Is 'Women's Work' Less Valued Than 'Men's Work'?

Predominantly a term used in North America, United Kingdom, Australia and some other Western nations, "women's work" refers to a stereotyped, gender-influenced work that was associated with women and rooted in unpaid domestic and maternal duties, and then transposed to actual paid work that included these functions or 'light' work, such as clerical or administrative, as opposed to professionally accredited, managerial or executive types of work[1]. The professionalisation of some of these types of paid work, such as caregivers, cooks, cleaners and household staff, etc. eventually led to the introduction of male workers in what became vocational areas, thereby increasing their validity, value and working conditions in the past hundred years[2].

In contrast, 'men's work' would be considered the anti-thesis of 'women's work' and acts as a validating model, as it involves the use of physical strength and labour, aggressiveness and territorial dispositions in business and relationship building, and what were considered to be physically demanding. As well it came to also include requiring 'higher reasoning' and intellectually complex skills, such as mathematical, scientific, mechanical, electrical or electronic knowledge and trade skills, more for the support of patriarchy[3]. Many of the skills demonstrated by men were outside the household, but tasks and chores inside the household revolved around being the 'head' of the home, an authoritative defender and disciplinarian who also oversaw and/or performed household tasks that where more physical or trade-related, as described above[4].

Determining the value of 'women's work' and 'men's work' and their comparative value is, to some degree, subject to the actual and perceived value within a particular time period,

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[1] Beneria, L. (ed.), Feldman, S. (ed.), 1992, Unequal burden: economic crises, persistent poverty, and women's work, David Lubin Memorial Library.
2 Abbott, Pamela; Meerabeau, 1998, The Sociology of the Caring Professions, Psychology Press.
3 Morrell, CE, 1934, “Professionalisation” (ref. 8), 981. Morrell's model of studying professionalisation as an occupational strategy, London.
4 Morrell, CE, 1934, “Professionalisation” (ref. 8), 982–4, italics mine, 986–8 on alternatives; Golinski, Making natural knowledge (ref. 8), 68.

nation and demographic stratifications (age, status, class, etc.) and acknowledging the stereotypes that were generated from these constraints. As well, the determination of 'value' can be viewed from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. In other words, women workers have an economic value as expressed through pay, compensation and benefits and women as caregivers and nurturers have a social value that imparts value to the wellbeing of individuals, communities, social capital and society, as a whole. The latter, can be more difficult to measure.

Now and into the future, what stands to confound both terms and stereotypes are the changes in gender identity and gender orientation, as seen in Western nations in recent decades; moving from a hetero-normative to a gender diverse social structure will have numerous impacts to family structures, social features and socio-economic and political constructs. The shift in our hetero-normative society may ultimately redefine gender differentiated work and possibly reduce the terms 'women's work' nothing more than a euphemism or paradoxical idiom and possibly at some point both terms may be entirely obsolete[5]. Currently, at this point of our societal progress, the 'women's work' is already viewed as having a pejorative connotation, often indicating a less valued or easily fulfilled type of light work that at one time was outside the scope of 'professionalised' work.

By examining its historical social features, genderised characteristics and applied context and performing a comparative to 'men's work', using the same constraining factors to create a validating model, a clearer definition can be determined with a level of specificity indicative of that context. Likewise, examining distinctions in paid and unpaid work types (labour versus knowledge workers), gender associated work (strength versus nurturing), working conditions, equality of wages and employee rights and social labour standard movements, as such with unions, provide added context.

[5] Fraser, Nancy, 1997, Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler, Social Text, No. 52/53, Queer Transexions of Race, Nation, and Gender (Autumn - Winter, 1997), pp. 279-289, US: Duke University Press.

Other factors such as martial status, class status, reproduction and leisure time and social, political and economic changes (peace/war time, industrialisation, capitalism, socialism, patriarchy and its economic controls and societal rules, etc.) provide a better comprehension of interdependencies and cause and effect[6]. These salient distinctions and differences that are indicative of the transformation of societal groups (for example, moving from an agrarian to an industrial society) and the development or reorganisation of aspects of society to accommodate the progress, as societal habits to meet the needs of an emerging industries, like hand trades to automation or mechanised manufacturing.

