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3 *Sexual Harassment: The Experience*

Most women wish to choose whether, when, where, and with whom to have sexual relationships, as one important part of exercising control over their lives. Sexual harassment denies this choice in the process of denying the opportunity to study or work without being subjected to sexual exactions. Objection to sexual harassment at work is not a neopuritan moral protest against signs of attraction, displays of affection, compliments, flirtation, or touching on the job. Instead, women are rattled and often angry about sex that is one-sided, unwelcome or comes with strings attached. When it's something a woman wants to turn off but can't (a co-worker or supervisor who refuses to stop) or when it's coming from someone with the economic power to hire or fire, help or hinder, reward or punish (an employer or client who mustn't be offended)—that's when [women] say it's a problem.¹

Women who protest sexual harassment at work are resisting economically enforced sexual exploitation.

This chapter analyzes sexual harassment as women report experiencing it.² The analysis is necessarily preliminary and exploratory. These events have seldom been noticed, much less studied; they have almost never been studied as sexual harassment.³ Although the available material is limited, it covers a considerably broader range of incidents than courts will (predictably) consider to be sex discrimination. Each incident or facet of the problem mentioned here will not have equal *legal* weight or go to the same legal issue; not every instance or aspect of undesired sexual attention on the job is necessarily part of the legal cause of action. Some dimensions of the problem seem to contra-indicate legal action or to require determinations that courts are ill suited to make. The broader contextual approach is taken to avoid prematurely making women's experience of sexual

harassment into a case of sex discrimination, no more and no less. For it is, at times, both more and less.

I envision a two-way process of interaction between the relevant legal concepts and women's experience. The strictures of the concept of sex discrimination will ultimately constrain those aspects of women's oppression that will be legally recognized as discriminatory. At the same time, women's experiences, expressed in their own way, can push to expand that concept. Such an approach not only enriches the law. It begins to shape it so that what *really* happens to women, not some male vision of what happens to women, is at the core of the legal prohibition. Women's lived-through experience, in as whole and truthful a fashion as can be approximated at this point, should begin to provide the starting point and context out of which is constructed the narrower forms of abuse that will be made illegal on their behalf. Now that a few women have the tools to address the legal system on its own terms, the law can begin to address women's experience on women's own terms.⁴

Although the precise extent and contours of sexual harassment await further and more exacting investigation, preliminary research indicates that the problem is extremely widespread. Certainly it is more common than almost anyone thought. In the pioneering survey by Working Women United Institute,⁵ out of a sample of 55 food service workers and 100 women who attended a meeting on sexual harassment, from five to seven of every ten women reported experiencing sexual harassment in some form at some time in their work lives. Ninety-two percent of the total sample thought it a serious problem. In a study of all women employed at the United Nations, 49 percent said that sexual pressure currently existed on their jobs.⁶ During the first eight months of 1976, the Division of Human Rights of the State of New York received approximately 45 complaints from women alleging sexual harassment on the job.⁷ Of 9,000 women who responded voluntarily to a questionnaire in *Redbook Magazine*, "How do you handle sex on the job?" nine out of ten reported experiences of sexual harassment. Of course, those who experience the problem may be most likely to respond. Nevertheless, before this survey, it would have been difficult to convince a person of ordinary skepticism that 8,100 American women existed who would report experiencing sexual harassment at work.

Using the *Redbook* questionnaire, a naval officer found 81 percent

of a sample of women on a navy base and in a nearby town reported employment-related sexual harassment in some form.⁸ These frequency figures must, of course, be cautiously regarded. But even extrapolating conservatively, given that nine out of ten American women work outside the home some time in their lives⁹ and that in April 1974, 45 percent of American women sixteen and over, or 35 million women, were employed in the labor force,¹⁰ it is clear that a lot of women are potentially affected. As the problem begins to appear structural rather than individual, *Redbook's* conclusion that "the problem is not epidemic; it is pandemic—an everyday, everywhere occurrence"¹¹ does not seem incredible.

One need not show that sexual harassment is commonplace in order to argue that it is severe for those afflicted, or even that it is sex discrimination. However, if one shows that sexual harassment in employment systematically occurs between the persons and under the conditions that an analysis of it as discrimination suggests—that is, as a function of sex as gender—one undercuts the view that it occurs because of some unique chemistry between particular (or aberrant) individuals. That sexual harassment does occur to a large and diverse population of women supports an analysis that it occurs *because* of their group characteristic, that is, sex. Such a showing supports an analysis of the abuse as structural, and as such, worth legal attention as sex discrimination, not just as unfairness between two individuals, which might better be approached through private law.

If the problem is so common, one might ask why it has not been commonly analyzed or protested. Lack of public information, social awareness, and formal data probably reflects less its exceptionality than its specific pathology. Sexual subjects are generally sensitive and considered private; women feel embarrassed, demeaned, and intimidated by these incidents.¹² They feel afraid, despairing, utterly alone, and complicit. This is not the sort of experience one discusses readily. Even more to the point, sexual advances are often accompanied by threats of retaliation if exposed. Revealing these pressures enough to protest them thus risks the very employment consequences which sanctioned the advances in the first place.

It is not surprising either that women would not complain of an experience for which there has been no name. Until 1976,¹³ lacking a term to express it, sexual harassment was literally unspeakable, which made a generalized, shared, and social definition of it inaccessible.

The unnamed should not be mistaken for the nonexistent. Silence often speaks of pain and degradation so thorough that the situation cannot be conceived as other than it is:

When the conception of change is beyond the limits of the possible, there are no words to articulate discontent, so it is sometimes held not to exist. This mistaken belief arises because we can only grasp silence in the moment in which it is breaking. The sound of silence breaking makes us understand what we could not hear before. But the fact we could not hear does not prove that no pain existed.¹⁴

As Adrienne Rich has said of this kind of silence, "Do not mistake it/for any kind of absence."¹⁵ Until very recently issues analogous to sexual harassment, such as abortion, rape, and wife beating existed at the level of an open secret in public consciousness, supporting the (equally untrue) inference that these events were infrequent as well as shameful, and branding the victim with the stigma of deviance. In light of these factors, more worth explaining is the emergence of women's ability to break the silence.

Victimization by the practice of sexual harassment, so far as is currently known, occurs across the lines of age, marital status, physical appearance, race, class, occupation, pay range, and any other factor that distinguishes women from each other.¹⁶ Frequency and type of incident may vary with specific vulnerabilities of the woman, or qualities of the job, employer, situation, or workplace, to an extent so far undetermined. To this point, the common denominator is that the perpetrators tend to be men, the victims women. Most of the perpetrators are employment superiors, although some are co-workers or clients. Of the 155 women in the Working Women United Institute sample, 40 percent were harassed by a male superior, 22 percent by a co-worker, 29 percent by a client, customer, or person who had no direct working relationship with them; 1 percent (N = 1) were harassed by a subordinate and 8 percent by "other."¹⁷

As to age and marital status, *Redbook* finds the most common story is of a woman in her twenties fending off a boss in his sixties, someone she would never choose as a sexual partner. The majority of women who responded to the survey, in which 92 percent reported incidents of sexual harassment, were in their twenties or thirties, and married. Adultery seems no deterrent. However, many women were single or formerly married and ranged in age from their teens to their sixties. In the Working Women United Institute speak-out, one woman men-

tioned an incident that occurred when she was working as a child model at age ten; another reported an experience at age 55.¹⁸ The women in that sample ranged in age from 19 to 61. On further investigation, sexual harassment as a system may be found to affect women differentially by age, although it damages women regardless of age. That is, many older women may be excluded from jobs because they are considered unattractive sex objects, in order that younger women can be hired to be so treated. But many women preface their reports of sexual harassment with evaluations of their appearance such as, "I am fat and forty, but . . ."¹⁹

Sexual harassment takes both verbal and physical forms. In the Working Women United Institute sample, approximately a third of those who reported sexual harassment reported physical forms, nearly two-thirds verbal forms.²⁰ Verbal sexual harassment can include anything from passing but persistent comments on a woman's body or body parts to the experience of an eighteen-year-old file clerk whose boss regularly called her in to his office "to tell me the intimate details of his marriage and to ask what I thought about different sexual positions."²¹ Pornography is sometimes used.²² Physical forms range from repeated collisions that leave the impression of "accident" to outright rape. One woman reported unmistakable sexual molestation which fell between these extremes: "My boss . . . runs his hand up my leg or blouse. He hugs me to him and then tells me that he is 'just naturally affectionate.'"²³

There is some suggestion in the data that working class women encounter physical as well as verbal forms of sexual harassment more often than middle class and/or professional women, who more often encounter only the verbal forms.²⁴ However, women's class status in the strict sense is often ambiguous. Is a secretary for a fancy law firm in a different class from a secretary for a struggling, small business? Is a nurse married to a doctor "working class" or "middle class" on her job? Is a lesbian factory worker from an advantaged background with a rich ex-husband who refuses to help support the children because of her sexual preference "upper class"? In any case, most women who responded to the *Redbook* survey, like most employed women, were working at white collar jobs earning between \$5,000 and \$10,000 a year. Many more were blue collar, professional, or managerial workers earning less than \$5,000 or more than \$25,000 a year. They report harassment by men independent of the class of those men.

The Working Women United Institute sample, in which approxi-

mately 70 percent reported incidents of sexual harassment, presented a strikingly typical profile of women's employment history. Almost all of the women had done office work of some kind in their work life. A quarter had done sales, a quarter had been teachers, a third file clerks, 42 percent had been either secretaries or receptionists, and 29 percent had done factory work. Currently, fifty-five were food service workers with the remainder scattered among a variety of occupations. The average income was \$101-\$125 per week. This is very close to, or a little below, the usual weekly earnings of most working women.²⁵

Race is an important variable in sexual harassment in several different senses. Black women's reports of sexual harassment by white male superiors reflect a sense of impunity that resounds of slavery and colonization. Maxine Munford,* recently separated and with two children to support, claimed that on the first day at her new job she was asked by her employer "if she would make love to a white man, and if she would slap his face if he made a pass at her." She repeatedly refused such advances and was soon fired, the employer alleging she had inadequate knowledge and training for the job and lacked qualifications. His last statement before she left was: "If you would have intercourse with me seven days a week I might give you your job back."²⁶ Apparently, sexual harassment can be both a sexist way to express racism and a racist way to express sexism. However, black women also report sexual harassment by black men and white women complain of sexual harassment by black male superiors and co-workers. One complaint for slander and outrageous conduct accused the defendants of making statements including the following:

warning customers about plaintiff's alleged desire to "get in his pants," pointing out that plaintiff had large breasts, stating "Anything over a handful is wasted," calling plaintiff "Momma Fuller" and "Big Momma," referring to her breasts, "Doesn't she have nice (or large) breasts?" "Watch out, she's very horny. She hasn't gotten any lately" "Have you ever seen a black man's penis?" "Do you know how large a black man's penis is?" "Have you ever slept with a black man?" "Do you want to stop the car and screw in the middle of the street?"²⁷

One might consider whether white women more readily perceive themselves as *sexually degraded*, or anticipate a supportive response

*Her lawsuit, *Munford v. James T. Barnes & Co.*, 441 F. Supp. 459 (E.D. Mich. 1977), is discussed in chapter 4, *infra*, at 73 ff.

when they complain, when they are sexually harassed by a black man than by a white man. Alternatively, some white women confide that they have consciously resisted reporting severe sexual harassment by black men to authorities because they feel the response would be supportive for racist reasons. Although racism is deeply involved in sexual harassment, the element common to these incidents is that the perpetrators are male, the victims female. Few women are in a position to harass men sexually, since they do not control men's employment destinies at work,²⁸ and female sexual initiative is culturally repressed in this society.²⁹

As these experiences suggest, the specific injury of sexual harassment arises from the nexus between a sexual demand and the workplace. Anatomized, the situations can be seen to include a sexual incident or advance, some form of compliance or rejection, and some employment consequence. Sometimes these elements are telescoped, sometimes greatly attenuated, sometimes absent. All are variable: the type of incident or advance, the form of response, and the kind and degree of damage attributable to it.

The critical issues in assessing sexual harassment as a legal cause of action—the issues that need to be explored in light of women's experiences—center upon the definition of and the relationship among three events: the advance, the response, and the employment consequence. Critical questions arise in conceptualizing all three. Where is the line between a sexual advance and a friendly gesture? How actively must the issue be forced? If a woman complies, should the legal consequences be different than if she refuses? Given the attendant risks, how explicitly must a woman reject? Might quitting be treated the same as firing under certain circumstances? To get legal relief, must a job benefit be shown to be merited independent of a sexual bargain, or is the situation an injury in itself? When a perpetrator insists that a series of touchings were not meant to be sexual, but the victim experienced them as unambiguously sexual, assuming both are equally credible, whose interpretation controls when the victim's employment status is damaged? These issues will be explored here in the context of women's experiences; suggestions for their legal treatment will be made in chapter 6. In addressing these questions, it is important to divide matters of persuasion from issues of fact, and both of these from issues which go to the core of the legal concept of the discrimination. The first distinguishes the good from the less

good case; the second sets a standard of proof; the third draws a line between a legal claim and no claim at all.

Women's experiences of sexual harassment can be divided into two forms which merge at the edges and in the world. The first I term the *quid pro quo*, in which sexual compliance is exchanged, or proposed to be exchanged, for an employment opportunity. The second arises when sexual harassment is a persistent *condition of work*. This distinction highlights different facets of the problem as women live through it and suggests slightly different legal requirements. In both types, the sexual demand is often but an extension of a gender-defined work role. The victim is employed, hence treated, "as a woman." In the *quid pro quo*, the woman must comply sexually or forfeit an employment opportunity. The *quid pro quo* arises most powerfully within the context of horizontal segregation, in which women are employed in feminized jobs, such as office work, as a part of jobs vertically stratified by sex, with men holding the power to hire and fire women. In a job which is defined according to gender, noncompliance with all of the job's requirements, which may at the boss's whim come to include sexual tolerance or activity, operatively "disqualifies" a woman for the job. In sexual harassment as a condition of work, the exchange of sex for employment opportunities is less direct. The major question is whether the *advances themselves* constitute an injury in employment.

