with the salaries given to men."

It is clear from the contemporary literature as well as recent analyses (Anderson, *ibid* : *passim*) that an oversupplied clerical labour market existed from the late 1880's onwards, and that this affected the pay of both male and female clerks in this period. However, it is inadequate to suggest that low pay, deriving from the 'oversupplied market' argument, is the only reason for low pay within clerical work. A glance at table 14 confirms that throughout clerical work women suffered low pay disproportionately. It is therefore necessary to seek other explanations for this phenomenon. Of some relevance here are the arguments and concepts which

derive from 'human capital' theory. In short, 'human capital' refers to the extent of skills, training, education and experience which any given worker may possess. And, as Kemp and Beck state (1981 : p.252):

"The basic argument is that workers with minimal stocks of human capital have low individual productivity and therefore receive the low wages and experience the high job turnover that is commensurate with their human capital."

In the clerical work context in the late nineteenth century 'human capital' arguments were often employed to justify and/or explain the low pay of female clerical workers. Some writers emphasised inadequate training:

"In my opinion, the reason that so many women can earn comparatively little is that they run away with the idea that, to become good operators, they have nothing to do but to learn to manipulate the keyboard, whereas the manipulation is only a very small item towards making an efficient typist."⁽³⁶⁾

Inadequate education was considered to be another cause of low pay:

"A great many young ladies have acquired just enough shorthand and typing skill to secure a position in an office, with but a very indifferent equipment of general education, and these have had to be content with elementary work and low pay."⁽³⁷⁾

Such arguments pervade the literature of the period, but, as is to be expected, there is little assessment of the reasons why female clerks 'own' less

human capital relative to men. At the direct level women have acquired less human capital than men because they have been excluded from education and training through the existence of the ideology of domesticity within capitalism. At the indirect level, if human capital theory accepts 'traditional' female roles as themselves suppliers of human capital, i.e. the organisational qualities and overall responsibility which being a wife and mother requires of an individual, these features of human capital are excluded as being irrelevant to the world of work. This, regardless of whether females have or have not less human capital than men in any objective sense the fact is that the extent of their human capital would always be subject to definitions which suited employers and men, and thus be socially constructed within a particular socio-political framework. Human capital theory as an explanation for the low pay of female clerks in the 1870 to 1914 period is related to the argument which suggested that female clerks had a 'natural' aptitude for routine and boring work. To argue that women were inadequately educated or were 'naturally' inferior intellectually to men are two parts of the same ideological system of patriarchal social relations. If men believe women are intellectually inferior it becomes easier to justify their exclusion from forms of training and education, and easier also to emphasise their primary role as that of wife and mother, and, importantly in the clerical work context, to justify the nature of the clerical labour they perform and the pay they receive for doing it. Thus human capital theory type arguments used by some contemporaries to explain the low pay of women were essentially no more than superficial arguments which covered a more insidious and pervasive structure of social relations which excluded women from either acquiring human capital or excluded their existing human capital from being defined as such. In this sense human capital theory is, in fact, apolitical and atheoretical, and simply justifies what it seeks to explain.

An extension of this issue is contained in the explanations of contemp-

oraries who saw the low pay of female clerks as somehow related to their innately poorer physical constitution relative to men:

"Absence from ill-health is far-oftener the case with the female than the male clerks; the daily routine tells upon the women, and the repetition without break of the same monotonous employment seems to wear them a great deal more than it does the other sex. The constant confinement, the want of fresh air, and the upright position, all tend to increase the average of absentees, and to swell it above that of the male officers. Added to this is the fact that many live at long distances, and travel backwards and forwards in stiffling third class underground railway carriages; many bring little or no lunch with them and abstain from ordering food in the building; many work hard after office hours, and thus use more strength than they ought to expend. Thus they are oftener absent from their posts than the men, and during rough weather they are more apt to fall ill."⁽³⁸⁾

Harkness, the writer of this piece, shows no indication of recognising that the very fact of their low pay is a possible reason for the greater absenteeism among female clerks. Rather than low pay reflecting inherent unhealthiness it is more likely that the relative unhealthiness of female clerks reflects and relates to their poor levels of pay. The pervasiveness of the ideology of women's mental and physical inferiority is crucially implicated in providing employers of clerical labour with the opportunity to reduce labour costs through the employment of women.

The essence of patriarchal social relations within the capitalist mode of production are to be discovered in the capitalist family. The exist-

ence of the family form within capitalism is in itself the "cornerstone of the precarious and subordinate position of women workers" in the form of the "family wage" (Thompson, 1983 : p.201). The 'family wage' "is the idea that an adult man ought to earn enough to enable him to support a wife and children" (Barrett and McIntosh, 1980), and is associated historically with the emergence of the modern relation between the family and work, and the fashion in which the labour market is structured by gender and females are marginalised. The implications of the 'family wage' concept for female wage labourers are severe. In short, female wage labourers are considered not to require wages and salaries as high as those of men because they do not, by definition, require enough to support a family. Recent writers who have addressed the 'myth' of the family wage have argued that in reality the 'family wage' never existed (Barrett and McIntosh, *ibid*; Land, 1980). Although it clearly influenced those arguing and negotiating for pay rises, and in this sense was a concrete contributor to the low pay of females. Many male clerks believed that their failure to secure a 'family wage' was a consequence of the existence of the 'pin-money' female clerk. Rather than blame the existence of the concept 'family wage' for the relative low pay of female clerks, they sought to attribute their declining status and prospects on female clerks who were considered not to need a 'family wage', and who were, therefore, lowering clerical salaries overall (Anderson, *ibid* : pp.58-60). Though a 'myth' in practice the notion of the 'family wage' is key to appreciating the fashion in which employers of clerical labour were able to exploit females undertaking clerical work. Thus, employers had both a 'natural' reason for paying female clerks less, i.e. they were inherently incapable of performing more responsible and better paid work; and an economic reason built on women's dependency on men, i.e. the 'family wage' concept which derived from the existence of the capitalist family and the dominance of the male within it. The immutability of these 'facts' shaped the relative pay levels of men and women. Furthermore it was 'natural', in any case, that the primary

social role of women should relate to the maternal and domestic, and that they would always, ipso facto, live out their existence within families, dependent upon men. The point here (and considered further in the concluding chapter) being that the subordinate position of women within the capitalist family relates to conceptions of women's 'natural' position which have emerged through time as a set of patriarchal social relations based upon the perceived relationship between childbirth and childrearing. This is aside from the shape or form of the family within capitalism. In other words, the utility of the family to capitalism as a centre of reproduction and as an ideological superstructural framework cannot be understood without appreciating the form of patriarchal social relations as they manifest themselves within the family form, and their emergence and development through history. Gender inequality, in this sense, is thus crucially tied up with the development of patriarchal social relations.

The above issues will be considered in greater detail in the conclusion, to return to the 'family wage', however, not all commentators were unsympathetic to the supposed 'pin-money' girl clerk:

"Many of the women (clerks) go home to continue their exertions in some other form. The salary is small, and one tries to increase it by giving lessons; another by sewing; a third in drudgery of a domestic kind. The continuous close application is often found a relief from pressing thoughts of great sorrow or loneliness; or there may perhaps be anxiety to rise as rapidly as possible to a higher position in the section, that a larger salary may be obtained. The clerks in some cases have others depending on them. Lodgings where two idiot brothers are her only companions, is the home of one woman. A solitary attic near London Bridge is the home of another of these clerks."(39)

It is important to note that, particularly in the context of clerical work in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, the idea that what a female clerk earned contributed to a family budget, in which she was a secondary earner to her husband, is a false one. The majority of female clerks, indeed, virtually all of them were unmarried. The Civil Service did not recruit married women, while the vast majority of employers employed women partly because they would leave to get married, thus enabling women to be employed on routine jobs with no promotion prospects. The money that a female clerk was paid, then, was likely to act as 'pin-money', i.e. spending money for a female who lived in the parental home; a situation which historical evidence suggests was rare. Or, secondly, the low pay of a female clerk was often used to support at least her and often 'aging' or 'idiot' relatives as well. The consequences of the 'family wage' for the 'single' woman are made clear by Beechey (1977):

"Since the wages of single women are paid on the assumption that they do not have to bear the costs of reproduction, those categories of women who do not have husbands whose wages can contribute to the costs of reproduction, and who do not have families of origin to meet at least part of the costs of reproduction, are depressed into poverty."

It is, furthermore, somewhat ironic that a consequence of the existence of the 'family wage'/'male breadwinner' idea is the decline in the wages and salaries of male clerks which made the "ideal model of the family wage and women's peripheral place in wage-work" more unobtainable for male clerks (Barrett and McIntosh, *ibid*). In this sense the requirements of capital for ever cheaper labour contradicts patriarchal social relations and the existence of the capitalist family. The family might be threatened in this context, but for the maintenance of opportunities for men

to escape from low paid work through promotion/mobility; opportunities which again, because of the existence of the ideology of domesticity, are often denied to women.

"If they (women) become cashiers, accountants, clerks, they take these places from the men at a lower salary. Always they take lower pay and turn the men out. Well, the men must go elsewhere, or they must take the lower pay. In either case the happiest lot of all, that of marriage, is rendered more difficult because the men are made poorer; the position of the toiler is made harder because he gets worse pay, and a man's sense of responsibility for the woman of his family is destroyed. Nay, in some cases, the men actually live, and live contentedly, on the labour of their wives."⁽⁴⁰⁾

The insidious influence and pervasiveness of the 'family wage' idea remained largely hidden from contemporaries attempting to explain the willingness of female clerks to accept lower wages. Yet, it is likely to have been the case that most women, and particularly the majority who were young female clerks, perceived themselves as only temporary workers, not 'pin-money' workers, but certainly waiting for the opportunity to marry. This was their expectation, created by patriarchal social relations through the existence of the capitalist family. Thus they accepted low pay as a fait accompli associated with their position in society and their expected role within it. Moreover, their resistance to low pay was structured by such 'reality' and expectations. Consequently, contemporary commentators who could not or would not link the low pay of women to the 'family wage' were often reduced to cries of despair in the explanations of it:

"Why will women persist in making themselves so cheap? It is

not recorded that any woman has ever regarded herself as an inferior being to man; why then does she sell her labour at half the figure secured by him? If there is to be competition between the sexes, let it be fair competition."⁽⁴¹⁾

The central point to make is that while 'inferiority' may or may not have been a factor influencing the low pay of female clerks; and in terms of 'human capital' it was argued generally in the 1870 to 1914 period that women were inferior, the foundation upon which low pay was based was in reality the 'family wage' concept. In this sense the existence of the idea of the 'family wage', and the pervasive belief that it was a fact, enabled employers of clerical labour to effect economies by employing females. Moreover, and in any case, the notion of 'human capital' is itself theoretically loaded against an appreciation of patriarchal social relations and the part they play in excluding women from acquiring 'human capital'.

It is noticeable that into the twentieth century a greater awareness of the significance of the 'family wage' concept for the low pay of women generally did emerge. As one writer observed:

"I am afraid a large part of a woman's economic value is her undoubted cheapness. It pays the employer to use her because her wages need only be sufficient to keep herself. They are often insufficient, but let that pass. Anyway, she is not expected to earn enough to support a husband and children."⁽⁴²⁾

In reality, the fact of the matter was that not even most male workers earned an adequate 'family wage' (Barrett and McIntosh, *ibid*). The Women's Industrial News⁽⁴³⁾ recognised three factors which affected the pay of women; that they do not treat work as central to their lives; that they

need less pay than a family man; and that they live at home. The paper concluded that "true equality would be reached when an employer pays his workers at such a rate that his choice of a man or woman is dictated by suitability and not by cheapness."⁽⁴⁴⁾ However, the writer fails to challenge the misconceptions, material realities, and ideological constructions upon which the low pay of women was based.

Those seeking to organise clerks were also becoming increasingly aware of the problems of the 'family wage' as they impacted upon pay:

"Female clerks are at one with the males in their desire to obtain a living wage for their labour, but, like all female workers, are at a great disadvantage from the point of view of sex, as well as from lack of organisation. In the case of most they follow their occupation with the knowledge that it is only temporary, and will be ended by their marriage, which in itself is a temptation to bid lower than the male, who consequently finds himself in the position of keeping a wife and children on wages which are low because his partner has in the past assisted in forcing them down to a ridiculous point."⁽⁴⁵⁾

Increasingly 'radical' and 'progressive' writers and movements were calling for greater organisation among women clerks to overcome the pervasiveness of low pay built upon the concept, the 'myth' of the 'family wage'. Constance Hoster in *The Fingerpost*⁽⁴⁶⁾ argued that "to work for less, because a woman has her parents' home to live in, or because she has other means of subsistence to fall back upon, is a cruelty to those less blessed by fortune." She hoped that all female clerks "will play the game fairly, and support and uphold one another in this and every other respect".

In the public service the importance of the family in relation to the low pay of female clerks was also becoming clear. Sir John Anderson of the Colonial Office, in his evidence to the MacDonnell Commission, was engaged in the following exchange:

"I have only one more question to ask you... You said if a woman were living at home she might be able to exist upon this £1 a week?

"Yes"

"Why should a woman who is living at home be paid a smaller wage than a woman who has to live in lodgings?"

"I did not fix the scale"

"How does it come to pass that it is cheaper to live at home than to live in lodgings?"

"She does not have to pay rent for one thing"

"But somebody has to pay rent?"

"Yes, somebody has to, presumably her parents"

"And therefore the parents are subsidising State underpaid employment. It amounts to that does it not?"

"It does"⁽⁴⁷⁾

Recognition of the usefulness of the family in "subsidising State underpaid employment" did not, however, develop into increases in pay for those female clerks who did not live with their families.

Although there was increasing awareness of the significance of the 'family wage' in determining the low pay of female clerks into the first decade of the twentieth century, there was little that such increased awareness could tangibly achieve. The pervasiveness of the 'myth' based on the material reality of patriarchal social relations enabled employers to use

it to their economic advantage in the employment of female clerks. Moreover, the financial expectations of female clerks, as well as their mobility expectations (see chapter eight), were themselves shaped by the existence of the capitalist family and patriarchal social relations as well as their actual work situation. An explanation, therefore, for the low pay of female clerks in the 1870 to 1914 period, as in the present, must be located within patriarchal social relations and the capitalist family and the 'family wage'/'male breadwinner' concept deriving from them. To suggest, as nineteenth century contemporaries did, and indeed, as present day apologists do, that women's low pay is related to other factors serves only to avoid the central issue - that patriarchal social relations, and specifically their manifestation through the material reality of the capitalist family, form the basis upon which women's low pay rates were and are established. Having argued, however, that gender inequality at work is related to the capitalist family, how can a theory of patriarchy help to develop an understanding of the sexual division of labour within the family and work? The concluding chapter will address these issues.