The socially constructed gender roles over various periods and collective of ideals, or accepted behaviours, become the indicative criteria that genders specify and identify with being 'woman' or 'man'. Resulting gender dependencies, as seen with women, like being primarily financially dependent on men and the inferred “private responsibility of individual men" limited women to economic viability only attained through marriage to a man. It is argued that this that rendered women’s needs and rights 'invisible' and in turn permitted men define and maintain women as dependent, adding to the male dominance over women and transferring that to the workplace.

In determining the 'value' of women's work, several issues arise when observing conventional conceptual frameworks and statistics, which are used to develop macro-economic policies. The contributions to the economy by women is systematically underestimated, as is the unpaid aspect of the economy in the capacity of care, social cohesion, civic responsibility and volunteerism. These are effectively non-market processes that are difficult to quantify but are nonetheless important in a functioning of an sustainable economy. It is recognized deficiency in these frameworks that more women's work, than men's work, is not captured in national economic statistics due to the fact that some of women's work falls outside conventional markets.

[6] Fink, George, 2010, Stress of War, Conflict and Disaster, US: Academic Press.

Three areas in particular, that can be classified as non-market work that women perform, relate to subsistence production, unpaid care work for family and friends and voluntary community work. Where subsistence production relates to the production for 'home use' of goods, such as food, clothing, soft furnishings, etc. - for family use and consumption, that is a common component in western Europe and in poorer rural communities of the UK and US. The omission of unpaid care work and tending the household, such as cooking, cleaning, providing personal care and administrative functions, etc., and voluntary community work undermines and undervalues the contributions by women in particular as they are predominantly active in these three areas. These areas of unpaid work are is complex to measure but speaks to an invisible or false economy that is very important but not factored into the system of paid and compensatory work; these sub-economies for lack of a better term, are not only complex in their contributions but also complex in what they may 'take away' from paid workers of both genders.

When considering market economies and gendered work, in general, it be asserted that 'value' can be enhanced or diminished by the availability of a functional substitute and replacement in a 'free market', where uniqueness and indispensability raises value, homogenisation reduces it. If the perspective is that a particular function that is provided by a person or an item is of high value but can be delivered by many other entities other than one unique one, its individual value will decrease. A command market, the polar opposite of a free market, constrains these functions to the imposed control factors or systems and renders them obligatory, or as demanded. If we apply this simple concept to 1) women in the home, 2) women in the workplace and the 3) economic and 4) social value of each, these perspectives can applied to the valances of women's roles in society[7].

In the next sections, specific social, political and economic changes will be explored on the 'women's work' home and workplace from economic and social value and their resulting impacts on working conditions, equality of wages, employee rights and social

[7] Grossman, Gregory, 1963, Notes for a theory of the Command Economy, Soviet Studies Vol. 15 , Iss. 2.

labour standard movements[8]. In North America and the United Kingdom, there were five significant historical events since the late 1800s that impacted the value of women's work and their role in society by moving them into the workforce, then later into chosen vocations and careers that influenced family structures and spurred equal pay legislation, improved worker rights and working conditions;

1) industrialisation in the late 1800s,

2) the First World War in the early 1900s,

3) the emancipation of women at various points in the early 1900s by various Western nations,

4) the Second World War in the 1940s and

5) the Feminist movement of the 1960-70s.

Industrialisation, or the Industrial Revolution, that began in the late 1800s revolutionized societies with enormous impacts to economies, politics and social functions and practical day to day life in Western nations, bringing forward innovative technologies leading to mass production. Beginning in England, it spread to the United States and then to the rest of the Western nations into the early 1900s - a relatively short amount of time considering the advancements that grew exponentially from each other[9]. The sum of the Industrial Revolution shifted societies from one that was fundamentally agrarian and relying on hand-crafted production of goods of necessity to one that mass produced machine-made products that ranged from necessities with wider lines and to the availability of luxuries, not previously available to lower class stratifications.