QUID PRO QUO

This category is defined by the more or less explicit exchange: the woman must comply sexually or forfeit an employment benefit. The exchange can be anything but subtle, although its expression can be euphemistic: "If I wasn't going to sleep with him, I wasn't going to get my promotion";³⁰ "I think he meant that I had a job if I played along";³¹ "You've got to make love to get a day off or to get a good beat";³² "[Her] foreman told her that if she wanted the job she would have to be 'nice'";³³ "I was fired because I refused to give at the office."³⁴

Assuming there has been an unwanted sexual advance, a resulting *quid pro quo* can take one of three possible shapes. In situation one, the woman declines the advance and forfeits an employment opportunity. If the connections are shown, this raises the clearest pattern: sexual advance, noncompliance, employment retaliation. In situation

two, the woman complies and does not receive a job benefit. This is complex: was the job benefit denied independently of the sexual involvement? Is employment-coerced sex an injury in itself or does compliance mean consent? Should the woman in effect forfeit the job opportunity as relief *because* she complied sexually? In situation three, the woman complies and receives a job benefit. Does she have an injury to complain of? Do her competitors? In a fourth logical possibility, which does not require further discussion, the woman refuses to comply, receives completely fair treatment on the job, and is never harassed again (and is, no doubt, immensely relieved). In this one turn of events, there truly is "no harm in asking."³⁵

In situation one, the injurious nexus is between the imposition of the sexual requirement and the employment retaliation following upon its rejection. To date, all of the legally successful suits for sexual harassment* have alleged some form of the trilogy of unwanted advances, rejection, retaliation. In Adrienne Tomkins's case** the advances occurred over a lunch that was to include a discussion of her upcoming promotion. She refused to comply, was threatened, demoted, and eventually terminated.³⁶ In the case of Paulette Barnes,† her supervisor repeatedly insisted that she engage in social and sexual activity with him. When she refused, he took away her duties and eventually abolished her position. A witness in Barnes's case described a classic situation of this type in her own experience with the same man:

Q. Did you ever have any problems working under Mr. Z?

The Witness: Well, the problem started when I took a trip to Puerto Rico with Mr. Z in February of 1971. When we got back he took all of my secretarial duties and gave them to E_____ M_____, who was white. Something happened in Puerto Rico, and he used to write me nasty little notes and things like that.

By Miss Barnes:‡

Q. Could you tell us exactly what happened in Puerto Rico or is this confidential information?

*These cases are discussed in detail in chapter 4.

**Her lawsuit is reported as *Tomkins v. Public Service Electric & Gas Co.*, 422 F. Supp. 553 (D. N. J. 1977) reversed on appeal, 568 F.2d 1044 (3rd Cir. 1977), discussed in chapter 4, *infra*, at 69-72.

†Her lawsuit is reported as *Barnes v. Costle*, 561 F.2d 983 (D.C. Cir. 1977), discussed in chapter 4, *infra*, at 65-68.

‡Ms. Barnes was not represented by counsel at this point in the proceedings.

A. Well, when we went to Puerto Rico, I was going there as his secretary to take notes on the conferences. . . . When we got there he was supposed to make hotel reservations. He took that out of my hands and when we got there he didn't do it. We waited around until 10:00 or 11:00 that night to get a hotel.

When we got there we went upstairs and put our bags in the room. His bags were in the room, so, he said he had to go and take someone to another hotel, and he would be back to get his things.

When he came back he started undressing, and I told him that he could not stay in the same room with me. He asked me why, and I said—

Mr. H. _____: (attorney for Mr. Z) I think we get the picture.

Appeals Examiner: There was a dispute over room accommodations. Is this one of the problems?

The Witness: Right.

Appeals Examiner: You came back and then what happened?

The Witness: He started writing me nasty little notes telling me he no longer wanted me to work for him. He started giving all of his duties to E. _____ instead of me, and he even asked me to quit working for him because of what happened.³⁷

This structure was also presented in *Alexander v. Yale*, a case complaining of sexual harassment in education. A student who refused a professor's advances allegedly received a low grade in a course.³⁸ In a related situation, a woman who declined to "join [her employer] in his bed" while on a business trip was reminded at lunch the next day that she was soon to be reviewed for reappointment, that her chances depended largely upon his support and recommendation, and that she would be well served if she "linked both her professional work and her personal life more closely to his own needs." She did not do so. Subsequently she was not renewed, a decision in which his lack of support and negative recommendation were instrumental. He stated publicly that in his decision he regretfully recognized the fact that they had not been able to establish "a closer personal relationship." Women commonly report such a man's insistence that a sexual relationship is essential to their working relationship³⁹ and that without it the women cannot maintain their jobs.

Some employers use job sanctions to promote the sexual harassment of their female employees by male customers or clients, as well as to assure their own sexual access, and to punish the noncompliant:

June, a waitress in Arkansas, was serving a customer when he reached up her skirt. When she asked her manager for future protection against such inci-

dents, she was harassed by him instead. "They put me on probation," she recalled, "as if I was the guilty one. Then things went from bad to worse. I got lousy tables and bad hours."⁴⁰

In each case, following the woman's refusal, the man retaliated through use of his power over her job or career. Retaliation comes in many forms. The woman may be threatened with demotions and salary cuts; unfavorable material may be solicited and put in her personal file; or she may be placed on disciplinary layoff.⁴¹ In one case, a sexually disappointed foreman first cut back the woman's hours, then put her on a lower-paying machine. When she requested extra work to make up the difference, he put her to sweeping floors and cleaning bathrooms. He degraded and ridiculed her constantly, interfered with her work so it was impossible for her to maintain production, and fired her at two o'clock one morning.⁴² In another case, failing to extract sexual favors, the supervisor belittled the woman, stripped her of her job duties, and then abolished her job.⁴³ In another, a supervisor, following rejection of his elaborate sexual advances, barraged the woman with unwarranted reprimands about her job performance, refused routine supervision or task direction, which made it impossible for her to do her job, and then fired her for poor work performance.⁴⁴

Sudden allegations of job incompetence and poor attitude commonly follow rejection of sexual advances and are used to support employment consequences. When accused of sexual harassment, men often respond that they were only trying to initiate a close personal relationship with a woman they liked very much. In Margaret Miller's situation,* her superior at the bank appeared at her door, bottle in hand, saying, "I've never felt this way about a black chick before."⁴⁵ Women who refuse become just as abruptly disliked. In this case, the bank stated that the reason for Ms. Miller's firing was her "insubordination to Mr. Taufer."⁴⁶ Under parallel factual circumstances, one judge pointedly concluded: "Ms. Elliott was not terminated because of . . . her insubordination except such insubordination as was embodied in her refusal to go along with Lawler's propositions."⁴⁷

*Her lawsuit is reported as *Miller v. Bank of America*, 418 F. Supp. 233 (N.D. Cal. 1976), *appeal pending*, discussed in chapter 4, *infra*, at 61-63.

†Sherry Elliott's lawsuit, *Elliott v. Emery Air Freight*, is unreported; it is discussed in chapter 4, *infra*, at 72-73.

Women whose work had been praised and encouraged suddenly find themselves accused of incompetence or of sabotaging their employer's projects and blamed for any downturn in business fortunes. The investigator in Diane Williams's case* was suspicious:

How did an employee hired in January suddenly become so bad that during the period from July 17 through September 11, a case was built for her separation? . . . I believe a program of faultfinding, criticism and documentation of minor offenses was undertaken.⁴⁸

Some employers do not even bother to create the appearance of actual job incompetence:

The man who was second in command to my boss asked me out and I fielded it. I was charming but I said no. He said that I'd be sorry. . . . Later on, my boss said he had evidence of my inefficiency on which he could fire me, and when I said it wasn't possible, he said he would make evidence. He was supported by the man who had asked me out.⁴⁹

Situation two, the second of the three forms of the quid pro quo, requires inquiry into the impact of compliance. Even less is known about women who comply than about those who refuse. But there is little to suggest that women who meet sexual conditions receive job benefits. More common is the following: "I'm told by the supervisors that the women on the oil slopes and in the camps are fired if they do and also fired if they don't."⁵⁰ This suggests that employment sanctions simultaneously prohibit and compel compliance with employment-related sexual advances. Women both must and may not comply—or face the consequences. Constantina Safilios-Rothschild suggests one possible explanation for men's failure to deliver promised job rewards:

Actually it has been quite questionable whether women did in fact obtain economic security through marriage, or desirable occupational advancement in exchange for sexual favors. In the latter case, most often adulterous men, for a variety of motivations (including guilt and fear that their infidelity will be suspected or known) have not returned favors or have done very little. Others have simply not honored the existence of any self-understood or implicit contract of exchange of favors.⁵¹

*Diane Williams's case is reported as *Williams v. Saxbe*, 413 F. Supp. 654 (D.D.C. 1976) and is discussed in chapter 4, *infra*, at 63–65.

This implies that men believe that whenever women are advanced on the job, an exchange of sexual favors must have occurred.

If such a compact were made and broken, a woman attempting to get the benefit of her bargain would encounter little sympathy and probably less legal support. But this misconstrues the issue. Whether or not the woman complies, the crucial issue is whether she was sexually coerced by economic threats or promises. Requiring her to decline would allow the employer to impose such a deal in bad faith, secure sexual favors, and then assert she had no right to complain because she had done what he had no right to demand. Her compliance does not mean it is not still blackmail. Nevertheless, allowing a compliant woman to sue for sexual harassment when an exchange fails leaves open the unattractive possibility of encouraging women to acquiesce in unwanted sex for purposes of career advancement, knowing that they can enforce the man's promise if he does not perform as agreed. For this reason (among others) it would seem preferable to define the injury of sexual harassment as the injury of being *placed in the position* of having to choose between unwanted sex and employment benefits or favorable conditions. From the standpoint of proof, situation two would then make a woman's case weaker (although not impossible) than before she complied. It would simply undercut the plausibility of the argument that her advancement was contingent upon compliance. Such a posture would support women in refusing unwanted sex, and discourage abuse of the cause of action through attempts to get whatever could be gained through sexual compliance and reserving legal resort for times when it did not work out.

"The other side" of sexual harassment is commonly thought to be raised by situation three, in which women who comply with sexual conditions are advantaged in employment over men or over women who refuse. Despite the indications that few benefits redound to the woman who accedes, much folklore exists about the woman who "slept her way to the top" or the academic professional woman who "got her degree on her back." These aphorisms suggest that women who are not qualified for their jobs or promotions acquire them instead by sexual means. Do these stories raise serious difficulties for a conceptualization of sexual harassment as integral to women's employment disadvantage?⁵²

Since so few women get to the top at all, it cannot be very common for them to get there by sexual means. Yet undoubtedly some individuals, whether by calculation or in the face of discrimination and lack of recognition of their qualifications, must have followed this course. A mix of these elements is suggested in the following (undocumented) observation: "By using sex, women were able to diminish the social distance between important, rich or powerful men and themselves, and to obtain desirable goods such as economic security and social status through marriage, or a desirable job or promotion through sexual relations with an influential man."⁵³ Although the author of this statement qualifies it substantially in a footnote, she concludes: "There are, however, even at present a few outstanding examples of professional women, businesswomen, and artists whose occupational success is largely due to a powerful male with whom they have a long-standing and open relationship."⁵⁴ This portrays a relationship that appears more like a consensual one than like unwanted sex acquiesced in for career advancement, although it is admittedly difficult to tell the difference.

As discussed earlier, women consistently occupy the lowest-status, lowest-paying jobs, much lower than men of the same education and experience. Given this, it is difficult to argue that women in general receive advantages even remotely comparable with the sexual harassment to which they are subjected. This, after all, is the implication of the supposed "other side": some women are hurt by the practice, it is said, but then look at all the women who benefit from it. Initially, it seems worth asking, as a hypothetical parallel, whether if some blacks are advantaged just because they are black, that is a reason why blacks who are disadvantaged because they are black should continue to be. Next, from the available data on sex discrimination, it cannot be deduced that women in general (and certainly not in individual cases) derive undeserved job opportunities from sexual compliance or by any other means. On the contrary, it would be difficult to show that cooperating women derive advantages commensurate even with the disadvantage of being female. Of course, it is impossible to estimate how much worse women's position might be without the possible contribution of unwanted sex to their side of the bargain. Overall, however, the statistics on discrimination suggest that no fulfillment of any requirement, sexual demands included, results

in job status for which women are qualified, much less undeserved advancement.

Presuming for the argument that these stories have some truth, one might look at women who "succeed" this way as having extricated themselves from a situation of sexual harassment. Rather than deriving unfair advantages because of their sex, perhaps they had to meet unfair requirements because of their sex. In this perspective, the woman who "slept her way to the top" may have been the woman who would not have been hired or promoted, regardless of qualifications, without fulfilling sexual conditions, conditions equally qualified men do not have to fulfill. Moreover, for every woman who "got her degree on her back," there were men who offered rewards, supervision, and attention to her development only at a sexual price. To the extent they are true, then, these stories document a point seldom made: men with the power to affect women's careers allow sexual factors to make a difference. So the threats are serious: those who do not comply are disadvantaged in favor of those who do. (It is also seldom considered that a woman might be an attractive sexual object to her superior for the same reasons that *qualify* her for the position.)

Further, there may be compelling explanations for these stories other than their truth. How many men find it unbearable that a woman out-qualifies them in an even competition? Perhaps they assuage their egos by propagating rumors that the woman used her sexuality—something presumptively unavailable to men—to outdistance them. These stories may exemplify a well-documented inability of both sexes to see women in any but sexual terms. Willingness to believe the stories may illustrate the pervasive assumption that, since a career is so intrinsically inappropriate for a woman, her sexuality must define her role in this context, as well as in all others. This dovetails with the prior assumption that if a woman's sexuality is present at all, she must be receiving unfair consideration.

Certainly it is important to establish in individual cases whether a woman is complaining about a failed attempt cynically to use sex to get ahead or a bona fide situation of sex imposed as a career requirement. But to believe that instances raised in situation three symmetrically outweigh the injury that women as a whole suffer from sexual harassment ignores the evidence and provides a convenient excuse not to take the problem seriously. Whatever they mean, people who

do not take sexual harassment seriously are an arm of the people who do it.