Notes

1. Annual Report of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, 1873
2. Ibid, 1880
3. Mercy Grogan, How Women May Earn a Living, 1883 : p.86
4. Ibid, p.86
5. Ibid, p.86-7
6. Ibid, p.86-7
7. A.T. Vanderbilt, What to Do with Our Girls, 1884 : p.118
8. Ibid, p.119
9. Ibid, pp.119-120
10. Annual Report of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, 1888
11. The London Phonographer, July 1891
12. Ibid, September 1891
13. Ibid.
14. The Office, May 3, 1890
15. Ibid.
16. The London Phonographer, July 1892
17. Ibid, May 1893
18. Women's Industrial News, June 1898
19. Committee of the Treasury Memorandum, Bank of England, May 1st 1895
20. Appointment of Women Clerks in the Bank of England, Bank of England Archive, February 19, 1894
21. Writing Machine News, August 1904
22. B.L. Hutchins, 1906
23. See Hugh Cockerell, 1982; Surrey County Council, transcript of tape recording of an interview with Miss Frances Hall; Midland Bank Archives, Copy of letter from F.O. Free, Secretary, to Miss Anne Tullock, and

also extracts from directors' minutes of the London Joint Stock Bank, 6/4/1911; Shell Transport and Trading Co. Ltd. Staff Magazine, April 1955.

24. A. Kingston, 1907 : p.20
25. Edith Morley, 1914 : p.280
26. Ibid : p.281
27. The Railway Clerk, July 1914
28. See Martindale, 1938 : pp.158-175; Humphreys, 1958 : pp.194-222.
Also these contemporary commentators; Edith Morley, 1914; The Fingerpost, 1910.
29. Quarterly Review, Volume 151, 1881
30. Edith Morley, ibid : pp.260-1
31. Annual Report of the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, 1888
32. Olive Pratt-Rayner, 1897 : p.20
33. The London Phonographer, November 1893
34. Annual Report, SPEW, 1899
35. Quarterly Review, Volume 151, 1881
36. The Office, September 20, 1890
37. A. Kingston, 1907 : p.19
38. Nineteenth Century, Volume 10, September 1881
39. Ibid.
40. Westminster Review, Volume 131, March 1889
41. Ibid, Volume 158, December 1900
42. Fortnightly Review, Volume 83, January to June 1905
43. Women's Industrial News, September 1904
44. Ibid.
45. The Clerk, March 1908
46. The Fingerpost, 1910 : p.206
47. Evidence to the MacDonnell Commission, 1912 - 1915 : p.276

CHAPTER EIGHT : JOB MOBILITY, PROMOTION PROSPECTS AND RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE CLERKS

Introduction

This chapter considers the labour process theory issue of control. Firstly it will outline aspects of the work situation of the female clerks in relation to their job mobility and promotion opportunities in the 1870 to 1914 period. Secondly, it will consider the relationships which existed between men and women within offices. Finally, in an analytical section, it will relate these features of female clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period to issues of managerial control of and stability in clerical work bureaucracies and in smaller offices. The chapter indicates the importance of the gender dimension to understanding the nature of control in offices, and how the utilisation of the gender dimension aided both the employers and men as the clerical labour process developed up to 1914.

Job mobility and the promotion prospects of the female clerk in the 1870 to 1914 period

It has been argued that one of the characteristics of mid-nineteenth century clerical work was that it offered the prospect of 'job mobility', although such mobility varied considerably in degree between different firms and trades. (Anderson, 1976a : pp.20-21). As the nineteenth century progressed, however, and "the struggle for respectability on a small income and the realities of depression and insecure employment eroded, in many clerks, the belief in the possibility of achieving economic independence" (ibid : p.49) the male clerk became increasingly anxious about his opportunities for job mobility. A major feature in the thinking of male clerks' in general was that it was the entry of females into clerical work which

threatened their opportunities and prospects. Although previous historical analysis shows this to be a misconception (ibid : p.60) it is worth reviewing the situation from the viewpoint of the female clerk, to assess what opportunities were available for them to gain promotion, and to highlight instances in which upward mobility was achieved.

As employment opportunities for 'middle-class' women generally began to expand in the period after about 1870 the question of prospects was not so much one of promotion, but of the prospect of obtaining work. Indeed, Zimmeck, (1986) has argued that obtaining clerical work was in and of itself an upwardly mobile step for women in the sense that it 'freed' them from the home or unemployment. In this sense, regardless of their class position or status in work, the fact of being in work was the factor of most significance. At any rate, it is clear that into the 1870's the prospects of obtaining work of a 'genteel' kind were growing:

"The occupations successfully followed by women are now sufficiently numerous to give scope for individual talent and character, and to remove the idea that all self-supporting gentlewomen must follow one of two callings; connected with the rearing or training of children."⁽¹⁾

This trend was also specifically apparent in clerical work:

"The employment of women as bookkeepers, clerks, and cashiers, continues to gain ground in private offices, shops and stores; never before in a single year have so many young women been placed out in this capacity."⁽²⁾

Opportunities of employment for women in the public service were also incr-

easing in this period. The Playfair Commission of 1875 saw "no reason why the employment of female clerks should not be extended" to government departments other than the Post Office, in which they were already employed; "where the circumstances will admit of it."⁽³⁾

Despite this early optimism it was not long before the numbers of women seeking clerical work exceeded the numbers of such jobs available,⁽⁴⁾ while the prospects of promotion of those in work remained entirely negligible. In its 1885 Annual Report the Society for Promoting the Employment of Women observed that "there is, perhaps, no branch of industry in which the demand for the services of women has so largely increased as in that of clerks and bookkeepers," three years later it was emphasising vehemently the problems of over-supply.⁽⁵⁾ An article by Janet Hogarth in the journal 'Fortnightly Review' argued that for educated women of average ability there were three avenues of employment opportunity; business, including all forms of clerical and secretarial work; trades and handicrafts; nursing and other branches of domestic economy. Hogarth concludes:

"And it may be said at once that of these three the first, though far the most frequently chosen, offers a much less favourable prospect than either of the others."⁽⁶⁾

Another journal in the period noted that "three-fourths of the women of the world have no occasion, or never make the effort to 'get on'. There are only 25 per cent of English girls who come to the surface, and of these, 5 per cent would rise in the teeth of the most discouraging surroundings."⁽⁷⁾ The Scottish Council for Women's Trades wrote that:

"The chances of promotion are limited. A clerk may, as a rule, look forward to the management of his department, the

buying or selling of goods as a traveller, the general management of the business, or entering into business on his own account. Most of these avenues are closed to a woman in commercial life."⁽⁸⁾

Into the twentieth century the situation, if anything, got worse, with continuing overcrowding of the clerical profession and the consequent diminution of job prospects for women, such as they were. The Central Bureau for the Employment of Women noted that "competition" was "extreme" for the position of clerk, "and it is not an occupation which has anything like the chances of the other 'professions'." The writer argues that "secretarial appointments are not nearly as numerous as one is led to expect by the specious advertisements in the newspapers."⁽⁹⁾ It was also suggested by another contemporary that those females entering clerical work were doing so regardless of future prospects:

"An occupation is sought which will need the minimum of preparation, and give a monetary return at once, regardless of future prospects. Such an occupation has been found in typewriting, shorthand and the lower grades of office work generally, and hence arises the unabated stream of girls into this occupation."⁽¹⁰⁾

Edith Morley, writing in 1914, summarised the position of female clerks in the period circa 1870 to 1914:

"Most important of all, women clerks and secretaries want more scope. After 10 years of clerking and secretarying they find that they are up against a dead wall. There is no prospect of advancement, and no call on their initiative (particularly in the commercial world)."⁽¹¹⁾

While most writers were rightly critical of the prospects for female clerks, they also sought to identify the possibilities for job mobility which did exist. Certainly in the public sector these opportunities were much greater, although they should not be overstated. At the London County Council promotion prospects were clearly structured around the extent of a clerk's education and abilities. Candidates for typing posts, for example, were initially selected on the basis of competitive examination, and were informed that:

"As there is a possibility of some of the typists being required to do superior clerical work in addition to typewriting (for which, while engaged on such work, a typist will receive extra duty pay up to 5s a week) candidates, to improve their chances of being selected for such work, will be at liberty, should they so desire, to take up the following extra subjects."⁽¹²⁾

Promotion, furthermore, "shall only take place on the typist showing exceptional ability; and that the half yearly increase shall only be given on a certificate from the Clerk of the Council that the work and conduct of the typist have been in all respects satisfactory during the preceding six months."⁽¹³⁾ The position for typists was similar within departments of government, although it was noted in 1905 that the advantages of being a Civil Service typist were that the employment was permanent; full wages were paid during sickness; and that they were entitled to the same rate of pension as other civil servants. However, the disadvantages, according to the writer, consisted of poor promotion prospects; the monotony of the work; no opportunity for a woman to use "other attainments" she might possess.⁽¹⁴⁾

By the MacDonnell Commission of 1912-1915 the promotion prospects of women

clerks in the Civil Service had become something of a contentious issue. In his evidence to the Commission Mr Bernard Mallet, Registrar-General, argued that it was better to employ women on routine work than boy clerks. He had the following exchange with the Commissioners:

"The difficulty is that routine labour, if it is to be done cheaply, must be done by people to whom you can offer insufficient prospects ? - Yes"

"For that purpose it is an advantage that some labour should be used that has a large natural wastage? - Yes"

"And for that purpose it is an advantage to employ the labour of women, a large number of whom for natural reasons leave the service, and which produces a smaller permanent element than the labour of boys who do not leave the Service? - That is the case; that is why we rather largely employed women and girls temporarily."

"The evil of blind-alley occupation is in their case less? - Yes, that was the idea."⁽¹⁵⁾

In countering such a policy Miss Oldham, the headmistress of Streatham High School, argued in her evidence:

"We think that women have shown that they are capable of rising; we think that there is abundant evidence now, if we look around us, that women are capable of taking responsibility, and we think it is a very bad thing for them, as well as for the Service, that at the present time they are condemned to dull and monotonous employments such as men have rejected, for it really comes to that."⁽¹⁶⁾

Edith Morley pursued this argument:

"The present limitation of the employment of women, and their lack of prospects of advancement constitutes a serious grievance. Whilst many avenues are open to men to improve their condition in the early years of service, if they possess the necessary ability and enterprise, women have no such opportunities, and have practically no chance of advancement except by way of supervision in their own grade. It is in the interests of the public that the best type of officer should be secured, and not merely the best male available, and the unrestricted admission of women to the higher classes in the Civil Service, and their payment on the same terms as men would make for the greater efficiency of the Department, by securing the services of highly qualified women, who at present are not attracted by the small salaries and the meagre prospects offered."⁽¹⁷⁾

Overall, although there was some possibility of women achieving responsible positions within the Civil Service, the opportunities were few. And, as has been noted, this fact became something of a grievance. The major problem besetting female civil servants, in relation to promotion opportunities, was that they were segregated from the mainstream of the Civil Service, "strictly separate and distinct from comparable men's grades". Consequently, "women could not obtain promotion to higher grades of the service like men but were restricted to the supervisory classes within their own grades". (Holcombe, 1974 : p.176).

The limited opportunities offered to female clerks in the public sector appeared positively generous when compared to those on offer in the private sector. To be sure, large bureaucracies like the Prudential Assurance

operated a similar structure with similar opportunities to that of the Civil Service, employing female clerks in segregated offices with female supervision. While in banking there was absolutely no chance of females acquiring positions of great responsibility, indeed, most banks were not employing women clerks by 1914. Of those who were, like the Midland for example, the prospects for female clerks revolved again around self-contained, segregated offices. Furthermore, in the insurance industry women were actually prevented from qualifying professionally until 1919 (Cockerell, 1982). In other large offices the same degree of segregation existed and any promotion prospects available to female clerks arose in this context. Miss Frances Hall, who was initially employed at Christ's Hospital in London in the later years of the nineteenth century as a shorthand-typist, "got on fairly well" and she "was put in charge of the women upstairs or thereabouts". She estimated that the number of women in her charge must have been about fifty. Miss Hall later moved into the public sector with the London County Council and was eventually put "in charge of 90 or 100 girls".⁽¹⁸⁾ Another case study in job mobility is that of Miss Prideaux, who was employed by the Girls Friendly Society as a clerk in January 1906 on 10 shillings per week. In April of that year her pay was increased to 15 shillings after she had been identified as a "satisfactory worker". In March 1907 "in view of the fact that Miss Prideaux is now able to undertake the typing at the office, her salary be raised from 15/- to £1 a week. To this the Committee⁽¹⁹⁾ agreed considering also the increased responsibility of her position". By November 1907 the Committee was proposing "that Miss Prideaux, now acting as Clerk, be appointed Assistant Secretary from January 1st 1908, at a salary of £60 per annum, and that an agreement be drawn up to this effect". From January 1909 Miss Prideaux' salary was to increase to £70 per annum, and from January 1910 to £80. Furthermore "it was decided to include Miss Prideaux in the Office Pension Scheme, and to insure her in the Commercial Union Assurance Company".⁽²⁰⁾

Despite such case histories it is clear from the historical evidence available that the opportunities for promotion of female clerks were limited in both the public and private sectors. Moreover, the simple fact that most female clerks were employed on routine work suggests a degree of exclusion from promotion opportunities which cannot be adequately explained by simplistic supply and demand arguments. Also, while it would have been possible for contemporaries to have used the 'oversupply' argument to justify the lack of promotion opportunities for female clerks, the main thrust of contemporary analyses of this issue revolved around discussions related to 'human capital'.

In short, an oft cited argument seeking to explain why female clerks (and, indeed, male clerks, see Anderson; *ibid* : chapter 6) did not gain promotion was that they had not received an adequate education and training; that their 'human capital' was not 'worthy of' promotion. The Clerks Journal argued in 1890:

"A business firm recently advertised for a young lady to write shorthand, 120 words per minute, and to operate the typewriter. Not a single application was put in. Two or three ladies called who said they were willing to learn shorthand and typewriting, but that is not what is wanted these days; employers want someone who can work and not someone who wants to learn. Ladies think they can hold responsible commercial positions receiving six or eight weeks training. A young man with 3 years office apprenticeship will, if he has ordinary wits, be far more competent than a lady who has studied typewriting for 3 months simply because he adds to this month's lessons in typewriting a knowledge of commercial routine which ladies cannot master so easily. Ladies are too apt to work as mech-

anical note-takers and copyists, and automatism thus becomes their besetting sin. As a matter of fact, ladies are sharper at typewriting than men, when they put any experience and interest into their work, but it is lack of these that brings about so many failures."⁽²¹⁾

In general terms, but in relation to specific skills, it was recognised as early as the mid-1880's that shorthand was an indispensable feature of a clerk's skills. The London Shorthand Writers Association argued that the "complaint of modern commercial life respecting the competition of the German element in London would speedily be ended if young men entering commercial life made themselves facile in what the German could not possess - viz, an accurate knowledge of shorthand".⁽²²⁾ Another writer some ten years later argued that as far as women clerks were concerned "for typewriting to be satisfactory as an occupation it should be combined with shorthand, for a typist pure and simple can seldom rise beyond the clerkship in a typewriting office".⁽²³⁾ Despite such beliefs and arguments amongst contemporary observers, the fact was that "it is doubtful whether shorthand alone ever offered any easy route to promotion in business".(Anderson, *ibid* : p.104).

