The girls in the shop: The productive and reproductive lives of garment millworkers.

Karen Margaret Hicks

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THE GIRLS IN THE SHOP:
THE PRODUCTIVE AND REPRODUCTIVE LIVES
OF GARMENT MILLWORKERS

by
Karen Margaret Hicks

A Thesis
Presented to the Graduate Committee
of Lehigh University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in
Social Relations

Lehigh University
1983
This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

May 3, 1983
(date)

Professor in Charge

Chairman of Department
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Abstract

Until relatively recently, women's work has been largely overlooked in serious anthropological, sociological, and economic analyses of the labor force. This thesis partially remedies the lack of attention by focusing on a particular instance of the sexual division of labor. The ethnography describes the world view of female garment millworkers in the United States and offers a first-hand insight into a set of life and work patterns that prescribe little, if any, enduring status, security, or financial reward in an occupation that employs a large segment of female blue-collar workers.

Data were collected through the method of participant observation, which included working as a floorworker in the mill. Twelve workers were identified as a representative sample of the 35 workers in the mill. The descriptions of worker attitudes and workplace organization and structure are based largely on the information acquired from structured interviews and a field journal.

The major findings include: (1) these women work because they must in order to survive, (2) millworkers are conventional regarding the definition of sex roles and their work, asserting their primacy as reproducers but devaluing their non-market, at-home economic contributions to their families, and (3) working conditions and the organization
of labor in the garment industry militate against strong work role identity and the solidarity of workers.

There are some factors this research did not take into account which may confound the findings: (1) the impact of socioeconomic status on job choice, (2) the effects of limited education and/or job training, and (3) community ethos. The thesis concludes with specific recommendations for more comprehensive research on these other variables as they may affect the work experience of women.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
The subject of this research is the meaning of work to women in the United States, specifically garment millworkers in the blue-collar world. As of 1978, women constituted approximately two-fifths of all employed persons. That number is growing larger with each year. More than 50% of all women over 18 are gainfully employed (Stromberg and Harkess 1978:x). Many women are clustered in a very narrow range of occupations compared to men. These occupations are relatively restricted to women based on societal notions of women's appropriate gender roles, such as the service and nurturant occupations of nursing, teaching, sewing, cleaning, and food preparation. In 1973, more than two-fifths of all women in the labor force were found in ten occupations. The garment industry is one of them (Stromberg and Harkess 1978:5).

Until relatively recently, women's work has been largely excluded from serious sociological and economic analysis of the labor force (Tilly and Scott 1978:64). The assumption that women's productive roles were secondary to their reproductive roles precluded looking at their labor force participation in a penetrating way. The non-market activities of women were likewise excluded from study, thus implying virtually nonexistent status to women in regard to their work contributions. Women have largely been ignored in anthropology as well (Friedl 1975:6). According to
Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974), there were only a handful of ethnographies written about women. In the last ten years, however, a new literature on the status of women, including their economic activities, has proliferated (Quinn 1977:181).

In American culture, work is a highly-elaborated concept that defines one's sense of personal worth, identity, and value. A complex division of labor is also one way that industrialized societies order social arrangements and define the statuses of their members. The work people do is of great personal and social significance. Work establishes patterns of social interaction, imposes a schedule and pattern for life, and plays an important role in helping individuals establish their identity and self-esteem (Stromberg and Harkess 1978:3).

Since women are now a significant proportion of the labor force, their experiences and contributions cannot be ignored. Many researchers have established the inequitable position of women in the labor force relative to men, including their disproportionate location in low-paying, low-status occupations [Kreps (1971), Kanter (1982), and Saffioti (1975)]. Most of these studies are statistical analyses designed to show conclusively that women are discriminated against in the labor force. Women employed in manual industrial occupations constitute 38 percent of all female workers (Baker 1978:339). Yet, there is still comparatively
little known about female working-class labor conditions.

Who are the women in blue-collar industrial and service
occupations, and what are their life situations? What are
the characteristics of their jobs? How do they get into
such work? What are their attitudes toward their jobs and
work experiences? These are the questions that guided the
course of the fieldwork described in the body of this paper.
Many early studies of factory work and its effect on the
lives of men abound in the academic literature. It is time
for new, extensive research on the attitudes, self-images,
aspirations, and problems of working-class women as well
(Baker 1978:357). As more and more women join the labor
force each year, it is urgent to describe and understand
their motivations for working, the conditions and structure
of the workplaces they enter, and the type of work that is
available to them.

The sexual division of labor has far-reaching conse-
quencies for the assignment of work roles and the organiza-
tion of human labor. Every culture must satisfy minimal
requirements for subsistence — production — and must regu-
late population growth — reproduction (Harris 1980:116).
Although it is a biological universal that women bear the
children, it is a cultural phenomenon that prescribes the
distribution of productive and reproductive roles among the
members of any cultural group. Several scholars have been
very influential in tracing the origins of the sexual di-
vision of labor and its impact on the status of women in
Western, industrialized society. Engels (1972) is one of
the first to offer an evolutionary scheme in the sexual di-
vision of labor. He delineates labor into two types:
(1) that which is of use value (subsistence, domestic, and
household labor), characteristic of most of the early
"stages" of human organization, and (2) economic activities
that are for exchange value, which was based on the concept
of surplus and cash economies. The rise of a cash economy
dichotomizes labor into use and exchange values.

Throughout most of Western history, women's primary
function was that of reproduction in the private domain.
This contrasts with labor for exchange value carried out
primarily by men in the public domain. In the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries, women's labor in pre-industrial
Europe began to link both reproduction and production, pri-
marily through the development of cottage industries, such
as needlework. A woman remained at home but assumed pro-
ductive labor activities for exchange value in the cash
economy.

The advent of industrialization changed this pattern
back to the strong disjunction between use and exchange
value corresponding to private and public spheres. Marx
traces the changes in relations of production from a peasant
agrarian society to the emergence of machines and factories which required a change in relations of production to a new mode, namely capitalism. Household and market activities were separated. Some women, particularly single women, did go to the factories, but most remained at home, trying to combine wage earnings with domestic work. In time, more women had to move out of the home and into factories for economic survival. Although their productive and reproductive activities were temporally segregated, women took on both functions. They worked for wages in the market economy while continuing reproductive work at home.

A wife's relation to capital is always a mediated one because of her primary responsibility to service the family: her relation to production is always mediated through her relation to her husband precisely through the relation of reproduction (Engels 1972:30).

In an analysis of Marx's book *Capital*, Beechy (1978) explains that married women function as a disposable and flexible labor force that serves the needs of capital. The capitalist system requires a portion of the labor force to fluctuate in and out of work in response to market conditions. This "special" feature of women has been justified because of their domestic role in the family and the assumption that housewife and mother are their primary roles (Beechy 1978:190). Such flexibility means that women will be willing to take on part-time work, will not have a
strongly developed worker consciousness, and will be horizontally mobile due to movement in and out of the labor force. As a result, women comprise a large segment of what Marx calls the industrial reserve army, a surplus population of disposable workers (Beechy 1978:187). Women's labor in the market economy is expendable and responsive to the fluctuations in the marketplace, unlike most men, whose productive labor is clearly defined as primary by the sexual division of labor. Economic specialization has evolved from a long history of notions about gender roles, the needs of the economy for labor, and the assignment of work based on the sexual division of labor.

Are these principles relevant for describing the employment trends of women in the labor force today? What impact does the societal sexual division of labor have on the garment industry and its work environment? What impact does the structure of the garment industry and the workplace environment in the mills have on the self-images of these workers? What are their self-perceptions of their identities as producers and reproducers? Are they satisfied with their productive roles? These are the basic issues addressed in this paper. This study encompasses a more holistic notion of what work means to these millworkers in the context of their lives. It also includes issues of role behavior and the effects of the organization of labor in the workplace.
As mentioned earlier, many researchers today are applying themselves to the analysis of women's work behavior. This ethnography focuses on the world view of the workers themselves and offers a first-hand insight into a set of life and work patterns that prescribe little, if any, enduring status, security, or financial reward to a large segment of female workers.

The participant-observation method was chosen as the primary approach for conducting the research. Participant-observation has been defined in different ways but is commonly regarded as "a characteristic blend or combination of methods and techniques that is employed in studying certain types of subject matter" (McCall and Simmons 1976:1). According to these authors, this blend of techniques involves social interaction in the field with the subjects of the study, directed observation of relevant events, formal and informal interviewing, some systematic counting, collection of documents, and open-endedness in the direction the study takes.

The first step of this project was to identify a blouse mill in the Slate Belt area of Pennsylvania, an area which is about thirty miles northeast of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The Slate Belt encompasses the four towns of Bangor, Roseto, Pen Argyl, and Wind Gap (see Figure 1). The project was explained to and approved by the owner of a small
REGIONAL LOCATION OF THE SLATE BELT
mill in the town of Roseto. I began working as a floor-worker in the finishing area of the mill in October, 1981, and worked on an average of two to three days a week, seven hours a day for approximately two and one-half months. I was not introduced as a researcher. I assumed a standard entry-level job and concentrated on doing my work and getting to know other workers as any new worker in the mill might. During that time I kept a detailed field journal containing both my personal reactions to the work experience and my observations of the work behavior and interactions among the workers. For the 35 workers at the mill, I assessed such demographic variables as age, sex, marital status, and ethnic background and chose a core group of 12 workers as a representative sample of informants in proportion to the demographic composition within the mill. All of these workers readily agreed to cooperate with me.

After about a month of working, I was familiar with blouse production, terminology, and work behavior. I then conducted structured interviews with the 12 informants, and toward the end of the job, I interviewed the owner ("boss") of the mill. Questions and categories were developed from my observations of work behavior in the mill and from readings in the field of industrial anthropology and sociology. Some of the relevant categories included personal life and job histories, perceptions of the work environment and hierarchy
of job roles, personal ambitions and goals in life, the impor-
tance of family obligations, attitudes toward specific jobs held, social relations with other workers, and sources of satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with the job and the mill. The interviews were conducted in the private homes of the informants except in two cases. The time length of interviews varied greatly, depending on the degree of articula-
tion and feeling of rapport that developed between the in-
formants and myself. In several cases, I had to return sev-
eral times to finish or to pursue certain topics with partic-
ularly helpful and articulate informants. No one indicated any reluctance to discuss most of the topics, and other family members were present in almost all cases. This may have affected some of the responses, however. The interviews were audio-taped in their entirety and transcribed for anal-
ysis. The informants have been given pseudonyms or numbers throughout this paper to protect their identities.

The description to follow is based largely on the in-
formation acquired from these interviews and my field jour-
nal. Additional information about the history of the in-
dustry in the area and general concepts about mill operations was obtained from readings in the field and from conversa-
tions with other mill owners and employees of other mills in the area. In fact, I pretested many of the interview ques-
tions on these other millworkers as a way of establishing
the preciseness and relevance of my questions.

There is one limitation which should be noted at this point. Although this study focuses on the meaning of work to one specific occupational group, the workers bring a variety of social positions and behaviors to work with them that are not shed at the timeclock. Since all direct research was confined to the workplace during a normal workday, a complete picture of the "social context" is not available. Although conducting the interviews in the private homes of the informants was instructive about their family contexts, most of the information about the dichotomy between work and outside life was primarily obtained in response to my direct questioning during the structured interviews. A lingering question in my mind is whether the questions relating to their families and the division of household responsibilities approximates the real events or their conceptions about their ideal notions relating to family life.

Chapter 2 outlines the workplace environment, the division of labor, and the mill operation. Chapter 3 details the basic issue of the dual functions of labor, treating the workers in the aggregate. It examines the workers' motivations for seeking and staying employed, and their larger ambitions and goals in life. Chapter 4 describes the elements of millwork and work behaviors as a
particular set of adaptations to production. Chapter 5 presents five case studies drawn from the informants of this mill for an in-depth look at different types of people who are members of this occupation. Chapter 6 contrasts millwork with another blue-collar occupation, the construction industry. Chapter 7 summarizes the meaning of work to these workers, addresses the limitations of this study and includes recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2

THE SETTING
The Garment Industry

The development of the clothing trades has a long history in the United States, beginning in earnest with the labor of arriving immigrants to New York City between 1870 and 1920. The labor force was largely Jewish and Italian (Lamphere 1979:137). Starting up in the needle trades required very little capital. Garments could be made right in the homes or in small workshops today referred to as "sweatshops." When firms grew larger around the turn of the century, family ownership and management by the Jews was common. The industry was highly competitive and business mortality rates were high. Cheap labor was readily available in the continuing waves of immigration to New York. Before and during the 1950s, some sectors of the apparel industry moved to less unionized, lower wage areas relatively close to New York City. Today, the upper management sector of garment manufacture is retained by Jews in the garment district of New York City.

In the geographical locale of this study, a similar pattern of growth is in evidence. The clothing trade in the Slate Belt began around 1930. Although the first mills were owned and operated by Jews, the trade became increasingly dominated by the population of Italians who settled in the area. They initially came to the Slate Belt to work as manual laborers in the then-booming slate industry. Family
members were and still are incorporated in the ownership and management of the mills.\footnote{The Atlantic Apparel Contractors Association directory prints the names of the owners and officers of every mill in the association.} Competition between the mills is keen and mortality of businesses reflects the intense pressure among the mill owners to stay in business. The garment mills are the largest employer in the Slate Belt area today.