CONDITION OF WORK

In the *quid pro quo*, the coercion behind the advances is clarified by the reprisals that follow a refusal to comply. Less clear, and undoubtedly more pervasive, is the situation in which sexual harassment simply makes the work environment unbearable. Unwanted sexual advances, made simply because she has a woman's body, can be a daily part of a woman's work life. She may be constantly felt or pinched, visually undressed and stared at, surreptitiously kissed, commented upon, manipulated into being found alone, and generally taken advantage of at work—but never promised or denied anything explicitly connected with her job. These events occur both to "token women," whose visibility as women is pronounced and who often present a "challenge" to men,⁵⁵ and to women in traditional "women's jobs," who are defined as accessible to such incursions by the same standard that gives them the job at all. Never knowing if it will ever stop or if escalation is imminent, a woman can put up with it or leave. Most women hardly choose to be confronted by "the choice of putting up with being manhandled, or being out of work."⁵⁶ Most women are coerced into tolerance.

This feature of women's lives has sometimes surfaced in other people's lawsuits, although it has not been previously considered actionable in itself. One case from 1938 presents a zenith in women's vicarious relationship to the workplace. A long-time employee alleged (without success) that he was fired because his wife refused his superior's sexual advances.⁵⁷ In another case for reinstatement and back pay, in which the employer was accused of firing an employee because of his union activity, one comes upon the following account of the employee's conduct on the job:

He regularly made lewd remarks and suggestions to the waitresses and customers. . . . He caused at least one waitress to quit her job when he told her she would have to have sexual relations with him or he would make life difficult for her. He made similar advances to another waitress. Once Nichols called a waitress over to where he was seated drinking with a customer and solicited her to engage in an act of prostitution with the customer.⁵⁸

Sexual harassment is effective largely because women's employment status is depressed. The following account, a composite of several individual accounts, illustrates the interplay of women's feelings of inadequacy with an objective assessment of their options in the labor market. The employer has an eye for energetic, competent, chronically underemployed women in a captive labor market (such as spouses of university men). They are intimidated by the work world. For the first time in their lives, the job gives these women responsibilities, a real salary, a chance to be creative, and quick advancement for good performance. They are grateful; "thrilled." They love the work and feel recognized for their achievements and potential. They work hard and create a niche for themselves. They need the money. Then, beginning on off-times, perhaps when there are unusual work demands, the underlying sexual innuendo is made explicit. Or the man sends the woman on a business trip, shows up at the hotel room where he had booked her, and rapes her.

At this point, otherwise small things come together: all the other women who have precipitously left "such a good job"; the number of women on long, paid leaves that become terminal; the stereotypically attractive appearance of the women, including a ban on long pants at the office. To an individual woman, his demand that she be constantly emotionally available to him; increasingly using her "as a verbal carpet"; his jealousy of her friendships on the job; his casual, even concerned inquiry into her sex life; his lack of desire to meet her husband and his uncomfortableness (or transparent obsequiousness) when he drops in. It becomes clear that his personnel policy is based on his sexual feelings.

Given the woman's insecurity about her work competence, the job may begin to seem like make-work to her, an excuse to keep her available so long as she is sexually compliant, or he thinks she might be. Or the job may continue to be very important to her. Surely she knows there are many women just like her who will take her place if she leaves. Should a woman have to leave a job she needs financially, qualifies for, or finds fulfilling because the employer can make his sexual needs part of it? Or should she have no recourse other than the hope he will stop, or never try again, or that she can stand it just for the chance to work there, or to work at all? Will it ever be different any place else? When workplace access, advancement, and tolerability

(not to mention congeniality) depend upon such an employer's good will, women walk very thin lines between preserving their own sanity and self-respect and often severe material hardship and dislocation.

Two recent cases of women seeking unemployment compensation from jobs they left because of employer sexual harassment illustrate the problem, with variations, in somewhat more detail. In a California case,* Nancy Fillhouer⁵⁹ left work because she could no longer tolerate the remarks of her employer, which were "slandrous, crude and vulgar," and because he had "tried to exploit her, thus making her job unbearably difficult from an emotional standpoint." In the language of the referee:

She said he was constantly remarking concerning his wishes to have sexual contact with her, and that she reacted in such a way as to certainly inform him that such intentions were not welcome. When she would walk by him, he would occasionally pat her behind. He would make comments to his friends about her figure or legs whenever she wore a dress, implying that she was a loose woman and would do anything with anyone. The claimant asserted that the employer attempted to arrange a liaison with one of his friends for a price. On another occasion, she said one of his friends came to the office and made a comment about the weather being cold, and the employer said that the claimant could keep him warm.⁶⁰

In a similar case in New York State, Carmita Wood⁶¹ reported that she was forced to leave her job because of the physical and emotional repercussions of a superior's sexual advances. He constantly "incorporated palpably sexual gestures into his movements."⁶² When speaking to her "he would lean against her, immobilizing her between his own body and the chair and the desk."⁶³ Sometimes he would "stand with his hands shaking in his pockets and rock against the back of a chair, as if he were stimulating his genitals."⁶⁴

A similar barrage of indignities sustained by one woman in her job as a "photo finishing girl" at a camera store in Oregon† provides a third example. Her complaint alleges that on many occasions her superiors and co-workers, in the presence of other employees and customers, "peer[ed] down plaintiff's blouse from the upper level and stairways above the main sales area of Mr. Pix Camera Store, assisted

*This case is discussed in detail in chapter 4, *infra*, at 80-81.

†This case, *Fuller v. Williams*, No. A7703-04001 (Portland, Oregon), is discussed in chapter 6, *infra*, at 168-69.

by binoculars or telephoto lenses." In addition to making frank propositions and references to the large size of her breasts and of their penises, the defendants described the woman as desiring them sexually. Specific statements included:

'Did you just have sex with your husband? What was it like?', 'Is that all you do is have sex with your husband?', 'Do you sleep naked with your husband' pointing out that women were 'better off in bed,' meant 'only for the bedroom or the kitchen,' that plaintiff and other women employees were 'only interested in sleeping with the male employees,' that the former photofinishing 'girl' 'was a good lay. We screwed her down in the basement. We all had sex with her.', 'Do you think your husband would let me take his pants off in front of my camera if I lined him up with a nude female model?', 'Tell your husband I want to do nudes of him. I must photograph him.' that plaintiff was unfit to perform her duties, that women, including plaintiff, were 'not fit for the photography business,' 'incompetent,' unable to work under pressure without bursting into tears,' 'couldn't take it,' 'often stayed home due to headaches,' 'can't be relied upon,' 'possess a lesser ability to photograph,' 'don't know which end of a camera is up,' 'get shows in galleries by sleeping with gallery directors,' 'We've never had a girl selling cameras here. It might be an interesting experiment.' 'We can't hire a woman who has a boyfriend or a husband and have them last any length of time because their partners become very jealous of all us good looking males.'⁶⁵

The connections between sexual desirability and contempt for women, the denigration of women as workers, and exclusion of women from job opportunities have seldom been more vivid. All the careful admissions that women may be oversensitive cannot overwhelm the fact that such comments make women feel violated for good reason. Nor are these remarks aberrations. They make graphic and public the degradation women commonly experience as men's sexual playthings.

At no point in these cases was there an attempt to force the victim into more extensive sexual involvement. But the only reason sexual intercourse was not included was that the perpetrator did not so choose. Nor were the women told that if they did not submit to this molestation, they would be fired, although again this was the employer's choice. The victim's active cooperation with, or submission to, this behavior is relatively irrelevant to its occurrence. Short of physical assault, there is very little one can do to stop someone intent upon visual and verbal molestation, particularly if one has access to few forms of power in the relationship. These are hardly "arm's length"

transactions, with the man as dependent upon an affirmative response as the woman is upon maintaining his good will. They are transactions which make his sexism a condition of her work.

Sexual harassment as a working condition often does not require a decisive yes or no to further involvement. The threat of loss of work explicit in the quid pro quo may be only implicit without being any less coercive. Since communicated resistance means that the woman ceases to fill the implicit job qualifications, women learn, with their socialization to perform wifely tasks, ways to avoid the open refusals that anger men and produce repercussions. This requires "playing along," constant vigilance, skillful obsequiousness, and an ability to project the implication that there is a sexual dimension to, or sexual possibilities for, the relationship, while avoiding the explicit "how about it" that would force a refusal into the open.

A cocktail waitress, whose customer tips measure her success at this precarious game, reflects upon it.

[A waitress] must learn to be sexually inviting at the same time that she is unavailable. This of course means that men will take out their lust vicariously through lewd and insinuating words, subtle propositions, gestures. She must manage to turn him off gently without insulting him, without appearing insulted. Indeed she must appear charmed by it, find a way to say no which also flatters him.⁶⁶

Another waitress makes the economic connection explicitly:

[Men think] they have a right to touch me, or proposition me because I'm a waitress. Why do women have to put up with this sort of thing anyway? You aren't in any position to say "get your crummy hands off me" because you need the tips. That's what a waitress job is all about.⁶⁷

Still another corroborates:

Within my first month as a waitress, it was made very clear to me that if you are friendly enough, you could have a better station, better hours, better everything. . . . If you're tricky enough, you just dangle everybody but it reaches a point where it's too much of a hassle and you quit and take something else. But when you have children, and no support payments, you can't keep quitting.⁶⁸

While these women's responses do not constitute "compliance" in the fullest sense, in another sense nonrejection is all the compliance that is required.

Noncompliance is very problematic when sexual harassment is a working condition. Consider the opportunities for rejection, both immediate and long term, allowed by the situation depicted in the following woman's statement, prepared in an attempt to organize the women in her office:

I, ———, do hereby testify that during the course of my employment with the [company] I have suffered repeated and persistent sexual harassment by Mr. X, [head] of the [company].

Mr. X has directly expressed prurient interest in me on several occasions when he called me into his office as an employee, in his capacity as my superior, during normal working hours. I have been made audience to sexually explicit language and imagery in Mr. X's office during normal working hours. I have been intimidated by his power over my job and future, his connections in [the local government], his reputation for vindictiveness, and the gun he carries, often visibly. In his office, Mr. X has initiated physical sexual contact with me which I did not want.

I believe, and have been made to feel by Mr. X, that my well-being on the job and advancement as an employee of the [company], as well as my recommendations for future jobs, are directly contingent upon my compliance with Mr. X's sexual demands.

It is my opinion that Mr. X's hiring procedures are directly influenced by his sexual interests and that most if not all women who work for the [company] undergo some form of sexual harassment.

Tolerance is the form of consent that sexual harassment as a working condition uniquely requires. The evidence of such cases after they become quid pro quo tends to confirm the implicit judgment by the woman who "goes along": it is important, beyond any anticipated delivery, to maintain the *appearance* of compliance with male sexual overtures, a posture of openness. In many cases, the men seem only to want to know they can have a date, to be able "accidentally" to touch a woman intimately at will, or, in a verbal analogue to exhibitionism, say sexy words in her presence, while acting as if something else entirely is happening. The telling aspect is that the decisively nontolerating woman must suddenly be eliminated. Her mere presence becomes offensive; to be reminded of her existence, unbearable. Desperate strategies are devised, including flat lies, distortions, and set-ups, to be rid of her immediately. Something fundamental to male identity feels involved in at least the appearance of female compliance, something that is deeply threatened by confrontation with a wo-

man's real resistance, however subtly communicated. At the point of resistance the quid pro quo that was implicit all along in the working condition—the "tolerate it or leave" in her mind becomes "now that you don't tolerate it, you're leaving" from the boss—is forced into the open, and the two categories converge.

Before this point, the issues are considerably more difficult. The examples suggest that when sexual harassment occurs as a condition of work, it does not require compliance, exactly, on the woman's part. For consummation, nonrejection is not even required; rejection often has no effect. Since little or no active participation or cooperation is required of women in these sexual situations, how explicit should rejection have to be before she can protest the treatment? This is somewhat analogous to asking how ardently a woman must resist rape before she will be considered to have resisted, that is, not to have consented to it. In a case of sexual harassment, it would be paradoxical if, so long as a superior has the power to force sexual attentions by adopting forms of sexual expression that do not require compliance—for example, sitting naked in his office in her presence while giving dictation—a woman would be precluded from legal action or other complaint because she had not properly "refused." How is nontolerance to be conveyed? She can threaten or throw tantrums, but ultimately, what is she supposed to do besides leave work?

Should women be required to counterattack in order to force the man into explicit employment retaliation so she has something to complain about? The problem here is again analogous to a problem with the rape laws: a victim who resists is more likely to be killed, but unless she fights back, it is not rape, because she cannot prove coercion. With sexual harassment, rejection proves that the advance is unwanted but also is likely to call forth retaliation, thus forcing the victim to bring intensified injury upon herself in order to demonstrate that she is injured at all. Aside from the risks this poses to the woman, in a situation not her fault, to require a rejection amounts to saying that no series of sexual advances alone is sufficient to justify legal intervention until it is expressed in the quid pro quo form. In addition, it means that constant sexual molestation would not be injury enough to a woman or to her employment status until the employer retaliates against her *job* for a sexual refusal which she never had the chance to make short of leaving it. And this, in turn, means that so long as the sexual situation is constructed with enough coer-

civeness, subtlety, suddenness, or one-sidedness to negate the effectiveness of the woman's refusal, or so long as her refusals are simply ignored while her job is formally undisturbed, she is not considered to have been sexually harassed.

IMPACT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Women's feelings about their experiences of sexual harassment are a significant part of its social impact. Like women who are raped, sexually harassed women feel humiliated, degraded, ashamed, embarrassed, and cheap, as well as angry. When asked whether the experience had any emotional or physical effect, 78 percent of the Working Women United Institute sample answered affirmatively. Here are some of their comments:

As I remember all the sexual abuse and negative work experiences I am left feeling sick and helpless and upset instead of angry. . . . Reinforced feelings of no control—sense of doom. . . . I have difficulty dropping the emotion barrier I work behind when I come home from work. My husband turns into just another man. . . . Kept me in a constant state of emotional agitation and frustration; I drank a lot. . . . Soured the essential delight in the work. . . . Stomachache, migraines, cried every night, no appetite.*69

In the Working Women United Institute study, 78 percent of the women reported feeling "angry," 48 percent "upset," 23 percent "frightened," 7 percent "indifferent," and an additional 27 percent mentioned feeling "alienated," "alone," "helpless," or other. They tend to feel the incident is their fault, that they must have done something, individually, to elicit or encourage the behavior, that it is "my problem."⁷⁰ Since they believe that no one else is subjected to it, they feel individually complicit as well as demeaned. Almost a quarter of the women in one survey reported feeling "guilty."