Edwardian commentators argued also that the training, skills and experience of female clerks often appeared inferior to those of male clerks.

"As a rule the best paid appointments are associated with the demand for some special line of experience, and the male candidate has very often a better chance of securing these from the fact that he has taken the trouble to fit himself for more than the bare qualifications of shorthand and typing, with which the young lady candidate is too apt to content herself."⁽²⁴⁾

Another Edwardian writer echoed these sentiments, arguing that many young ladies entering offices were ill-equipped in shorthand and typing, and inadequately educated at a general level. As a consequence they had to be content with the most routine of office work.⁽²⁵⁾ G.H. Breda, offering 'Some Graduitous Advice', wrote:

"A woman's chances in business are better now than ever before, provided she has sound qualifications, and worse now than ever before for those with merely mediocre qualifications."⁽²⁶⁾

'Human Capital' was certainly considered an essential prerequisite in order for the female clerk to acquire more responsible and rewarding clerical work.

As the last chapter argued, however, 'human capital' arguments suffer from a number of inadequacies, particularly in relation to female workers. Indeed, to use 'human capital' theory to explain the female clerks' lack of promotion prospects or their failure to get promoted "may also serve as a powerful legitimation for the lack of success among women" (Crompton and Jones, 1984 : p.144). In fear of repeating the discussion of the previous chapter it might be asked why it is that women do not acquire enough human capital, either now or in the 1870 to 1914 period, to achieve promotion? There are two important and inter-linked features for consideration here. Firstly, the process of socialisation and its relationship with the notion of 'inherent characteristics'. Secondly, again the process of socialisation and its relationship with the 'career' of wife and motherhood; in brief, the ideology of domesticity. Furthermore, these features are intimately tied to the orientations and expectations women have to and from work. It is clear that the female clerical worker in the 1870 to 1914 period, much like her present day sister, was socialised into

approaching wage labour outside of the home in a particular fashion. Crompton and Jones (ibid : p.149) cite Brown who "has suggested that four interrelated factors may lead one to suppose that women's 'orientations to work' are rather different from those of men". These are, firstly, the influence and impact of primary socialisation; "from adolescence (and even before) girls are encouraged to think of marriage as a 'career' in itself, thus the 'employment career' - work - assumes only secondary importance". The second factor is that "the opportunities available to girls starting in employment are, in reality, more restricted than those available to boys and often confined to 'women's work'." Thirdly, a factor which is of less importance in the 1870 to 1914 clerical work context, mainly because so few female clerical workers were married, "women acquire responsibilities as they progress through the domestic life-cycle and thus work itself will assume a less 'central' role for most women". Finally, "the fact that many women are located in jobs that offer little in the way of opportunity or intrinsic job satisfaction means that the 'rewards for them are not such as to increase their involvement in the world of work at the expense of their "central life interests" in the home and family'".(ibid : p.149).

Intimately linked to the reality of women's disadvantaged position in the clerical (and other) labour markets as a result of their peripheralisation and oppression deriving from patriarchal social relations mediated through the capitalist family was (is) the prevalent and pervasive belief that women had distinctive, inherent characteristics which prevented them from the adequate performance of responsible jobs. In the same way that they had, as a sex, certain characteristics which made them 'right' for routine work (see chapter six), so they also had, conveniently, certain characteristics which in any case would prevent their upward mobility. Thus we have, for example, in relation to the use of shorthand, the opinion advanced

that because of some kind of innate differences between men and women, young men perceive shorthand in a pragmatic and utilitarian fashion, while young women perceive it mystically and romantically:

"There are few subjects which appear to have so great a charm for youthful minds as shorthand. To young men especially a knowledge of the art opens out a promising vista of increased usefulness in the office, as well as of pecuniary profit, and more rapid advancement in business. To many young women the art has an air of mystery and romance about it, which acts as a powerful attraction in itself."⁽²⁷⁾

Another prevalent view around this period suggested that in certain specific qualities, rather appropriately those which were likely to increase an office worker's promotion prospects, women clerks were somehow deficient:

"As far as shorthand and typewriting are concerned, experience shows that women are, as a rule, equal to men in adaptability and capacity, but as regards power of endurance and maturity of judgement, women have to give place to men."⁽²⁸⁾

The Shorthand Writer said of the female office worker that:

"As a mechanical worker she rivals and very often excels the male competitor, but, where the head is of more importance than the hand, she falls short."⁽²⁹⁾

These views were not only perpetuated by Victorian men, but were accepted by many 'educated' Victorian women. At the International Congress of Women in 1899 Miss Gradwell delivered a paper in which she argued:

"It was not unusual to find a girl clerk who, after a few months training, started with a higher salary than her brother; but her remuneration did not increase in the same proportion as that of her brother. Many complained of the inequality of payment of men and women clerks when doing the same work. The principle was not so unjust as it seemed. There were qualities in women themselves which largely accounted for this disparity. They were timid, and afraid to demand higher pay; or afraid to resign a post in case of not being able to get another... Women who had not been brought up to Commercial life had a great deal to learn before they could succeed in business ... Women were timid, and when once in a groove, were inclined to plod contentedly on whereas men seized opportunities of bettering their positions and extending their commercial knowledge. Women had courage and endurance, but were lacking in pluck, the spirit of adventure, and in initiative where their own affairs were concerned. They clung tenaciously to old associations, which caused them to lag behind in the race of life. Physical strength was perhaps another cause of inequality. With a finer and more highly strung organism, women were less reasonable than men, who worried themselves infinitely less, and fed themselves infinitely better."⁽³⁰⁾

Such views persisted into the Edwardian era (and beyond). Teachers of office skills considered male clerks to be more suited to the pressures of 'commercial work' than females. The Writing Machine News reported, in an article on the Pitman's Metropolitan School:

"In conversation, we asked the Principal if he considered

that, taken generally, the young women are the equals of the men in their capacity for commercial work. His reply was that, up to a certain point, he found the women quite as capable as their male competitors in most branches of office work; but that when it came to dealing with emergencies or times of great business pressure, the men displayed qualities which are by no means so common among their sisters of the pen."⁽³¹⁾

Another report in the same journal, quoting from an article in the Daily Express, argued that:

"Few women are capable of undertaking responsible work, partly because they do not recognise responsibility, and partly on account of the fact that they feel the nervous strain far more than men do, and are apt to fail just at the point where it is most essential that they should keep their heads."⁽³²⁾

The thrust of such views and beliefs clearly link with the discussion in chapter six. In characterising women in this fashion patriarchal social relations in the 1870 to 1914 period effectively restricted the opportunities for female clerks to achieve promotion in two ways. Firstly, through the existence of the institution of the capitalist family, and secondly, through pre-capitalist patriarchal conceptions of women's 'inferiority' to and difference from men; the first of these being in part a derivative of the second in association with the emerging capitalist social relations. The manner in which such factors impacted upon the issue of control within offices is considered in the final section of this chapter.

Relationships between men and women in the office, 1870 to 1914

As the analytical section below will show the issue of control includes features of interpersonal relations as much as hierarchic or bureaucratic relations. In this sense it is therefore necessary as a preliminary to the analytical discussion to outline the nature of the relationships between men and women in the office as they existed in the 1870 to 1914 period.

Once again Anderson (1976a : pp.57-60) has correctly argued (though atheoretically) that what concerned male clerks particularly in the later years of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth was that "female clerks appeared to be winning the Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest at their expense". He suggests that a quote from The Typist's Gazette describes the "typical male reaction to female clerks":

"...it has for some time pleased the minor wits of journalism, to grasp every opportunity that presented itself to ridicule and abuse the lady typist. She has been regarded as a husband hunter fired with a stern and lasting ambition to soar above what her critics call her position".

The "male image of female clerks was undoubtedly shaped by the so-called 'pin-money' girl clerks who, single and either financed by or living with their parents, used their salaries mainly as a source for personal entertainment". (ibid : p.57). Moreover, the decline in status being felt by many male clerks at this time was also blamed upon female competition in the clerical labour market. Male clerks utilised those patriarchal views, opinions, and beliefs outlined in previous chapters to argue that women were "unsexing themselves by taking men's places at the desk". (ibid : p.59).

A regular feature of The Clerks' Journal, the organ of the Liverpool Clerks' Association (LCA) was some kind of sexist jibe referring to women in general or the female office worker in particular. Thus the following verse from a poem:

"The phonograph is feminine,
I'll tell you how I know,
When once wound up it talks and talks
In an unceasing flow"(33)

Similarly:

"See the stenographer, handsome and fair,
And pretty blue eyes, and bright golden hair;
The merchant stands near dictating a letter;
She says, "Please go slow, and I'll get it much better'
'Excuse me, Please Sir, what's the name of that street?
And the number as well, will you kindly repeat!
You see I need practice; you'll have to go slow
I just began learning some three months ago!"(34)

One "prominent purveyor of typewriters" asked in an interview with The Clerks' Journal - "What will the lady typists be called? Girlprinters? Bless me, what a mouthful it will be compared with the 'ducky,' and 'dear' of the present regime".(35) Clearly these attitudes were expressions of patriarchal social relations as they existed in wider society. They also served to perpetuate the subordination and oppression of women within both work and wider society and enabled men to retain and extend their personal, gender-based control over women in the office.

While it is true that initially male clerks resented the 'intrusion' of

women into the office it is also true that the threat female clerks posed to them was largely putative, and was exaggerated and overstated (see chapter six). Such questions of bureaucratic control are considered in the final section of this chapter. What is interesting in the present context is the fashion in which social relations between men and women were used by men within office situations to control women. Not only in the sense of ridiculing her ability to perform clerical work (as above) but also in the utilisation of concepts of sexuality and domesticity to enhance their position of power over women in the office. A crucial strategy here is that of sexual harassment. As two recent writers have argued "sexual harassment is to do with men exercising power over women in the workplace. This is a reflection of our male-dominated society". (Sedley and Benn, 1982 : p.6). These writers argue that there is a palpable difference between the "patronising language" (of the kind quoted above) which "women suffer all the time", and sexual harassment which "is more direct and personal" (Sedley and Benn, p.8).

In a society obsessed by sexuality and sexual relationships, the experience of sexual harassment in the Victorian era was likely to have been great. It is clear that many people had strong views as to the likely implications of employing women and girls in offices and mixing with men. 'The Office' reproduced a letter written to an evening newspaper:

"I believe there will be more domestic quarrels and troubles caused through the employment of females as clerks than there ever have been. I know of an instance where a gentleman employed a typist and instead of being home to have a romp with his children and a chat with his wife, he is always detained on business (?) at the office. Of course the fascination of the female clerk, added to her being young and good looking, prove too strong a temptation for the man, and

his home is nothing to him. This is only one of a 100 cases, I believe. When men are with a girl all day dictating, etc, to her, they are sure to wish they had only just thought of getting married... The sooner men are employed instead of girls in offices, the better it would be for everyone."⁽³⁶⁾

While this kind of problem undoubtedly existed, the issue is not solved by restricting a females right to work, (such as it was in 1890) but is one of dealing with the Victorian (and present-day) male attitude towards women and what it indicates. The sexual objectification and inferiorisation of women represents a set of patriarchal power relations which are designed to retain power for men. At the same time such sexual objectification has the power to induce a complex of inferiority in women. Pratt-Rayner, in her novel 'The Typewriter Girl', expresses these issues, together with the fatalistic attitude with which they were often accepted by females. She writes:

"The pulpy youth ran his eyes over me as if I were a horse for sale. I was conscious of my little black dress and hat; conscious also of a fiery patch in the centre of my cheek; but if you struggle for life you must expect these episodes. 'That's good enough', he said slowly, with a side glance at his fellow clerks. I had a painful suspicion that the words were intended rather for them than for me, and that they bore reference to my face and figure than to my real or imagined pace per minute."⁽³⁷⁾

Such harassment appears to have been rife and not only from male clerks, but male employers also. Shorthand and Typewriting carried the following:

"PERILS OF LADY TYPISTS - The Free Lance warns parents and guardians against some of the dangers to which lady typists and lady clerks have been subjected in the past. 'Evidence is accumulating', says the Free Lance, to show that advertisements have been published which have been little better than baits to bring young and unsuspecting women within the reach of unprincipled employers. The prettier and more attractive the applicants, the greater have been the perils to which they have been exposed. Experience has shown that when a young woman is chosen entirely on account of her good looks and attractive appearance, without regard to her capabilities, and little or no work is provided for her, there are prima facie grounds for suspicion. Over and over again have girls been compelled to relinquish engagements for which their abilities have properly fitted them, for reasons which have only been made known to the nearest relatives. It often, however, happens that the girls themselves are the last to recognise the dangers by which they are surrounded. It is of the utmost importance that parents should make full enquiries into the character of would-be employers."⁽³⁸⁾

Studies of clerical work confirmed the dangers of sexual harassment from employers:

"A girl who came this year to an employment agency known to be organised for girls' welfare warned the Placement Secretary not to send any girl to her former employer, because he had been most insulting in his familiarity...