The ready-to-wear apparel industry can be characterized by the following external factors: seasonal boom and slump in demand (which results in frequent lay-offs), the influence of fashion changes on demand, simple technology and capitalization, high ratio of labor cost to total costs, and a large number of small, competing firms (Lupton 1963:198). To this should be added the continual threat of total shut-down due to market economy conditions and competition from imports.\footnote{Statistics from the Atlantic Apparel Contractors Association (which are posted prominently over the timeclock) indicate that within the last two years, 55 factories in this association went out of business, resulting in the loss of 3,800 jobs. In the state of Pennsylvania within the same time limits, 40,000 workers lost their jobs in the garment industry.} These factors have a direct bearing on the social organization of labor. Although the focus of this study is on the internal structure of a specific blouse mill, it is important to note that external factors have an impact on worker attitudes and work behavior.
Another feature of the garment industry that is important to understand is its female labor force. Eighty percent of the workers are women. This industry is labor-intensive, pays low wages, and has historically practiced occupational segregation, with what small percentage of men who are employed within it getting the more skilled, higher-paying jobs (Lamphere 1979:136). Clustering women into occupations such as these is a common pattern in highly industrialized societies.

The Garment Industry in Pennsylvania

There are approximately 123,000 garment workers currently in this state. In the last two years alone, over 40,000 garment workers have lost jobs. According to statistics from the Atlantic Apparel Contractors Association, there are 344 regional "shops" in northeast Pennsylvania. These shops range in size from 20 to 100 employees. To focus on the locale of this study, there are currently 13 mills of varying size in Roseto, ranging between 21 and 51 employees, with an average of 39.8 workers per shop. Roseto has a total population of approximately 1,500 people. In the neighboring town of Bangor, there are currently 21 active

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3These statistics are from the Atlantic Apparel Contractors Association. This same report states that Pennsylvania has lost more jobs to the sunbelt than any other state.
mills, employing an average of 44 workers. Bangor's total population is 5,004. There are over 900 workers in its mills. The blouse mills are the primary employment in the Slate Belt area today.4

The Research Site

Blouseworks, Inc. (pseudonym is used throughout this paper), the site of this research, employs between 35 and 41 workers. When the fieldwork started in October, there were 35 employees. By January, there were 41 workers on the payroll. Blouseworks is located in the borough of Roseto (see Figure 2). Roseto is a town that was settled exclusively by Italian immigrants from Roseto Valfortore, Italy, around the turn of the century. Today more than 90 percent of its residents are descendents of the original immigrant population. More than 90 percent of the 34 mills in both Bangor and Roseto are owned and operated by Italian residents from Roseto.

In the Atlantic Apparel Contractors Association Directory, Blouseworks, Inc. is listed for the production of medium-priced blouses. The mills in this area sew primarily blouses, but shirts, children's wear, and other sportswear are also made. The employees of the mills in the Slate Belt

4Information is from the mayor's office in the town of Bangor.
are members of the Easton local of the ILGWU. Blouseworks is owned and operated by Joe Cisco (pseudonym), a lifelong resident of Roseto. He purchased the mill approximately five years ago. The mill had operated for at least eight years under a different name before being sold to Mr. Cisco.

Blouseworks, Inc. is a one-story building constructed of cement block. The entire building, plus driveway and a small parking area, covers an area of roughly 80' x 80' (see Figure 3). The interior of the mill is divided as follows:

1. the front room, which contains the main office, most of the sewing machines and a sorting area;
2. the back room, which contains nine sewing machines, the machine repair and equipment room and the finishing work area;
3. the shipping and receiving room, which contains racks where the finished blouses are stored for shipment; and
4. the cutting room, which contains the mammoth cutting tables where cloth is "spread," "cut," and "split," and a small area where the owner has a desk.

---

5. There are 127 shops in this local and it covers all the towns in the Slate Belt, as well as Bath, Easton, Nazareth, and the Stroudsburgs.
6. These rooms are labeled according to terminology used by the workers when referring to different areas in the mill.
PHYSICAL LAYOUT OF BLOUSEWORKS, INC.
It should be mentioned here that, in general, work-space is severely limited and small. Stacks of blouse parts in all phases of production can be found on top of every available table or shelf, wherever space exists. Intermixed along the walls on shelves above and below worktables are spools of thread, buttons, scissors, and all accessories that are used in the garment construction. The sewing operators are sandwiched between the piles of their piece-work on one side, another operator on the other, and bins in front of their machines that catch their work as it passes through the machines. It is a cluttered, hectic, and noisy environment.

**Division of Labor**

There are at least three ways to categorize the workers at the mill. The first way to divide them is according to their job roles. The basic distinction here is between machine operators and floorworkers. The organization of labor and the consequences of this organization are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The second dimension for categorizing workers is by salary computation -- whether they are piece-rate or time-rate workers. The latter are paid a straight hourly wage and receive yearly increases set by the ILGWU. The piece-rate workers receive a base hourly wage (which is lower than
the hourly wage the time-rate workers get) but, in addition, their "output" is calculated by a set formula. Their weekly wage is determined by their production for the whole week. The worker must exceed the base hourly wage for the week in order to "make out," i.e., to earn her piece-rate. Almost all machine operators are piece-rate workers and floorworkers are all time-rate workers.

After the union contract negotiations in 1980, all operators were forced to go on piece-rate. The owners of the mills -- who all belong to the Atlantic Apparel Contractors Association -- felt that the time-rate increases being demanded by the union were excessive. By putting the operators on piece-rate, they could avoid across-the-board pay increases. Prior to this, the women could choose to be on either piece-rate or time-rate. After this contract in 1980, the women effectively received no increase at all because piece-rate workers do not receive the automatic pay increases that time-rate workers do. They are paid an entirely different base hourly wage (lower than straight time-rate workers do). Where many operators preferred to be on straight time-rate in the past and could count on a set salary, the pressure is now on to "make out" at piece-rate. Making the piece-rate is further complicated by two things: (1) the workers are often shifted from job to job, which interrupts the momentum necessary for developing skill and
speed, and (2) it is a relatively common practice for these mills to close down for one day a week. Since piece-rate is calculated on the week's work, this loss of time cannot be made up.

The last dimension for categorizing workers at this mill is by gender. At the time of this study, there were only four men working in the mill. Two of them were floor-workers in the back room. They were both men under the age of 21. The third man was the "cutter," one of the highest paying mill jobs. This man was also the brother-in-law of the owner. The owner was the fourth man at the mill. He was on the floor during the entire length of this study. He was involved in direct supervision of the work flow, job assignments, and reprimands. The mill hierarchy is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The Flow of Operations

The entire blouse is constructed and produced inside the mill. The retailer contracting with the mill provides all materials used in blouse production, including fabric, thread, buttons, and any other accessories required for its completion. The retailer contracts with the mill owner for the labor involved. In the words of another mill owner in the area who was interviewed during this project, the owner is selling the labor of his workers to the manufacturer.
Although each style varies somewhat due to seasonal and fashion changes, the only continuing adjustments to new contracts involve designating machine operators for specific steps in the production. Variations in style are one reason it is hard to automate this industry. Most mills regularly contract with the same retailers and get accustomed to their specifications.

Before a contract is agreed upon, a sample blouse is made up for approval by the retailer. A specifications sheet is provided by the retailer and includes such requirements as widths of seam allowances, distance between buttons, where to press creases, etc. A sample specification is shown in Figure 4. Although some operators have steady job assignments, it is often necessary to change many of them around due to the changes of the new style, e.g., not needing someone to sew cuffs on short-sleeve blouses.

The sequence of operations for the current blouse style being produced during this fieldwork follows. Figure 5 can be followed along while reading the description of each step. Numbers on the chart correspond to the steps outlined in the text.

1. The spreader aligns the bolts of fabric along the full length of the cutting table and separates a predetermined number of layers which will later be "split" into
SAMPLE SPECIFICATIONS SHEET
### SAMPLE SPECIFICATIONS SHEET

**Apparel**

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**Fabric Content**

- Percentages: 100% 16/11

**Measurements**

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**Thread Information**

- Chart

**Pressing Instructions**

- Chart

**Package**

- Chart

**Labor for Self Thin**

- Chart

**Sleeve Binding & Attachment**

- Chart

**Sample Specifications Sheet**

- Chart
FIGURE 5
THE FLOW OF OPERATIONS
bundles.

2. The pattern pieces are then laid onto the top layer of material. Various sizes of the same style can be laid along the full length of this material.

3. The cutter uses the special cutting machine to cut the pattern pieces apart. This machine is one of the major pieces of equipment in the mill. Precision and accuracy in cutting is the most crucial aspect of this operation.  

4. The splitter takes the cut fabric and separates it into "bundles" and then tags these bundles into "lots" according to size, color shade, and specific blouse parts.

5. The collars and cuffs are assembled. If the collar has a lining, it is pressed together. Then the collar is prehemmed, lining side up. It is then "sewn out" and turned right side out. The cuff is also sewn out, edge-stitched, and turned right side out.

6. The front plackets are assembled. First the lining of each placket is "merrowed." (Merrowing is the over-
lock stitch which interlocks the seams and finishes off the seam so the edges won't fray.) Then the two front plackets are pieced together and merrowed. Next they are sewn 10 inches down through both sides and finally these finished pieces get cut apart.

7. The yokes are pieced together on a merrow machine. This phase can go on simultaneously while collars, cuffs, and plackets are being assembled.

8. The three labels (size, company I.D., and care instructions) are set onto the middle back of the blouse.

9. The sleeve fronts and backs are hemmed and joined together on the merrow machine.

10. The yoke is shirred to the body. Shirring is the process whereby a larger piece of material must be gathered and fit onto a smaller piece.

11. The yokes are edge-stitched down.

12. The placket is set into the blouse front.

13. The collar is set onto the body of the blouse.

14. The collar is edge-stitched.

15. The collar is "stitched down." Stitch down is the term for the process of fastening the collar to the body and completely closing it.

16. The sides of the blouse are closed.

17. The vents (slits along the bottom side seam) are part-closed and notched.
18. The vents are "sewn out," i.e., finished.
19. The bottom of the blouse is blindstitched (hemmed).
20. The blouse must be turned right side out.
21. The buttonholes are made.
22. The buttons are sewn on.

The sequence of operations in the finishing process is continued in the back room.

23. Certain parts of the blouse get pressed first.
24. The trimmer clips off all loose strings and checks for damage.
25. The blouse fronts are buttoned, and a straight pin is inserted just below the collar.
26. The company's hang tags are inserted into the cuff or sleeve.
27. The blouses are steam pressed and hung onto hangers.
28. Another size tag is hung around the hanger itself, and often the blouse is "clipped." (A plastic clip pinches the blouse backs together.)
29. The "bagger" slides a plastic bag over the top of each blouse.
30. The blouses move to the shipping/receiving room where they are counted and verified for shipment.

The assignment of job roles and the effect of this
organization of labor on work behavior and social organization within the mill is discussed in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 3

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS
Introduction

The historical association between women and their labor in the factory system was outlined in Chapter 1. This present chapter explores the reproductive and productive choices and activities among the specific group of workers in this study.

In all subsequent tables, numbers instead of names have been assigned to each informant in order to preserve the confidentiality of data. Each number is assigned consistently to the same person in all the tables. These numbers also correspond to the demographic summary of all informants found in Appendix A.

Reasons for Working

In reviewing the literature on women in the labor force, there has been a significant departure in understanding their employment phenomenon over the last thirty years. Earlier books on the sociology of work are inadequate and incomplete in their treatment of women, specifically blue-collar workers. The most comprehensive study of women in the work force in the late 1950s was undertaken by Robert Smuts. He states then that most working women work to feel useful and important and not because they need the money (Smuts 1959:148). More recently, research points to the fact that most women who work, especially those hold-
ing blue-collar and service jobs, do so because they must (Baker 1978:345).

Table I outlines the relation of worker income to financial need among the sample of workers included in this study. The reasons listed on this table are responses given by the informants during direct questioning in interviews with each. In summarizing information from this table, it is clear that 75 percent of these workers must work for economic survival, for themselves and their families, whether married or divorced. The following statement typifies the responses.

I work to live. I have no choice because I am really the breadwinner. It's up to me now to pay all the bills.

This confirms the more recent findings of Baker on the nature of female employment in blue-collar occupations. "Manual female workers are often the sole support of themselves and their families" (Baker 1978:344).

In spite of the fact that these workers cite the economic pressures as their primary motivation for employment, they do talk about other reasons that are important to them, particularly the need to escape the boredom of the house. The following comments are standard responses:

I feel better about myself now that I've gotten out of the house and gone to work. I was really starting to get crazy in the house.