Judging from these responses, it does not seem as though women want to be sexually harassed at work. Nor do they, as a rule, find it flattering. As one explanation for women's apparent acquiescence, Sheila Rowbotham hypothesizes that (what amounts to) sexually harassed women are "subtly flattered that their sex is recognized. This makes them feel that they are not quite on the cash nexus, that they

*Ellipses separate different persons' responses.

matter to their employer in the same way that they matter to men in their personal lives."⁷¹ While the parallel to home life lends plausibility to this analysis, only 10 percent of the women in the Working Women United Institute sample and 15 percent of the *Redbook* sample* reported feeling "flattered" by being on the sex nexus. Women do connect the harasser with other men in their lives, but with quite different results: "It made me think that the only reason other men don't do the same thing is that they don't have the power to." The view that women really want unwanted sex is similar to the equally self-serving view that women want to be raped. As Lynn Wehrli analyzes this:

Since women seem to "go along" with sexual harassment, [the assumption is that] they must like it, and it is not really harassment at all. This constitutes little more than a simplistic denial of all we know about the ways in which socialization and economic dependence foster submissiveness and override free choice. . . . Those women who are able to speak out about sexual harassment use terms such as "humiliating," "intimidating," "frightening," "financially damaging," "embarrassing," "nerve-wracking," "awful," and "frustrating" to describe it. These words are hardly those used to describe a situation which one "likes."⁷²

That women "go along" is partly a male perception and partly correct, a male-enforced reality. Women report being too intimidated to reject the advances unambivalently, regardless of how repulsed they feel. Women's most common response is to attempt to ignore the whole incident, letting the man's ego off the hook skillfully by *appearing* flattered in the hope he will be satisfied and stop. These responses may be interpreted as encouragement or even as provocation. One study found that 76 percent of ignored advances intensified.⁷³ Some women feel constrained to decline gently, but become frustrated when their subtle hints of lack of reciprocity are ignored. Even clear resistance is often interpreted as encouragement, which is frightening. As a matter of fact, any response or lack of response may be interpreted as encouragement. Ultimately women realize that they have their job only so long as they are pleasing to their male superior, so they try to be polite.⁷⁴

Despite the feelings of guilt, self-loathing, and fear of others' responses, many women who have been sexually harassed do complain

*In both surveys, women could indicate as many feelings as they felt applied to them.

about it to someone—usually a woman friend, family member, or co-worker. About a quarter of them complain to the perpetrator himself.⁷⁵ Those who complain, as well as those who do not, express fears that their complaints will be ignored, will not be believed, that they instead will be blamed, that they will be considered "unprofessional," or "asking for it," or told that this problem is too petty or trivial for a grown woman to worry about, and that they are blowing it all out of proportion. Carmita Wood's immediate supervisor, to whom she had reported incidents with her other superior at length, when asked to recall if she mentioned them, stated: "I don't remember specifically, but it was my impression, it was mentioned among a lot of things that I considered trivia."⁷⁶

Women also feel intimidated by possible repercussions of complaint, such as being considered a "troublemaker,"⁷⁷ or other men in their lives finding out about the incidents, men who typically believe they must have been asking for it. One article reports a man "recalling a woman purchasing clerk who had just received a 'really good raise' and then showed up at work 'all black and blue.' Her husband had 'slapped her around' because he thought the raise was a result of 'putting out.'"⁷⁸ Women students (and women junior faculty) fear the repercussions of complaint more than the academic and professional consequences of the harassment itself.⁷⁹

Women's worst fears about the impact of complaint are amply justified. "Most male superiors treat it as a joke, at best it's not serious. . . . Even more frightening, the woman who speaks out against her tormentors runs the risk of suddenly being seen as a crazy, a weirdo, or even worse, a loose woman."⁸⁰ Company officials often laugh it off or consider the women now available to themselves as well. One factory worker reports: "I went to the personnel manager with a complaint that two men were propositioning me. He promised to take immediate action. When I got up to leave, he grabbed my breast and said, 'Be nice to me and I'll take care of you.'"⁸¹

Unions' response to women's complaints of sexual harassment by management has been mixed. Some union officials refuse to process grievances based upon claims of sexual harassment. In one such case,⁸² the complainant sued the union for breach of its duty of fair representation. Ms. Gates, the company's first and only woman employee, was hired as a janitor on the day shift, then reassigned to the night shift.

While on the graveyard shift she was assigned to clean men's restrooms, to which she did not object except for the treatment which she allegedly received while doing her work. She complained that men were using the urinals while she was cleaning; that on occasions she was propositioned and chased around the restrooms, and that the company refused to place locks on the doors to prevent this from happening.⁸³

Her doctor stated that the resulting emotional breakdown made her physically unable to work the night shift. The company then fired her on the grounds that she was unable to perform the work for medical reasons. Through its woman president, the union maintained that the firing was for good cause and urged Ms. Gates to accept the company's offer of reinstatement under the same working conditions. When she refused, the union declined to process her claim, a decision the court held was for the union to make.*

Firm union support was given to four women in another shop who complained to the union of sexual harassment by a male foreman. The National Labor Relations Board reportedly "decided that the foreman would have to apologize to each woman and from then on our relationship would be strictly business."⁸⁴ The women found this inadequate. The union continued to pursue the issue, intervening directly in their relations with the perpetrator and working to change the pervasive attitude that "any woman who works in an auto plant is out for a quick make."⁸⁵ It should be noted that this assumption is not limited to auto plants. Men in almost every working context attribute sexual desire to women workers based upon their mere presence as workers in that particular environment. This assumption is professed equally about women who are seen as anomalies on the job (any woman who would seek a male-defined work situation must be there because of men) as for those who are in women's jobs (any woman who would choose a feminine job must be looking for a man). Since no working context is excluded, one cannot conclude that women select particular jobs for sexual reasons. As with rape, the situation seems more to be that men wish to believe that women desire to be sexually attacked and to that end construct virtually any situation as an invitation. Constructed according to these images, women who do convey any sexuality whatever are assumed to be unselective: "If you

*This case is *Gates v. Brockway Glass Co., Inc.*, 93 L.R.R.M. 2367 (C.D. Cal. 1976). Sex discrimination was apparently not raised.

express any sexuality at all, they just assume you're available to them—you know, just anybody."

As a further result of such attitudes, complaining to the perpetrator usually has little good effect. The refusal is ignored or interpreted as the no that means yes. If the no is taken as no, the woman often becomes the target of disappointed expectations. She is accused of prudery, unnaturalness, victorianism: "What's the matter, aren't you liberated? I thought nothing bothered you." And lesbianism. The presumption seems to be that women are supposed to want sex with men, so that a woman who declines sexual contact with this particular man must reject all sex, or at least all men. Noncooperative women (including women who carry resistance to the point of official complaint) are accused of trying to take away one of the few compensations for an otherwise meaningless, drab, and mechanized workplace existence, one of life's little joys.⁸⁶ This essentially justifies oppression on the basis of what it does for the oppressor. When the man is black and the woman white, the emotional blackmail, the "you're not the woman I took you for," often becomes particularly unfortunate. The American heritage of racism that portrayed the white woman as "too good" for the black man is now used to manipulate her white guilt, putting her in the position of seeming to participate in that system's castration of the black man if she declines to have sex with him, and in racist repression if she complains officially.

Women's confidence in their job performance is often totally shattered by these events. They are left wondering if the praise they received prior to the sexual incident was conditioned by the man's perception of the sexual potential in the relationship—or is it only that the later accusations of incompetence are conditioned by his perception of the lack of this possibility? Attempting to decline gracefully and preserve a facade of normalcy also has its costs: "We've all been so polite about it for so long to the point we are nauseated with ourselves."

Jokes are another form that the social control over women takes. Women who consider noncompliance dread the degradation of male humor. At Carmita Wood's hearing, when she was describing disabling pains in her neck and arm which vanished upon leaving the job, the referee said, "So you're saying, in effect, that [the professor] was a pain in the neck?" On being told the perpetrator's age, the referee remarked, "Young enough to be interested anyway."⁸⁷ As the

brief for Ms. Wood put it, "Nowhere is the existence of a persistent sexual harassment... questioned, it is merely treated lightly."⁸⁸ Trivialization of sexual harassment has been a major means through which its invisibility has been enforced. Humor, which may reflect unconscious hostility, has been a major form of that trivialization. As Eleanor Zuckerman has noted, "Although it has become less acceptable openly to express prejudices against women, nevertheless, these feelings remain under the surface, often taking the form of humor, which makes the issues seem trivial and unimportant."⁸⁹

Faced with the spectre of unemployment, discrimination in the job market, and a good possibility of repeated incidents elsewhere, women usually try to endure. But the costs of endurance can be very high, including physical as well as psychological damage:

The anxiety and strain, the tension and nervous exhaustion that accompany this kind of harassment take a terrific toll on women workers. Nervous tics of all kinds, aches and pains (which can be minor and irritating or can be devastatingly painful) often accompany the onset of sexual harassment. These pains and illnesses are the result of insoluble conflict, the inevitable backlash of the human body in response to intolerable stress which thousands of women must endure in order to survive.⁹⁰

Without further investigation, the extent of the disruption of women's work lives and the pervasive impact upon their employment opportunities can only be imagined. One woman, after describing her own experiences with sexual harassment, concluded:

Many women face daily humiliation simply because they have female bodies. The one other female union member at my plant can avoid contact with everyone but a few men in her department because she stays at her work bench all day and eats in a small rest room at one end of her department.⁹¹

For many women, work, a necessity for survival, requires self-quarantine to avoid constant assault on sexual integrity. Many women try to transfer away from the individual man, even at financial sacrifice. But once a woman has been sexually harassed, her options are very limited:

If she objects, the chances are she will be harassed or get fired outright. If she submits, the chances are he'll get tired of her anyway. If she ignores it, she gets drawn into a cat-and-mouse game from which there is no exit except leaving the job.⁹²

Women do find ways of fighting back short of, and beyond, leaving their jobs.⁹³ As has been noted, nonrejection coupled with non-compliance is a subtle but expensive form. One shuffles when one sees no alternative. Women have also begun to oppose sexual harassment in more direct, visible, and powerful ways. The striking fact that black women have brought a disproportionate number of the sexual harassment lawsuits to date points to some conditions that make resistance seem not only necessary but possible. Protest to the point of court action before a legal claim is known to be available requires a quality of inner resolve that is reckless and serene, a sense of "this I won't take" that is both desperate and principled. It also reflects an absolute lack of any other choice at a point at which others with equally few choices do nothing.

Black women's least advantaged position in the economy is consistent with their advanced position on the point of resistance. Of all women, they are most vulnerable to sexual harassment, both because of the image of black women as the most sexually accessible and because they are the most economically at risk. These conditions promote black women's resistance to sexual harassment and their identification of it for what it is. On the one hand, because they have the least to fall back on economically, black women have the most to lose by protest, which targets them as dissidents, hence undesirable workers. At the same time, since they are so totally insecure in the marketplace, they have the least stake in the system of sexual harassment as it is because they stand to lose everything by it. Since they cannot afford any economic risks, once they are subjected to even a threat of loss of means, they cannot afford *not* to risk everything to prevent it. In fact, they often must risk everything even to have a chance of getting by. Thus, since black women stand to lose the most from sexual harassment, by comparison they may see themselves as having the least to lose by a struggle against it. Compared with having one's children starving on welfare, for example, any battle for a wage of one's own with a chance of winning greater than zero looks attractive. In this respect, some black women have been able to grasp the essence of the situation, and with it the necessity of opposition, earlier and more firmly than other more advantaged women.

Other factors may contribute to black women's leadership on this issue. To the extent they are sensitive to the operation of racism on an

individual level, they may be less mystified that the sexual attention they receive is "personal." Their heritage of systematic sexual harassment under slavery may make them less tolerant of this monetized form of the same thing. The stigmatization of all black women as prostitutes may sensitize them to the real commonality between sexual harassment and prostitution. Feeling closer to the brand of the harlot, black women may more decisively identify and reject the spectre of its reality, however packaged.

The instances of sexual harassment described present straightforward coercion: unwanted sex under the gun of a job or educational benefit. Courts can understand abuses in this form. It is important to remember that affirmatively desired instances of sexual relationships also exist which begin in the context of an employment or educational relationship. Although it is not always simple, courts regularly distinguish bona fide relationships from later attempts to read coercion back into them. Between the two, between the clear coercion and the clear mutuality, exists a murky area where power and caring converge. Here arise some of the most profound issues of sexual harassment, and those which courts are the least suited to resolve.

In education, the preceptive and initiating function of the teacher and the respect and openness of the student merge with the masculine role of sexual mastery and the feminine role of eager purity, especially where the life of the mind means everything. The same parallel between the relationship that one is supposed to be having and the conditions of sexual dominance and submission can be seen in the roles of secretary and boss. Rosabeth Kanter notes that the secretary comes to "feel for" the boss, "to care deeply about what happens to him and to do his feeling for him," giving the relationship a tone of emotional intensity.⁹⁴ Elsewhere, she sees that a large part of the secretary's job is to empathize with the boss's personal needs; she also observes that, since the secretary is part of the boss's private retinue, what happens to him determines what happens to her. Kanter does not consider that there may be a connection between the secretary's objective conditions and her feelings—sexual feelings included—about her boss.

Although the woman may, in fact, be and feel coerced in the sexual involvement in some instances of sexual harassment, she may not be entirely without regard for, or free from caring about, the perpetrator. Further investigation of what might be called "coerced caring,"

or, in the most complex cases, an "if this is sex, I must be in love" syndrome, is vital. It is becoming increasingly recognized that feelings of caring are not the only or even a direct cause of sexual desires in either sex.⁹⁵ In light of this, it cannot be assumed that if the woman cares about the man, the sex is not coerced. The difficulties of conceptualization and proof, however, are enormous. But since employed women are supposed to develop, and must demonstrate, regard for the man as a part of the job, and since women are taught to identify with men's feelings, men's evaluations of them, and with their sexual attractiveness to men, as a major component of their *own* identities and sense of worth,⁹⁶ it is often unclear and shifting whether the coercion or the caring is the weightier factor, or which "causes" which.