Another girl, interviewed in the course of this study, said

that when she started out she was young an immature, and being inexperienced had to take what she could get by way of a first opening... She said that, after the first few days, both employers were outrageous in their conduct. One of them put his arm around her every time he came to ask her anything about her notes; the other fairly insulted her."⁽³⁹⁾

Later writers perceived the importance of trade unions in dealing with the problems of sexual harassment, although this particular commentator does not acknowledge the rather different issues which may arise if the harasser is not also the employer:

"Apart from monetary prospects altogether, no girl should be allowed to enter the profession until she is old enough and wise enough to protect herself, should need arise, from the undesirable employer who may insult her with unwelcome attentions. The possibility of such annoyance is an additional reason for all clerks to join a Trade Union, -- which helps individuals to insist on proper conditions of work."⁽⁴⁰⁾

The irony is, of course, that while Victorian observers frowned upon the sexual morality of some male employers of female clerks and male clerks themselves, female clerks were constantly portrayed as sex objects;

"From what I have been able to gether from business colleges and places where stenography and typewriting are taught, fully 300 girls are being turned out with an equipped education every year. Of course the pretty ones get occupations very

very-quickly. That's natural, because a business or a professional man is just like every other person - he cannot refuse work to a sparkling-eyed, rosy-cheeked maiden."⁽⁴¹⁾

The range of strategies utilised by men to retain their power over women in the office were, therefore, broad. Ridicule and abuse, sexual harassment and objectification, all contributed to the subordination and inferiorisation of female clerks in the context of their increasing numbers in the expanding offices of the late nineteenth early twentieth centuries. Such strategies, moreover, in part enabled men to maintain their power in the clerical labour market, viz a viz women, by ghettoising women into the most mundane and routine clerical tasks, thus advancing men's overall promotion prospects. The ideology of domesticity also contributed most crucially to the strategies used by male clerks to protect their position. Many male clerks perceived the females who were entering office work in this period as 'husband hunters'. A belief fed by the continuous round of stories and articles appearing in the journals for clerical workers which emphasised the importance of marriage and the family to women. In some cases journals would carry reports of secretaries or personal assistants who had married 'well' as a result of their work:

"Quite a stir has been caused by the marriage of William H. Cross, the well known Massachusetts millionaire, to Miss Katharina Tobey. Miss Tobey belongs to a very good New England family, which had recently met with reverses. Not wishing to be a burden to her relatives, she acquired great skill as an operator, and then went to Paris, where she hit upon the good idea of starting a business as a typist and correspondent to rich Americans. She became private secretary to several American millionaires, and

she has now found a husband among them."⁽⁴²⁾

Furthermore, and as has been shown in previous chapters, the literature of the period emphasised a similarity between the role of wife and the role of clerical worker. Examples are legion in journals produced for the office worker which degrade and denigrate women and female clerical workers. In this sense wider social relations between men and women were carried over into the office and were used to support the structure and organisation of offices as women entered them. There is little doubt that the existence of a sexual division of labour within society, founded on the capitalist family and broader patriarchal social relations, contributed to the sexual division of labour within offices in the structural and personal sense. This issue is discussed further in the next section.

Analysis

In order to turn "labour power into labour for profitable production requires systematic control by capital of the labour process" (Thompson, 1983 : p.123). This is the point of consensus and departure for those writers who have considered the question of control within labour process theory. However, as Thompson argues, "complications arise when attempts are made to specify how control is acquired and maintained" (ibid : p.123). A great deal of debate has arisen from Braverman's analysis of this issue and his emphasis on Taylorism as an "essential and defining feature of the capitalist labour process" (ibid : p.74). In essence, those who criticise Braverman's assessment suggest that he overstates the impact of Taylorism and ignores the number of alternative and additional ways of control which are available to capital, and which are indeed, sometimes necessary to it. (Burawoy, 1981; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977; Littler, 1982; Thompson, 1983; chapter 5). Braverman's approach is too rigid in its conceptualisation of managerial

strategy.

It is equally clear, however, that these theorists themselves have limitations in their analyses of control within the labour process. Thompson (ibid : p.141) argues that Friedman's 'responsible autonomy' concept cannot be considered as a universal 'single trend', "many schemes of participation and enrichment offer little or nothing that is new, and are often disguised forms of intensified control and rationalisation of the labour process". Friedman himself has sought recently to assess criticisms of his framework of 'responsible autonomy'/'direct control' (1986) The work of Edwards (1979) has also been criticised. Edwards argues that under competitive capitalism 'simple control' existed. Although "the need for control was great, the mechanisms for achieving it were very unsophisticated, and the system of control tended to be informal and unstructured. The personal power and authority of the capitalist constituted the primary mechanism for control" (ibid : p.25). However, the emergence of monopoly capitalism meant that employers had to experiment with more sophisticated forms of control (ibid : chapter 6), until ultimately there was a shift to more structural forms of control. The first of these was technical control which involved "designing machinery and planning the flow of work to minimise the problem of transforming labour power into labour as well as to maximise the purely physically based possibilities for achieving efficiencies" (ibid : p.122). Secondly, there was bureaucratic control which "like technical control, differs from the simple forms of control in that it grows out of the formal structure of the firm rather than simply emanating from the personal relationships between workers and bosses" (ibid : p.131). However, while technical control approximates largely to the assembly line and other types of mechanisation, bureaucratic control is "embedded in the social and organisational structure of the firm and is built into job categories, work rules, promotion procedures, discipline, wage scales,

definitions of responsibilities, and the like." (ibid : p.131). Bureaucratic control, fundamentally, institutionalised the "exercise of hierarchical power within the firm".

Edwards thesis has been criticised for not recognising that bureaucratic control may in some senses operate in the interests of workers, indeed, the internal labour markets which are often a part of work bureaucracies and hierarchies, may derive from worker struggles (Thompson; ibid : p.149). Moreover, such an approach overemphasises the conspiratorial nature of divide and conquer strategies, and ignores the "systematic divisions on the basis of sex, race, skill or other educational attributes", which predate capitalism and not only monopoly capitalism (Friedman, 1977 : pp. 113-4). Also, as Thompson argues (ibid : p.149), bureaucratic control and technical control cannot be conceived of as independent from each other as distinct categories or strategies. Often the two are intimately linked.

Essentially hierarchy exists because the purpose of a work organisation within capitalism is profitability (or cost-effectiveness), "not because it is the only way of organising production, nor because it is technologically required". (Thompson, ibid : p.151). To achieve this end capitalism, through employers and managers, "has revealed that within the overall control of the labour process there are a variety of techniques and structures available " (ibid : p.151). There can be, in Thompson's opinion, no overarching theory of control in the fashion that Friedman and Edwards propose:

"It is better, therefore, to consider differences in terms of dimensions of control. The task of labour process theory becomes that of understanding the combinations of control

structures in the context of the specific economic location of the company or industry" (or organisation). (ibid : p.152)

An important element in such understandings would be the use of patriarchal social relations "as a means of securing compliance". And, more generally, a greater appreciation should be sought of the "relational components of work".

Patriarchal relations of control

In recent years there has been an increasing realisation of patriarchal relations of control and its use in the work context (Davies, 1979; Barker and Downing, 1980; Pollert, 1981 and 1983; Cavendish, 1982; Morgall, 1982; Lown, 1983; Knights and Willmott (eds) 1986b). Moreover, as Pollert has argued, such work "has brought out social and economic changes in the capitalist labour process together with employers' strategies of control, as underlying the development and perpetuation of 'women's work'" (Pollert 1983). The utility of such work lies in their attempts to "draw together the ideological and material processes which actually take place in the maintenance of this gender differentiation" (ibid).

This trend has been manifested specifically in the context of clerical work, both in historical analysis (Davies, 1979; Barker and Downing 1980), and in the present (Barker and Downing, 1980; Crompton and Jones, 1984). The historical analysis, however, has not been sufficiently comprehensive or theoretically sound enough to incorporate the totality of control issues which arose within clerical work as the process of 'feminisation' took shape in the 1870 to 1914 period. Davies' (1979) article, though useful, is limited both theoretically and contextually. Barker and Downing (1980) correctly identify the importance of patriarchal relations of control in

the nineteenth century office but overestimate the fashion in which new technology, in the form of word processors in the present day office, have helped to replace patriarchal relations of control with capitalist technical relations of control. Other writers who have considered the historical development of clerical work have really not assessed patriarchal relations of control in any meaningful way (Holcombe, 1973; Silverstone, 1976; Zimm-eck, 1986).

The historical evidence presented in this chapter, combined with the theoretical insights of labour process theory enable us to understand, in a more comprehensive and theoretical way, the use of the 'gender dimension' as a dimension of bureaucratic control per se, and also as a dimension of personal control. In other words, differences of gender enabled bureaucratic control to develop in offices, in part, based on gender divisions, and enabled such control to be supported and supplemented by personal control based on extant relations of power between men and women in wider society.

At the bureaucratic or structural level, the evidence produced in the first part of this chapter concerning the exclusion of women from promotion/upward job mobility, suggests that such exclusion derived from the material and ideological processes which maintained gender differentiation. Thus the 'fact' of marriage and the family, and of the ideology of domesticity affected and restricted a female clerks' job opportunities, but to what end? Again, the historical evidence produced above is indicative of the reasons for the restriction of female clerks' promotion opportunities. As the clerical labour process developed a great deal of routine work was being created (see chapter six). This work was routine, mundane and boring, and, seemingly a persistent feature of clerical work. Those wage labourers who were undertaking such work would need to be satisfied with little job

control and no long term promotion prospects; it was considered that females had the necessary 'inherent characteristics', plus the reality (to look forward to) of the 'career' of marriage, to be content with fulfilling such clerical tasks.

It should be clear by now that such strategies by employers of female clerks served a twofold purpose in terms of control. Firstly, employers were able to control and stabilise clerical work hierarchies partly on the basis of gender. Patriarchal social relations in association with capitalist social relations provided 'natural' material (capitalist family) and ideological processes, incontrovertible and inviolate, which could be used to differentiate workers. Internal labour markets could be established which peripheralised women and subordinated them to secondary, subsidiary, and supportive clerical tasks, while protecting for men those openings and opportunities for promotion and greater responsibility. This constitutes the second purpose of the bureaucratic control strategy based upon gender. The likely discontent of male clerks resulting from the decreasing opportunities created by expanding offices and numbers of clerical workers could, in part, be offset by employing females on the 'dead-end' and boring tasks.

In relation to bureaucratic control the argument put forward here is that one dimension of control, used by employers of clerical labour in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, was patriarchal social relations because they enabled an efficient and stable hierarchical organisation of clerical work, and controlled the possible discontent of male clerks. In this sense employers did to some extent import from outside the idea of a sexual division of labour (see Pollert, 1983 : p.103). However, the conspiratorial element should again ~~not~~ be overemphasised. The importation of the sexual division of labour in this way was not an employer strategy per se, but an extension of what was considered 'natural'

under patriarchal social relations. It was part of prevailing 'common sense'. Furthermore, these structural divisions in the workplace were supplemented and supported by those relational features of work which manifest themselves in interpersonal relationships between men and women, and which were also considered 'natural'.

The idea of power relations between men and women, in which men dominate and women are oppressed, is a vital feature of personal interaction between men and women. Within the context of work 'sexual politics' such as this are a form of management control, and also a form of control exercised by male workers over female workers. This is the point of the second topic of discussion contained within this chapter; to show that the relational features of clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period, i.e. the sexual objectification of females, sexual harassment etc, operated to justify women's position within office hierarchies, and maintain the advantaged position of male clerks relative to them. Thus, at the personal level men as employers and as fellow workers were able to utilise their social dominance to inferiorise and objectify women sexually. In doing so gender differentiation within offices could be maintained personally as well as bureaucratically to the employers' and men's advantage. However, it should be stressed again that the extent to which men contrive to subordinate women in the workplace should not be overstated. In this respect a further issue is relevant here; the apparent acceptance by most women of their position within clerical work. As Pollert states, "to this extent there appears to be a collusion between male and management stereotypes and the women themselves that a woman's place is in the home" (1983 : p.103). Pollert goes on to argue that it may be the nature of the work which they perform which forces them further into the world of marriage and the family, a point reiterated by Walby (1986 : p.248). This argument implies that women's expectations from work and their orientations to it are more likely to

be the creations of the work they are forced to perform, rather than expectations and orientations which they bring to work. Thus, while the wider social sexual division of labour was (is) important in justifying women's position in paid work, it is also the paid work per se which perpetuates the expectations from and orientations to work which women hold.

"The boredom of the work itself, and continual patronisation by male co-workers and supervisors, exacerbate the already alienated nature of the work and make the world of wage labour alien to female gender identity."

(Pollert, ibid : p.103)

To a degree, therefore, the consent of female clerical workers in performing routine, mundane clerical work with no opportunities for promotion was manufactured through patriarchal social relations, and the manner in which such relations interrelated with capitalist social relations in the workplace. To quote Pollert again; "seeing wage labour as temporary, resorting to the identity of a dependent on someone else's wage labour, is a way of negotiating meaning in a hostile environment". Moreover, in such situations, "where ideologies supportive to the prerogative of management are regarded as legitimate by workers, routine subordination in processes of control are normalised (Knights and Willmott (eds), 1986a : p.7)

The female clerical worker of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was subject to a vicious circle of control which pervaded her life outside and within the office, each impacting upon the other. A persistent and crushing ideology confronted these women, as it still confronts women in the 1980's, which sometimes obviously, sometimes subtly, controlled the totality of their work experience. The source of this control was patriarchal social relations, embodied in the ideology of domesticity and

the material reality of the capitalist family. And, while some nineteenth century commentators refuted the inferiorisation of women's abilities, and argued that "one result of the general employment of women as clerks would be that men would look upon them as equals and not as butterflies"⁽⁴³⁾ even such sympathisers recognised the significance of the 'expectation of marriage' to women's orientations to work:

"Few women look forward to the prospect of spending their lives as clerks, their idea being to obtain some means of support until such time as they may enter the married state".⁽⁴⁴⁾

Even if some contemporaries did dispute the naive and simplistic attitudes which attached certain 'unbusinesslike' characteristics to women in general, the attachment of females to the home, the family and to domesticity was irrefutable, although it was recognised as an obstacle to their advancement in the business world:

"But it is the one obstacle to women's progress in the business world in her early life, since nearly every young woman does have thoughts of married life and does look forward to the time when she will be settled in her own home. Therefore, any business in which she may engage is regarded by her as temporary employment."⁽⁴⁵⁾

This 'instinct' for marriage etc. among women was, furthermore, natural and therefore, incontrovertible:

"Nature has handicapped her with this natural instinct for matrimony, the family home, and social ambitions, so that she cannot go with the same freedom into business life that

man does. Therefore, man will always have the advantage in the business world, and it would seem that this is right, because upon man the chief burden of earning a living for himself and woman will always rest. A woman's heart will hold her to the hearthstone, while a man's heart will long for the world of activity and achievement, and he will go there."⁽⁴⁶⁾

Later writers began to recognise the significant impact such an ideology had on a female clerks' desire to succeed and achieve. The social construction of woman's role within society became an increasingly conspicuous fact to progressive women, but all they could do to combat it was to wonder at its consequences and persistence. One commentator wrote:

"The office girl is, comparatively speaking, a new institution in the business world; 40 years ago she was almost unheard of; today she runs men close in numbers - I wish I could also write, in ambition and determination to succeed; but to repeat myself in the majority of cases she is apathetic, she hugs round herself a cloak of ignorance and indifference as to the condition of every other working woman but herself. She looks on her business life as a few years to be got through as easily and comfortably to herself as maybe, until marriage shall relieve her of the necessity of earning the money for the necessaries of life."⁽⁴⁷⁾

Resisting the control management and men enjoy as a result of the interpenetration of patriarchal and capitalist social relations would be a difficult task. Not only did patriarchal social relations, embedded within the social formation, enable employers to control the clerical labour

process, and men to maintain advantages within it, but it restricted the ability of females to resist such control. The following chapter seeks to explore male clerks' strategies to resist the development of female resistance in the 1870 to 1914 period.