The drudgery of the everyday housewife? Forget it! I don't need to wash clothes every day and scrub the floor. That's not my bag!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code #</th>
<th>Main Reason For Working</th>
<th>Other Reasons</th>
<th>Definition of Income Relative to Survival</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>help out with the bills</td>
<td>feel better</td>
<td>supplementary</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>for the kids</td>
<td>household expenses</td>
<td>supplementary</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>to support self</td>
<td>car, trips, extras</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>single*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>head of household</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>for the money</td>
<td>long-term commitment to job</td>
<td>supplementary</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>head of household</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>to pay the bills</td>
<td>to get out of house</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>to pay the bills</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>head of household</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>to pay the bills</td>
<td>to prepare for the future</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>single*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>head of household</td>
<td>to get out of house</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>head of household</td>
<td>to get out of house</td>
<td>essential</td>
<td>divorced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = still living in parent's home
NA = no answer (no other reason given)
How is the decision to go to work made? In eight of the twelve cases, the decision was made by the worker independently. In the other four cases, the decision was made by the worker and her husband. The decisions were all based on economic considerations. If money is the impetus, then how is the alternative of not working (in the paid labor force) viewed? In response to the question of whether or not they would prefer to stay home, ten out of the twelve informants flatly reject that condition.

No way! It would drive me crazy. When I have a day off, I just feel so useless.

That would be boring after working now all my life.

A more thorough understanding of the juxtaposition of work and home will follow in the sections below.

Choosing Millwork for Employment

These workers choose millwork for two major reasons: (1) compared to other employment prospects in the area relative to their job skills and educational backgrounds, millwork is the highest-paying job that is available; and (2) millwork is convenient to their family obligations and responsibilities. Table II presents a comprehensive picture of this dimension. It is observed that nine out of the twelve workers have tried other types of employment
How is the decision to go to work made? In eight of the twelve cases, the decision was made by the worker independently. In the other four cases, the decision was made by the worker and her husband. The decisions were all based on economic considerations. If money is the impetus, then how is the alternative of not working (in the paid labor force) viewed? In response to the question of whether or not they would prefer to stay home, ten out of the twelve informants flatly reject that condition.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Age at entry</th>
<th>Reason for choosing millwork</th>
<th>Other job experience</th>
<th>Other goals, aims</th>
<th>Highest grade completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>good pay, flexible hours for family</td>
<td>office work</td>
<td>office work</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>convenient to family schedule</td>
<td>beautician</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>good hours and pay</td>
<td>beautician, medical transcription</td>
<td>medical transcription</td>
<td>12+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>14.</td>
<td>only job available</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>desirable but undefined</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>only job available</td>
<td>beautician</td>
<td>none but would like to finish high school diploma</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>best-paying job given skills</td>
<td>waitressing</td>
<td>finish college, own a mill</td>
<td>12+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>best-paying job available</td>
<td>landscape design</td>
<td>own a floral business</td>
<td>12+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>only job available</td>
<td>nurse's aide</td>
<td>finish high school, get a job using &quot;mind&quot;</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>best-paying job for need to have steady income</td>
<td>beautician</td>
<td>undefined but to pursue something at the community college</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>best-paying job for present needs</td>
<td>floraculture</td>
<td>own a small floral business</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>only job available</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>only job available</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>nursing</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
but they all prefer millwork because it provides the best salary in the local area. Yet nine out of the twelve informants desire to do something other than millwork. Others are content to stay in the mills. Long service or lack of other job skills precludes changing their employment patterns.

How did these workers get started in the mills? There are many common threads in the initiation of their employment in the textile industry. Most of these women typify the class and sex patterns common in larger, urban areas of blue-collar employment. Like men, women workers follow the class patterns of their parents. Many women currently employed in manual jobs were born into working-class or poor families (Baker 1978:345). In the sample of this study, that trend is also present.

From the information presented in Tables II and III, it seems apparent that the majority of these workers have limited employment options due to either their educational backgrounds, lack of career training, or class patterns. The labor market entry process for these workers conforms to repetitive factors found by Baker.

While it is somewhat exaggerated to say that young working-class girls are their own worst enemy when it comes to career preparation, their traditional aspirations, self-images, and adult role expectations do not help them face the realities of a long work life and the possibility of supporting a family alone (Baker 1978:355).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code #</th>
<th>Relatives in millwork</th>
<th>Relative who brought worker into mill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>husband, brother, brothers-in-law, niece</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>mother, sister, aunts</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>father, sister, sister-in-law</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>mother, sisters</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>mother, brother, husband</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>cousin, mother-in-law</td>
<td>sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>cousins</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>mother, grandmother, aunts, cousins</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>mother, aunt, cousins</td>
<td>cousin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>mother, sisters, sister-in-law, aunts</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among the older women who dropped out of school at the end of eighth grade (in the 1920s and 1930s compulsory education in the area stopped at age 14), the following statement is often heard.

I started work at the end of eighth grade, when I was 14. My mother didn't really believe in much education. We didn't need it. That was the attitude. I had signed up for ninth grade but my mother said no, she's a girl, she don't got to go.

Of the younger women who dropped out of school to get married, a common explanation of their entry to the mills includes the fact that it was the only thing they knew they could get hired for.

Two other factors that are important to the employment patterns of these workers and people in the Slate Belt area in general are the settlement patterns of the families and their continuing commitment to permanent residence there. The garment industry in the Slate Belt draws its workers almost exclusively from the immediate local area. There are very few commuters to the mills from other towns. Among the sample in this study, only two workers live outside the Slate Belt area. Ten of the twelve informants were born and raised in the Slate Belt. These workers attended local schools for their entire educational histories, and their families have been permanent residents of the area. These people are firmly committed to the area and plan to spend their lifetimes there. When asked about
their future employment plans if the mills should close down (a constant threat to garment workers), the responses indicate that they would try to get by as best as they could. Half of the informants would not relocate if they lost their present jobs. Four of the twelve would not commute outside the Slate Belt area. Only two of the respondents would consider relocating at this time, and these two are also single and have vocational training in other job skills. Given the context of this community, millwork may be called a localized occupation.

In summary, there are several socioeconomic factors that influence the choice of millwork in this area. These workers are socialized into millwork because of the class patterns of their families, because their relatives act as intermediaries facilitating their entry to the labor force, because their educational backgrounds limit their job options, and finally, because their enduring commitment to permanent residency in the Slate Belt constrains other employment options. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the garment industry is the largest employer in the area. That is an important external factor that makes millwork a natural and readily-available employment option.
Defining Jobs and Careers

These workers think seriously about the meaning of work in their lives and their other goals and options (see Table II). It is interesting to consider their perceptions of jobs and careers and to relate this information to their reasons for working at their present jobs. Table IV contrasts their definitions of jobs and careers. Their definitions of a "job" corresponds to their primary motivation for working in the paid labor force. There is a clear dichotomy between "jobs" defined as necessary drudgery and careers as something based on personal talents and interests that are enjoyable.

By referring back to Table II, it is clear that among this sample of workers, ten would prefer to have careers, or to do work that is satisfying and personally rewarding to them. Of all the informants in this study, only one ever refers to liking her present employment for its own sake.

If you like your job and can do it every day with your eyes closed practically, then it's not a job. I don't consider it a job. To me, it's something I like to do.

On the whole, these workers would choose work that is more personally rewarding to them at some future point when, and if, their needs for financial survival were diminished.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code #</th>
<th>Definition of &quot;JOB&quot;</th>
<th>Definition of &quot;CAREER&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 **</td>
<td>What you have to do but don't necessarily enjoy...It's not rewarding.</td>
<td>Something you enjoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 **</td>
<td>Working in a mill</td>
<td>A profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 **</td>
<td>A place to earn money</td>
<td>What you work for as a student and enjoy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 **</td>
<td>It's work...staying in one place.</td>
<td>Not a job. You don't do the same thing. You move around.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 **</td>
<td>Something to earn a living and provide for material things to survive.</td>
<td>A field to stay in and succeed to the fullest and be happy doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 **</td>
<td>What you work at regardless if you like it or not</td>
<td>What you choose to do and like to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 **</td>
<td>What anybody can do. It's nothing hard.</td>
<td>Something with training and a challenge and advancement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 **</td>
<td>Something that must be done as a chore or for money</td>
<td>A position or goal an individual sets in their life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 **</td>
<td>Something we do because some of us need to have a job. We might not like it but we need it.</td>
<td>What we enjoy and a means for making money</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** = This person defines their present employment as a job.
NA = This person did not answer this question which was asked as a follow-up to the main interview.
Productive vs. Reproductive Roles

If these workers must "work" for a living, and if they prefer to be in the labor force instead of being full-time homemakers, then what value do they give to their roles and identities as workers relative to their roles and responsibilities at home? When asked to rank order a list of the most common roles in the spectrum of their lives, the following pattern emerges in Table V.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Rank order of roles — from most important to least important</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>wife, mother, sister, friend, daughter, worker</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>mother, wife, sister, worker, neighbor</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>daughter, sister, friend, student, worker</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>wife, mother, daughter, friend, nurse, worker</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>mother, worker, friend, sister, daughter, businesswoman</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, worker</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>mother, wife, sister, daughter, worker</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>mother, wife, worker</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>servant, son, brother, friend, worker</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>mother (incomplete information)</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>mother, daughter, sister, friend, worker</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M = married    S = single    D = divorced    NA = not answered

Note: The basic categories given were: daughter, sister, friend, wife, mother, worker (except in case 10). Other choices listed in their answers were solicited from each informant to be added and ranked by them. The words were given in random order.
From studying the table, it is evident that 75 percent of these workers do not identify themselves importantly as workers. On the contrary, identities as workers are consistently low in the self-described perceptions of these informants. In reviewing the reasons these workers give for their participation in the labor force, this trend is consistent. It is clear from Table V and Table I that family responsibilities are foremost in their decision-making and carrying out the economic necessities of survival. The high value placed on their roles as wives and mothers confirms the findings and theories of women in the labor force conducted by many other researchers, e.g., Smuts, Baker, Beechy, Marx.

Workers in this sample have dual roles — that of producer and reproducer. Their families' survival is their motivation for their entrance to the paid labor force. As unstable and unsatisfactory as these working conditions are personally to these women, they do adapt to them out of their urgent responsibilities to their family commitments.

This conclusion also presents an interesting contradiction. Although they feel obliged to seek employment in the labor force and do not identify strongly with the role of worker, they prefer the structure of their jobs to that of staying home in their role as reproducer. They have noted their primary identity in the role ranking of Table V.
It is difficult to generalize about the reason for this. Would the role ranking be different if these workers were involved in jobs (or careers) to which they personally aspire? Does their present employment have more intrinsic value for them than they admit to? This study does not answer these questions conclusively. Many of the comments in the interviews allude to a personal void that is characteristic of the work itself.

I would like a better job. I can't say that a mill is a lower form but I feel that in a mill, anyone can do the job. It's nothing hard. I would like a challenge, something where I could say I really accomplished something ... where in the mill, I just go in.

Baker's findings do not seem to approach the trend found among this group of workers. Nearly half of the blue-collar women in her study report that they like the "intrinsic" aspects of the job, e.g., the work itself, the potential for self-development, the promotion possibilities, etc. (Baker 1978:364). However, a few paragraphs further, she admits that little systematic in-depth research is currently available on manual women workers' subjective feelings about their jobs and the meaning of work to them. The potential for self-development and promotion alluded to by Baker are negligible for this group of workers.

In summary, the responses to the categories that deal with personal aims, role-ranking, and direct questioning about satisfaction in present and projected jobs indicate
that these workers do not choose work for personal reasons or self-interests, as Smuts (1959) suggests. Rather, they, like their husbands, work out of economic necessity. Despite this, women in the garment industry value their role in the family far above their role in the labor force.

Although this study is basically confined to female garment workers, these remarks are not meant to imply that only women are faced with these concerns about productive and reproductive activities. Future research on this topic should be broadened to survey both unskilled and skilled labor and productive and reproductive decisions and activities of both men and women.
CHAPTER 4

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF WORK
Introduction

Every occupation has a set of social behaviors that are required of its workers. Work situations are characterized by norms, rituals, customs, rewards, and sanctions (Neff 1968:9). The social organization of millwork, as in other blue-collar occupations, leads to a distinctive occupational subculture.

There are several basic features of millwork alluded to in Chapter 2 that bear repeating in order to enhance the understanding of the social organization within this mill. First, most of these mills are small and are characterized by independent ownership. They are compelled by the nature of the capitalistic market economy to be fiercely competitive with other mills in order to secure contracts with the large manufacturers in New York City. Second, the nature of the garment industry itself — the rapidly and constantly changing nature of fashion design — requires the mills to respond quickly in order to remain competitive. Their basic adaptation to this compulsion is to be labor-intensive instead of technologically-oriented. Only the larger factories with secure and steady contracts can afford to "modernize" their operation with automated machinery.

Coupled with the above factors is the seasonal aspect of garment production — peak and slack periods which require adjustments in the labor force. This often results
in lay-offs or instant demand for a supply of labor. These workers must shape their lives around the vagaries of the industry. And finally, the garment industry in America is severely threatened by competition from foreign imports. This is cutting into domestic production and profits and poses the potential for total shutdown of production. Given these elements and the general socioeconomic climate that prevails and plagues all American industry today, these workers must struggle just to maintain their standard of living with little chance of improvement.

