

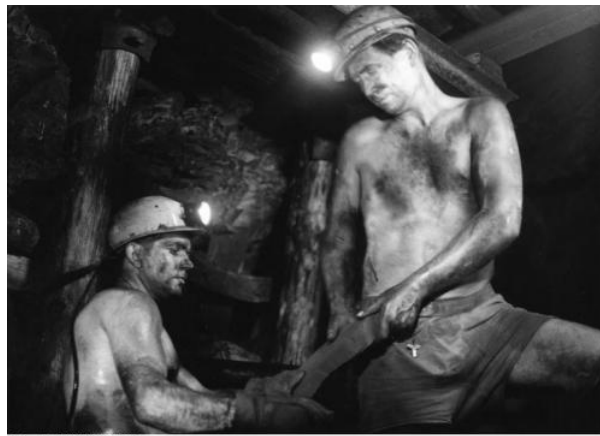
The Gender of Occupations

19th - 20th centuries

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ABSTRACT

The naturalization of feminine and masculine qualities, which was used for the gendered division of occupations, intensified during the nineteenth century. The occupations of men were often based on physical strength, or the exercise of high public office and professions involving knowledge and power, whereas the occupations of women were more connected to dexterity and the fields of care and education. Transgression of the gendered occupational order has led to many professional “firsts” among women since the late nineteenth century, as well as to a few “firsts” among men in the early twenty-first century. Their history is closely connected to recognition of rights granted to women as well as progress towards professional equality, without however leading to equal pay.



Essen, miners in the gallery (1961), photograph by Egon Steiner



“Worker and Kolkhoz Woman,” work created in 1937 by the sculptor Vera Muchina to represent the Soviet Union at the International Exhibition of Paris. The sculpture of a woman wielding a sickle and a man wielding a hammer symbolizes the two branches of the proletariat in the form of peasants and workers, and also represents men and women, the two foundations of society, on equal footing. Source: Wikimedia Commons <https://goo.gl/gdrgmv>

On farms and in the fields, spaces and activities were distributed and specialized according to gender. Women served as washers and as caretakers of pasturage or homes, while binding vines, hoeing, and earthing up potatoes were male tasks, along with the occupation of carter. With the industrialization of European societies beginning in the eighteenth century, the transition to the factory involved men as much as it did women. In England, the chief source of industrial labour in weaving workshops (Lancashire) was women, contrary to the stereotype associating manual labour with a perpetually masculine figure. The number of men and women employed in industry varied from one production location to another. In Italy in 1876, there were two to three times more women than men in the industries of the Piedmont and Lombardy, which were often in the textile sector. Conversely, men were in the majority in the shipyards of Liguria. However, technical changes redistributed roles within industry, as did changes to how production was organized. Technical changes parcelled up work, and the emergence of machines made it possible to employ large numbers of women to carry out simple and repetitive tasks. The prestige of typographers, a masculine occupation, was the polar opposite of the unskilled and less well-paid occupations in textiles or canning, which were most often given to women. The most complex machines were reserved for men. The industrialization of mechanical tulle production during the late nineteenth century mobilized skilled men to use and repair machines, and women for less skilled tasks. At the same time, there was a decrease in the number of lace-makers as this occupation, which lent itself to feminine “taste” transformed itself into an artistic industry which preserved know-how. There were more women in Scottish coal basins than in the rest of the British coal industry. Like men they were exposed to the same risk of mortal and incapacitating accidents. While women’s bodies were damaged by carrying coal, those of men were also shaped by the hardship of working in the pits, as respiratory

illnesses weakened their bodies and stature as head of the family.

Gendered division was not restricted to relations with machines. The rise of professional training and diplomas in Europe reinforced divisions at the turn of the century. The skill level of male work increased markedly in Germany, whereas it decreased for women: unskilled female workers represented 7.1% of the female labour force in 1907, as opposed to 5.4% in 1895. In spite of co-education, including within engineering schools (beginning in 1917 in France, 1918 in Portugal, 1919 in Belgium, England, and Germany, and 1920 in Sweden and Greece), the way in which degrees were defined consolidated the gendered division of occupations: while office heads or certified public accountants were men, during the 1920s and 1930s women held subordinate positions connected to stenography in increasing numbers. Courses in home economics (cooking, ironing, housekeeping or needlework (embroidery, sewing, lingerie) could involve (future) housekeepers and mothers of families, but they also structured training networks for women's professional training for jobs in the secondary (textile industry) and tertiary sectors (care).

In the name of hygienist and natalist considerations, the first social protection laws in Western Europe chiefly concerned women, who were protected from arduous working conditions. The laws banning night work in industry for women from the mid-nineteenth century strengthened in France, the law of 1874 banned night work for young women under the age of 21, and that of 1892 extended this ban to all women, regardless of age or the hazardous nature of the work. There were major chronological differences. Swiss law established an eight-week maternity leave in 1877 and in 1878 German women obtained an unpaid mandatory leave of three weeks after birth, while in France maternity leave was established in 1909. This measure gradually extended throughout Western Europe and intensified after the First World War. However, not all female workers were covered by social protection, such as the 40% of late-nineteenth-century working women in Germany employed in agriculture as family caregivers or farm domestic workers.

Women working in masculine occupations, and more rarely men working in feminine ones (especially in occupations of care), prompted moralizing discourses that questioned femininity or masculinity. The First World War disrupted these representations in Europe, without renouncing the naturalizing discourse; the feminization of certain occupations (the arms industry, female police officers in England, postmistresses in France) and the presence of female teachers in boys' classes during the war can be explained by men being away at the front. It was neither a starting point nor a sustained trend, as women had long practiced occupations of a diverse nature, despite barriers preventing them from practicing certain ones. The end of the conflict brought a "demobilization" of women and invalidated the pattern by which women's non-salaried work at home would be followed by access to salaried work and professional activity in collective spaces. Highly qualified professions and even supervisory positions, which were essentially male-dominated, slowly opened up to women from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards and extended between the 1920s and 1970s to higher professions such as the magistracy.

During the same period, the post-Russian Revolution Soviet model was personified by the image of the worker and the Kolkhoz woman. Women were nevertheless quite widely employed in all sectors of the economy. From the 1930s to the 1960s, working hours for production in the USSR were the same for men and women at about forty hours per week, with women doing most of the household work on top of that. The Six-Year Plan implemented in Poland between 1950 and 1955, which was designed according to the Soviet model, was based on the integration of two hundred thousand women in industry per year. Those who transgressed established gender hierarchies were ultimately rare, although after 1956 the "Polish path towards socialism" rejected the female tractor driver as a heroine of work, and confined women to typically feminine positions in the textile industry or clothing factories.

In Europe more generally, the opening up of occupations to gender diversity was not well reflected in the respective proportions of the men and women who practiced them, with reversals such as the feminization of the

magistracy or the masculinization of agriculture. Despite the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000), which enshrined the principle of gender equality in all domains, this equality is not a reality with respect to pay—still unequal because equally qualified women are often paid less—nor in the composition of company boards of directors, which are often male-dominated. The same is true of the representations that are associated with occupations, as demonstrated by the gender of occupation names: while in English there is no suffix for indicating gender, in French the debate has been ongoing for a long time, as the Académie Française—to limit oneself solely to the twentieth century—began including feminine neologisms in the language in 1932 (for instance *factrice* [postmistress] and *aviatrice* [aviatrix]), but in 2014 rejected the systematic use of forms such as *professeure* [female professor], *recteure* [female school superintendent], and *sapeuse-pompier* [firewoman].

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