Notes

1. Annual Report, Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, 1877
2. Ibid, 1880
3. Report of the Playfair Commission, 1874-75 : p.18
4. See chapters four and five
5. Annual Reports, Society for Promoting the Employment of Women, 1885 and 1888
6. Fortnightly Review, Volume 68, April 1898
7. The Typist's Gazette, September 3, 1896 : p.125
8. Scottish Council for Women's Trades, Occupations for Girls in Glasgow, n/d : p.10
9. The Fingerpost, 1910 : p.viii
10. Freewoman, March 7, 1912 : p.315
11. Edith Morley, 1914 : p.296
12. Writing Machine News, August 1899
13. Ibid
14. Ibid, July-August 1905
15. Evidence to the MacDonnell Commission; p.294
16. Ibid : p.368
17. Edith Morley, ibid : p.270
18. Transcript of tape recording of interview with Miss Frances Hall, Surrey County Record Office, reference cc237
19. The Central Employment Office Committee of the Girls Friendly Society
20. Girls Friendly Society. Minutes of the Central Employment Office Committee
21. The Clerks' Journal, July 1890
22. London Shorthand Writers Association, Report of Proceedings 1884-85
23. A. Bulley, 1894 : p.40
24. Writing Machine News, January-February 1902

25. , A. Kingston, 1907 : p.19
26. The Clerk, September 1909
27. The London Phonographer, January 1892
28. Ibid, September 1892
29. The Shorthand Writer, February 1897
30. Shorthand and Typewriting, September 1899
31. The Writing Machine News, March-April 1903
32. Ibid, March-April 1905
33. The Clerks' Journal, January 1890. On the importance of 'man-made language', and the views of men about women's 'gossip', see Spender, 1982
34. The Clerks' Journal, May 1890
35. Ibid, August 1890
36. The Office, October 4, 1890
37. O. Pratt-Rayner, 1897 : p.24
38. Shorthand and Typewriting, December 1900
39. Eaton and Stevens, 1915 : p.247
40. Edith Morley, ibid : p.291
41. The London Phonographer, February 1892
42. The Typists' Review, October 1903
43. The Clerks' Journal, October 1888
44. Ibid
45. The London Phonographer, July 1895
46. Ibid
47. The Business Girl, February 1912

CHAPTER NINE : RESISTANCE AMONG, AND THE RESISTANCE TO, FEMALE CLERICAL
WORKERS IN THE 1870 to 1914 PERIOD

Before 1914 trade unionism among clerks was limited for a variety of reasons. One important reason was the physical separation of clerks by their employment throughout the economy; they were employed in industry, commerce, the professions, and the services (see Chapter two). Moreover, across sectors there were great variations in pay and conditions, and in status. Clerks also, on the whole, especially up to the last fifteen years of the nineteenth century, worked in small offices, and were closely supervised and had a paternalistic relationship with their employer. Finally, as other commentators have pointed out, most clerks perceived themselves as 'above' trade unions "which were considered purely working class institutions". (Anderson, 1976a : p.108; Holcombe, 1973 : pp.153-4). By forming or joining a trade union many clerks considered that the status separation between them and the working class would be undermined. Where clerical trade unionism did develop on a large scale, however, was in the large homogeneous and bureaucratic sectors; the railways, national and local government. Anderson (ibid : p.110) argues that the reasons for this are clear:

"The decisive factor in the growth of clerical unionism was neither the sex composition of the workforce, the rate of remuneration nor the demonstration effect of manual workers' unions but the nature of the work situation itself, and more specifically the degree of employment concentration".

This chapter is not aiming to reassess these issues, or indeed, to assess such growth as there was in clerical trade unionism in the public and private sectors: this task has been adequately undertaken by other writers

(Anderson, 1976a : Chapter 7; Clinton, 1984; Hughes, 1953; Humphreys 1958; Spoor, 1967; Walkden, 1928). The purpose of this chapter is rather to consider what resistance, as far as is determinable, female clerks offered to their employment situation, as outlined in the previous chapters, and how the extent of their resistance might have been shaped by patriarchal social relations.

Information on trade unionism amongst female clerks in the 1870 to 1914 period is limited. Humphreys' (1958) work is useful for the public service and Clinton's (1984) work for early Post Office trade unionism among women. Holcombe (ibid: chapters 6 and 7) also draws together much of the available material for both the public and private sectors. There is also a very useful section in Drake's (1980) early work from which Table 19 is derived. Other works on women and trade unionism or on trade unionism generally have little to say about female clerks, or indeed clerks. (Boston,

Table 19 : Female Membership of Clerical Unions for the years 1896, 1906, 1914

	1896	1906	1914
Commercial	70	180	1703
Railway	-	-	100
Civil Service	850*	5135*	13656*
Total	920	5315	15459

Source : Drake, 1980

* These figures include some postal workers who cannot technically be considered clerks, i.e. telephonists

1980; Clegg, 1978; Lewenhak, 1977; Soldon, 1980; Webb, 1911). Clearly a primary reason for this is that in the 1870 to 1914 period there was very little clerical trade union organisation among women, although it is not correct to deduce necessarily that this was as a result of any less commitment on the part of female clerks, vis-a-vis male clerks, to the

concept of trade unionism. This is a point emphasised by Anderson who argues, using Humphreys' (1958) work, that in areas of highly bureaucrat-ised and concentrated employment women "were also active in union develop-ment". Indeed, female clerks joined and formed trade unions in a number of public service areas. In 1901 the Association of Women Clerks in the Post Office was formed; in 1903 the Civil Service Typists' Association; in 1911 the Association of Women Clerks in the Board of Trade; and in 1913 the Federation of Women Clerks. Moreover, important clerical unions in the Post Office which catered for all workers had a female element, i.e. the Postal Telegraph Clerks' Association, formed in 1881, and the Provin-cial Postal Clerks' Association, formed in 1887. Anderson (p.110) argues correctly that such involvement reflected the position of many females working in the public sector whose "incomes represented their livelihood and they were, therefore, not unnaturally resentful of blocked promotion prospects, undue overtime and unequal pay, and formed unions to redress their grievances".

It is the private sector, however, which undergoes assessment within this chapter. What was the extent of trade unionism among female clerks in the private sector, what was their involvement, and most importantly, how were these two features affected by patriarchal social relations in its relationship with the development of the clerical labour process?

A descriptive history of the early years of the National Union of Clerks (NUC) has been written (Hughes, 1953). Other writers (Anderson, *ibid*: pp.115-126) have considered the impact of the NUC within the development of trade unionism, and he concluded (p.126):

"For all the NUC's determined efforts to impress upon clerks that, compared to the clerks' associations, it was a fighting

organisation pledged to improve their economic and social conditions, it would be futile to exaggerate its achievements".

Relative to the clerical unions operating in the large bureaucracies it was far less successful. Moreover, given that the NUC sought to recruit all clerks, across sectors of the economy, it made little headway. Perhaps, however, the significance of the NUC lay not in its recruiting success, but in its recognition of a "false-consciousness" among clerks. The NUC was questioning the attachment of clerks to a "false class-consciousness which bore no relevance to economic realities". (Anderson, *ibid* : p.126). By 1914 the NUC had some 12,680 members, an increase of over 500 per cent from the 2,350 members in 1910. As Drake's figures show, however, (see table 18) women constituted barely 12 per cent of the membership.

According to Holcombe (*ibid*) "from the beginning the NUC was notable for admitting women to membership on equal terms with men". Moreover, "women were organised together with men in the union's branches". (*ibid* : p.155). However, before 1914, and for some years after, this was as far as women were to go within the NUC hierarchy. As Drake (1980 : p.172) pointed out:

"Women were eligible for all official posts, but up to now no woman has been appointed. They act, however, as branch secretaries and take their full share in branch work."

It appears that the onset of the First World War, and the consequent dilution of clerical work by women, increased the numbers of women members of the NUC, and also the extent of their involvement. Indeed, Drake suggests that in 1918 there were some 13,000 female members of the NUC,

a substantial increase on the 1,703 for 1914. In terms of involvement it was noted at the October 19, 1916 meeting of the Wisbech Branch of the NUC that four females had become NUC members. They were "the first to join this branch of the weaker (sic) sex".⁽¹⁾

The NUC was not the only union in the private sector entreating female clerks to join them in the struggle for better pay and conditions. As early as 1890 there was talk of 'another union':

"the projected union of lady typewriters is said to have every chance of success. Lady typewriters are a small body of well-educated, energetic, and intelligent women, and the chief danger they have to contend against is 'sweating'."⁽²⁾

The more general Clerks' Associations (Anderson, *ibid* : chapter 5) were also in the business of recruiting women, seemingly with no prejudice. A report from the Dundee Branch of the Scottish Clerks' Association states:

"Mr Adamson in the course of his speech, said there were so many female clerks in the country now that he did not see why they should be excluded from participating in the benefits of the Society. One of the Gentlemen from Glasgow told him that no application had been made to have ladies enrolled, so that apparently it was not owing to the closeness of the Society, but for the want of interest on the part of the female clerks, that there were none of them on the roll."⁽³⁾

One organisation whose history has been neglected, undoubtedly because

of its comparative insignificance, is the National Union of Typists (NUT). Formed in May 1889 the Society of Typists, as it was originally known, was initially something of an employers organisation, seeking to fix charges across typewriting offices to restrict the extent of 'unfair' competition practised by some offices. One of its earliest problems was whether to register under the Company Acts of 1862 and 1890, or as a Trade Union under the Trade Union Acts of 1871 and 1876. It chose to register as a Trade Union simply because it was less expensive to do so, and on June 9, 1892 the Society of Typists became the NUT. The Society was in many ways a unique body in its attempts to bring together both employers of typists and the 'clerk operators' themselves. Clearly it benefited employers to fix the charges made for typing services in order to take wages out of competition. It would also have benefited operators, however, inasmuch as "there is no doubt that clerk operators in many instances are shamefully sweated".⁽⁴⁾ Despite this the overwhelming majority of employers refused to join and continued to reduce, whenever possible, the wages of their employees.

Unlike the NUC there was considerable female involvement in the running of this organisation. In part this reflects the fact that typing was a 'feminised' occupation by this time. For example, at a meeting of the Society of Typists six women "were added to the existing Committee as representatives of clerk operators". It was further reported that "several new members joined, and evinced much interest in the matters under discussion",⁽⁵⁾ which included holding examinations. At its second AGM in the July of 1891 the Society outlined the considerable problems involved in organising both the employers of typists and typists themselves. It was at this AGM that there was some discussion among employers to organise a Clerks' Union; "this attempt fell through on account of the apathy of the Clerks, and from want of a leader among themselves".⁽⁶⁾ In an effort

to circumvent this 'apathy' it was suggested at the AGM that typing clerks should become members of the Employers' Union, electing their own committee and "abiding by rules formulated by both committees".⁽⁷⁾

"Up to date some 40 clerks have become members, many of whom are employed in 'fair' houses. These latter have joined with the sole object of acting as decoys to induce their less fortunate sisters to become members. This is as it should be, and is the spirit that ought to govern all trade unionism - one for all, all for one."⁽⁸⁾

The London Phonographer, acting as the organ for the Society of Typists (and the National Union of Typists (NUT) as it became), consistently emphasised the need for a union amongst female typists, not only to improve pay and conditions per se, but also to elevate the quality of the teaching of shorthand and typing:

"The immediate effect of a union would therefore be to raise the standard of work, and the public would learn that it could only get cheap services performed by careless and ignorant workers. The second result would consequently be the weeding out of rubbish, and occupation of the market by only first-class labour."⁽⁹⁾

However, despite the constancy of the London Phonographer's recruitment drive in June 1893 the NUT had barely 80 members. It was later reported that the "first general annual meeting of the NUT is over and gone, and a skimpy, shabby turn out it was. A mere sprinkling of some 6 or 8 members turned up to hear the report and accounts read and passed."⁽¹⁰⁾

In July 1898 the journal Shorthand and Typewriting became the organ of

the NUT and reported the sixth AGM. Insignificant membership figures were reported, some 140 members. Mrs Greenwood who spoke at the AGM, argued that "there were very few women who knew of the Union; and that it would be a good thing, through the press or some other medium, to get it made known more widely".⁽¹¹⁾ Within the framework of the NUT it is important to note that members were admitted to the union and placed into a category, class A, B or C. Class A members were "typists carrying on business on their own account"; class B were "articled pupils, clerks or assistants"; and class C were "persons taking an interest in typewriting and typists, who were desirous of promoting the objects of the Union".⁽¹²⁾

The objects of the Union were:

"The promotion of the more efficient practice of typewriting, the raising and maintaining of the qualifications and status of its Members; the fixing and maintaining of a minimum scale of charges; the holding of examinations and granting of certificates of efficiency; the establishment of an employment bureau; the granting of pecuniary or other aid to necessitous Members; and such other things as may be conducive to the attainment of its objects."⁽¹³⁾

It is apparent that the NUT was more of a Typists' Provident Association than a trade union, although it must be said that it was, at least ostensibly, a national body seeking to recruit throughout the country (although most typewriting offices and typists were based in London).

While the NUT was having a great deal of difficulty in recruiting members from the increasingly large numbers of female typists, its Committee did at least reflect the female dominance of shorthand and typing. At November

1898 the Committee consisted of eight women and two men. Despite the attempts of this Committee to attain the objects of the Union, however, the poor membership figures, and the level of support which this indicated, obviously limited the degree of success achievable. Moreover, the membership figures themselves reflect the difficulties in recruiting a dispersed band of workers. It also indicates the weakness of the typists' position in a labour market which was vastly oversupplied. Under such circumstances no amount of motions calling for a better system of training, fairer pay structures etc. could possibly succeed. The majority of proprietors of typewriting offices were as keen as other employers of labour to reduce labour costs and maximise profits. The gradual peripheralisation and inferiorisation of typing in offices which had occurred in association with its feminisation weakened the labour market position of typists, and weakened, as a consequence, the ability of the NUT to promote itself as a 'craft' union and its ability to restrict entry to 'skilled' practitioners (see chapter six) of shorthand and typing. Moreover, its ability to protect and promote a 'union rate for the job' was also seriously circumscribed. Nevertheless, the NUT continued to work hard towards this end:

"Steps are being taken to make the Union scale more widely known, and as time goes on it is hoped that this will become the recognised scale... The committee cannot reasonably hope to stop undercutting entirely, but they may do a great deal in the direction of crippling it if they are vigilant."⁽¹⁴⁾

Amendments made to the objects of the NUT at the seventh AGM emphasised the desire of the NUT to achieve these objects. It was reported in this year that total membership had increased to 161.⁽¹⁵⁾

There are few reasons suggested in the pages of any of the organs of the NUT as to why they had problems recruiting members. Two reasons, however, were often implied; apathy and hostility towards the Union. The idea of hostility towards the Union can probably best be understood using Anderson's notion of 'respectability' (Anderson, 1976a : pp.122-126). It is likely that many typists found the idea of joining a trade union offensive, perhaps because of their socio-economic background. Drake (1980 : p.202) writing in 1920 identified such women:

"A more than usual prejudice against trade unionism may nevertheless be remarked amongst certain (genteel) classes of women. It is the part of a 'lady' to be exclusive and inconspicuous, and such qualities are not conducive to active trade unionism."