This is not the point at which the legal cause of action for sexual harassment unravels, but the point at which the less good legal case can be scrutinized for its social truths. The more general relationship in women between objective lack of choices and real feelings of love for men can be explored in this context. Plainly, the wooden dichotomy between "real love," which is supposed to be a matter of free choice, and coercion, which implies some form of the gun at the head, is revealed as inadequate to explain the social construction of women's sexuality and the conditions of its expression, including the economic ones. The initial attempts to establish sexual harassment as a cause of action should focus upon the clear cases, which exist in profusion. But the implications the less clear cases have for the tension between women's economic precariousness and dependency—which exists in the family as well as on the job—and the possibilities for freely chosen intimacy between unequals remain.

There is a unity in these apparently, and on the legal level actually, different cases. Taken as one, the sexual harassment of working women presents a closed system of social predation in which powerlessness builds powerlessness. Feelings are a material reality of it. Working women are defined, and survive by defining themselves, as sexually accessible and economically exploitable. Because they are economically vulnerable, they are sexually exposed; because they must be sexually accessible, they are always economically at risk. In this perspective, sexual harassment is less "epidemic" than endemic.

Changing Images of Identity in Poland: From the Self-Sacrificing to the Self-Investing Woman?

MIRA MARODY AND ANNA GIZA-POLESZCZUK

Men are stupid, stuuupid . . .

Yeah . . . they can think only about their work. They're stupid . . .

I'm simply a feminist . . .

Me too.

. . . and any young girl is able to make fools of them.

—*Conversation between two elderly Polish women*

IN TIMES OF MAJOR systemic upheaval—such as Poland experienced following the 1989 transition from state socialism—the study of gender provides a particularly illuminating perspective on social change. Gender is one of the broadest identity concepts. Not only is gender implicated in discussions about sexuality and reproduction; it also underlies many assumptions about work, leisure, political activity, religion, family relations, and socioeconomic relations. Careful analysis shows that while femininity and masculinity, including “styles” that differentiate one sex from the other, are often ascribed to biological differences, they are in fact constrained and constructed by specific economic, political, and social forces. But the effect also works in the other direction. Reconstructing gender practices provides an insight into the broad spectrum of social processes that shape expectations and requirements related to male and female identities. Forms of gender identity are never incidental; they disclose the sociocultural pressures and circumstances under which men and women live.

Although most Polish women understand gender as a biological attribute rather than a socially constructed identity (Marody 1993), there is little doubt that the rapid institutional changes precipitated by the transition to democracy and a free market have changed the social context in which men and women understand and carry out their social roles. Among those institutions that have changed fundamentally we must include labor markets, national and local political organizations, and legal systems. From the beginning, institutions such as the Catholic Church have strongly influenced the transition. By exercising political pressure, the Church has tried to transform gender-related legal regulations and

to shape public discussion about women's status in society, their rights and duties as citizens, and their biological responsibility to reproduce the nation. The mass media, another crucial institution, has been equally important in producing ferment around gender roles. The opening of the mass media to private sector interests and foreign investment has introduced new images and models of gender identities, propagating ideals of masculinity and femininity that challenge older visions of manhood and womanhood.

This chapter aims to document how identities in Poland have changed since the transition. Specifically, we hope to trace the tense relationship between idealized images of women and men available in media representations and the practices of women in their everyday lives. We are witnessing today the beginning of a process that Ginsburg and Tsing (1990) have called "negotiating gender," although in the Polish context, this process is perhaps more volatile and less legalistic than "negotiation" implies. On the one hand, men and women are confronted by conflicting ideas and demands emanating from a variety of institutions. Indeed, the identification of men and women's "proper" responsibilities has become a contentious public issue. On the other hand, we see individual men and women struggling to make sense of recent changes—some resisting, some taking advantage of emerging opportunities, and many both resisting and accepting different aspects of the new vision. The long-term effects of this process will change not only hegemonic ideals of female and male identities, but also the everyday relations between men and women.

Put another way, we assume that the process of gender formation draws on two main sources. The first is the world of everyday practice, in which individuals are confronted with a set of factors that shape the available possibilities for action. This includes the size and shape of the labor market, the level of salaries and wages, the adequacy of public services, the legal regulations of marriage, social welfare, and childcare facilities, among others. The second is the world of discourse, contained in traditional and popular culture, mass media reporting, and especially advertising. The world of everyday practice defines the range of opportunities and constraints that shape individual actions; the world of discourse offers idealizations of appearance, personality, and behavior that become attached to gender and gender relations. Thus, to understand and describe the process of changing gender identities now taking place in Poland, we have to refer to two sources of material: the symbolic imagery offered to the public (together with the language in which one talks about gender and gender relations) and the hard facts of life that are the hammer and anvil of gender formation.

Our first goal, then, is to document ideals about femininity and masculinity. For this we turn to popular women's magazines. It is an important cultural fact that there are no "men's magazines" to which we could turn for a parallel investigation, although women's magazines provide much information about expectations and images of men. This asymmetry is also evident in the fact that women, far more than men, have been targets of public debate concerning gender role identification. Our second goal is to chart the nature and magnitude of

changes in gender ideals, and for this purpose we systematically compare magazines published in the socialist period with those produced after several years of "transition." Finally, we juxtapose the imagery of gender identities presented in magazines with data about the actual economic and political pressures under which people acted in Poland. For this we use sociological surveys, statistics, and general social and economic indicators to examine the opportunities open to men and women and the types of relations that exist between them.

Our choice of research design has two advantages. First, it allows us to contrast cultural images and social contexts in two historical periods. More importantly, it directly taps one of the major forces producing the changes we are investigating. The "press" is by no means the same institution in these two periods and systems. In the first period, we are considering a situation in which the press was largely controlled by the ideological policies of a centralized state. In the second, it is not the state's ideology and policies but market principles, the ideology of the market, competition among domestic and foreign magazines, and advertising that drive the mass media. We can thus ask a number of crucial questions: Do the principles and logic of each social system—state socialism and free-market economy—create distinct relationships between discourse and practice, particularly as they pertain to gender identity? Under each system, what is the disjunction between reality and representation, and how does it matter in women's everyday lives?

WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

Content analysis of popular women's magazines provides our basic source of data. Such magazines allow us to trace the relationship between discourse and practice in at least one public forum. In photos, advertisements, and journalistic accounts, readers see the "woman" they should strive to be. Articles and fiction pieces also show journalists' and editors' sense of what a woman's life goals and expectations should be. Here, the tone of women's magazines is often explicitly didactic. A look at these writings also allows us to infer certain institutionalized patterns that journalists often assume but do not discuss. Our reading of women's magazines also includes letters to the editor. These highlight the problems and topics raised by female readers themselves. We are aware that publication of readers' letters is a matter of editorial policy and that the content is not freely shaped by readers. Nevertheless, even a biased selection of letters provides invaluable access to a forum in which some women have articulated their problems.

To place gender ideals and images within the context of systemic constraints and opportunities that most readers actually experienced at the time, we've used a combination of sociological surveys and economic and political indicators to depict "real life" conditions in Poland during each of the periods we consider. Such broad-based sociological data also help to illuminate the ways in which those constraints and opportunities color the relations between men and women,

creating structural status differences based on gender. Thus, although we cannot have direct access to readers' responses, we can infer their general socioeconomic circumstances. This allows us to identify many of the ironies, paradoxes, and incompatibilities between ideals and genuine possibilities.

Since our focus is on the change in women's gender identity that has occurred in Poland since the transition, this chapter is divided into "before" and "after" snapshots of the change, showing perceptions of gender identity during the communist period, and then after socialism's demise. We chose two women's magazines, *Przyjaciółka* [Woman's Friend] and *Kobieta i Życie* [Woman and Life], and one magazine for girls (*Filipinka*), all of which have been published since the 1960s. *Przyjaciółka* was circulated mainly in small towns and villages, whereas *Kobieta i Życie* was addressed primarily to urban women. We analyzed the 1974 and 1994 annual run of each magazine. Information about each copy was systematically recorded in a specially designed "table of contents" according to the following categories: title of a contribution, author, summary of problems, conclusions, descriptions of women and men, and the percentage of magazine space given to the contribution. This register enabled us to estimate more precisely changes in the stress put on specific issues (such as marital problems, sexual problems, or housekeeping advice), shifts of interest, and changes in ideal or "problem" characteristics imputed to women and men.

We turned to the magazines' 1974 issues to reconstruct ideals of woman's identity already established during the communist period. We wanted to examine a "mature" form of the pattern, that is, one well past the formative stage, and one that arguably was the starting point for current changes. The year 1974 was also a relatively prosperous one in Poland, which means that problems specific to the economy of shortage do not skew our results, since such articles are not much in evidence in these issues. The 1994 issues served as a source of information about the new process of gender negotiation, which was well underway by this time. Additionally, our analysis included the independent findings of Beata Łaciak (1995), whose content analysis included a broader range of women's magazines published since 1990.

WOMEN'S IDENTITY UNDER SOCIALISM

Three basic factors influenced the processes of gender negotiation during the socialist period. First, official state policies directly shaped female roles by attempting to forge a "New Society," and they indirectly affected women by controlling and limiting the public spaces in which individuals were allowed to act. Second, traditional patterns of gender relations—that is, those that predominated in the immediate pre-socialist era—persisted. Despite the state's effort to dominate all realms of life, the "new" socialist society could never fully eradicate traditional forms of social behavior. Third, trends and changes in global culture, imported largely from the West, offered alternative role models for women.

Throughout the communist period and into the transition, all three factors—state, cultural tradition, and external influences—interacted with each other, creating conflicting demands and providing contradictory images from which women could forge their own sense of gender identity.

Women's Official Image: Employee and Mother

In the official politics of the communist regimes, distinctly women's issues were raised twice, and in both cases were closely connected and subordinated to the broader political, ideological, and economic problems facing the regimes. The first episode started at the beginning of the post-war period and was aimed at the occupational activation of women. Apart from doctrinaire reasons, such as communism's long-standing commitment to full and compulsory employment and to women's equality, there were practical motivations to this policy: Women were an important source of labor in a post-war economy suffering a relative shortage of workers.¹ This was due in part to enormous population losses suffered in World War II. But it was produced as well by the new industrialization policy that created huge labor demands. The government actively encouraged women to take jobs. In part, this took the form of public urging in the media; it was otherwise achieved through the imposition of material constraints. Except for work in certain strategic blue-collar jobs (mining, for example), wages and salaries were quite low. Men were unable to fulfill their role as breadwinners, and family income had to be supplemented by women's income. Faced with such extreme economic hardship, many women had no choice but to take on wage labor.

Nonetheless, although the state guaranteed women an equal right to work, women were not treated equally in their work. Throughout the communist period, Polish women were generally not given leadership positions or promotions, and worst of all, there was no pay equity. Women's wages were 20–40 percent lower than those of men working in the same positions. According to studies done in the early 1980s, in all occupational categories, except the professions, gender influenced earnings more significantly than education, occupational position, age, job tenure, or membership in the Communist Party (Siemieńska 1990).

At the same time that the state was encouraging women to join the workforce, another issue became a matter of state policy: motherhood. By the early 1960s, it had become clear that the socialist state would be unable to develop the wide-reaching social policies earlier envisioned, not the least of which was an agreement to help women by assuming some of the responsibility for their families. The post-war baby boom, which lasted until 1958, created an enormous demand

¹That the "occupational liberation" of Polish women was not the result of their own political struggles but occurred basically by coercion (Titkow 1995) is doubtless one important factor in the current situation and attitudes about Polish women. Another is the fact that the communist regime, in its plans for social change, was interested primarily in women's economic role and not in a more thoroughgoing change in gender relations.

for social services that the state was unable to supply.² As an alternative, the government—primarily between 1960 and 1965—tried to decrease the birthrate. It promoted birth control, advertised contraceptives, and established the Conscious Motherhood Association, a network of family planning centers. These efforts, reinforced by broad societal changes and by certain external influences, were so successful that, by the early 1970s, government officials had grown alarmed by Poland's declining birthrate. As a consequence, the government developed a pro-natalist policy that promoted a "2 plus 3" family model and introduced paid maternity leave and special credits for young families.

Just as labor policies defined women exclusively as workers, so did pro-natalist policies and the new propaganda define women exclusively as mothers. The picture of a woman who wants to work—even in such male jobs as a tractor driver, doctor, or postal worker—was simply changed to depict the woman *and* her children. In the state's essentializing vision, women were workers and mothers, nothing else. And while the government encouraged each, they did little to help women coordinate the two roles, except to reemphasize a traditional image of the self-sacrificing Polish mother who subordinates her needs and aspirations to the needs of family and country (Titkow 1995).

One finds a clear reflection of this picture in our women's magazines from 1974. There are only two salient roles in which women are portrayed—employee and mother. Women's social identity is most often described as *wife, mother, worker, citizen, and breadwinner*.³ Consistent with this image, women who work and are upstanding citizens also have happy marriages, strong families, and admirable children. Other kinds of women were presented as negative models and were held up to suggest the looming threat of what might go awry. These were *potential rivals, mistresses, divorcees, hussies, and bimbos*. Most frequently, women were characterized as *hard-working, kind, economical, clever, reasonable, experienced, resourceful, and organized*. But they were also referred to as *lonely, depressed, and tired*.

In the articles and stories we analyzed from this period, the average heroine is a shop assistant, teacher, nurse, white-collar worker, occasionally a doctor or a skilled worker. She usually begins her career following secondary or even primary school, and then supplements her education by attending night school. Even if she has a high level of education, she usually is not very ambitious. Her primary asset and life goal is her family. Indicative of this image is the phrase, "I was not tempted to make an academic career; I wanted to be a good doctor who efficiently helped people."

In such idealized scenarios, the heroine invariably quits her job after giving birth and stays at home to raise her family. "I have dedicated my life to my

²The birthrate increase lasted until 1958 and had its peak in 1953 (19.5 per 1,000). Between 1958 and 1964, the birthrate fell rapidly (from 18 to 10 per 1,000; it was still higher than the average for European countries). This level persisted until the mid-1980s when it again started to increase (Okólski 1992).