[8] Apodaca, Clair, 1998, Measuring Women's Economic and Social Rights Achievement, Human Rights Quarterly 20.1, pp. 139-172: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/13602/summary

[9] Pinchbeck, Ivy, 2004, Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution, Routledge.

Industrialisation also created a liberation of supply, demand and marketplaces that were propelled by competition and capitalist ventures resulting in the growth of the cash economy and wage dependency of women and children putting further demand on the availability of a workforce. For women, industrialisation was anything but liberating but did impart some freedoms and liberations in the form of unintended consequences. The demand of industry necessitated massive workforces and while paid these jobs were inequitable between the genders and marked by dangerous, unsanitary work conditions, as seen in mills, mines and textile factories and men assumed supervisory roles to women, reflecting the existing patriarchy in society and further entrenching those controls, in spite of women's increased freedom and mobility outside the home.

As these lines of products developed individual market sectors and enhanced competition in the markets, it created a demand for more workers and developed opportunities for women - and children - to work outside of family home. It can be argued that it was at this point in time that this was the first wave of women moving into paid work types that were or would have been traditionally occupied by men. This set the stage and removed barriers that now allowed for additional waves of female workers to enter the work force as a response to particular societal needs. It was only later that equity improvements that formed on the inside by women demanding fair and equal rights that made the entry to the work force for women much easier in later decades.

Prior this and in concert, 'women's work' at home was unpaid and was viewed as obligatory and simple in its functions, lending to a lower societal value - in many cases, women were expected to maintain their role in the home, whilst earning a wage outside the home in the paid workforce. At this point in history women's value in the home and workplace from both an economic and social perspective were extremely low, primarily due to the patriarchal controls, in effect acting the gendered 'colonisation' of women in the workforce.

Interestingly, measures of overall value of the work young men (and children) as paid workers were also low and they were treated with dispensability, as evidenced in working conditions, equality of wages and employee rights, being trumped by the requirements of industrial sustainment and advancement[10]. Women's role and value in terms of motherhood and reproduction and the related responsibilities, were hobbled during this period and for many decades due to the exercised belief that women were 'property' of men or their husbands and were effectively constrained by sexual contract[11].

When the First World War broke in 1914, one of the most profound impacts to women's work, as employees, were the loss of household and servant jobs with the middle classes who had to economise their households and to small business that were forced to scale, after the economies slumped, after enjoying substantial growth during and after the Industrial Revolution; this was noted in primarily in the UK and US. As the need to replace volunteers who went to the front line grew with conscription and the enactment of the Munitions of Work Act 1915, putting munitions factories under the control of government, numbers of women were brought in to fill vacant jobs and to meet the increased demand for labour to support the war effort.

A variety of tactics were employed to manipulate the working and non-working to shift to jobs and volunteer efforts that would support the war effort, from propaganda, influencing public opinion and job lists. In the US in the early part of the First World War, as a means to encourage men to switch jobs to support the war effort, the United States Employment Service published lists of jobs that would be suitable for women and encouraged men in those jobs to switch to ones that supported the war effort; this was capitalised on with the assurance that there were plenty of women ready to occupy those

[10] Lebergott, Stanley, 1960, Trends in the American Economy in the Nineteenth Century, Wage Trends, Volume ISBN: 0-870-14180-5, Princeton University Press http://www.nber.org/books/unkn60-1

[11] Williams, Joan ,2009, Reconstructive Feminism: Changing the Way We Talk about Gender and Work Thirty Years After the PDA: 79–117.

jobs; the pay wasn't as much as what the men were being paid, but they paid more than what the were making in household or servant jobs[12].

This change, unlike the Industrial Revolution, was "a genuinely liberating experience" (Braybon, 1989, p.113) that increased their freedom, independence and, more importantly, their social and economic value in the workplace that only men had enjoyed thus far. Women's mobility increased substantially as many number of women abandoned household service work for factory permanently. Their entrance into the workforce initially was not always positively regarded but it became clear after a short time that the success of the war effort hinged on this new wave of employees. With the government combining welfare policy, offering subsidies to families with husbands on the front line, women steadily increased in order that conscription could be sustained.