This point was also made by Morley:

"It must be remembered that a difficulty in the way of men and women clerks combining, is that women of good education, sometimes in possession of degrees, find themselves in competition with men of an inferior social class. A large proportion of the best secretaries are the daughters of professional men. The average woman clerk is invariably a person of better education and manners than the male clerk at the same salary."⁽¹⁶⁾

It would be wrong, however, to overstate the significance of socio-economic background as a factor determining a female clerk's involvement in trade unionism. This is particularly so given that the involvement of female clerks in the public sector trade unionism was considerable. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that by 1914 the mass of female clerical workers were of a higher social status than their male counterparts.

Indeed, evidence is to the contrary (see chapter four).

The notion of apathy is equally difficult to explain and is subject to considerable misconception, i.e. that apathy is somehow related to inherent female characteristics. As an aid to a more adequate understanding of the lack of success met with by NUC and NUT in their attempts to recruit females it is helpful to move away from the ill-considered explanations developed by contemporaries, and to utilise recent analyses of the low participation rates of women in trade unions. It is also important to note that "low participation in trade unions is not a phenomenon restricted to women". (Ellis, 1981 : p.19)-- as is clear from the very low membership figures for all clerks' unions, outside of the public sector and railways, in the 1870 to 1914 period. 'Apathy', therefore, is not related in some way to females specifically; as a consequence, it is necessary to search for other explanations of female clerks' low participation rates in clerical unions in the 1870 to 1914 period.

Ellis notes firstly (ibid : p.20) concentration of employment; in short, the concentration of employees in one place is a major factor in organising workers into unions. Moreover, it is also an important factor in the problems of communicating with, servicing and the levels of participation of union members (ibid : p.20). This may have been a factor limiting the success of the NUT, particularly in the case of typists who worked at home, or in small, isolated offices. It was most certainly a problem for the individual typist who might be working for a very small company, or in a solicitor's office for example. However, overall the NUT was concerned with recruiting typists and their employers in the larger more concentrated typewriting offices.

Secondly, Ellis (p.21) identifies the importance of discontinuity of employ-

ment as a factor which affects women's involvement in trade unionism.

It seems clear that the high turnover and, relative to men, shorter lengths of service of female workers will influence their perceptions of the utility of trade unionism for them. Data from the 1870 to 1914 period does not allow any meaningful judgement to be made as to the extent of horizontal mobility exercised by female clerks and typists. However, it would be realistic to suggest that the length of service of a female typist/clerk in the 1870 to 1914 period would be severely restricted by the prospect of marriage. On this basis the NUT may have had difficulty in recruiting some female clerical workers. Thirdly, Ellis (p.22) identifies the job attachment of women as an influential factor in low participation rates. In the 1870 to 1914 period the ideology of domesticity would have been a most important element impinging upon the development of job attachment among female office workers. Furthermore, the nature of the tasks they performed were, in themselves, unlikely to stimulate a great deal of commitment to the job.

While these three factors may have been important in influencing the success of the NUT in their attempts to recruit female clerical workers, there are a number of points which qualify the relevance of these arguments. Firstly, it does seem apparent that concentration of employment is an important explanatory variable given that female clerks working in the public sector in the 1870 to 1914 period were organised in considerable numbers (Humphreys, 1958; Clinton, 1984). Secondly, it is difficult to adequately compare the participation of female clerks in trade unions in the present with the organisation and participation of female clerks of one hundred years ago. This is so because virtually all Victorian and Edwardian female clerical workers were unmarried, thus they did not have the problem, generally speaking, of the 'dual role' of performing wage and domestic labour, which might have affected their involvement in trade unionism.

Nevertheless, as we have already pointed out the pressure to marry, combined with the nature of the clerical work they performed is likely to have influenced female clerks' perceptions of the utility of trade unionism for them in the 1870 to 1914 period.

In large part the failure of the NUT to develop reflected the weakness of the typists' position within the labour market. They were unable to protect and control entry to the 'profession' and were thus at the mercy of the vagaries of the 'laws' of supply and demand. With no possible way of controlling entry in typing through qualifications/examinations (as, for example, was the case in the public sector), any union attempting to organise labour, particularly in a white-collar, 'feminised' occupation was immediately disadvantaged. The existence of a mass of mainly young women who could perform typing work, this work being developed and perpetuated by the progression of the clerical labour process and the interaction of capitalist and patriarchal forces, meant essentially that there was no structure upon which a formal pattern of resistance could be developed. Given the constraints upon such organisation, which the combination of capitalist and patriarchal social relations had created at work, the growth of resistance among female typists could never take off in any meaningful sense.

It has been suggested that the failure of the NUC to organise clerks in any significant numbers was, in part, due to the lack of concentration of employment among clerks in the private sector outside of the railway service. It may also have met with hostility from some clerks. However, whereas the NUT failed to organise women, for a number of reasons, despite the fact that there was no opposition from male clerks, the situation in the NUC, in relation to female clerks, requires a separate analysis.

In short, the NUC adopted a strategy of 'resisting' on behalf of female

clerks as part of a tactical process ultimately aimed at removing females from clerical work altogether. - As Walby (1986 : p.152) recognises "both the union strategy of excluding women and that of organising women were based on the pursuit of the interests of the male clerk". This was the case because the NUC was male-dominated, and clerical work, other than typing, had not yet been feminised. In this context men had to consider how best to organise the resistance of women to their advantage. Walby (ibid : p.155) is correct in identifying that this is where "employer preference for women clerks for lower level work was confronted by male clerks' hostility to the entry of women to their established position". Whereas in relation to typing, the 'feminised' and 'ghettoised' nature of this aspect of clerical work (created by the articulation of capitalist and patriarchal forces operating in unison; see chapters six and eight) perpetuated its inability to develop resistance, which meant that capitalist forces could, in large part, act relatively unhindered by resistance; the organised resistance of clerical workers in male-dominated areas, as represented by the NUC, and as we shall discover, also by the Railway Clerks' Association (RCA), confronted capitalist forces and resulted in a negotiated outcome. That is, an outcome negotiated by the articulation of capitalist and patriarchal forces. This requires, perhaps, some more detailed investigation.

Holcombe (1973) has referred in glowing terms to the NUC's attitudes and policy towards female clerks, while some contemporaries were equally favourably inclined. The Clerk, organ of the NUC, carried a message from the prominent Mrs Fawcett:

"I heartily wish well to your efforts to raise the status of clerks and am very glad that you admit women to your Union and keep in view as an ultimate aim the principle of equal pay for equal work."(17)

Such support, however, was misplaced as Walby (ibid : pp.144-155) has correctly argued. The strategy of 'organisation for exclusion' in relation to women, was also adopted by another clerical union dominated by men, the RCA.

The evidence available shows clearly that there was considerable opposition from male railway clerks to the employment of women. The organ of the Association, 'The Railway Clerk', utilised many of the 'conventional wisdoms' in an attempt to promote the feeling that women should not be employed as clerks in the railway service. Marriage, the journal often argued, is the 'proper' role for women, and their chances of marrying would be increased if "every adult man received fair remuneration for his labour". This, the journal believed, would be a much better solution to the 'problems' created by the unemployed, unmarried women than finding employments for them. The poor pay of male clerks, in particular, means that "they have to go without the always-desired 'home of their own', and the girls who would be their wives are forced to compete against them industrially". This commentator concludes:

"The contrivance of this unnatural state of things must ultimately result in revolution - or permanent national degradation. That is one reason why we should all fight earnestly for the adoption of the Railway Clerks Association standard scale of salaries."⁽¹⁸⁾

By the Annual Conference of the RCA in 1913 male railway clerks were advocating not that the wages of men should be raised to promote marriage, and therefore reduce the problems caused by unmarried women competing with men 'industrially', but rather that female clerks wages should be raised to prevent the overall lowering of salaries. One speaker, Mr Knight of

the City of London Branch of the RCA, moved that:

"this Conference calls attention to the increased number of women employed by Railway Companies in their offices, and claims that where they are employed they shall be paid on the same scale as men."⁽¹⁹⁾

'The Railway Clerk' went on to report:

"He said the resolution was not directed against women labour; but if women were paid the same wages as men, there would be a tendency to weed out the females".⁽²⁰⁾

The argument is self-evident, if all railway clerks were paid the same, employers would prefer to employ males and, as a consequence female clerks would gradually disappear. Furthermore, male railway clerks also resented having to undertake the most unsociable shifts as a result of the employment of females. Mr Ridgman of the Plymouth Branch moved the following amendment to Mr Knight's motion:

"and in order that the latter may not be unduly penalised in the way of late turns, night work, and Sunday duty, the woman should fairly work round all turns with the men."⁽²¹⁾

Discussion around these motions and amendments indicated a good deal of resentment among male railway clerks to the employment of women. Such resentment continued into the 1914-1918 period as women increasingly entered the railway service as clerks. The familiar 'pin money' argument was used to explain their cheapness - "because girls do not look upon Railway employment as a career, and have, therefore, no keen sense of future responsibility

therein - having marriage in view". Also their cheapness was put down to their supposed inferiority or that they were unorganisable.⁽²²⁾ In short, in order to protect their jobs from women the overwhelmingly male RCA utilised the ideology of patriarchal social relations to perpetuate and reconstruct the popular myths about women's role and position in society. It was keen to encourage the "employment of lads" rather than girls or women with the long-term hope of protecting pay levels and opportunities, and it institutionalised its desire to exclude women from railway clerical work by adopting the 'organise to exclude' equal pay strategy. From the evidence it is apparent that the RCA's commitment to equal pay for female clerks was not based upon a principled commitment to equal pay for women, but upon a desire to force women out of railway clerkship and back into the home - "to weed out the females". Thus, in similar fashion to the situation within the NUC, there existed a confrontation between the interests of capital, manifested through the employers who were seeking to reduce labour costs, and the interests of male clerks who were hostile to the entry of women into clerical work. Part of the resistance offered by male railway clerks to their employers consisted of attempts to restrict the entry of women into the occupation which they felt reduced their own pay and conditions. Arguments deriving from patriarchal social relations were a central feature of their resistance to capitalist exploitation.

Returning to the NUC it is clear, using evidence from this research, that Lewis (1984) and Walby (1986) are correct in perceiving such patriarchal strategies in the policy on equal pay pursued by the NUC also. Lewis (ibid : p.197) argues that the NUC sought to exclude women from clerical employment but, because the NUC "was too weak to defend the position of the male clerk by adopting a policy of exclusion", the Union "argued instead for equal pay, making it clear that this position was based on pragmatic considerations rather than principle". Certainly the NUC recognised the

relationship between women's low pay, marriage and the family, but they failed, as a male-dominated organisation with patriarchal values, to recognise that it was not the female clerks who were exploiting male clerks, but overwhelmingly male employers who were benefiting from patriarchal social relations and their expression in the office. In this situation they were exploiting both male and female clerks. Thus 'The Clerk' argues:

"Female clerks are at one with the males in their desire to obtain a living wage for their labour, but, like all female workers, are at a great disadvantage from the point of view of sex, as well as from lack of organisation. In the case of most they follow their occupation with the knowledge that it is only temporary, and will be ended by their marriage, which in itself is a temptation to bid lower than the male, who consequently finds himself in the position of keeping a wife and children on wages which are low because his partner has in the past assisted in forcing them down to a ridiculous point". (23)

To be fair, however, the NUC did also recognise the existence of 'unscrupulous' employers who dismissed male clerks and replaced them with females employed at substantially lower rates of pay. The NUC argued that such cases indicated "how necessary it is for all clerks (male and female) to join hands, to prevent the exploitation of one sex by some firms at the expense of the other". (24)

The commitment of the NUC to equal pay cannot be disputed. Nevertheless, overall its commitment was undoubtedly motivated by pragmatism rather than principle; as one writer noted:

"Let men look upon the ranks of women as they look upon their

own ranks, let them feel the same sentiment of loyalty, 'each for all and all for each', towards the women clerical workers as they are urged to feel towards the men; and let them adopt the principle of equal pay for equal work, because the women need fair wages even more than the men, not because they think it can be used to lever women out of the labour market ... Women, within the last 3 years, have shown themselves masters of the art of combining, organising and fighting for a cause they have at heart. But they will do none of these things for the clerical cause while they feel - as they do feel at present - that men are fighting them under a cover of friendliness". (25)

This same writer argued that in order for equal pay for equal clerical work to be enforced men "will have to set steadily to work and try and undo what they have been doing for so long. Remove from a woman's mind that idea of inferiority which has become almost second nature to her, and give her back her self-confidence again". (26) She recognises the fact that the exploitation of females within clerical work is a consequence of both the need of the capitalist to reduce labour costs, and the fact that the employers are overwhelmingly men:

"You talk of women undercutting men in the labour market. What about the huge brewery firm 2 years ago that changed their entire staff from male to female, 'saving half their wage bill without diminishing the efficiency of their staff!' Were the managing directors of that concern women? Did women sit on its board? Did any women have a hand in, suggest, or advise such a movement as that? No, it was all men, men, men...

Once more, women do undercut men in the labour market; and upon examination of their reasons for so doing - for everyone of those reasons men have to blame themselves".(27)

Despite such arguments, the NUC continued to seek the exclusion of women from clerical work under the 'cover of friendliness'. It seems likely that the creation in January 1911, of the NUC Women's League was, in part at least, an attempt to overcome the problems of male opposition to female clerks within the NUC. As one letter to the organiser of the Women's League, Miss Mimi Brodie stated; "we ought to be able to present a combined front, so that we can attack boldly those who still handicap us in the struggle for livelihood".(27) Some sixty women and a 'sprinkling' of men attended the inaugural meeting of the League; a fact which in itself probably reflects the unimportance of such a development for male clerks.