³These are the actual words (translated from Polish) used to describe women in the magazines we analyzed.

children and family, for whom I have taken full responsibility," says one protagonist. However, this self-sacrifice is not presented as purely altruistic, but as a kind of delayed self-fulfillment. She says about her children, "I believe they will achieve what I could not." When pushed to specify the kinds of achievements her children will make, she can only reply, "They will certainly be citizens of good standing." Again, the job of motherhood is to produce respectable citizens for the state.

According to the magazine articles, the heroine's job, even if she continues to work after having children, is not as attractive as other forms of self-fulfillment because she knows that her chances for promotion are slim. "I began to work as a simple clerk, today I have an independent post in the office. Whom can I become more? An Assistant Director? There is an Assistant Director. A Director? There is one. Both the Assistant Director and Director are still young. It means that there are no more rungs on the ladder of my career." She works because she has to. The family could not make ends meet on her husband's salary alone.

In magazine stories, the rare women who do not forfeit their ambition and become involved in their career usually pay a high price. One might infer that when the state's dual interest in promoting women's employment and motherhood conflicted, motherhood was given higher priority, at least in this period. The job market was presented as offering little opportunity or fulfillment for women. To be sure, there may have been some truth in these images. Women were portrayed as having to work much harder than male colleagues, having to fight for even the smallest bit of respect in the workplace, suffering a beleaguered family life, and having to cope with stress and conflict at work and again with husband and children at home. As a final blow and result of these sacrifices, women were then shown to be abandoned by their husbands, who had taken up with a "nice little woman," stupid but smart enough to keep saying, "Sweetheart, how clever of you!"

Ironically, the dilemmas of juggling work and family are often seen to result in the destruction of the family. According to the magazine stories, the main threat for a Polish woman and her family is an unmarried *woman, a woman* who craftily snatches a husband from the wife. Compared to the heroine, she is usually younger, more stupid, and, unfortunately, more attractive. The heroine who takes care of her family does not have time to take care of her own appearance. Most important, however, this "other" woman has more patience with men and can appreciate their foibles. The husband does not play a very significant role in the story—he is, rather, a dupe or a bit of property that belongs to one woman but is stolen by another who dares to become interested in a married man.

In the 1974 women's magazines that we reviewed, there are no positive images of a divorced woman. Divorced women are portrayed either as unhappy or as wicked and crafty. Divorce is seen as a particularly dramatic event in a woman's life, not only because it destroys her main achievement—the family—but also because it changes her social image and status. She becomes a potential troublemaker for her social environment, which is portrayed as a *community of families*, and she is treated with disdain as a potential rival and "the other."

More to the point, the magazines provide no advice to women who might need or choose to divorce, blaming them—not their husbands—for the failed marriage. Indeed, divorce itself is presented as an anomaly. If only a woman had focused on her family, the argument goes, she would not be in this situation. Marriage crises can be avoided through planning and a proper assessment of problems. "Anna's marriage was saved when she became aware of what her husband expected from her, that is, which of his desires were not satisfied." Anna's desires are taken for granted—she wants to have children and to bring them up without too many problems. "Sooner or later everyone starts a family." Husbands are seen as more or less the same and are viewed as playing no real role in the success of the marriage or the family. Discussions of men's roles and about problems, such as domestic violence and alcoholism—which often cause women to leave their husbands—are largely ignored.

Although focused on traditionally female goals, the idealized woman presented in the magazines is nearly devoid of any feminine or even individual features. It is difficult to find information about her age, physical appearance, and inner problems or about her feelings and behavior except as they relate to family or work. She is, above all, a social being: one element of several different social structures (family, company, planned economy, and socialist society) that demand "rational" behavior from her. Even such fundamental practices as eating and nourishment are "rationalized" to fit and justify the particular, idealized logic of the (shortage) economy: "The norm of protein consumption is half a gram per one kilo of body weight. A Pole consumes 46 grams daily, which is exactly what he needs. Every gram above that norm is a blameworthy waste." Similarly, there is a social logic to every activity; she should remain active—jogging or walking on weekends—because her work requires that she be in good physical shape. While raising children, she should remember that the state needs not only managers and engineers, but also housekeepers and secretaries.

Likewise, reproduction is presented as a function of state necessity and is discussed largely in the language of production: In the magazines we reviewed there are many alarming articles about the decreasing birthrate. "We are efficient in our work, but ineffective in giving birth." The language of production is also used in discussing problems of sexuality, although these are addressed only rarely. One article summarizes: "What you have said, Doctor, [referring to a well-known sexologist] leads to a conclusion that a successful sexual life is an *additional* domain in which one should *invest* her/his psychological energy, imagination, and *work*. How is it feasible in the 20th century, under the present circumstances [e.g., with women overworked and tired] to come home and undertake a new, difficult *task* [e.g., having sex]? What you have talked about, all this absorbing play is good, but only during summer holidays." The hierarchy of "tasks" is clearly articulated: "If a woman is to be [sexually] ingenious, always attractive . . . well-dressed, clean, cheerful, and at the same time the home is to be kept in order—such a woman will end up quickly in a dark grave." Because nobody wants to "end up in a dark grave" and the home must be kept in order, the implicit message is to forget about such unproductive things as sexual satisfaction or postpone them until the summer holidays.

The image of a rational woman focused on her job and family is also part of the socialization model promoted in the girls' magazine *Filipinka*. "Filipinka has many times and in different ways encouraged you to be ambitious . . . in the sense of seizing the hard-earned opportunity to play a useful role in society and in a job. And this is the precondition of happiness and satisfaction." Thus, girls' ambition is implicitly defined as limited; it is merely a synonym for doing one's best. Girls are cautioned to avoid aiming too high. If you failed the university entrance exams, do not worry. You can be useful and creative as a dressmaker or shop assistant. What is really important is the welfare of society, and individual happiness can follow from personal commitment—to whatever one does.

Although the most important domains for this commitment are, of course, occupation and family life, they are not often discussed in *Filipinka*. Rather, it is taken for granted that everyone works and has a family. *Filipinka* does not offer its young readers models of the good employee and mother; in fact, it avoids difficult issues of all kinds. Instead, didactic stories focus on keeping girls young. The magazine's typical heroine is "always busy, engaged in school activities, enthusiastic, a bit crazy, but skilled and full of initiative, a nice colleague." Any "individualizing" behavior, whether reading ambitious books or listening to jazz, is kept within the limits of social convention.

There is a rather surrealistic and fantastic quality to the ideals presented by these magazines, if one remembers the social circumstances in which they were written. In 1974, *Woman and Life* and *Woman's Friend* were telling women to be brave, yet one detects a quiet undercurrent of women's exhaustion and helplessness. In 1974, *Filipinka* was telling young readers to be happy, but one has a nagging sense that the magazine is arguing against the grain of readers who are too bored, shy, and lost to feel the excitement of youth that *Filipinka* so desperately tries to purvey. However, in both cases the hidden message is the same: *You can manage your problems if you accept the reality of the system and of your place within it.* What that reality meant was only superficially discussed or mentioned in passing. The message was simply that there is a presumed "right" way to do things. It is only by searching carefully that one finds, in these magazines, traces of another reality. For example, in 1974, readers of *Woman and Life* sent in letters to the editor as a way to protest an absurd regulation requiring that the cost for sewing services be calculated according to the length of seams and the threads used in them. Meanwhile, oblivious to such mundane dilemmas—which affected daily life deeply indeed—*Filipinka* published a story about scouts building tourist huts in Bieszczady, a desolate mountain region beyond the reach of its readers.

GENDER RELATIONS: "BRAVE VICTIM" AND "BIG CHILD"

While the socialist state took great interest in shaping women's roles vis-à-vis work and motherhood, it was silent on gender relations broadly defined. A patriarchal model of family was presumed by both.

children to bed, and before my husband was ready to go out I told him that today it was my day off. He thought I was joking, but I really went out and spent the night with my colleague from work. . . . In the morning I went directly to work. At home, when he asked me about this, I repeated his words about the freedom of spouses. And it worked. Next evening he didn't go out and observed my doings. This month he brought me at last his whole salary.

In other instances, women talk about helping their husbands through night school or making bargains in which men are given special allowances (the right to buy a motorcycle, for instance) in exchange for taking the initiative to improve the family's economic status. "I promised him that I would do anything to buy him a motorcycle if he only passed the first grade of technical school." Such strategies demand, however, constant control and initiative. "I read books aloud for him, made summaries, drew him into discussions, controlled his homework, and sometimes wrote them myself for him." In many cases, the task of improving a husband's qualities requires real sacrifice. "At the beginning we were in a very difficult situation. My husband was ill since he [had just undergone] a serious surgery. Nothing, however, frightened me. I was ready to work in order to provide for both of us. . . . My husband recovered some time later. He graduated from the university." Certainly, this was made possible by her hard work, which often tested the limits of physical endurance: "How many sleepless nights and miles walked in fall rains and winter snow!" In letters to these magazines, women consistently portrayed themselves as sacrificing everything for the family, consistently portraying their role as the gentle and wise mother who rears not only her children, but her husband, too.

The theme that women are more clever than men, and especially more mature, is one that is also emphasized in the girls' magazine *Filipinka*. Often, it is invoked when "explaining" sexual behaviors or as part of an official response to changes in sexual patterns. Whether because of western influence or because of communist policies that encouraged women's independence (e.g., divorce laws, employment), there is evidence that by the 1970s there were significant changes in sexual/reproductive behavior among younger people. A retrospective study comparing the dates of marriage with the dates of a first child's birth showed that by the 1970s, there was an 8.3 percent increase in the number of children born before marriage and a 35.3 percent increase in those born during the first eight months of marriage (Giza-Poleszczuk 1993). Viewed together with a 7 percent increase in births among women aged 15–19 and a growing rate of abortion, the data indicate that patterns of sexual behavior were shifting significantly.

Yet the editors of *Filipinka* seemed to willfully ignore these trends. They advised girls not to pay too much attention to boys. As far as sexual behavior was concerned, the magazine stressed that girls should seek their boyfriends' "respect" by disallowing touching before marriage. In this situation, "the girl should be the restraining factor because girls are more mature," having gained a sense of responsibility for their actions sooner than boys. Thus, despite social trends to the contrary, the magazine stressed the importance of keeping sexuality

within marriage. In sexual ideals, as in much else, the official line encouraged the centrality of family.

At least as it was shown in the socialist period women's magazines, this stereotypical Polish family was composed of a strong woman and a weak man. Men were portrayed as "big children" dependent upon their wives for coaching and support. Their accomplishments could all be attributed to their wives' self-sacrifice. Before all else, the heroine of the women's magazines thinks of her family's well-being, even at the expense of her own health. Frequently, this sacrifice is accompanied by complaints that men are ungrateful and would leave their faithful wives for other women. In the end, the self-sacrificing wife is hailed as a "brave victim." The officially supported image of the Polish mother is insinuated into the magazine's portrayal of women as beleaguered at home and exploited at work, always sacrificing for the good of the family and society. There is, however, a reward: the belief that *he would not have become what he is without her*. A woman's husband is indebted to her not only for all her household work, but also for his social status and personal importance. Even if he leaves her, the heroine knows that he would be unsuccessful and helpless, like a child, without her own sacrifice, maturity, and cleverness.

It should be remembered that the "brave victim" identity was not just given to women, but was also shaped by them. As one reader of *Filipinka* wrote in a letter tinged with irony, "[Mother] keeps complaining that she is tired. Sure, she is. Does she sit for a moment, read a newspaper? Oh no. She has always something to do, of course for us, not for herself. And then she reminds us that she is sacrificing herself for our sake." Women willingly assumed the role of the victim; what we must ask is, why?

When speaking of the "brave victim," we might stress either "brave" or "victim." One could emphasize a woman's sacrifice and the burden of dividing her life between job and family (brave), or one might focus on the wickedness of a male world in which a woman is discriminated against both as an employee and as a woman (victim). Following the cultural logic of such labels, one could argue that the notion of "bravery" provides supplemental gratification, making bearable such onerous tasks as "carrying heavy bags full of shopping, suffering from lack of sleep, and being terribly tired," simply to have some "justifiable sense of being an indispensable manager of family life" (Titkow 1995:318). Perhaps the sense of *victimhood* encourages a kind of self-respect.

We argue that the "brave victim" image also gave women a kind of moral upper hand in their domestic lives, especially when considered in conjunction with the relatively high level of education that these women achieved (United Nations 1991). Certainly, women were victims of the social system, they were discriminated against in the world of politics and work, they were responsible for most domestic work, and they often suffered from physical violence at home. Nonetheless, it seems to us that the "brave victim" identity gave women some justification for—and pride in—their situation; they were sacrificing themselves for the greater good. And this conferred upon them a sense that they were the real authority in the private sphere, the real head of the family.

a housewife and domestic laborer in the 1950s to promote the "modern family," an arrangement in which partners share duties and responsibilities, the attempt was met with widespread resistance and was soon abandoned.

Explanations for the persistence of the patriarchal family can be found, at least in part, in Poland's pre-war social structure and in the country's changing demographics both during and after the war. Before the war, approximately 70 percent of the population lived in the countryside; during the war, the urban intelligentsia suffered disproportionate losses, so that the post-war population was comprised mainly of peasants. Between 1946 and 1983, six million people migrated from the countryside to the cities, accounting for a 42 percent increase in the urban population. By one estimate, the number of contemporary Polish families who do not have at least grandparents living in the countryside is only 15 percent (Wasilewski 1986). Not surprisingly, social models of family organization have remained closely linked to the rural peasantry.

While demographic factors provide one explanation for the continued persistence of the patriarchal family, this model persisted, on a symbolic or representational level, because there was no real alternative. The socialist government, failing in its attempt to redefine men and women's social roles, began instead to reinforce pre-war conceptions of gender. Nevertheless (and ironically) the continuing official emphasis on a "traditional" family model, together with the changing socioeconomic conditions created by communism, altered family life and fundamentally changed the structural conditions that shaped relations between the sexes.