Job Roles and Their Effects on Work Behavior

There are two general classifications of workers in the mill: (1) machine operators, and (2) floorworkers. Machine operators do tasks that are confined to individual sewing steps in blouse production. The operators are primarily located at the machines in the "front room." These tasks are numerically sequenced in Figure 6 and are executed in the following order:

1. collar and cuffs
2. plackets
3. yoke stitching
4. labels
5. sleeves
6. shirring
7. cuffs
8. edgestitching
9. collar setting and edgestitching
10. collar stitch down
11. closing
12. part-closing vents
FIGURE 6
13. sewing out vents
14. blindstitching (hemming)
15. buttonholing
16. buttonsewing

Floorworkers do all of the non-sewing jobs. Most of these workers are located in the "back room." These tasks, in order of assembly sequence and continuing from the sewing operations are:

17. pressing
18. trimming
19. buttoning
20. tagging
21. clipping
22. bagging
23. counting and inventory

A separate category within the floorworkers is the "floorgirl." This person has a critical and very strategic job. It has several parts: (1) "taking out the work," which means to take the blouse parts out of the bins in front of each operator as they push their pieces through the machines and it accumulates in the bins; (2) "laying up the work," which means laying the pieces in proper alignment for the next sewing operation; and (3) distributing the work from one operator to another. The floorgirl moves constantly from machine to machine, keeping an eye out for overflow in the bins and bottlenecks along the assembly sequence. She also sees that the operators are steadily supplied with their piecework. From studying the flow of operations in Figure 6, it is easy to see that this person
covers a considerable area throughout the mill and that
during peak production times must hustle to keep up with
the demands of the operators.

The remaining job roles in this mill are:

A. the cutter
B. the floorlady (or foreman, if a male)
C. the secretary-bookkeeper
D. the boss (who is also the owner of the mill)

After considering the elaboration of job roles and the
flow of operations from the beginning to the end of produc-
tion, an appreciation for the coordination of all the tasks
necessary to "put out the work" is gained. When work must
be articulated closely to a number of others, a consistent
output has to be maintained to avoid bottlenecks and delays.
The work must flow smoothly through each unit. The nature
of garment production in a labor-intensive operation is
both individualistic and cooperative and has important con-
sequences for work behavior.

Occupational Colleagueship

Walter Neff outlines an important aspect of the social
organization of work called "occupational colleagueship"
(Neff 1968:31). Colleagues exhibit commonalities in their
deportment, dress, speech, work behavior, and attitudes

1At the time of the fieldwork, there was no official
floorlady. The boss was acting as foreman. This will be
discussed in detail under the section "Mill Hierarchy."
toward their work. There are subtle discriminations of who is marginal and who is a full colleague among workers in any occupation. At Blouseworks, Inc., full colleagueship is measured and gained by a willingness and effort to put out a fair share of work. In a job that requires such intense eye concentration on the task, it is amazing how little escapes the veterans sitting and sewing at their machines. Acceptance into this colleagueship is gained after careful observation of a novice's work behavior by the veterans. One episode described in an interview crystallizes this phenomenon.

When I came here, I had to prove myself to the girls. One day there was a 'lot' that needed repairs when it got to me, so I just did it. I didn't complain. It slowed me way down, but I had to swallow it and get it done before we could continue. After that, I was all right in their eyes.

Critical analysis of each other's skills is made as the blouse parts move down the assembly sequence. A blouse that needs repairs is going to cost time and money not only to the owner but to the other workers whose paychecks may suffer from being slowed down. Workers who don't keep a sharp eye out for repairs, who don't respond to the others' need for steadily-supplied work and who aren't particularly attentive to the quality of their work are targets of resentment and classified as marginal colleagues.

Although the ideal among these workers is to put out the work and to have a considerable skill at doing so, it
is not always met. From observations made during the fieldwork, variations in speed and skill were noticed. The workers respond differently to these pressures. Some workers were unconcerned about the rate at which they worked. Others exhibited considerable nervous tension to put out so as not to slow the next operator. Still others worked more skillfully than their peers and were willing to pitch in to help those who were not capable of working so fast. For an occupation that requires no skill training upon entry, it becomes important for the worker to acquire adeptness at the machine. There are also workers who are "trying their best" but cannot keep up with the frantic pace. In spite of some genuine difficulty with the nature of the work, e.g., lack of manual dexterity or poor hand-eye coordination, it is still possible to gain full colleague-ship. Working hard is highly valued among these workers. The discrimination of who is marginal and who is a full colleague hinges on the willingness of each worker to make the production process go as smoothly as possible.

The Work Persona

Other dimensions of the social organization outlined by Neff are details of dress and grooming, style and content of speech, deportment, and the ability to relate to peers, subordinates, and superiors (Neff 1968:31). These
factors all contribute to a profile of the "work persona."

It is virtually impossible to distinguish different job roles among the workers by the way they dress. As one may suspect, the nature of the work lends itself to the most casual attire. Comfortable slacks and sweatshirts or blousetops are the order of the day. A skirt or dress is only part of the "uniform" of the secretary. Sitting on very uncomfortable stools demands the least restrictive clothing. The informal expectations that the workers have of each other also requires that none distinguishes herself from the rest. Jewelry, hairdos, and make-up are simple to non-existent. These markers of informality are important to the colleagueship.

There were subtle indicators of differences. Some workers consistently came in to work looking like they had just rolled out of bed. Others came in neat, ironed clothing. The most distinguishing marker of clothing was worn by the mill owner. Although he worked in the mill daily, he wore expensive European-cut shirts and heavy gold jewelry. He dressed in basically casual attire, but not without marking his special status.

Deportment on the job is another element that shapes work behavior. This work demands intense hand-eye coordination. The slightest abrupt or startling movement can interrupt the work flow of an operator and break the con-
centration necessary for piecework. Although the shop is quite noisy with the action of the machines, the workers have a subdued and quiet way of moving about. When tensions ripple through the mill, they are difficult to observe in overt behavior. The nervous energy or aggravations that mount have a natural outlet in transference from the worker to the work on the machine in front of her.

In spite of the noise and pace of the workplace, the workers subtly cue in to the movements, tensions, and pressures of the others. As mentioned earlier, they monitor the behavior of the others with their eyes. They know who goes to the bathroom too often (and at what times), when the boss is on the horizon or nearby (and exactly what he's doing there), who is in a bad mood, etc. They also have an early warning system that ripples in cryptic messages sent from machine to machine. The floorgirls, while laying up or taking out work in the bins in front of each machine, act as messengers between workers. They carry news, warnings, lunch menus, or just plain gossip from one worker to another throughout the day. Those who are not full colleagues are simply omitted from this chain of information.

It must be pointed out that there is a basic difference in the work style between the front and the back rooms. At the big work tables in the back room, there is much more
face-to-face interaction and freedom of movement. These workers also stand up. They may observe each other's work progress directly. Most of the jobs are interchangeable at any given moment and they frequently "pitch in" to help others out when work gets stacked up. This group of workers evidences the most "solidarity" in the mill. They are congenial and cooperative with each other. They do not monitor the behavior of the operators. In fact, they cannot even detail the assembly sequence of sewing very well.

Shop language is not very complex or technical. Although there is some terminology and vocabulary frequently used when communicating, it evolves from ordinary speech and can be understood easily by any novice. A worker must "put out" and "make out," i.e., make her piece-rate. The most distinguishing feature of the language that I noticed is the way they refer to each other. They are all "girls," no matter what their ages. All the males in the shop are "men," however. The men refer to the females as "girls."

During the course of a workday (which starts at 7:30 A.M. and ends at 3:00 P.M.), there is only one break — the lunchbreak from 12:00 to 12:30. This is the only time when conversations are allowed or even possible, yet the content is consistently the same: weekend plans (past and future), the children, the boss, the soaps, the next church bazaar, etc.
Social Relations Among the Workers

One useful element in trying to assess the cohesion-ness of this occupational group is to look at the patterns of their personal relations with each other, both on and off the job. What is the extent and/or the variability of their networks? What are the commonalities among them? How do they interact with each other? Table VI is a representation of their notions about their relationships with each other, along with factual information that may contribute to an understanding of the extent (or lack) of their friendships. The two categories of "acquaintances" and "friends" were generated and distinguished by the informants during the course of the interviews.

There is great variability in their notions about the relationships they have with each other. Some admit to being outgoing and friendly and their estimates reflect that. Others qualified their numbers with their attitudes about staying out of other people's business. This overlay of personality characteristics and attitudes about how to relate to other people generally compounds the problem of determining the extent of their solidarity as a working group.

Their mobility within this industry is also a factor in their personal relationships. The mobility may result in a far-flung network of friendships that links workers
TABLE VI

EXTENT OF SOCIAL NETWORK WITHIN THE MILL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code #</th>
<th>Number of acquaintances</th>
<th>Number of friends</th>
<th>Length of work at present job</th>
<th>Total number of mills worked in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>1 year**</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7 years**</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>4 years**</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2 years**</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2 years**</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>half</td>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>half</td>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>6 years**</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>half</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>2 years**</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = no answer to question

** = came to present mill because friend or relative works here
from firm to firm but does not necessarily insure close
relationships with each other at any particular site.

Direct observation during the fieldwork supports
the notion that there is not a generalized, cohesive social
unit in this mill. There are smaller groups that relate
closely to each other, however. Due to the concentrated
eye-hand coordination of the work, the loud machinery, and
a blaring radio, socialization during the workday is mini-
mal. The lunchbreak is the only time for extended inter-
action. Although the workers have adapted to passing
gossip, information, jokes, etc., while at their tasks,
this method is spotty, unpredictable, and difficult to
sustain. The lunchbreak has a particular, repetitive
structure. Figure 7 shows the pattern of lunch groupings.
(There is no lunchroom at the mill.)

There are basically two core groups that routinely
cluster in two very separated areas of the mill. These
two groups have a distinctive composition. The lunch
group in the back room have several things in common.
They are almost entirely of the local, Roseto Italian
community. They all seem to have some personal connection
with the boss -- either they are a friend or relative of
the family. Their conversations are replete with church
activities and kin-related people they all know in common.
They often bring in some type of Italian food "treat" that
FIGURE 7

- INDIVIDUALS WHO EAT STANDING UP
- INDIVIDUALS WHO EAT SITTING DOWN
--- AREA OCCUPIED BY A WHOLE GROUP
they pass around to each other. The two women who stand up at the edge of the table near this group also tend to join in to their conversations and joking often.

The lunch group in the front room are primarily machine operators from the front room. Some of them sit at their own machines and the others join at nearby vacated machines. They are, on the whole, the younger women. There are many heads of households. They are primarily workers of Pennsylvania Dutch (German) backgrounds. It is a lively group. They primarily discuss their children, the latest jokes, and the soaps.

Both groups discuss aggravations or problems affecting production in the mill. There is much speculation about the mood the boss is in and when the next lay-off will occur. It is difficult to separate the composition of these groups by their job roles. There are floorworkers and operators in both groups. There are certain times when members of each group mingle with each other, generally for common purposes such as selling raffle tickets, distributing Avon orders or the like.

About half of the workers in this mill do not join in either of these groups. Some go home for lunch. At

---

2 I became part of this group during most of my fieldwork.
3 None of the men stay in the mill for lunch.
least one worker ate out in her car. Figure 7 also shows individual workers or pairs who sit elsewhere in the mill, either sitting at machines or standing at the edge of a table. In summary, it is not readily discernible that there is a significant degree of common interactions among these workers during the only available time for socializing.

A survey of their off-the-job interactions also confirms a limited socialization pattern with each other. A Christmas party is the only event during the year when most of them come together away from the mill. Although there are small groups who may seek each other out for companionship and outside interests, there is great variability in this pattern. By and large, most of their personal relationships revolve around their kin groups, friends from high school, or friends from other mills.

The productive process does not clearly define the social and personal relationships of these workers with each other. If there is a common bond in a generalizable sense, it appears to be their colleagueship as millworkers. Although this is a localized industry, there are clear-cut divisions based on ethnic and cultural differences that are also characteristic of the local community. Their mobility within the industry may also disrupt the establishment of close, personal ties. The occupational colleague-
ship mediates the commonalities that do exist at a more distant level. These networks are important to them for the ease of securing employment at the very least.

**Competition vs. Cooperation**

The spirit of the social organization among this group of workers brings up a basic distinction between colleagueship and solidarity. The preceding sections have sketched a social context of millwork that contains considerable elements of colleagueship. This factor certainly brings with it certain behaviors that are desirable and complementary to the nature of the work itself, i.e., a carefully coordinated system of production for the manufacture of clothing. It is not clear that the mill actually operates cohesively. There are factors that militate against solidarity. The particular nature of the assembly process aggravates rather than enhances cooperation. Although the production requires close articulation of work for swift and continuous flow of operation, it is not always forthcoming. Some workers are faster than others. Some are methodical and insist on precision more than speed. Some are just not adept at tasks which require manual dexterity. Since the operators work on piece-rate, they must be continuously supplied with work in order to make their rate.