Although female members of the NUC made worthy attempts to increase the numbers of involvement of female clerks in the Union it was clear to the leading females that male opposition undermined their efforts. They also questioned the integrity of the commitment of the NUC to equal pay for equal work. Dolly Lansbury wrote:

"I am driven to write the following, however, by a firm conviction that many members of the Union, especially the men, subscribe to the principle, not from any motives of abstractt justice, but because they want to protect themselves from the competition of cheap labour".(28)

She goes on to argue that "the best men at present are ready to rid the market of us, and only put up with us".(29) The President's Address to

the 1912 Annual Conference again highlighted the belief among male NUC members, that the low pay of women was the consequence of women's actions, not of employers exploiting the position of women in relation to the labour market - "we fight the underselling of men's labour by women in sheer self-defence".⁽³⁰⁾

As far as the male-dominated NUC was concerned the best way to protect their pay and overall position within clerical work was to argue for equal pay. In this sense the achievement of equal pay for equal work would force women out of clerical work because, it was believed, employers of clerical labour preferred to employ males, and only employed females because they 'bided lower'. Unified resistance, therefore, including both female and male clerks, was not a position the NUC held as a matter of principle, despite the activity of females within the organisation. Rather, the NUC sought to exclude women from clerical work, as did the RCA, by including them within the Union. It is hardly surprising, given these institutionalised attitudes, that some women sought to organise separately within the NUC and outside of it.⁽³¹⁾

Walby (ibid : p.155) argues that the confrontation between capitalist and patriarchal forces as embodied in the struggle between employers who sought to utilise cheap female clerical labour, and the NUC and RCA who sought to prevent or restrict women's entry into clerical work, led to a negotiated outcome.

"The outcome was the entry of women to the new occupational slots not already monopolised by men and the rigid sex segregation of the workforce. These new slots were created at lower levels of pay and status than the old. Thus while men won their struggle not to have women in direct competition with themselves, employers won theirs to employ women at

cheap rates of pay."

There are problems with Walby's assessment of the development of sex segregation in clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. She overexaggerates the role of the NUC, and male clerks generally. Although, overall, male clerks were opposed to women's entry into clerical work, the position women took up within clerical hierarchies was less a result of struggles between capitalist employers and patriarchally motivated male clerks; and rather more a consequence of a pre-existing set of patriarchal social relations which predetermined, in association with capitalist social relations, women's 'natural' place in work. There was certainly some "articulation of specific patriarchal and capitalist structures" as she argues, but it would be wrong to explain sex-segregation in clerical work simply as a result of struggles within clerical work itself. Walby inadequately assesses the interpenetrations of social relations as they influence the feminisation of lower order clerical work. She excludes the external and historic reasons for sex segregation in clerical work, and in doing so fails to acknowledge the impact of patriarchal social relations on sex segregation outside of context-specific 'struggles'. She lacks, in short, an understanding of the hegemonic nature of patriarchal social relations, and their role in forming individuals and their 'common sense'. Moreover, sex segregation in clerical work, as it was emerging in the 1870 to 1914 period, was only one manifestation of the articulation of patriarchal and capitalist structures. The issues of 'skill', managerial control, pay etc, considered in previous chapters, were all the consequence of interpenetrations between patriarchal and capitalist social relations which require a more sensitive appreciation of what patriarchy is than that which Walby offers. Articulations of patriarchal and capitalist social relations, as they affect women, should not always be perceived as conspiracies, or as struggles. They are rather part of an hegemony, structuring, ordering,

and shaping the social formation at a particular historical conjuncture, and claiming it as 'natural' and 'common sense'. The concluding chapter will return to these points.

Notes

1. NUC, Wisbech Branch Minutes 19/10/1916
2. The Clerks' Journal, January 1890
3. Ibid, May 1889
4. The London Phonographer, June 1891
5. Ibid
6. Ibid, August 1891
7. Ibid
8. Ibid
9. Ibid, December 1891
10. Ibid, July 1893
11. Shorthand and Typewriting, July 1898
12. Ibid, September 1898
13. Ibid
14. Ibid, February 1899
15. Ibid, September 1899
16. Edith Morley, 1914 : p.296
17. The Clerk, January 1908
18. The Railway Clerk, August 15, 1911
19. The Railway Clerk, June 15, 1913
20. Ibid
21. Ibid
22. Ibid, June 15, 1915
23. The Clerk, March 1908
24. Ibid, April 1908
25. Ibid, January 1909
26. Ibid, February 1909
27. Ibid, January 1911
28. Ibid, February 1912

29. Ibid
30. Ibid, July 1912
31. See Hughes, 1953 on the friction that existed between the NUC and the Association of Women Clerks and Secretaries.

CHAPTER 10 : CONCLUSIONS

Female Clerks 1870 to 1914

Throughout this thesis reference has been made to Anderson's (1976a) work on male Victorian clerks. The reasons for this are quite simple; Anderson's study remains the most fertile historical source for the male clerk in this period. His largely descriptive, atheoretical discussion provides us with important background details of the work, market, and status situation of the nineteenth and early twentieth century male clerk. In specific terms he deals with issues of recruitment, promotion, pay, social status, nature of the work, and trade unionism and other forms of organisation among clerks. As a yardstick against which to measure female clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period, therefore, Anderson's study is very important. Consequently, at the descriptive level, the outline of female clerical work provided within this study; (on recruitment, status, the nature of female clerical work, pay, promotion opportunities and trade unionism) can be directly compared with the position of the male clerk.

Despite the significant historical contribution Anderson has made in filling a gap in our historical knowledge of a very important grouping in nineteenth century society, his work is atheoretical, and his historiographic approach is inadequate for a full understanding of clerical work in the period in which he is concerned. Walby (ibid : pp.153-4) has suggested that Anderson's (1976a and 1976b) work suffers from three major problems. Firstly, he overstates the extent to which there was no direct competition and substitution between male and female clerks in the 1870 to 1914 period. Secondly, he ignores the dynamic aspects of clerical work in this period, in that new occupations were constantly being created and old ones destroyed which impinged upon the sexual division of labour. Thirdly, he offers

no explanation for the sex typing and sex segregation of clerical occupations and the rigidity of this feature. Certainly these are problems inherent in Anderson's study, which emerge from his conceptualisation of the period in question. In short, Anderson, using the terminology employed in this study, does not identify a clerical labour process, or an important gender dimension within this process, unless it impinges upon the position of the male clerk in an indirect sense. His study of male clerks in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, therefore, is narrow and limited, and his failure to consider adequately the position of the female clerk in the 1870 to 1914 period circumscribes the usefulness of his analysis of the male clerk. Crompton's (1986 : p.135) helpful phrase comes to mind here; "our understanding of men's work cannot be grasped adequately unless women's contribution in both the public and the private spheres is also taken into account". Thus, an understanding of the processes which brought about the genesis of the feminisation of clerical work will also provide a more accurate and theoretically sound knowledge of male clerks in the 1870 to 1914 period, and a better understanding of the whole clerical labour process per se.

In the previous chapter Walby's (ibid) assessment of clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period was criticised for being too restricted in its analysis of sex segregation in clerical work. Although she appreciates and uses new ideas in her approach, it remains inadequate. Her overall argument stresses the process of change of gender forces and their relationship to the organisation of capital, and gender struggles, over employment over time. She argues that each period of capitalist restructuration is based upon the relations of labour and capitalist organisation which are "fixed in the previous round". The present-day sexual division of labour is a consequence of the accumulation of round upon round of restructured gender relations. The contemporary pattern of such relations have not simply

resulted from the current balance of power between different social forces, but must "include the sedimented forms of the previous rounds". Walby suggests that women's employment in relation to men's, and we might also add that men's employment in relation to women's, cannot be comprehended without analysing patriarchal as well as capitalist relations, and the manner in which the two articulate.

This contribution (Walby's notion of patriarchy will be discussed in a later section), and specifically the fashion in which Walby uses it to analyse clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period, is a substantial move forward from previous considerations of female clerical work in this period. The emphasis on the process of change highlights the need for a more meaningful historiography of clerical work between 1870 and 1914 than has so far been offered. Other writers who have sought to understand aspects of contemporary female clerical work have felt it necessary to sketch the early development of office work, but have not sought to analyse the period in itself (Crompton and Jones, 1984 : pp.16-34). Others have failed to recognise the persistence and durability of patriarchal relations, and have been particularly guilty of failing to note the development of the articulation of patriarchy and capital over time; suggesting that ultimately capitalist relations hold sway (Barker and Downing, 1980). Some writers have been completely devoid of theoretical insight (Holcombe, 1973; Silverstone, 1976), or have not considered capitalist development as an important enough variable impinging upon the clerical labour process and the process of feminisation and sex segregation (Zimmeck, 1986). One writer has suggested very useful, though limited, insights into patriarchal relations in the office (Davies, 1979).

Thus, of all the contributions to the debate on the early development of female clerical work, Walby's approach is the most fruitful and useful

starting point for a more comprehensive understanding of the genesis of clerical work feminisation and job segregation. Importantly her approach stresses the centrality to analysis of fully understanding periods of capitalist and patriarchal structuration and restructuration before we can move to the next. She argues, therefore, that; "patterns produced at one historical moment built on previous patterns and the sexual division of labour at any time is the result of the accumulation of these rounds of restructuring gender relations" (ibid : p.243). To the extent that Walby can use this point as her launching pad for assessing the development of clerical work into the modern era the approach is clearly useful. However, what she does not adequately deal with is the establishment of the sexual division of labour in clerical work to begin with. She merely argues that it derives from struggle between male employers, male clerks, and females, as representatives of capitalist and patriarchal social relations. Moreover, her discussion of gender inequality and patriarchy as a theoretical construct does not address the factors, other than struggle within offices, which might have impinged upon women's position in clerical work, i.e. the significance of patriarchal social relations as part of 'commonsense'; the relationship between such 'commonsense' and the capitalist family; the importance of these factors in influencing the form and development of elements of the clerical labour process.

Before moving to a consideration of patriarchy and patriarchal social relations it would be useful to reiterate the central points which have been made concerning gender inequality as a feature of the developing clerical labour process in the 1870 to 1914 period.

Certainly, for employers of clerical labour in this period, the cheapness of females was the impetus for their employment; they also needed to rationalise and routinise clerical work more systematically in order to continue

to minimise labour costs while making the task of carrying out clerical work more effective and efficient. This is where the insights developed within labour process theory are of use in not only comprehending the development of the clerical labour process per se, but also the fashion in which the gender dimension impinged upon it. Chapters six to nine inclusive showed that the emergence of sex segregation in clerical work, and its eventual feminisation, resulted from the impact of a set of patriarchal social relations on the clerical labour process. It would be easy to argue that employers contrived and conspired to use patriarchal social relations to structure clerical work hierarchically, and to divide it technically; to enhance their control over it as well as to facilitate the employment of cheap female labour. Indeed, to some extent this is probably the case. However, this thesis has suggested that such a position can be overstated. In the sense that gender was important in structuring work technically (chapter 6), females' work in offices was limited to the most boring and mundane. To the extent that 'gender control' was exercised hierarchically (chapter 8), the promotion opportunities for female clerks were limited. Furthermore, these structural forms of gender control were compounded by the sexual politics of personal control.

It is also correct to identify that the division of the clerical workforce by gender was aided by, and sometimes compromised with, the struggles of male clerks to protect their position within the clerical labour market (chapter 9). These 'facts' are not at issue. What is being questioned is the approach to these 'facts' which suggests that all men are always conscious actors in the perpetuation of patriarchal social relations, and, therefore, conscious oppressors of women. To be sure, the rigid sex segregation of clerical work which emerged in the 1870 to 1914 period developed from a complex array of interpenetrations between patriarchal social relations and capitalist social relations. These interpenetrations excluded women to 'lower level' clerical work; defined the nature of that work;

'genderised' the skills and abilities involved; delimited the opportunities for female clerks, and once again 'genderised' the abilities and qualities required to achieve them; and created the capitalist family which formed the basis for the low pay women were to receive in clerical work (chapter 7). To argue, however, that men as employers or as clerks were constantly conspiring against females, in one way or other, on the basis of some abstract notion of 'male dominance', does not address the fundamental questions - from where do patriarchal social relations derive, and what was their specific importance within clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period?

Patriarchy, Patriarchal Social Relations and Gender Inequality

It has been accepted in the above argument that a system of patriarchal social relations existed in the 1870 to 1914 period. It has also been argued that the existence of these social relations create gender inequality throughout any given social formation, but particularly within the present context, capitalism and clerical work within monopoly capitalism. However, for patriarchal social relations to be fully appreciated within the capitalist mode of production (CMP), they should be analysed in association with developments within that mode of production, and in terms of their interpenetrations with capitalist social relations. To distinguish, or associate, this conceptual approach to patriarchal social relations from, or with, others, it is necessary to outline what other approaches have been developed. Walby (ibid : p.5) has usefully listed five categories of writings on gender inequality; gender inequality as theoretically insignificant or non-existent; gender inequality as derivative from capitalist relations; gender inequality as a result of an autonomous system of patriarchy, which is the primary form of social inequality; gender inequality as resulting from patriarchal relations so intertwined with capitalist relations that

they form one system of capitalist patriarchy; gender inequality as a consequence of the interaction of autonomous systems of patriarchy and capitalism (dualist writings).

The first of these is characterised by the work of Goldthorpe et al (1980) and Stewart et al (1980). Such work has largely ignored gender inequality, or accepted it as a 'natural' feature of social life. The suggestion is that the fact of gender inequality means that women are dependent upon men, usually as husbands, and their life chances derive from this position. For such writers the concept of patriarchy is of limited use. Lockwood (1986 : p.18) has argued that:

"Those who regard the ubiquity of this phenomenon (patriarchy) as more impressive than its historical and social variability have sought to account for its pervasiveness by a whole range of reductionist, extra-sociological explanations, be they biological, cultural, or psychoanalytical, or simply in terms of men's (presumably innate) drive to dominate women".

He suggests that whatever the value of "these various theories and their respective redemptory promises", they "afford no basis for a systematic, comparative, study of gender relations and inequalities".

A major ingredient in the debate around gender inequality as derivative of capitalist relations is the domestic labour debate. In essence, the writings within the domestic labour debate are attempts to conceptualise the material position of house-wives, and in so doing outline the distinct material position of women. The focus and aim of the debate is not gender inequality but the relationship between unpaid work in the home (domestic labour) and capitalism. Most writers in this area perceive domestic labour

as work and that the set of social relations within which it is performed are crucial in explaining the oppression of women (Seccombe, 1974; Malos, 1976; Molyneux, 1979). However, there are complex differences between those within the debate in relation to what type of work domestic labour is. As Walby points out there are considerable variations "as to whether they view it as production, consumption, reproduction or circulation and whether it is productive, unproductive or non-productive of value and of surplus value" (ibid : p.17). A significant problem with the domestic labour debate, and indeed other attempts to locate the roots of women's oppression within capitalist social relations (Zarelsky, 1976), is that they fail to account for, while recognising the fact that women's oppression pre-dates capitalism (Middleton, 1981 and 1983).