During this period, the first formal evidence of employment accommodation was seen where the entry of women in factories was often facilitated by 'dilution' or redistribution of complex tasks into simpler ones that the initially non-skilled women workers could perform. In the UK, women's employment rates increased during WWI, from 23.6% of the working age population in 1914 to between 37.7% and 46.7% in 1918 (Braybon 1989, p.49). Exact estimates are difficult to ascertain as domestic workers were excluded from these figures and a significant number of women transitioned from domestic service into the war-created jobs. As well, the employment of married women increased sharply and by 1918 alone accounted almost 40% of all women workers by 1918 (Braybon, 1989: p. 49).

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[12] UK National Archives:
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/document_packs/women.htm
BT 55/24: Employment of female labour in engineering industry, 1917.
HO 45/10790/300791: Various material on women factory inspectors, 1914-18.
LAB 15/95: Various reports with statistics on increased employment of women during war, 1916-18.
MUN 5/70/324/22: Pamphlet on women's war work, Sept 1916.
MUN 5/84-88/342/17: Minutes of meetings of War Cabinet committee on women and industry, Oct 1918-Feb 1919.
RECO 1/749: Employment and training of women after war, 1918.

While women's equity was improving, women were often paid less than men creating a concern that when men returned from war that employers would continue to employ women for this reason. However, even before the end of the war, many women had refused to accept lower pay for, what in most cases was the same work, and strikes ensued that ultimately became the first social effort by women for equal pay. While the principle of 'equal pay for equal work' was successful in all three nations, a dangerous 'legislative' caveat and precedent was set; there was a distinct recognition of women having a 'lesser strength' and 'special health problems', thereby affecting their output of work that would render it unequal and lesser to men. This was despite evidence that women had already been performing these jobs and tasks adequately and as well as men during the war effort; popular (and governmental) perception was hard fought but unrelenting.

The National War Labour Board determined that women workers should be paid the same: "If it shall become necessary to employ women on work ordinarily performed by men, they must be allowed equal pay for equal work[13]", as was the case in the Second World War. With women workers were a necessary factor in the war effort, the equal pay directive was supported heavily by the unions and male workers, mostly over the fear that men's wages would be reduced once they return to these jobs when they return form the war. After the war ended, war veterans needed work and women were therefore pushed back to the home front.

By the end of the war, women had enjoyed an extended period of economic and social value in the workplace, which began to impact their economic and social value in the household, and certainly more so for the generations below them. However, the First World War established a moderate equity that persisted in select industries and sectors for many decades thereafter, up to replacement through automation. Women's rights were informally recognised during the war and after the war they began advance and

[13] Eyraud, François, 1993, Equal Pay Protection in Industrialised Market Economies: In Search of Greater Effectiveness, International Labour Office, International Labour Organization.

politicians who were savvy to the position of women in the workforce recognised their value as voters.

On a societal level, women were not only recognising their rights, idealised through protests, and their independence and success outside of being married or being 'property' of a man and thusly, were being recognised as such by society, albeit slowly and reluctantly. From an equality perspective, this period was particularly important as it bore impacts to present struggles for women's value due to a societal argument emerged, mainly by men, that women were physically incapable providing "equal work" to men[14]. This directly challenged and destabilised weakly written future employment regulations and legislation stating "equal pay for equal work" as an assurance of equity between the genders.