Table VII confirms the notion of cooperation that is
desirable work behavior. The comments are a result of direct questioning about whether or not working in the mill requires cooperation with the other workers.

### TABLE VII

**NOTION OF COOPERATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code #</th>
<th>Does your work require cooperation with others?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It has to be. If someone has an off day, it affects everybody.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>You have to. If too many are out sick, it ruins everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>We all pitch in to get a 'lot' out. When we're caught up, we help the others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I have to be busy because I have to keep the others in work, too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>That's the only way to get ahead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>It should be that way but it doesn't always happen, especially if we have a lot of repairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>It should be, but at this mill it isn't.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>You have to do your share. We all have to give our best for the end product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>We all work together and pitch in to help out someone who may be behind in their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I really don't think about it. You're just doing your job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I don't bother anybody. I'm there. I do my job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = not answered
During the participant observation stage of this fieldwork, I observed the entire range of behavior expressed by the comments in Table VII. I have already referred to aspects of this variation under the discussion of colleagueship. Irritations and job pressures often mount if someone in the chain is not putting out their fair share. If someone ahead of you is grabbing work out of your bin, or if you must wait for someone behind you to put it out faster for you, tempers may flare and resentments may erupt. The irony of the situation is that while the orchestration of related steps in the production line is critical to insuring the maximum profit to both the owner and the workers of the mill, the individualistic nature of each task or the work behavior of the operator seems to interfere or impede the process. The delicate balance of intense, individual concentration and close articulation with others is often not met.

Mill Hierarchy and Its Effect on Work Behavior

In any organization, there is a hierarchical structure imposed to insure the smooth operation and coordination of all constituent parts toward a common goal. The formal hierarchical structure in this mill tends to be limited and not highly elaborated. Figure 8 sketches the formal organization structure of Blouseworks, Inc.
In a hierarchical system of organization, there are certain members who are invested with decision-making authority over others. At the time of this fieldwork, the boss was the only formal figure with this power. He made all decisions about the work production. He assigned workers to their tasks, set the pace of work, decided when and whom to lay-off during slack periods, and set the rate of pay for all workers. The secretary-bookkeeper carried out his orders often. With the presence of a floorlady, an intermediate step would be added. Figure 9 outlines this type of structure.  

4At the time of the fieldwork, there was no floorlady, but shortly thereafter, a floorlady was hired. The dynamics of the presence or absence of such a figure will be discussed later.
(Broken lines indicate that the cutter may receive instructions from either the boss or the floorlady, but he remains basically semi-autonomous.)

FIGURE 9. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE WITH A FLOORLADY PRESENT

Underneath this formal structure lies another recognized by the workers. Figure 10 sketches this organization. Within this informal structure, differing lines of authority were clearly understood. The boss made all of the major decisions described above. Below this was Norma (a pseudonym) who had once been the official floorlady. However, she preferred her job as an operator and returned to her sewing machine a year before this fieldwork was conducted. She was still recognized by both the boss and the other workers as the intermediate step in the mill operation. Norma often directed the work flow in the absence of the boss. The workers would often go to her instead of the
FIGURE 10

INFORMAL ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE RECOGNIZED BY WORKERS

72
INFORMAL ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE RECOGNIZED BY WORKERS
boss. The workers would often go to her instead of the boss when they had questions about the work itself or some problem with the boss or another worker. Although she was not paid the salary of a floorlady and eschewed the title, she was continually placed in that role by either the boss or her fellow workers.

Shortly after the fieldwork was concluded, a new woman was hired. She was introduced to the workers as an operator. The way she was introduced lead to some confusion among the workers. They immediately noticed that she seemed to have additional responsibilities that they did not. She was gradually beginning to direct the work flow. Unfortunately, no public announcement was made that she was, in fact, the new floorlady. Resentments and tensions mounted. Most of the workers were still seeking out Norma as they were used to doing. Within two weeks, one of the floorgirls quit due to conflicts over the appropriate and recognized lines of authority. Until the role of the new floorlady is clearly defined and formally announced, these tensions will not evaporate. The workers still prefer to turn to Norma for advice and help in coping with work-related problems.

Blouseworks, Inc. does not have an elaborate hierarchical structure. The management is always on the premises and theoretically available and accessible. In spite of this, on-the-job tensions still mount and can be aggravated by
the dichotomy between the formal and informal channels of authority.

There was also an unfortunate lack of clearly defined company policies, rules, and regulations. The daily patterns of superior-subordinate relations created many tensions and misunderstandings. As observed in other occupational groups, B. B. Gardner describes the dynamics of this interplay. There is considerable anxiety concerning the relationship with the boss and an outcome of this is that the workers at every level focus their attention on their superior.

They are alert to anticipate his wishes, to avoid his censure and to gain his praise. They are often sensitive to his every mood and constantly seek for the inner meaning of every word and gesture (Gardner 1946:12).

This statement crystallizes many of the interactions between the boss and the workers that were both observed during the fieldwork and elaborated during the interviews. With the absence of formal policies and consistent rules, the boss and workers rely on personal relationships to get what they want.

In a business such as this, conducted on a small scale, the tie between the individual worker and management is strong (Cunnison 1966:50). The workers must be happy, content, and willing to put out the work in order to earn a profit for the owner. In an occupation where the paycheck
and benefits package are quite low and static, compensations in other areas can be and are devised to achieve this goal. For example, the boss at this mill often provides a chauffeur service for workers who either don't drive or won't drive in the winter. Workers are also able to construct their working schedule, to a certain extent, in consideration for their families. Permission is often granted for time off or special job assignments due to medical or personal limitations. During my interview with the boss, there were constant and precise references to his knowledge about the personal lives of many of his workers and how that affected his production schedule.

The workers likewise pay attention to the personal life of the boss. Many of them know his family intimately or come to know more than they might care to from the other workers. They monitor the growth and activities of his children. They are attentive to his family crises, such as deaths or weddings, and respond appropriately. On the job, they are intensely sensitive to his pressures and moods. They wait for the most auspicious moment to make personal requests.

The tie between the boss and the workers is complementary. He needs them in order to maximize his profit in the labor-intensive nature of his production and they need his approval and consent to make the best possible salary.
In a small, localized industry such as millwork in the Slate Belt, elements of personal relationships get elaborated in a way that would be impossible in a large factory or where high mechanization was utilized.

There is some selectivity and favoritism implicit in this style of management, however. There are also resulting bitteresses and resentments. When directly questioned about their value to the company, not one informant responded that they had the impression that their efforts were appreciated. In fact, not one had ever been directly praised in any way for their work. The paycheck, compliments from fellow workers, or the absence of complaints about their work were the only indicators of appreciation or value.

Conflict is an element present in any social group, and in work environments as small and loosely structured as this mill, the impact of this dynamic is heightened and complex.\(^5\) Sheila Cunnison, studying the small waterproof manufacturing mills in England, points out that the boss's power lies in the threat of firing (Cunnison 1966:60). This phenomenon definitely applies at Blouseworks, Inc. Conversely, the main pressure a worker can bring to bear is threatening to quit. If the worker is valuable in the eyes

\(^5\)The influence of the local and regional ILGWU is another whole subject for study.
of the boss, a resolution will be forthcoming. If not, the worker does end up quitting and going to another mill. During the interviews, all informants emphatically stated that they would definitely leave the mill if they could not accept conditions that were unfair to them. During the two months of this fieldwork, two workers did walk out as a result of misunderstandings or perceived injustices. In one of the cases, the boss was on the telephone trying to get her back soon after she left.

Among the sample group in this study, six of the twelve workers have left other mills over disagreements with former bosses. The reasons fit into two general categories: (1) unfair treatment regarding either pay or job assignment; and (2) insensitivity to the demands of their family responsibilities. During the interviews of this study, disgruntlement was expressed by at least three workers. They were struggling to make a decision about whether to stay or to find work elsewhere. In an occupation where there are no clear formal policies for resolving conflict and where the personal managerial style of the boss is practically the only recourse for resolution, the only real power that these workers have available individually is to decide whether to stay or leave.
Status and Prestige Among the Workers

Another dimension of organizational structure is the prestige hierarchy that identifies and defines the members. What job roles have more prestige than others? Are workers accorded differential status? If so, how is that symbolized and expressed? How do they rank each other? A combination of direct and fieldwork observations led to the conclusion that these workers basically share an egalitarian notion in both the way they think about each other and relate to each other on the job. Only the formal status of either boss or floorlady is recognized as being somehow superior. Table VIII summarizes these perceptions.

The responses outlined in Table VIII reveal a generalizable pattern with respect to the ranking system among the workers. There are more lateral than hierarchical ambitions, if any, evident. Eighty-three percent of these workers have no ambitions to "move up" in the hierarchy. These respondents complain that such a position would place too much pressure on them to make decisions about the other workers that would impede their cooperation with each other. Such demands would create tensions in their relationships. A typical reflection of that development is crystallized by one of them:

No way would I want to have to put up with those women, because I like all the girls and sooner or later there would be a problem, like being seen as partial to one over another.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code #</th>
<th>Current job role</th>
<th>Best job in mill?</th>
<th>Jobs with high prestige?</th>
<th>Personal aspirations in mill (beyond present job)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>FW</td>
<td>buttonholer</td>
<td>all the same</td>
<td>maybe learn a machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>collars</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>FW</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>presser</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>all are valuable</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>floorlady or boss</td>
<td>floorlady or boss</td>
<td>floorlady or mill owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>FW</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>all equal, maybe</td>
<td>floorlady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>FW</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>floorgirl</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>topstitching</td>
<td>higher-skilled machine operators, e.g., collar-on</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>FW</td>
<td>boss</td>
<td>boss, floorlady, cutter</td>
<td>maybe foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>topstitching</td>
<td>harder jobs, e.g., collars</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>MO</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MO = machine operator  FW = floorworker  NA = no answer given
The observation of their work behavior and interactions with each other also confirms this notion. As described in earlier sections, the styles of speech, deportment, and peer relationships indicate a preference for being part of the colleagueship, rather than for setting oneself apart from it. To do so is to risk exclusion and censure. The few who may aspire to move up have already contemplated the consequences of that ambition and do not view that in the negative light held by the majority. The reasons for the apparent lack of advancement or separation from the group are linked to other aspects of the occupational structure already touched on. The reasons why they work, the limited perception of this job being personally rewarding, their commitments to their families that preclude real career planning, and their lack of continuous employment at any given mill are all contributing factors. Although their cohesiveness and solidarity as a group is debatable, their values about cooperation and egalitarianism dominate and define their work behavior.
CHAPTER 5

CASE STUDIES
Introduction

Chapters 3 and 4 have treated the workers in the aggregate. It is hard in those chapters to get a "flavor" for the individuals who come to a garment mill for most of their lives. The profiles of several workers in these case studies are included to fill that gap. These five people represent a cross-section of the millworker population. The mill owner is also profiled at the end of this section.
NORMA

Norma is a 55 year old woman of Italo-American descent who has lived and worked her entire lifetime in the town of Roseto. She and her husband live next door to her mother's house, the home where she was born. They are the proud parents of a twenty-three year old daughter who is married and lives a few miles away. Norma lives about one-quarter mile from Blouseworks, Inc.

Norma has a rich experience in millwork. She is lively in her descriptions of the trials and tribulations of all the mills she has worked in over the last 40 years. She left school at the age of fourteen as most women her age in Roseto did and began working in the mill where her mother worked right down the street from the family home. She has worked in a total of nine different mills within a one-mile radius from home, mostly as a buttonholer and buttonsewer.

The conditions of the workplace are very important to the way she has felt about her jobs. She is very proud of the work she does, has always liked this work, and enjoys going to work if there is not a strain between the workers and management. She has asserted her disenchantment many times in the past by quitting. Whenever she walks out of a mill, some other boss (and neighbor) would see her on the street or on her porch and entice her to begin working for
him immediately. She has personally known eight of her nine different bosses.

Norma's primary job at Blouseworks, Inc. is button-sewing. She has been there approximately four years. In the beginning, she was the floorlady. She would direct work, keep the flow going smoothly, and take charge when the boss was absent from the mill. After a couple of years, she preferred to return to her sewing machine and "just mind her own business." At the time of this fieldwork, she was working on the buttonsewing machine but was still informally recognized as the floorlady. Many women, including myself, went to her for job assignments or to straighten out a problem with an operation or another worker.

Norma is a warm, friendly woman who is always concerned about helping to instill a congenial, cooperative working atmosphere. She is constantly watching the interpersonal dynamics on the floor and is deeply concerned about the happiness and fair treatment of the other workers. She is often the mediator between the other women and the boss.

Over the years, she has been a perceptive observer of working conditions and work behavior in the mills. She readily counsels and advises the younger women on how to cope with tensions related to the job. Although she has no formal role in the union, she takes an active interest and
participates in the local ILGWU.