The argument that gender inequality is a consequence of patriarchy alone is associated with a number of writers. Millett (1977) for example, perceives patriarchal relations as an ingredient of every aspect of social life. Thus, every sphere of social life contributes to the maintenance and perpetuation of patriarchal relations, i.e. the family, economy, religion, sexuality etc. The criticism of her analysis is that it fails to assess the interrelationships between these structures and, therefore, does not offer a theory of gender inequality. Firestone (1974) has developed a theory of patriarchy which has argued that women's subordination to men derives from the biology of reproduction. It is their weakness through this reproductive biology; child-bearing, breastfeeding, child-rearing etc. which enables men to dominate women. It is considered that such biologism is the major weakness of her work.

The concept of patriarchy itself has been considered and debated by numerous writers (Barrett, 1980; Beechey, 1979; Rowbotham, 1981; Sargent (ed), 1981), and considerable problems persist. For example, does patriarchy

constitute a distinct social system, can it overcome its ahistoricism, reductionism, biologism, universalism (Walby, *ibid* : p.28)? Walby argues that up to the present writers have largely been unable to link together the concept of patriarchy within several interrelated structures, and moreover, to relate them to capitalist relations of production. The formulation of capitalist patriarchy by a number of writers was a move in this direction (McDonagh and Harrison, 1978; Eisenstein, 1979). In short, this approach argues that capitalism and patriarchy are so intertwined and interdependent that they cannot be conceptualised in separate systems.

The final category of writings on gender inequality conceptualise patriarchy and capitalism as analytically independent, yet coexisting. As Walby suggests it "captures the autonomy of patriarchal relations whilst not ignoring the significance of capitalist relations" (*ibid* : p.33). Dualist writings can be divided into two major sub-categories; firstly, those which allocate different spheres of society to the determination of either patriarchal or capitalist relations; secondly, those which see patriarchal and capitalist relations as articulating at all levels and spheres of society. The first sub-category can be further divided according to which spheres are allocated to patriarchy and which to capitalism. Some writers argue that patriarchy is concerned with ideology, culture and sexuality, and capitalism with the economy. Others confine patriarchy to reproduction and capitalism to production. (Walby, *ibid* : pp.33-47).

The basis for Walby's new approach to patriarchy, and towards developing a new theory of patriarchy, is broadly the argument that patriarchal relations and capitalist relations are analytically independent, yet co-exist. She argues that patriarchy is never the only mode in a society but always exists in an arrangement with another, such as capitalism. Furthermore, unlike other conceptions of patriarchy, which have stressed that

patriarchal relations have only one base, or have considered so many features of social life as being relevant in an unstructured way, Walby argues that her model of patriarchy is composed of a limited number of "relatively autonomous structures". The most crucial sets of patriarchal social relations are to be found in domestic work, paid work, the state, and male violence and sexuality. Of these the social relations of domestic work should be seen as a patriarchal mode of production, and this is of considerable significance in determining gender relations. When patriarchy is in articulation with the capitalist mode of production, however, then patriarchal relations within paid work are central to perpetuating the system of gender relations and inequality. All of these sets of patriarchal relations interrelate in a complex fashion, composing an intricate system of patriarchy, which Walby defines as;

"a system of interrelated social structures through which men exploit women. This formulation is deliberately designed to avoid the problems of building an explanation of what I am trying to explain in my definition of that object". (ibid : p.51)

She further qualifies her definition by stating that it refers to a system of social relations rather than individuals, "since it is presumed that it is at the level of a social system that gender relations may be explained, not that of individual men, nor that of discrete social institutions".

Walby expands on her theory of patriarchy by firstly, arguing that there is a patriarchal mode of production (PMP) which acts as the basis for patriarchal social relations. This establishes an analytically independent mode of production from capitalism. The PMP is made up of the producing class of housewives or domestic labourers, and the non-producing class and exploiting class of husbands. This PMP articulates with the capitalist

mode of production (CMP) and ensures that women will serve their husbands by excluding women from paid work on the same terms as men. The PMP does not have any autonomous laws of development, rather the nature of change is governed by the articulation between the PMP and CMP.

The patriarchal division of labour in the household does not totally determine the form of patriarchal relations in a given social formation, other sets of patriarchal relations are also significant. In particular, patriarchal relations in the workplace and the state, as well as those in the family, are crucial in determining the position of women in paid work. Moreover, the position of women within paid work cannot be adequately comprehended without some assessment of the tension between capital and patriarchy.

There are other elements in the social formation which, Walby considers, have a less important place in a system of patriarchy. These also constitute sites of patriarchal relations; education, the media, language, sport, religion. Again, such structures contribute to an interrelated and interdependent system of patriarchy.

While the above outline, does not do justice to the complexity of Walby's theoretical construct, her approach overall suffers from some of those criticisms which she attaches to others. Firstly, her approach, although recognising that patriarchal social relations articulates importantly with other social relations, both capitalist and pre-capitalist, does not suggest that patriarchal relations are sufficiently independent of capitalist social relations in the way she initially argues that they are. Secondly, her patriarchal mode of production seems to be too much rooted in the capitalist family structure to be conceptualised as "analytically independent" from capitalism. This begs the question, is there a material base to patriarchal social relations? Thirdly, the social relations which apparently

derive from this PMP are conceived of in such a general way that the unified notion of a patriarchal system, which Walby proposes to be developing, appears to be as unsystematic in its assessment of the interrelationships between these various structures, as does Millett's approach, whom she criticises (ibid : p.23). Certainly Walby is correct in identifying that there are various sites of patriarchal relations, but her approach leaves them vaguely hanging around in an ahistorical, unexplained fashion (ibid : p.68).

The historical and contextual specificity of this study does not facilitate the development of a theory of patriarchy as complex as that posited by Walby. However, what it has sought to accomplish is an understanding of the manner in which a set of patriarchal social relations, very much existing as social relations, interrelated with capitalism to produce a particular division of labour within clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. Indeed, in this respect Walby is correct to argue that the manifestation of patriarchal social relations as social relations takes place as they interrelate with other sets of social relations. However, if the material base for patriarchal social relations extant in the form of the division of labour in the household, is too context specific to explain the social relations of patriarchy, from where do these relations derive? Do they have to have such a concrete basis in history to be recognised as a palpable set of social relations?

A key argument in this study has been that in the 1870 to 1914 period patriarchal social relations were considered as 'natural'. To question such relations, as this thesis has shown, was considered pathological in the Durkheimian sense, abnormal and unnatural. The essence of such relations, revolved around the belief that females were sometimes 'inferior', but most definitely always 'different', from men. The nature of their roles

within society, and latterly within paid work, in the nineteenth century were pre-determined by these features of the dominant ideology. It would be easy to argue that men manipulated these patriarchal social relations to suit their requirements in clerical work in particular, but this would overemphasise the conspiratorial element of men as capitalists. To be sure, there were conflicts of interest between men as capitalists, men as clerks, and females, but this was not directly implicated in the sex segregation of clerical work. Such sex-segregation was in one sense pre-determined in 'nature'.

This is not to argue that women's oppression within society derives necessarily from the biology of reproduction, although I believe this is a particularly important element in the social construction of their position in clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period. Rather it derives from the "social structure of infant care ; the social structure within which we all are 'psychologically born'" (Harding, 1981 : p.151). Harding argues that it is this crucial period of infant care, directly after birth, which is undertaken overwhelmingly by women, which distinguishes women as 'different', and secondly, devalues their worth. There are clearly elements of Althusserian thought in this idea that at birth persons are interpellated as individuals and subjects (Althusser, 1971). It is the contention here that such interpellations derive from this relationship between childbirth and child rearing; this is the critical factor which develops, at the level of ideology, the notion of women's inferiority and difference, and which ultimately becomes part of common sense.

The historical development of patriarchal social relations based upon the 'natural' relationship between childbirth and child-rearing offers a means of understanding the process by which men dominated the public arena, and women were excluded to the private. Furthermore, this 'material base'

has produced, through history, a 'common sense' view of women's position within society which impacts upon and 'genders' many aspects of a woman's role in any given social formation (cf Mann, 1986; Scott, 1986), on the basis of a 'natural' inferiority to or difference from men. It is important to acknowledge the considerable profundity of this within the capitalist social formation, not only within paid work, but also in relation to the structure of the capitalist family, the state, personal relationships, the media, education etc. Moreover, when each of these structures embody patriarchal social relations in an interrelationship with capitalist social relations, they become integral to the hegemony of a particular social formation, perpetuating both capitalist and patriarchal social relations.

It has been suggested that it is the relationship between childbirth and child rearing that is the most critical factor, through history, determining women's position within any given social formation, and their position and roles within structures in social formations. Furthermore, these structures within social formations will interact and interrelate to perpetuate and maintain the social formation and patriarchal social relations within the social formation. Using other analyses of women's position within capitalist work, it is possible to highlight, in broad terms, the most salient points of this historical exclusion, inferiorisation, and differentiation between women and men, based upon the association of women specifically with childbirth and child rearing. To employ Althusserian terms once again, if we are treating the childbirth/rearing connection as the material base, then we are now developing an understanding of the superstructural elements deriving from it, its ideological components, which have, through history, been intrinsic to the cohesion of social formations, and which play a crucially important part within the hegemony of patriarchal capitalism. Patriarchal social relations, then, derive from the relationship in history between childbirth and child rearing and their association in nature with

women. A fact of biology, childbirth, is associated socially with the total act of child rearing. This emerges into a set of social relations determining women's place in social formations.

To clarify this argument it would be useful to suggest some possible central features of the course travelled by patriarchal social relations as they have operated within social formations. It is important to remember that each set of patriarchal social relations are specific to the context in which they operate, but that they are also autonomous in that they persist from one social formation to others in a different form. That is, they operate and function in different ways as they interrelate with other social relations, and as they are embodied within structures within social formations.

A very useful, if somewhat dated, history of women provides the basis for the following discussion (Langdon-Davies, 1932). Langdon-Davies begins his analysis of the history of women by arguing that the primitive mind had no factual conceptualisation of his/her world, it was simply a part of their own personality, "subservient to their will, chained by their thought, conditioned by their needs". Everything that existed for the primitive man and woman was the result of a mysterious mana, a spirit, which pervaded the whole of the natural world. It is within the context of the mechanical solidarity of primitive life that men and women first existed. The division of labour that existed in such a world was one based on necessity;

"In short, the amount of work a woman has to do in such a primitive community is not because she belongs to a weaker or oppressed sex, but because the savage has less leisure in his fight with nature for the means of living."

(ibid : p.106)

This is not to suggest that there existed in primitive society no domination/subordination in male/female relationships. Rather it suggests that primitive society, and the place of females and males within it, was governed by 'natural' laws, uninformed by reason or thought.

It is only when acceptance of the 'natural' turns to a fear about and over life that primitive society begins to create a body of thought, a set of ideas, based upon the 'natural'. The questioning of mana, and the thrusting of this fear of life on to women, who are the carriers of mana because they give birth to life, is a crucial period in the history of women's oppression. In this sense the origins of patriarchal social relations emerges from fear in the minds of a questioning primitive culture. The male primitive uses his biological distinctiveness from the female to develop an understanding of his world. Part of this explanation of his world emphasises the difference of the female, her 'other worldliness'.

From this point, when explanations are sought in the minds of humans for their existence and their function in the world, patriarchal social relations, as a system of relations between men and women, organises biological reproduction through history as a set of authority relationships, essential features of which are woman's separation from and dependency on men. As civilisation develops and social formations change patriarchal social relations become embroiled in new and changing social structures. The 'fear' of primitive society may be transformed into god worship of a less phrenetic kind; the fertility of the mother is not to be feared, but revered and worshipped. Despite such changes in the position of women as constructed through dominant ideology, the central feature of patriarchal social relations persists; the separation of men and women. In Greek society this separation could not be clearer, as a character in one of Menander's plays says:

"War, politics and public speaking are the sphere of man; that of woman is to keep house, to stay at home and to receive and tend her husband."

(Langdon-Davies, *ibid* : p.150)

Thus, the 'public' and the 'private' spheres:

"As conceptual categories, public and private ordered and structured diverse activities, purposes, and dimensions of human social life and thinking about that life."

(Elshtain, 1981 : p.9)

This separation of the public and private became incorporated as an essential ingredient within the Western political tradition from this period. Moreover, it filtered through, as dominant ideology, to all levels of society:

"To the average stupid Athenian, it was probably rather wicked for a woman to have any character, wicked for her to wish to take part in public life, wicked for her to acquire learning or to doubt any part of the conventional religion, just as it was wicked for her to deceive her husband. Such a woman should not be treated with understanding and sympathy."

(Langdon-Davies, *ibid* : p.151)

Elshtain's study argues that all of the august array of thinkers influential in the Western political tradition assume and deploy the division between public and private based upon gender (*ibid* : p.9). Aristotle, for example, believed that the household constituted a non-public sphere within which the "female was subsumed and which therefore defined her". Moreover, although 'good', the household was a lesser good than the polis, the public

sphere, and the wife-mother achieved only a limited goodness. Aristotle also believed that the family was for private persons, not fully rational. It was essentially an inferior life, insignificant in its purpose for political life, but a "functional prerequisite for the realm of freedom". (ibid : pp.45-7).

Probably the most overwhelming contribution made to embedding patriarchal social relations within the very fabric of Western society was that made by the Judaeo-Christian tradition. While Christianity was itself a fierce, passionate, revolutionary force in the face of Roman imperialism, one of its essential tenets was woman's subservience to man: "man was a human being made for the highest and noblest purposes; woman was a female made to serve only one". (Langdon-Davies, ibid : p.210).

Through history, then, patriarchal social relations, deriving from the social relations of reproduction, have become embedded in the many social structures of social formations. They have inferiorised and differentiated women's role within each of these structures; within capitalism this has meant the sexual division of labour in the family and in paid work, their relative exclusion from politics and religion, their separation in education and sport etc. In all of these social structures patriarchal social relations formulate some degree of distinction between men and women to women's disadvantage. Moreover, each of these social structures within any given social formation will interpenetrate to produce an all-pervasive, hegemony of patriarchal social relations. As Scott (1986) argues:

"Precisely because the economy had been shaped by the wider society in the course of its development, political and ideological forms become incorporated into the economic mechanisms themselves".

The position of women within clerical work in the 1870 to 1914 period, therefore, should be seen as a consequence of the embeddedness of patriarchal social relations within every structure of capitalist society, and the interrelationship between patriarchal social relations and capitalist social relations. The form and manifestations such patriarchal social relations take will be specific to capitalism and subject to change over time. Their material base lies in the historical and social organisation of biological reproduction.

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