The women's movement for the right to vote in the early 1900s began as far back as the mid-1880s and overlapped with the First World War efforts and spanned well into the 1940s. Known as the or suffragette movement as it was known in the UK and US, the war effort provided substantial traction and empirical precedent to women's rights movements and was in some ways as a direct result of it; it can be argued that suffrage in particular would not have occurred in the same manifestations and with the same conditions and outcomes if it weren't for the war effort[15]. This success of this effort was delta-ed by several women's social and political groups who advocated the extension of the "franchise", or the right to vote in public elections for women in the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

Overtaking several decades, women's right to vote was passed in the UK 1918 for women over 30 years of age and 1928 for women over 21 years of age, in the US in 1928 and in Canada in 1919 at the federal level and between 1916 and 1940 within the provinces. The

[14] Goldin, Claudia, 2006, The Quiet Revolution That Transformed Women's Employment, Education and Family, The American Economic Review. 96 (2): 1–21.
[15] Williams, Joan ,2009, Reconstructive Feminism: Changing the Way We Talk about Gender and Work Thirty Years After the PDA: 79–117.

impact of the right to vote on women's economic value in the workplace and in the household was not significant in the sense that it did not provide much more than a mechanism to advance women rights through political means and elected officials[16]. However, women's social value in the workplace and in the household was increasing due to the recognition of equal pay for work of equal value, support of women's groups and the social value of women as having social identity[17].

The Second World War that unfolded in 1939 had much the same impact in the UK, US and Canada as the First World War; in fact, as a system process in the social climate of the time it was nearly an exact replica in terms of its impacts to women's value socially and economically; the necessity of an augmented workforce brought forth hundreds of thousands of women in the first phase to support the war effort. Similar stereotypes about women's capacity to perform 'men's work' were expressed by employers, government and trade unions as what appeared to be protectionist measures with a preloaded gender bias. Government figures show that women's employment increased during the Second World War from about 5.1 million in 1939 (26%) to just over 7.25 million in 1943. About 46% of all women aged between 14 and 59, and 90% of all able-bodied single women between the ages of 18 and 40 were engaged in some form of work or National Service by September 1943 (H M Government, 1943, p. 3) in the UK[18]. Actual numbers of employment could have been higher, as domestic servants were excluded from these figures and many of these work types would have been re-deployed.

Following the Second World War, there was a substantial effort, due to shared work and mobilisation during the war, to scribe and pass international agreements that assured the rights of people, regardless of there home country, that granted them basic human rights and protected them from discrimination, such as the United Nations Universal

[16] MacLean, Nancy, 2009, The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents." Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.
[17] Davis, R. L, 1972, The Social and Cultural Life of the 1920s, p. 9. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
[18] The National Archives, UK: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/land-requisitioned-war/

Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In particular, this statue founded the human rights legislation of many Western nations, which in turn was used to found other wage and employment rights legislation for fairness and respect. In the following decades, concerted efforts were made by the US, UK and Canada to ensure that the now skilled and educated women's workforce that was depended upon by the national economies, was protected. Ratification of Canada's Act to Promote Equal Pay[19] for Female Employees in 1956, the US Pay Act in 1963 [20]and the UK Equal Pay Act in 1970 [21]added to not only the mobility of women internationally but stood to improve women's economic and social value in the work place.

On the surface this looked like progression but in actuality it continued to be hard-fought and difficult to govern and enforce. By the 1970s in all three nations, women had witnessed several decades of industrial profit and growth within a capitalist system, that they were an integral part of, and the incongruence of rights between them and men were markedly clear. In the 1960s and 1970s, the feminist or Women's Movement stood to challenge, deconstruct and reconstruct the socially imposed gender roles and to quash the ideals and dictated norm of being a woman, thereby increasing overall position, value and equality of women in society to that of men.

During this period, women were dually employed as paid professional and knowledge workers and also began to enter labour work, while balancing the expectation that women also provide nurturing, maternal roles. With the rise of women remaining single for a longer period and many rejecting the notion that their primary role was validated only by marriage and motherhood, many social changes occurred: marriage rates, divorce rates, birth rates and family structure. The gender division persisted in unpaid work and also in work types but less and less the socially constructed role of women - giving birth, caring for children, the elderly, and disabled, preparing food and maintain the household - was

[19] Canadian History of Rights, Canada's Act to Promote Equal Pay: http://historyofrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/statutes/CN_Female_Em.pdf
[20] US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, EPA: https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/epa.cfm
[21] The National Archives, UK, Equal Pay Act 1970: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1970/41

being validated. no longer were women's economic contributions can be easily replaced and care work could be effectively bought and sold[22].