First of all, the so-called "occupational activation" of women, in conjunction with the state policy of keeping wages low, led to significant changes in the actual economic relations between men and women. Because men could no longer be the sole, or even primary, providers for their families, they lost the base of their authority as head of the household. Meanwhile, women gained new educational opportunities and social networks, and, thanks to an indulgent divorce law, they could more easily extricate themselves from unwanted relationships. Yet, the persistent discrimination against women in the workplace, not to mention the generally low wages paid to employees of both sexes, hardly made the choice of career over marriage a viable option (Giza-Poleszczuk 1993). Consequently, women gained social duties and responsibilities outside the household, without much help in performing the traditional ones inside it, whereas men lost their elevated status as family providers, without gaining alternative sources of social importance.

This discrepancy between the symbolic ideal and actual gender roles created significant tension between men and women and ushered in a new stage that was not about "negotiating" as much as "hard bargaining" over gender relations (Ferree 1990). By the early 1970s, worsening economic conditions exacerbated the problems between the sexes, with women and men scraping to make ends meet, making alliances out of sheer economic necessity, and continually facing chaotic, unstable, and often untenable economic conditions. Whereas in 1966 it

increased to 94 minutes (Smulska 1985). Nevertheless, the ratio of women's to men's contributions to household chores remained 4:1 (Siemieńska 1990). Thus, despite women's increasing significance as wage earners, they still bore the brunt of household work.

Interestingly, in the women's magazines of the period, some articles touted the value of partnership within the family. They were not warmly received. In a rare example, *Woman and Life* published a piece in 1974 that compared men's and women's relative contributions to the household economy. The value of women's household activities, including cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing, and taking care of children, was estimated according to average market prices for these services. When this amount was added to a woman's average job income, the total was much higher than the average man's salary.

The article elicited a heated response from men. In letters sent to the publisher, many tried to prove that the calculation was wrong, pointing to the value of their own household work, such as doing small repairs, washing dishes, and painting. But more importantly, many women also reacted negatively. In several letters to the editor, women blamed the journal for "disturbing their husbands' peace of mind," and asked the magazine to leave "our dear pets" alone.

To understand such a reaction from women who, on other occasions, had complained of being overworked and undervalued, it is best to look more closely at male-female relations during this period. Schematically, the 1974 magazines reveal two levels of discussion that roughly correlate to divisions between public and private. In those articles that address women's role in the public sphere—that is, in their working lives—men are seen to be rivals. Women must fight to be acknowledged as equals and accomplished workers. "A man can have a moment of weakness; he can fail to succeed in something," says one article. "A woman has to be alert all the time, or people will say she is a sissy, she didn't manage." A female doctor was quoted to say, "I was always put in the worst kind of work. They did not allow me to perform surgery. Everyone would wait to catch my mistakes. To be acknowledged in work, a woman professional must be ten times better than a man."

In contrast to the combative language used to describe relations between women and men in the working world, a very different kind of language is used to describe gender relations in the home. Here, women talk about the need to bring up their husbands, to raise them as they would a child. "Knowing my husband well," a wife is quoted as saying, "I knew that he had a lot of merits and that I would be able to bring him up, to raise him." This can include both formal and informal education. The articles describing such actions emphasize the need to finesse changes in male behavior, rather than challenge men directly, which might hurt their pride. Indirect methods seemed to be preferred. One woman is quoted as saying about her husband,

Since he kept saying that marriage wasn't slavery and everybody should behave according to one's own will, I decided to show him that I was also free. One evening I put the

What were men's possibilities in the same period, and how did they respond to the "brave victim?" First, in objective terms, men were victims of the system, too. Because the public sphere was so thoroughly controlled by the Party, men who were unwilling to become communists, for instance, were often blocked in their professional ambitions. Second, as we have noted, men were often frustrated at home because the legal and economic structures of socialism prevented them from fulfilling their role as head of the family—a role demanded by pre-war traditional values. Finally, the state-controlled mass media provided little in the way of an idealized image of masculinity. The "heroic socialist worker" was not relevant to the domestic scene. At home, men could not even play the martyr, since women had already taken that role. They thus had few options: They could feel guilty and submit to a wife who supposedly knew best what was good for the family or they could rebel against the "big child" role.

Judging by the evidence we analyzed, there were several forms of such rebellion, revealed most poignantly in letters to the editor. In the 1974 magazines, many women complain that their husbands drink, do not care about children, and do not give them the money necessary for everyday living. "He drank and wasted [money] and I, with my little salary, had to make ends meet." This form of rebellion—a refusal to participate in family life—can be interpreted as an attempt to compensate for the undermined position of family head. Another form of rebellion was to maintain and even exaggerate the patriarchal model, although it did not fit the new circumstances in which women's wages made important contributions to the family's income. Thus, women also complain that husbands behave as sovereigns whose will must be immediately satisfied. "He works for 16 hours a day, absorbed by plans, perspectives, urged with deadlines. . . . We do not see him, but when he comes home at last, the children must run with slippers for daddy and the wife must make the bed so he can regenerate [his] working power for tomorrow." Frustrated with this attitude, women note that they are also working and are equally entitled to "regenerate their working power."

In sum, the "new society" created by state socialism was new economically and, to some extent, new in terms of its legal regulations. It substantially changed the material conditions in which the vast majority of Poles lived, and it noticeably altered women's economic contribution. But many pre-war notions persisted in the symbolism and ideology of gender during the communist era. The image of the stalwart Polish mother, admonitions against premarital sex, pro-natalism, and the fundamental idea that the family is the center of life were all drawn from popular cultural ideals that existed long before the advent of communism. Although communist ideology claimed to be creating new forms of social ties, it nevertheless endorsed the ideal of a patriarchal family.⁴

⁴We have argued elsewhere (Marody 1993; Giza-Poleszczuk 1993) that the state's support of "family," and of the sacrifices women should make for family, was also motivated by an explicit calculation that this would stabilize economic and social reproduction, which was endangered by the inefficiency of the communist public service sector.

Generated by the conditions of state socialism—that is, in response to material needs and ideological contradictions—the gender identities of "brave victim" and "big child" helped to unite couples around a common goal: ensuring the well-being of the family and children. Yet these images blocked the development of new gender constructs within marriage (or alternative images of gender relations) that might have been more congruent with women's increasing education and contribution to the family budget and men's declining opportunities in the public sphere.

GENDER AND TRANSITION: THE NEW WOMAN AND THE OLD

What happens to the "brave victim" image—not to mention all of the women who have styled themselves after it—when socialism is replaced by free-market capitalism and when the media are no longer state-controlled but run as a set of distinct, private sector businesses? In the new Poland, the "brave victim" image, crafted in reaction to the limitations and demands of state socialism, no longer serves its intended purpose. Three shifts are important here. First, the range of available commodities and services has expanded to a degree previously unknown. Second, the position of women in the labor market has changed dramatically; unemployment has grown significantly at the same time that a plethora of career opportunities have opened up, giving women entirely new choices. Third, the symbolic sphere of culture has expanded enormously in the past years, and now offers women a variety of "model" lifestyles that challenge the one we described earlier.

Today, women must choose between the old and the new—between roles that undoubtedly will take them in opposite directions. Economically, the abundance of goods and services stands in stark contrast to the "economy of shortage" that marked the period before the transition. This eases the burden of daily work needed to maintain a family and, indeed, seriously diminishes the importance of the family as an economic unit. Women no longer have to wait in line, carry heavy bags, or do everything themselves. But the abundance of goods is also a temptation to buy, and it puts pressure on limited family budgets. Women must either economize, choosing to forego newly available commodities, or must earn more money in order to purchase the goods and services now flooding the Polish market.

Yet, women who choose to earn face a formidable obstacle in the bifurcated labor market. On the one hand, unemployment is growing, and women are disproportionately affected. Women have a hard time finding jobs, especially if they have small children or other demands that restrict, or are perceived to restrict, their ability to work consistent hours. Yet, at the same time that the demand for unskilled or moderately skilled labor is decreasing, there is growing demand for highly skilled workers. One result is the emergence of a new class of professional women whose investment in education and training has finally

begun to pay off. But such careers usually demand significant personal concessions, making it almost impossible for women in Poland to combine career and family. Many women, especially younger women, must choose between the two.

Besides the structural and economic changes that are redefining women's roles, the explosion of advertising and media images that accompanied the opening of markets has significantly transformed symbolic representations of women, creating new images for women to aspire to, and hence affecting the real life choices they make. Previously, women responded to a state-dominated media that not only encouraged them to be workers and mothers but, before all else, to be *subservient to the "collective needs" of family and society*. Now, the media is no longer an agent of the state, and women are responding differently. Accentuating the values of free-market capitalism, the mass media today are largely funded by advertisers who aim to sell consumer goods rather than state policy. Even so, there are many kinds of consumers. For example, advertisements often depict women as *responsible consumers* whose market behavior is based on planning, rational evaluation, and economic calculation. Other times, advertisements assume women's individualism, creating a world of female needs, comforts, and desires.

In the service of consumerism, the new women's magazines—many translations of Western publications—are introducing Polish women to different models of masculinity and femininity, which stand in stark contrast to both traditional Polish and socialist era images. Julia Wood, in her summary of popular imagery in the western mass media, writes,

Typically men are portrayed as active, adventurous, powerful, sexually aggressive, and largely uninvolved in human relationships. Just as consistent with cultural views on gender are depictions of women as sex objects who are usually young, thin, beautiful, passive, dependent, and often incompetent and dumb. Female characters devote their primary energies to improving their appearance and taking care of homes and people. (1995:235)

The difference between this and the "brave victim-big child" pattern is especially striking.

Yet, there are also counterpressures to gendered consumerism. The Catholic Church continues to produce images of women as mothers and "vessels of the nation." And irrespective of the motivation for this model, it has not been lost on political leaders that its acceptance by the population would contribute to solving the unemployment problem. Since half the employed persons in Poland today are women (45.5 percent of the labor force in 1995), their retreat from the labor force would increase the number of jobs available. While men may not want many of these feminized and low-paying jobs, the general idea has political appeal.

But if post-1989 images of women present a new ideal of gender, what are these contrasting images, and how do women react to their symbolic appeal?

Individualization: Success and Personality

During the communist period, the most general characteristic of women's identity formation was its collectivist bias. A woman was not seen to have her own personality. Instead, she was described through her social context; her aspirations for self-development were transferred onto the lives of her children, and her needs were subordinated to the interests of her family and, ultimately, to the needs of society or state policy. The images presented in women's magazines after 1989 present a very different model.

The "new woman" is first and foremost portrayed as an individual. The focus is on self-fulfillment and individual success. In all domains, from career to sexuality, the shift toward individualization is evident, while collective goals and responsibilities are downplayed. For example, in *Your Style*, a magazine targeted to an affluent and upscale market, women are presented as successful professionals who are active, glamorous, and dedicated to their careers. They are usually shown to be in their mid-40s, very smart, and attractive. More significantly, these women are encouraged to develop social graces and intellectual interests; youth and beauty, while important, are not enough to make a "new" woman. According to one article, "The most popular are those who are newly employed—but not those who work in the telephone unit or with the photocopier. . . . The women most sought after are not only attractive and fashionably dressed, but they have a high IQ, know how to make brilliant conversation, and have a sense of humor."

By contrast, *Woman's Friend* and *Woman and Life* continue to target middle-class and lower-class women,⁵ building on the more traditional image of a homemaker. Although articles about housekeeping in the 1994 issues of *Woman's Friend* appear half as many times as in 1974, they still predominate. Nonetheless, major distinctions are made between the "new" and "old" woman, even when the emphasis is on the domestic sphere. The "new" woman, although she cares for her family, does not forget about herself. The publishers of *Woman's Friend* declare that their mission is to promote a modern lifestyle, to advise women about how to care for themselves with minimum expense, and about how to relax, dress, and cook—all so that a woman can say about herself, "I am practical and modern." The new image of a woman's family responsibilities and duties no longer demands complete sacrifice. On the contrary, even if a woman quits working to raise her family, it is argued, she should not neglect her own personal development.

Other magazine stories portray women who successfully do it all. A typical protagonist in the post-transition magazines is a journalist—as one article put it, "a true TV star, but also a wonderful wife and mother." The story continued, "Home and family are at least as important as her job." One woman interviewed

⁵We use the terms "middle class" and "lower class" as simple shorthand for income differences. The social structure of Poland is being fundamentally transformed, and it would be difficult to characterize emerging strata or classes in more detailed terms.

by the magazine said, "I care for my job because it gives me satisfaction. But if I were forced to choose between my job and my family, I would choose the family." The ideal for the "new" woman is to link a happy family life with a successful professional career. The article finishes by urging women to seek more than just success; "for real happiness," it says, "a woman needs the satisfaction of both work and a loving family."

Nowhere is the symbolic shift in women's aspirations more evident than in the magazine articles that depict a young heroine. Łaciak reports on a magazine interview with one young woman who says, "I am not ready to make such a decision—to find a husband, to have children, and to give up my job. I have worked too hard for all this" (Łaciak 1995:235). Careers are perceived in purely individualistic terms: as a prize for individual talents and effort, and not as the result of excellence in implementing collective goals. Professional success is located almost exclusively in the domains of business and the culture industry (for example, among TV stars, singers, and actresses). A woman's success is understood to put her husband in a difficult position; thus the best combination is if they are both successful or run a business together.

The individualization of women's identity is particularly visible in the representation of sex. In *Woman's Friend*, sexuality was covered three times more frequently in 1994 than it was in 1974. In *Woman and Life*, coverage is less frequent, but here too, two striking changes are evident in the way that sexuality is addressed. First, it is increasingly presented outside the context of marriage, and second, the problems related to a woman's sexual life are discussed less than sex itself, which is now treated as an important domain of activity.

The articles appearing most frequently focus on sexual technique, including ways to avoid routine and boredom or increase satisfaction. More important, they stress women's right to sexual satisfaction. The new woman is not just the object of a man's sexual fulfillment, but his partner in reaching mutual pleasure while building a deep relationship. The emphasis on sexual pleasure stands in sharp contrast to the "sex is yet another task" message of the 1974 magazines. Consistent with this shift, articles about contraceptives are twice as frequent in the 1994 issues of *Woman's Friend* than they were in 1974. Partnership in sexual life, say the magazines, is built on mutual recognition of the different needs and reactions experienced by men and women. Thus, it is no longer just biological differences, but psychological differences that are discussed. In fact, both *Woman's Friend* and *Woman and Life* carried three times as many articles about such gender-based dilemmas in 1994 than they had in 1974. Authors focused on ways to avoid conflict and misunderstanding and urged readers to respect women's and men's unique characteristics.