Norma has definite ideas about how to get the best work production from the workers. She was very impressed by her early experiences working for Jews who first owned the mills in Bangor and Roseto. She tries to incorporate small courtesies and kindnesses that she remembers those bosses giving to their employees. She believes that they all need each other to put out a quality product.

She has developed many friendships with other women in the mill. Her closer friends are among the older, veteran workers like herself. She is one of a small group of women that socialize outside the mill, often taking out-of-town excursions or meeting at local diners during lay-offs. If pressed, she could probably relate many details about the lives of the others but instead she honors their confidence.

Her life outside the mill is divided among caring for her sick mother, spending weekends with her family, participating in church functions, and getting together with women from other mills that she has known over the years.
DEE

Dee is a 25 year old single woman who lives with her parents and sister in the same house she was born in. She is second generation Italo-American. Most of her relatives live within a five-mile radius of her home. She does not pay room and board at home but contributes to the household chores. Her income is spent on tuition at the nearby community college and other expenses that she has.

Dee is the "turner" at the mill. She is classified as a floorworker. It is a time-rate job. She eschews any interest in the sewing machine, insisting that there is too much pressure to rush and produce on those jobs. Dee's job, as I observed it, is very rhythmic and mechanical. She takes the individual pieces of collars and cuffs and turns them right side out, pushing the points of the pieces through the turner (a non-mechanized piece of equipment). Turning is a simple procedure, and it is easy to process hundreds of dozens in a day's work. Dee believes that this is not a skilled job and says that because she is so used to the job that she can go through the motions without really concentrating on the procedure itself. She has been on this job for seven years.

Dee began working in mills on a part-time basis while she was in high school. With a license in hairdressing from vocational education in high school, she took a job
in a beauty shop shortly after graduation but complains that the pay was poor and the hours were too long. She then took a job in this mill, with the understanding that it would be just until she decided what she wanted to do for a career.

Dee's mother and aunts have been lifetime employees of local mills in Bangor and Roseto. Her cousin got her the job at Blouseworks, Inc. Her parents have encouraged her to find a "career" because they believe there is no future in the mills. Dee is almost finished with a medical transcription course at the local community college. She is "putting in time" at the mill until that goal is accomplished. She will then consider commuting or moving to one of the larger communities about 25 miles or so from the Slate Belt.

Dee considers her job at the mill as a temporary way to make money. It is a dead-end job which older women take mostly because of their larger commitment to their families or their lack of education and advanced training. She believes that young women today have more choices and options for employment than their mothers did. Marriage is optional but desirable. She is not sure how she would feel if she had young children at home, but she thinks she would like to stay home until they were grown.

Dee's life outside the mill includes her studies at
the college, visiting with her relatives often, attending church and pursuing typical leisure activities of her age group with friends from high school or with her cousins.

Dee is basically a quiet, subdued person. Her job at the mill requires sitting down all day, and she rarely gets up. She confesses to being a slow starter in the morning, and her familiarity with her job allows her to wake up gradually. She becomes fully alert around 10 A.M. and then pays attention to her co-workers, often chatting in the cryptic style referred to in earlier sections. Although her job requires intense hand-eye coordination, she is adept at glancing around and monitoring the behavior of others. Her ability to perform her job in such a mechanical fashion facilitates this. She is particularly attentive to the workers nearby who are in the same age group and who are single. She enjoys a congenial, relaxed relationship with them. When she is smiling, it is a result of some interaction this group has with each other.

Dee is anxiously waiting for the day when she can leave the mill. It is a depressing environment to her and she eagerly anticipates embarking on a real career.
LENNY

Lenny is a 19 year old male of Italo-American and Dutch descent. He was born into the community of Roseto and still resides in the only home his family ever owned. He is the oldest of three siblings, and his parents are divorced. His mother works at a mill about a block away from the house. He lives approximately one-half mile from Blouseworks, Inc.

While in high school, he completed the vocational education course in floriculture and worked for a short time after graduation in a flower shop locally but he came to work in the mill because he needed a better income than that job provided.

Lenny began working in mills part-time and summers while he was in high school. He took jobs either at the mill where his mother works or at the mill his cousin owned a few blocks away.

At the time of this fieldwork, Lenny was one of three men in the mill (the other men were the boss and the cutter). Lenny does a variety of jobs in the back room. He is classified as a floorworker. He sometimes buttons, tags, bags, clips, ties, or marks. He enjoys varying the work and the freedom of movement he has during the workday. He is a time-rate worker and considers piece-rate a higher pressure job that he would never personally aspire to.
Lenny also does a variety of jobs that the women don't do. He brings out supplies from the storage area that are considered too heavy or bulky for the women. He runs errands in his car for the boss (e.g., getting the water cooler refilled or taking home some of the women who don't drive) and he may often do "handyman" jobs around the mill, such as replacing the long fluorescent light tubes.

Lenny has ambitious goals for his life. His current job is just a way for him to earn money for his own expenses, to help his mother pay the bills in the household, and to buy supplies he needs for his budding floral business at home. He has dreams of becoming an independent small businessman. If his floral business could become self-supporting, he would leave the mill entirely. He has a deep commitment to contributing to his family's survival and a business in the home would be a perfect career for him.

He does not entirely rule out staying in millwork, however. Although his job as a floorworker is not personally satisfying to him, he does express an interest in advancing himself in the business. He has relatives who own mills and has identified with the role model of the boss. At present, he vacillates between wanting to assume more responsibilities and authority and yet does not want the pressures and tensions that he sees the boss having.
His outside activities are divided among running his floral business, participating in church and leisure activities common to his age group, devoting time and energy to his car and helping his mother with the family. For his age, he has considerable responsibility and shows much initiative in organizing and conducting his personal affairs.
JANET

Janet is a 30 year old divorced woman with two young sons at home. She is the breadwinner of her family but receives a small amount of child support from her ex-husband. She is "straight American," as she puts it, and part Dutch. She has lived her entire life in the Slate Belt and is currently renting half of a double house in Pen Argyl, about three miles from the mill.

Janet has been through the school of hard knocks. She started working in mills part-time during high school and quit school to get married. Her first child was born soon after this. She has never known the luxury of not working. She has thirteen years of experience in mills spread out among five different mills in the Slate Belt. Although she did finally complete her high school education, she has never acquired other job skills and her family's need for survival compels her to stick with millwork in spite of the fact that she is basically unhappy with it. She describes millwork as a bleak, unfortunate necessity of life but seems quite good-natured about her situation and determined to work hard for her family.

Janet is a machine operator and works on piece-rate. With her need for a steady income, the external factors that inhibit her "making out" consistently are both aggravating and frustrating to her. She is quite skilled at her
work and has the distinction of using the oldest sewing machine in the mill. It is an old treadle machine that has been converted electrically. She actually enjoys using the machine and has learned to adapt to its peculiarities. She puts out her fair share of work and is generally considered to be a good worker in the spirit of mill colleagueship.

Her expressed philosophy about relationships is to respect others' rights to privacy and to expect the same in return. However, in observing her behavior, it is apparent that she pays a great deal of attention to the work behavior and goings on in the mill. She is actually quite warm, open, and friendly. She is a focal member of the front room lunch group. She closely monitors the events daily within the mill. During the time I worked in the mill, I would glance up from my work to look around and my eyes would invariably connect with hers. I found this a most amusing phenomenon. She also does a critical analysis of the work of others. She doesn't miss a thing.

Her outside activities revolve around the activities of her two young sons. She is continually running around for their wrestling and baseball practices and competitions. On the weekends, they visit with her parents. In spite of her devotion to her children, she is bothered by the burden of being the only one to shoulder the parenting
responsibility. Her long-range personal ambitions include getting nursing skills and she looks forward to the day when she can leave the mill behind. In the meantime, the realities of life constrain and limit her to holding down a job that can keep her family going.
JOE CISCO

The owner of Blouseworks, Inc., is a 49 year old life-long resident of Roseto. He currently lives one block away from the home where he was born. He is married to a local schoolteacher and they have several daughters.

Joe's life has elements of the "rags to riches" theme. Born into a struggling immigrant family, he typifies the pattern of working initiative at a very young age. He began working in his uncle's mill for forty cents an hour before he was "of age." He peddled newspapers, did delivery work for his father, and the like. He summarizes his philosophy about work as follows:

If you want something, you have to work for it. If you want it bad enough, you'll get it.

He differs from many local mill owners in that he has only run a mill for the last five years. As an adult, he had many different job experiences, from construction work, to running a music store, and owning the local Sears catalog store right before buying the mill. He secretly longed to own a mill years before he bought Blouseworks, Inc. He allowed himself to be talked out of buying a mill earlier and regrets listening to those types. He is basically a fighter and a risk-taker but he does admit that owning a mill these days is harder than it used to be.
The old-timers can't believe what's happening. You have to work twice as hard for half the money. I wish I would have started a long time ago. That's when there was money to be made. It takes a lot of guts to start up now ... but I still wouldn't talk anybody out of it.

Joe takes great pride in the quality of blouse that he likes to produce. He makes no bones about the fact that he is out to make a profit but he is emphatic that his name and reputation be connected to a better-than-average product. In the dog-eat-dog competition of today's industry, it is not always possible to get the type of contracts that he would prefer to get. Among his other aggravations, he must put up with lower standards and styles than he would like to produce ideally.

At the time of the fieldwork, millwork was entering its winter slack period. Joe was busy hustling enough work with the jobbers so he wouldn't have to close down. As a result, he got some contracts that he might not have accepted in a boom period. There were problems with the material and the specifications about the way to sew certain seams. This led to repairs, bottlenecks, and sporadic lay-offs. On top of that, certain parts, like labels or buttons, were slow in arriving. Work was often at a standstill due to circumstances beyond his control. He was under considerable pressure.
I really haven't closed down, except for a couple days at a time, but that's not always good. It might be good for the girls ... they came to work and made their money but it doesn't mean that I came to work and made what I was supposed to make. I came to work and lost. Let's put it this way. What you work all year for, you can work and save money and then in two months, everything you saved just goes right out the window.

Those tensions are compounded by the fact that he not only owns the mill, but he works there alongside the workers daily. He can do almost every job in the mill himself and he fixes most of the machinery himself.

Joe has the same expectations for his workers that he has of himself. They must be willing to give him a good day's work. There are two categories of workers necessary for his operation: (1) those with nervous energy who can really put out the work; and (2) those with enough attention to precision so that the quality of the work won't suffer. This ideal conforms to the expectations that the workers have of each other.

A continuing problem of his operation is the attention he must pay to the personal difficulties of the workers that interferes with his output. He must, for example, hire extra workers to double up on steps because so many are frequently out of the mill and without the extra workers, production would come to a standstill. He believes that allowance for family circumstances of the workers
arose historically because there was a shortage of labor supply. He talked at length about the fierce competition between mills for good workers.

Around here they call it 'stealing' girls. If a guy is looking for a collar setter, for example, and he knows there's a good one working here, some of these people — but not all — would pick up the phone and call that girl and offer her more. I wouldn't do that.

At the present time, with more mills closing all the time, the labor supply is swelling. Bosses, including Joe, are in a better position to call the shots. It is not as necessary to adapt to the demands of the workers as it used to be.

All of these pressures can take a toll. Joe doesn't want to give up running a mill. But he is realistic about life.

I can't get enough work for my girls. I can always go to work myself. It doesn't bother me in the least to lock the doors and go get a job. I don't want to, but I could. I could always go back to repairing musical instruments like I used to. I could teach music. I won't starve.
CHAPTER 6

CONSTRUCTION WORKERS: A COMPARISON CASE
Occupational Subcultures

It has been pointed out in earlier sections that occupational groups have differing and distinct sets of work behaviors and social organization that set them apart from other groups of workers. Within each subculture in the world of work, there are unique sets of demands and pressures, conventions and rituals with which individuals must cope (Neff 1968:5). The world of work is a defined cultural system, complete with traditions, customs, laws, rituals, compulsions, rewards, and sanctions (Neff 1968:9). The lifeworld of millworkers has been detailed in the major portion of this paper. This chapter compares and contrasts another blue-collar occupational community that represents a distinct departure from millworkers. The comparative method used in anthropology serves as a basis for formulating hypotheses and theories about the causes of behavior and lifestyles. The construction industry stands in clear opposition to millwork by the nature of gender differences and the classification of work as a skilled occupation.