The narrative of women as members of the domestic sphere, reinforced through economic motives, and the gender relations between men and women as an exchange of support for service, was beginning to unravel. Slowly 'patriarchal control' was ebbing and a more 'individualistic' notion was being accepted by both genders[23]. However, this evolution was slow and the disproportionate division of the household unpaid labour held fast, regardless of its negative impact on women's ability to navigate outside the household. As well, in some cases women were still discouraged from investing in education and skills, which can be attributed to the generational experience and attitudes seen in the 1950s and 1960, creating social norms that maintained gender division in work.

Where single women entered the workforce, some having already embarked on education to a particular field, they experienced much more mobility and freedom than married women, or those who came to marry while in the workforce; married women were often still responsible for the unpaid household work[24]. Since then a number of legislative improvements have been made that have also been stood up legally in higher courts and won. In the US, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 that protected pregnant employees and the Family and Medical Leave act of 1991 that permitted parents, regardless of gender, to take maternal, paternal and family leave[25].

In the US in 2012, women comprised nearly 58% of the labour force - working or looking for work - and are projected to account for 51% of the increase in total labour

[22] Walker, R. H, 1971, Life in the Age of Enterprise, pp. 120-121. Capricorn Books.
[23] Marx, Jerry D., 1998, Women, Settlements, and the Redefinition of Poverty, University of New Hampshire, Department of Social Work, Durham, NH.
[24] Witz, Anne, 1990, Patriarchy and Professions: The Gendered Politics of Occupational Closure, 24 (4): 675–690.
[25] Scharlach A. E., Grosswald B., 1997, The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, Social Service Review. 71 (3): 335–359.

force growth between 2008 and 2018. In the UK for 2016, the employment rate for women was 69.1%, the highest since comparable records began in 1971. In Canada, women fall just below the 50% mark for 2014. Currently, women in these nations still make approximately 77 cents for every dollar a man makes - or 19% - according to the National Equal Pay Task Force. The gap has closed since the 1980s to 2010 by about 20%+; the UK is slightly better and overall, these nations fall in the mid-range as far as the gender wage gap, with Japan with the highest at 38% and Norway at the lowest at about 8%[2627].

But progress is still slow. Last year, a bill that would have made it illegal for employers to retaliate against employees who discuss their wages failed in the Senate. To remedy the existing lower social and economic value of women to men will require time. Closing this gap rapidly by immediate legislation to align women's pay to men's for the same occupations or credentialed careers is difficult. This would require not only de-genderising the work types entirely, due to the shift in the hetero-normative, and balance them with pay equity based on credentials, experience and maintained by performance and it would also require an entirely new mindset that removes status and capability from the gender narrative[28]. However, we may not be too far from this. As mentioned the hetero-normative shift will have a significant impact on Western societies in the decades to come and the relevance of 'female' and 'male', or 'woman' and 'man', will surely diminish both in social and economic values, presumably to be replaced by functional, not gender, driven value.

Currently, there is substantial discourse around the gender wage gap clear and frequent, gender associated work on a massive down turn, substantial legalisation on working conditions, equality of wages, employee rights and social labour standards in place and

[26] Conference Board of Canada, International Assessment of the Gender Wage Gap: http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/society/gender-income-gap.aspx

[27] Cabrera, E.F., 2001, Opting out and opting in: understanding the complexities of women's career transitions. Career Development International, 12, 218 – 237.

[28] Spade, Joan Z., 2000, Gender and Education in the US, Gender Mosaics: Social Perspectives, Oxford University Press.

our social features as far as martial and class status, reproduction and leisure time, gender identity and orientation and loosening of controls that maintain patriarchy. These factors, although directly dependent not only on the nation and their current social value of women but the social, political and economic changes on the horizon as interdependencies, stand to slow or speed up the process of equity in the 'free market' through fractional market needs, like trades, and legislated gender percentages in the workplace.

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