The model of the "new" woman now put forward is based on an individualistic belief in self-expression, rather than on the old notion that women should provide for others first (family, state, society, and economy). "You are exceptional!" reads a title on the cover of *Your Style*. "You deserve it!" declares an advertisement. A woman is now presented not as an element of the social and family network, as an individual, whose psychological requirements and needs

"A woman should actively shape her life, broaden her [mental] horizons, develop interests, and strive for perfection" (Łaciak 1995:239). A woman's social worth is no longer based on her complete self-sacrifice. She is encouraged to make demands on others and to strive for herself. Paradoxically, these new virtues are promoted not as being important in themselves, but primarily as a means to attract men.

Discovering Femininity

The most striking change in the content of the magazines we analyzed is the return of "femininity" and, with it, a return of elements from the "old-style" patriarchy. By "femininity" we mean particular standards of character and physical attractiveness stereotypically ascribed to women. Without a doubt, physical attractiveness is portrayed in the majority of women's magazines as the most prized feature a woman can possess. We see this not only in advertisements, but also in advice columns ("you can be more beautiful") and in the increasing number of articles that feature famous actresses and models. If, in the communist period, women were presented as devoid of physical features, the "new" woman is described first in terms of her appearance and her dress.

Attractiveness is recognized as a key factor behind a woman's "success," both with men and in the labor market. Polish newspapers are full of classified ads offering jobs to young, attractive women. Companies now demand dress codes and teach their employees how they "should" look. An article in one magazine reads, "In one of the companies in Warsaw, women are required to wear clothes made from high-quality fabrics. In another, girls are asked to sign, in addition to their job contracts, an agreement to always have painted nails and depilated legs."

In the upscale magazine *Your Style*, it is taken for granted that women value and will spend time at being attractive—striving toward a standard of beauty largely defined by advertisements of glamorous, thin, young models. "To be a genuine, modern woman, you have to find time for yourself." However, in publications for the less affluent, *Woman and Life* and *Woman's Friend*, beauty is treated with ambivalence. While they criticize the superficiality of physical attractiveness, these magazines nevertheless reinforce images of beauty based on slenderness, youth, and fashion. A common strategy for reconciling these seemingly contradictory messages is to wrap beauty in the familiar package of personal health. One article begins, "I will certainly disappoint all those who expect that I will be writing about cosmetics and make-up. Of course, they matter for a woman who would like to look cared for, but health is most important." Despite her disclaimer, the author continues, "The basis for health and beauty is a slim figure, a young firm body with peach-colored skin, and a young looking face without wrinkles."

Polish women have revived this definition of femininity with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the magazines seem harmless and fun—it can be interesting to read about new fashion, to learn how to care for one's hair, to know which exercise routines promote a better figure. But this image of the "new" woman is modern. All the things that marked the "old" woman are gone. A

columnist for *Woman and Life* revealed her bitterness toward the new standards of attractiveness when she described a scene in which a man rudely pushed her off a bus: "I am sure if I wore at least black stockings as my [fashionable] 'femininity banner,' my bus misogynist would feel like a superman who opens the door, falls to my feet, and proposes an exciting weekend in Anin."

Coming after years of what may be called the "a-sexualization" of communist era images of women as workers and mothers, the new emphasis on sexual attractiveness undermines women's position in relation to men. Besides working as mothers, housewives, and wage-earners, women are also expected to spend time on their appearance. The new feminine ideal suggests an interesting shift: Instead of sacrificing themselves to serve the needs of family and society or to "manage" men, women should now subordinate themselves to male desires and standards of beauty. Schematically, one might say that in the "brave victim/big child" model, both men and women sacrificed themselves to the inefficiencies of the socialist state and economy, although women found a kind of moral strength in their victimhood. By contrast, women, according to the new model, are valued primarily as pretty objects. Because a woman's worth is now determined by her desirability to men, the new ideal of femininity reinforces male dominance.

The Revival of Masculinity

One of the most striking and, we would argue, significant changes in the post-1989 media is the "male comeback." Whereas men had largely disappeared from communist era women's magazines, the new enthusiasm for Western capitalist values corresponds to a burst of enthusiasm for a particular type of man. He is shown in advertisements as strong, attractive, individualistic, and dominating and can be seen to embody the vision of the post-transition world. Men are no longer discussed in terms of "dear pets" or "big children." The men presented in women's magazines (TV stars, journalists, and businessmen) earn a lot of money, dress well, and are self-confident and independent. They can cook for themselves and do not need a wife to run their household. More to the point, these men are always shown with a beautiful woman at their side, a companion to enhance the man's image.

The new man emerging in both advertisements and articles in women's magazines is certainly desirable to Polish women—at least to some Polish women. But it is ironic that the women who want such a man at home have to use the old methods to "make" one. Although we can draw only upon anecdotal data, wives are often the ones pushing their husbands into the public sphere and to make a name for themselves in the new capitalist system. According to a friend of ours who runs an employee search and selection agency, half of the resumes and inquiry letters sent to his company by men are actually sent by their wives. Several psychologists have pointed out that many of their male patients are brought in by wives who demand, "Do something with him. Motivate him." This change was astutely captured by the well-known Polish cartoonist Andrzej

Mleccko, who depicted an ordinary man sitting in an armchair with his newspaper, his wife prodding, "Don't just sit like that! Look at Wałęsa, what he has achieved! Do something!"

Ironically, this new man is also threatening to women. One article reads, "Young capitalism is usually an enterprising man who tries to either dispossess you of your apartment or your land. He knows best, knows that he deserves it, and that everything can be arranged. He visits offices, looks for legal possibilities, and Mrs. W. from Jozefów is trembling." Poor Mrs. W. understands neither those young men nor the new reality. She reads women's magazines and sees herself as a victim of the transformation, which she believes is depriving her not only of her apartment but also of her status as a Polish mother.

By redefining men as no longer in need of a wife's "protection," the new system has again opened the process of gender bargaining. As we have shown, the "brave victim/big child" imagery was rooted in the institutional conditions of the communist political and economic system, but it was maintained and simultaneously reinforced by everyday relationships between men and women. It was through a web of daily interactions that underlying systemic patterns were experienced. The imagery kept its power because there were neither symbolic nor material resources available through which women and men could imagine their lives independent of the other sex, or imagine a different set of arrangements, based upon different assumptions.

In sum, the old virtues and assets, which previously bolstered women's self-esteem, are losing their importance as a means for dealing either with the new conditions or with the new man. Different assets have become important: age, education, computer skills, fluency in languages, personal attractiveness. It is not surprising that women feel both challenged and threatened. For some, mostly younger women, there are new opportunities. For others, especially those who forged their identities in the pre-transition world, the changes are probably threatening. Importantly, the very same can be said of men; the "big child" or even "rebellious big child" model does not fit the new imagery. Moreover, as participants in the ongoing changes, we sense that it is not only women who feel the basis of their womanhood or femininity threatened. As the comments in current magazines suggest, men feel their masculinity threatened not only by the demands of these new images, but also by the direct, everyday demands placed upon them by wives and girlfriends.

CONCLUSIONS: FROM SELF-SACRIFICE TO SELF-INVESTMENT?

Having presented the range of new imagery evident in the magazines of 1994, we now turn in closing to sociological survey research, contrasting media images with the opinions expressed by respondents in a nationally representative sample. We then offer some conclusions about the media and changing gender expectations. Although the magazines seem neatly different in the two periods we

examined, the surveys present a more complicated picture. In the 1990s, socially accepted norms for women in Poland are inconsistent and contradictory. This indicates that, despite the media's clear imagery, people are ambivalent about the role women should adopt in the current circumstances.

On the one hand, we have a set of attitudes that seem to go together; they tie women to households and children and men to wage labor. In one opinion poll, 47.3 percent of respondents agreed (strongly or rather strongly) that, "If a married woman's job demands too much of her time, keeping her away from home, she should give up her job." Only 20.5 percent felt the same way about men. Of the respondents, 54.5 percent also agreed (strongly or rather strongly) with the opinion that, "If there is unemployment in the country, men should have more rights to jobs than women." A full 75.3 percent accepted the opinion that, "It is necessary for women to have children in order to gain a sense of fulfillment" (Marody 1994). Approximately 50 percent of those polled believe that, "Most men are better suited emotionally for politics than most women" and that, "Women should take care of their homes and leave running the country to men" (Cichomski and Sawiński 1993).

On the other hand, and despite the results described here, the model of a family in which only the husband works, leaving the wife to take care of the home, was accepted by only 23.5 percent of respondents (more often by men; $n = 1,698$). And 55.9 percent of those questioned accepted a model in which both spouses share housework and childcare (Marody 1994). In other ways, too, there are signs that the family is not central to all respondents. Only 19 percent of respondents believe that it is wrong (always or almost always) to have sex before marriage, and only 27 percent wanted "to make divorce more difficult to obtain than it is now" (Cichomski and Sawiński 1993). Finally, there was widespread acknowledgment, among all parties polled, of the social discrimination that women face. Also, women were perceived by members of both genders as having fewer opportunities to learn new skills, get a job, or receive a promotion.

As we have demonstrated, the inconsistency in opinions about women's role in Poland is, in part, a legacy of the socialist state. It attempted to mobilize women into the labor force, but it neither provided the social support that this required nor offered an alternative image of femininity. A parallel case can be made for men, whose material conditions were substantially changed and for whom there appeared no new imagery depicting masculinity in the domestic realm. Even so, other survey research suggests that the current changes do not have parallel effects on men and women. Men seem more accepting of the new definition of femininity; they welcome a sexually attractive, witty, and professionally successful woman. Women are more dubious.

For instance, responding to the survey question, "What do men expect from women in Poland nowadays?"⁶ women consistently overestimated the emphasis that men place on housekeeping. Despite the new imagery, women believed that they were expected to be perfect housekeepers and to sacrifice their own needs

to their family's interests; indeed, women cited such expectations significantly more often than men declared them. On the other hand, women tend to underestimate men's respect for a woman's intelligence and professional success. More men expect these traits from women than women believe they do.⁷

The incongruity between 1994 media images and survey results echoes—albeit in a different tone—the disparity between the images purveyed by communist era magazines in 1974 and the practices evidenced by letters to the editor and statistical information about gender in that era. In both periods, there is clearly a sizable gap between public discourse and practice, or between "reality" and "representation." But it is also the case that the content and structure of this gap is importantly different in the two periods; the representational terrain has shifted along with the social system. In the communist era, the mass media functioned in the service of a state hoping to produce workers and mothers. Media stories were didactic and often bland, acknowledging and valorizing women's heavy burden while denying the larger social structure—an economy of shortage—that created them. The old media addressed women in a depersonalized way, identifying them as a kind of fulcrum on which balanced larger social forces; the woman it most idealized was the "common woman" with everyday struggles and needs, bravely running a household, raising children, and working a job. Implicitly or explicitly, self-sacrifice was touted as the road to satisfaction.

By contrast, the new advertising-based, capitalist, mass media seeks to encourage consumerism. As analyses of the media in Western Europe and the United States have emphasized, this is most often achieved by creating a sense of need or a desire for unattainable personal traits that commodities promise to supply. Far from encouraging material self-denial, magazines use seductive, glossy images to evoke fantasy and desire. In our estimation, these images bear less resemblance to the everyday lives of most Polish women than did the communist era stories we analyzed. In the new formula, every woman should try to be extraordinary: She should be attractive, successful, and elite and should reach for beauty, affluence, and happiness. Presumably, the first condition leads to the other two, and all three can be achieved through consumption. Whereas the old media generalized, the new media individualize. Yet they do so not by rewarding individuality, but by creating stereotypes of a new "ideal," which can be purchased on the market.

The strikingly different goals and methods of the media during these two eras point to some of the challenges facing women since 1989. Both the imagery of the new media and the constraints produced by the increasing importance of private corporate employment pose new dilemmas for women's daily lives. Women must adjust to new values that do not reward them for being a self-sacrificing mother or a brave victim—both roles to which many women have dedicated their lives. More generally, the transition period has inverted the

⁷ We note that these results are suggestive but hard to interpret. The seemingly distinct perceptions between the genders may reflect different attitudes, or it might be indicative of a domestic division of labor in which men take housekeeping so much for granted that they do not even consider it in their assurance that women's nature is suitable for household work: "housekeeping."

⁶ In research conducted by the firm GfK Poland, women were asked: "What do men expect from women in Poland nowadays?"

emphasis on self-sacrifice in private and victimhood in public that was both a value and a necessity under state socialism. Moreover, the state and the (much older) patriarchal culture congratulated—or at least consoled—women who accepted the role of “brave victim” as a practical strategy.

Since 1989, the image of woman most idealized—and indeed glamorized—has been that of the successful professional whose happiness is derived not from self-sacrifice, motherhood, or victimhood, but from success in the “outside” world. For the few women who are relatively young, have the requisite job skills, and are unburdened by children, the post-1989 transition has been filled with rewards and opportunities. These women have been able to reject the “brave victim” frame of reference and are finding satisfaction in their new jobs and careers.

Nevertheless, this is a relatively small new elite. For many other women—retirees and pensioners, unskilled and nonprofessional workers, mothers struggling to raise their families—the new ideal is not a woman that they recognize or hope to become. Most women have neither the means nor the opportunity to meet the new standard of an attractive, intelligent, admired woman or a “rational manager.” Whereas the old “brave victim” image provided some comfort to these women by affirming their struggles, the new images of success largely deny the validity of their lives; by downplaying the importance of the work they have done, the new images deny them moral power. Whereas the discourse of the socialist state emphasized a role for women based on labor and sacrifice and subordinated both men and women to the inefficiencies of the state, the new discourse of advertising emphasizes a role for women based on beauty (as judged by men) and individual success (as defined by patterns of consumption). For many women, this emerging model of femininity only undermines their efforts toward self-recognition.

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