The construction industry, like garment production, has a rich cultural tradition in American labor history. Table IX presents a summary of comparisons and contrasts of these two occupations. Each category is discussed in the following discussion.
TABLE IX  
Comparison and Contrast of Two Blue-Collar Occupations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Construction Workers</th>
<th>Millworkers</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job Entry</strong></td>
<td>1. apprenticeship system</td>
<td>1. no experience necessary</td>
<td>1. personal networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. highly skilled</td>
<td>2. unskilled</td>
<td>2. family class patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. seasonal demand</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. job insecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>due to market conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labor Organization</strong></td>
<td>1. skilled craft roles</td>
<td>1. interchangeable operations</td>
<td>1. labor-intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. control over work process</td>
<td>2. managerial prerogative</td>
<td>2. minimal mechanization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. unique projects</td>
<td>3. repetitive mass production</td>
<td>3. sub-specialties</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>articulate for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>production goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Organization</strong></td>
<td>1. &quot;gang&quot; work teams</td>
<td>1. isolation</td>
<td>1. work hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. face-to-face interaction</td>
<td>2. individual concen- tration to task</td>
<td>2. produce high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. identity markers</td>
<td>3. uniformity</td>
<td>quality goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. union work standards</td>
<td>4. managerial standards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Ethos</strong></td>
<td>1. autonomy</td>
<td>1. dependence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. cooperative solidarity</td>
<td>2. colleagueship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. identity emanating from work life</td>
<td>3. identity emanating from home life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recruitment and entry to these occupations have many parallels. In the upstate area of New York studied by Applebaum (1981), the construction workforce was predominantly Italo-American. Fathers and grandfathers brought in the new recruits. He also generalized that in other locales, family and ethnic affiliations are important elements in bringing in new members. In the site of this study on mill-workers, recruitment through family and community ties is also in evidence. Both of these groups of workers tend to follow the class patterns of their relatives.

The main difference in entry access is that construction work is a highly-skilled trade which requires an apprenticeship. Millwork is an unskilled to semi-skilled job that does not require new entrants to have skills before they are hired. The apprenticeship system in construction work is monitored and administered by the trade unions, controls the entry of new members, and sets the work standards for entry to the trade. In millwork, experience is gained through trial and error on the job, with little encouragement or training from either the management or fellow veteran workers. Skilled mill workers are not recognized by any internal body (such as the union) which could feasibly facilitate securing employment and set standards that would compel the garment industry to pay
higher wages with craft esteem.

Construction workers are highly-skilled craft tradesmen who own their own tools and command high pay for this identity. The needle arts also have a rich history among craftspeople, but the adaptation of sewing to the factory system of production unfortunately has not led to a comparable prestige system among trades at the industrial level of market economy societies. Millworkers are not readily identified for their craft tradition, nor do they own the tools of production.

External Factors Which Affect the Industry

There are external factors specific to both the construction and garment industries that have parallel impact on work attitudes and affect work behavior. These industries are characterized by seasonal demand for labor that influences the economic and psychological security of the workers. Where in millwork the insecurity stems from the nature of fashion design and changes, in construction work the demand for new building structures and the weather compel the workers to accept and adapt to relative insecurity about their incomes. Applebaum describes the atmosphere that surrounds job sites when a project is near completion. There is tension and a high degree of speculation about future job prospects and new contracts that will have to
be negotiated (Applebaum 1981:39). My observations in the mill are similar. When a "lot" is nearing completion, lunch discussions revolve around new bids being made by the boss and whether or not he is out there hustling a new contract or going to lay everyone off. Unfortunately for both occupations, the sporadic nature of employment often leaves the workers unable to fit the unemployment benefits guidelines of the government.

Millworkers, however, are more severely limited in seeking other employment because their family responsibilities compel them to stay at home. Construction workers often travel far away from home to work at a new job site.

The Organization of Labor

Both of these industries are labor-intensive in nature. Although they utilize mechanized equipment, they basically eschew high technology and modern, automated mechanization in the work process. The reasons for this are quite different in the two occupations. In the case of construction workers, their esteem as craft tradesmen and the uniqueness of the building structures precludes extensive mechanization. The unions are often blamed for restricting technological improvements in the building arts (Applebaum 1981:62).

In the garment industry, the historical tradition of
small, independent, and competitive ownership has had a lasting effect on the organization of labor. It is acknowledged that in some larger factory settings, automated mechanization and high technology are applied, but by and large, this industry relies on the labor-intensive method in order to keep capital investments low and to maximize profits.

Both millwork and construction require a careful articulation of many subspecialties in order to complete their products. There is a predetermined sequence of events and tasks that has to be followed. Construction workers are specialized into skilled craft roles, each replete with its own norms, values, and defined work standards. Millworkers, however, are considered as interchangeable parts. They are often assigned to completely different tasks when new blouses come through. Part of their inability to "make out" at their piecerate is because they are switched around and lose the momentum or precision needed to gain a high degree of skill on any one sewing operation. Among themselves, they do not elaborate norms or standards among the subspecialties of job roles.

Another major difference of labor organization that has been studied by countless scholars beginning with Marx is the nature of the work itself and the amount of satisfaction or alienation that can result from it. Construc-
tion workers are involved in creating unique projects. No two architectural designs and structures are alike. These workers must organize the tasks and work to be performed on every new site. The journeymen perform an entire complex of operations, have mastery over their tools, and plan the most efficient method of accomplishing their work (Applebaum 1981:22). These workers are in a position to derive pride and satisfaction from having control over production norms.

Millwork is characterized by a mass production structure that gives the worker a limited number of repetitive tasks, treats the worker as a tool, and has the work totally defined and planned by management. Although this study did not intend to analyze the extent of the alienation of the workers, it is apparent from the information gathered from the informants that their identities and pride as workers are partly a response to this factor.

The Social Organization of Workers

The organization of labor mentioned in the last section has important effects on social organization. In construction, men must work in teams, gangs, or pairs. This work is characterized by personalized, face-to-face interaction. They must then coordinate with teams in the other trades and the next step in the assembly process. There
is a spirit of interdependence and resulting solidarity among this group of workers. They all share in the pride of creating something new (Applebaum 1981:22). Those members who cannot get along with others or have a history of conflict do not last long on a job site.

In contrast, millwork requires intense hand-eye coordination of individual tasks that inhibits the development of a team spirit. Each operator works in isolation and spends the entire workday concentrating on his or her single task. The inability of the workers to detail the correct assembly sequence or to identify which workers do what tasks reinforces the relative individualistic nature of the work.

Another difference relates to the identity markers either present or lacking in these two occupations. Among the craft roles in the building trades, workers are distinguished from each other by uniforms, vocabulary, and norms of work behavior. Standards of performance are defined and codified by each union representing the trades. In millwork, there are no distinguishing markers that separate and identify the subspecialties. The standards of performance are mandated and evaluated by management. The lack of personal ambitions among the workers for other phases of mill production tasks has been discussed already.
Construction workers also tend to continue their social contacts off the job as well. There are favored "haunts" where they socialize with each other away from the job site. Even on the job, there is opportunity for joking, horseplay, and interaction. Their leisure activities both off and on the job reflect the physical nature of their work.

Millworkers in this study do not do extensive socializing with fellow workers. Their interaction is largely confined to the job site, and then only elaborated during the half-hour lunchbreak. Their sense of colleagueship prevails to some extent in their larger interactions within the community but, by and large, they do not interact closely with large numbers of their fellow workers at the mill. Millworkers "leisure" time is centered in fulfilling their reproductive responsibilities according to the answers given by the informants in this study.

Worker Ethos

Both of these occupations have developed a set of informal and normative expectations and attitudes regarding work performance. Both construction work and millwork place a high value on working hard and demand excellence in acquiring the skills necessary to do the job. Both require interdependence to put out a successful product that they
all have a hand in producing. They are both characterized by relative democracy that maintains a minimal amount of stratification among any of the subspecialties. The millworkers interviewed for this project readily admit that they all need each other to put out the work.

The major distinction between the occupations relates to the general question of this study — reproduction vs. production roles. The construction worker perceives of himself as a worker first. His primary identity is as a tradesman in a skilled craft.

Construction workers are bound to one another in work and family networks that do not include others, and they project relationships, values, and norms from their work into their nonwork lives (Applebaum 1981:viii). While he has achieved a marked degree of autonomy and control over his work process, he is bound to other workers in the spirit of cooperative solidarity.

The inverse is true for millworkers. The work situation requires their dependence on management for their work process. They work in a spirit of cooperation defined earlier in this paper as colleagueship, not solidarity. Too many factors militate against their solidarity with each other. Their primary identity emanates from their non-work lives — specifically their reproductive roles. These concerns influence their reasons for choosing millwork, their momentum for staying on jobs they would not otherwise
aspire to, and the nature of their social organization on the job.

Conclusion

Construction workers present a striking contrast to millworkers in many ways, but most importantly in the differences of their self-concept primary identities. The self-concept of construction workers emanates from productive activities. The self-concept of millworkers evolves from reproductive activities. Millworkers' entry to the paid labor force is mediated by their reproductive roles. However, construction workers also have reproductive obligations. I do not suggest here that these roles are mutually exclusive. A future study of this issue should compare groups specifically on the question of both their productive and reproductive roles. While that is the central issue of this paper, it is not generally treated in profiles of male occupational groups. Some recommendations to provide a more comprehensive treatment of reproductive responsibilities in many occupational groups will follow in the conclusion.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS
What effect does the structure of the garment industry and the sexual division of labor have on the work experiences of these millworkers? The external factors that predetermine the instability of work in the mills require the availability of a disposable and flexible labor force. Women function as an industrial reserve army. Secondly, the wage structure of the garment industry is designed to be a supplemental income (Safa 1980:5). The problem is that employment trends of women in these mills and for working-class women in the United States indicate that incomes are essential and not supplemental. However, the subordinated status of women's productive roles maintains the restricted entry of these women to low-paying, low-status jobs like millwork.

Do the workers' self-perceptions correlate with this conceptualization? The millworkers included in this project are conventional regarding the definition of sex roles and their work contributions. They do assert that their primary roles are as reproducers. However, their dual roles are compatible to them for two reasons: (1) their productive labor is viewed as service to their families, and (2) they devalue their own domestic labor. Labor in the cash economy carries a preferred value precisely because it has' monetary value, even though their wages in the mills are abysmally low.
Are the workers satisfied with this situation? At first glance, it seems contradictory that they give precedence to their roles as wives and mothers and yet complain of the boredom at home and the undesirability of staying home. They highly value the dynamics of the relationships and the personal fulfillment of their family relationships, not the "work" routine. The work routine in the mills is also dull and boring. However, as displeasing as the work there is, going to the mill does establish patterns of social interaction, imposes a preferable schedule and pattern for life, and provides a paycheck. The low ranking of worker as an identity relates more to the nature of the work itself than the importance of holding a job.

In reality, these women are working at two full-time jobs, but neither type of work provides a sense of personal fulfillment. They have a strong sense of commitment to both types of work and view this commitment as complementary. Their other personal goals or aims (outlined in Table II) do not figure prominently in their current decisions about the jobs they hold.

There are several factors that this research failed to take into account and must be considered in further study before substantive conclusions can be made about the nature of women's labor force experiences and perceptions of their
work contributions. Gender is not the unitary causal factor determining female status and location in the occupational hierarchy or in determining the strength of identity with work roles. There are at least three confounded variables only hinted at so far that must be explored in greater details: (1) the impact of socioeconomic status and job choice, (2) the effects of limited education and/or job training, and (3) community ethos. A more comprehensive analysis beyond the scope of this paper is required in order to fully understand all of the structural factors that shape the work experiences of women like millworkers. Recommendations follow about how to pursue the impact of these other variables for a more complete understanding of women and work.

What is the effect of socioeconomic status on occupational location and opportunity and attitude toward work?

This question is included as a means of correcting one of the serious limitations in this paper, which was to concentrate on the work experiences and attitudes of women in the factory work-setting in isolation from men. The comparison case of construction workers is a glaring contrast to the case of female millworkers and unskilled or semi-skilled male workers. A review of studies about male blue-collar factory workers reveals some interesting parallels
with women. Rubin (1976) researched unskilled and semi-skilled workers and their wives in a blue-collar community. She found that most of these men have severely restricted occupational mobility and blunted career paths, with little autonomy and freedom in their work situations, low on-the-job status, and few intrinsic rewards in their work. For men in such jobs, bitterness, alienation, and boredom are the defining features of their work experience (Rubin 1976:159). Like women in such job roles, many of these men turn to their family roles for the source of meaning and fulfillment in life.

Kanter (1982) has also studied the impact of location in occupational structures on both men and women. She found that both sexes in relatively powerless, low-mobility work situations tend to limit their aspirations, seek satisfaction in activities outside of work, dream of escape, and cultivate sociable peer groups on the job (Kanter 1982:236). Kanter concludes that this is a phenomenon of work hierarchies and not a sex-related difference.

The studies by Rubin and Kanter suggest that gender differences alone are insufficient as a rationalization for female work choice and attitudes toward work. Further research would incorporate some attention to the effects of socioeconomic status on all workers. The division of labor
has been used extensively as a way of stratifying American society into different social "classes." This hierarchy implies arranging people into categories with differing degrees of access to jobs, mobility, financial rewards, and power. Alba M. Edwards devised one of the first socio-economic scales used to stratify the United States labor force. His scale is still widely used today for purposes of compiling statistics and information about gainfully-employed workers. Social researchers (including those who study female labor force participation) then use that information to show trends and formulate social theories. Edwards' categories are as follows: (1) professional, technical, and kindred workers, (2) business managers, officials, and proprietors, (3) clerical and kindred workers, (4) craftsmen, foremen, and kindred workers, (5) operatives and kindred workers, and (6) laborers, except farm and mine (Edwards 1943:179).

I propose using these categories as a basis for comparing the work attitudes and perceptions of male and female workers. This requires finding adequate comparison groups of informants from all six categories for both sexes. One of the major problems in comparative analysis is the definition of the units to be studied. In order
to make adequate comparisons, there must be carefully planned selection of controlled comparisons. The problems inherent in finding comparable groups is dramatized by the choice of construction workers in this paper. By using the looser category of "blue-collar workers," I failed to consider the finer distinctions in training, income, and skill level of millworkers and construction workers. The Edwards' scale provides sharper distinctions but there are still other factors involved in obtaining the right comparison groups for this project. Will age, length of job experience, and marital status be considered for all groups? There must be an attempt to control for these factors as well in order to maintain fairly comparable groups. I suggest that all informants be held constant on age, number of years in the labor force, and have children, whether currently married or not. The workers selected should have about 15 years of experience in the labor force. This would allow for charting mobility, advancement, and pay scale trends.

The hypotheses guiding this investigation are: (1) the strength of work role identity and positive self-perceptions toward work will correlate with socioeconomic status, i.e., the higher the status, the stronger and more positive work role identity is and conversely, the lower the status, the weaker the identification with work role, and (2) both men
and women at the lower socioeconomic levels give higher priority to their reproductive identities.

Structured interviews similar to the one used in this paper will be the primary data collection technique. A role ranking scale similar to the one used in this paper will also be included. Attitudinal questionnaires relating to work can be incorporated.

The information gathered from informants of both sexes across six categories of socioeconomic status can add to our knowledge of uniformities and differences that exist with regard to occupational location and the work perceptions and attitudes of men and women.

What is the relation of educational opportunity to occupational location and attitudes toward work?

The millworkers in this study are restricted to this type of work partly because of their limited educational backgrounds. Of the informants who did possess vocational training (all in the limited sex-stereotyped roles as beauticians, nurse's aides, or secretaries), millwork was preferred because it pays higher wages. What factors in the environment operate to limit or restrict job opportunities? What kind of career planning did these women receive in the local schools? Why did they stop at the educational level they received? Are there differences
in educational aspirations and achievement based on socio-economic status? All of these questions relate to the issue of access to education or advanced training.

There are several types of data necessary to understand the relation of education to the job opportunity structure in the area. Some of these categories to be charted are as follows: (1) the patterns of vocational training curricula studied by both boys and girls at the local vocational-technical school, (2) the post-high school educational histories of men and women from the area, (3) an inventory of all job roles in the area and prerequisite training or education for each, and (4) the distribution of men and women in the job roles defined in the last category.

From this information, correlations of educational attainment and the job opportunity structure can be noted. Comparisons with men can be made to assess whether or not there are factors of discrimination operating in the employment structure in the area.

Part of this project design also involves obtaining a group of female informants (possibly from the high school records) who have differing levels of education. There should be five groups as follows: (1) women with less

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2The Slate Belt still uses a tax structure called the occupational privilege tax which requires every resident (including housewives) to identify their occupations. This would be of great assistance in compiling this information.
than 12 years of schooling, (2) women with a high school diploma, (3) women with associate's degrees from two-year college programs, (4) women with four year college degrees, and (5) women with education beyond four years of college.

Again, attention must be paid to maintaining comparability of groups. Since I am interested in noting a developmental life cycle, these informants should have some substantial amount of employment history. They should be relatively the same age and have children, whether or not they are currently married. Charting their educational and job histories would illuminate patterns of mobility, access to other opportunity or the opposite — restriction to stagnant, dead-end, low-paying jobs. Profiles of family background would be important information. It was pointed out elsewhere in this paper that workers tend to stay within the class patterns of their families. This factor greatly influences access to further educational opportunity, which in turn affects employment opportunity.

The structured interviews conducted with this group of informants would include questions about their productive and reproductive responsibilities and attitudes toward work, including strength of work role identity, similar to the one developed for this paper. In addition, I would probe fantasies about careers that these women had in high school days and that they may entertain at present and
explore the reasons they did or did not pursue such goals.

The hypotheses guiding this investigation are:

(1) the amount of education or advanced training will correlate with occupational mobility, hierarchical location, and strength of work role identity, i.e., the higher the education level attained, the better the location in the job hierarchy and the stronger the self-perception of work role identity, and conversely, the lower the educational level, the lower the job location and weaker role identity, (2) access to education and training is related to the socioeconomic status of a woman's family. Women with higher educational levels will come from families or be married to men with higher socioeconomic status, (3) during the public school years, particularly in grades 9-12, women are counseled to choose sex-stereotyped career paths, whether they are in the academic or vocational training programs. Educational records and questions from the informants' interviews will confirm or disprove this assumption, and (4) the distribution of men and women in job roles in this geographical will show a pattern of discriminatory and restrictive hiring practices for women.

Access to educational opportunity is an important foundation for building a career. In the case of women, there are two important factors that I hope to demonstrate that shape their eventual employment prospects: (1) the
effects of local sentiment regarding appropriate female career paths during the critical exploratory and decision-making ages, and (2) the effects of socioeconomic status in determining the probability of achieving educational goals.

Is there something unique or specific to this community that explains a restrictive approach to the definition of sex roles and work role identity for women?

This question addresses the problem of external validity that the study described in this paper faced. To what population are these findings relevant? Does the predominant Italo-American ethos confound the issue of reproductive and productive identities? Roseto is a rather insular community with a very pervasive orientation to the family unit. Family networks, relationships, and support systems are a pronounced and extensive feature of life in the Slate Belt.³ As pointed out previously, most mill ownership and management is contained within kinship networks. Even at Blouseworks, Inc., this pattern of family ownership and job recruitment exists. One informant told me that at a previous job, her boss (a distant relative) used to drive her home twice a day to nurse her

³It was reported to me that one of the mills in Roseto, which employs over 30 women, is composed almost entirely of members from a single family network.
baby. Although the boss of Blouseworks is frustrated by the interruptions in his production schedule that are caused by family obligations, he still adheres to the tradition of permitting flexible work hours for child care needs. The informants repeatedly refer to their preference for working in the mills because of consideration for their family responsibilities.

Extended research on this issue should be conducted to examine the correlation or variance of community site with female work experience and attitude toward work. There are still many problems in the selection of other sites, specifically comparable size, rural vs. urban location, and population diversity factors of ethnicity or national origin. What type of community would be a more balanced or "typical" American community? These are preliminary questions to consider for selecting adequate comparison communities. Perhaps census data can be used to locate other sites.

This project requires varying community location and holding other variables constant. The comparison population should be female factory operatives in semi-skilled jobs, and also matched on age, length of job experience, and presence of children, whether or not the workers are currently married. All of the same information and research format would be carried out as described in previous sec-
tions. Two additional features would be added to this project, however. First, the researchers should conduct a participant observation study in order to assess the community sentiment or ethos and to determine if that has a correlation to work and work role attitudes. Secondly, a scale relating to role strain should be administered to all informants in all communities. There are several that already exist in the literature on job attitudes (Cook, et al. 1981:106).

The hypotheses guiding this project are: (1) Reproductive role identity will be most strongly elaborated in the communities with the most pronounced ethos regarding family networks and relationships, and (2) role strain among female workers will correlate with prevailing community sentiment. Female workers in cohesive communities with strong commitment to family networks will experience less role strain than those women who live in communities with less elaboration of family networks.

What are the work experiences and attitudes of women who do not have reproductive responsibilities?

Single women who have never married and have no children should enjoy better access to occupational mobility and improved job opportunities. Understanding the work experiences of women without families could underscore
or temper the argument that employment discrimination against women truly exists.

This project would require comparing a group of informants from the mills who have never married with a group who have been married. Preference is given to women with at least 10 years in the labor force in order to chart significant patterns in their employment histories. All of the same information about work, background profiles, attitudes, and primary identities would be gathered according to the structured interviews described before. In addition, leisure activities and commitments outside work will be included.

The hypotheses guiding this investigation are:

(1) positive self-perceptions of work role identity will be significantly higher for unmarried women but other roles (such as daughter, sister, aunt, niece) will take precedence in their ratings, and (2) unmarried women also faced blocked career mobility early in life for a variety of reasons: a. the socioeconomic status of their families prohibited them from getting advanced skill training or higher education, and b. gender discrimination in the assumption that they would eventually get married and raise families.

The plight of unmarried women dramatizes the effects of sexual discrimination in the labor force. The automatic
assignment of all women to the primary role as reproducer ignores the circumstances facing women in other categories such as single, separated, divorced or widowed. The number of female household heads is increasing dramatically and yet relative to men, they are still more likely to be located in the lowest-paying, lowest-status, dead-end jobs.

What are the solutions to the problems of this occupational group? There is virtually no opportunity for advancement within the mill structure. The women need these jobs to survive and can afford little time or energy to make changes. In spite of those reservations, I suggest three strategies for improving their situations that are based on rather idealistic principles. (1) These workers could benefit from increased solidarity and heightened political consciousness, specifically through active participation and pressure applied through the union. At present, most workers do not have the energy to become politically active. Their dual labor functions on the job and at home are all-encompassing. However, the very future of their jobs and their long-range economic survival demands more political activism. International market competition is seriously threatening the United States garment industry. The ILGWU is an important source for lobbying to protect the industry as a whole and the rights and status of its
workers. These women could presently use their lunch hours for educating themselves about their status as workers, the discriminations they face, the profit structure of the garment industry, and the misrepresentation of their interests by the local union. (2) The local area must be pressured to be responsive to job opportunities for women in careers that offer real economic security. The present economic climate does not appear favorable for this development. The Slate Belt is already a depressed economic area. Perhaps government-subsidized programs could be located there precisely because of that fact. Jobs held exclusively by men now must be opened up to women. These women could benefit to increased exposure to career planning and subsidized training programs. The present adult education programs reach a miniscule fraction of workers. (3) Married women must incorporate their families into their long-range career planning. Without sharing or redistributing the household work load, women cannot pursue training programs. Men must become more actively responsible for running the household. In homes where two incomes are earned, there is no equitable reason why one of these workers must do all of the reproductive labor as well.

The experiences of women in the labor force are conditioned by several interrelated factors; the sexual division of labor, and the social and economic stratification
of American society in general. The recommendations for further research should illuminate how these factors shape work choices, the work experiences and attitudes, and the limitations facing women and their productive labor. The description of the garment mill work environment, the type of work faced by these workers, and their own perceptions of their work confirm the consequences of inequitable and subordinated status faced by an important segment of the industrial labor force.
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Safa, Helen

Saffioti, H.

Smelser, Neil, ed.

Smuts, Robert

Stromberg, A. H. and S. Harkess

Tilly, Louise and Joan Scott
### APPENDIX A

#### DEMOGRAPHIC TABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code #</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Ethnic background</th>
<th>Birthplace/childhood residence</th>
<th>Adult residence</th>
<th>Present residence/distance from mill</th>
<th>School/training</th>
<th># of schools worked in</th>
<th># of childrens/ages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Swedish/German</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Bangor/1 1/2 mi.</td>
<td>H.S. grad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2/8 &amp; 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Roseto</td>
<td>Roseto</td>
<td>Roseto/4 mi.</td>
<td>H.S. grad/beautician</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2/17 &amp; 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Pen Argyl</td>
<td>Pen Argyl</td>
<td>Pen Argyl/3 miles</td>
<td>H.S. grad/beautician</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Irish/Dutch</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Bangor/6 mi.</td>
<td>8th grade</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3/27, 25, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Roseto</td>
<td>Roseto</td>
<td>Roseto/4 mi.</td>
<td>8th grade/beautician</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Pa. Dutch</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Penna.</td>
<td>Stroudsburg/9 miles</td>
<td>2 years of college</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3/15, 16, 17</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Neola/16 mi.</td>
<td>A.B. degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Slate Belt</td>
<td>Slate Belt</td>
<td>Stone Church/10 miles</td>
<td>10th grade</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3/4, 8, 9</td>
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<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Bangor/1 1/2 mi.</td>
<td>H.S. grad/beautician</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5/16, 23, 24, 27, 29</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Roseto</td>
<td>Roseto</td>
<td>Roseto/1 1/4 mi.</td>
<td>H.S. grad/floraculture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Pa. Dutch</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Bangor/15 mi.</td>
<td>11th grade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2/11 &amp; 15</td>
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<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>Pen Argyl/3 miles</td>
<td>H.S. grad</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2/9 &amp; 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>49</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Roseto</td>
<td>Roseto</td>
<td>Roseto/1 1/2 mi.</td>
<td>H.S. grad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**
- S = single
- M = married
- D = divorced
Vita

Karen Margaret Hicks

Date of Birth: October 31, 1947
Place of Birth: Munich, Germany
Parents: William and Margaret Hicks

Institutions Attended:

1960-1964 Balboa High School, Balboa, Panama Canal Zone

Professional Positions:

1968-1971 High school Spanish teacher, Dansville, Michigan
1971-1973 Teaching Assistant, University of Massachusetts
1977-1979 Remedial Reading Specialist, West Junior High School, Binghamton, New York
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