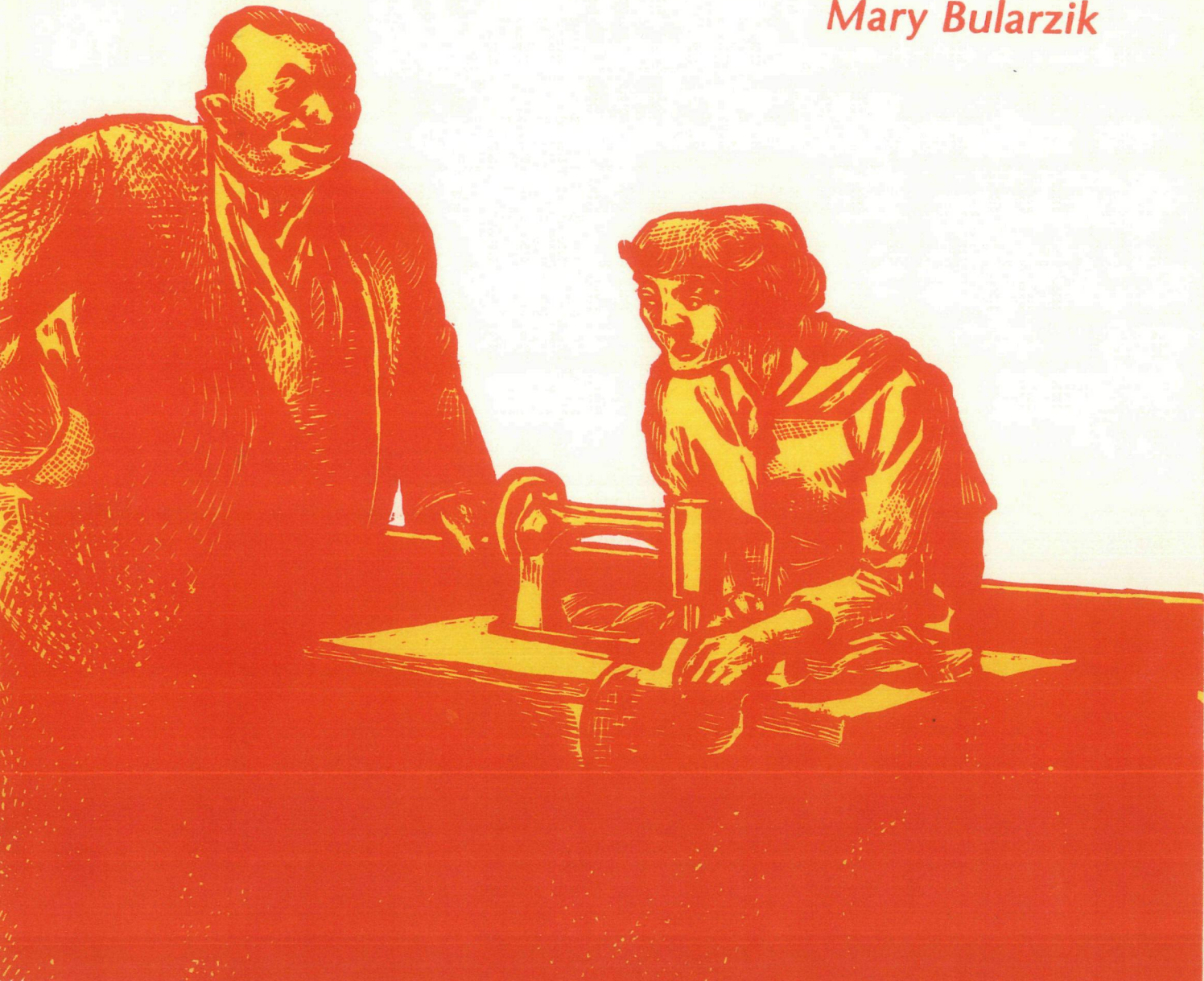


Violence = Sexual Exploitation / sexual harassment
x-list: Artist Culture / ♀ in history / oppression /
B resistance
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SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE

Historical Notes

Mary Bularzik



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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

In 1908 *Harper's Bazaar* printed a series of letters in which working women wrote of their experiences of city life. (1) A typical experience was reported by G.E.D., a New York stenographer:

"I purchased several papers, and plodded faithfully through their multitude of 'ads.' I took the addresses of some I intended to call upon. . . The first 'ad' I answered the second day was that of a doctor who desired a stenographer at once, good wages paid. It sounded rather well, I thought, and I felt that this time I would meet a gentleman. The doctor was very kind and seemed to like my appearance and references; as to salary, he offered me \$15 a week, with a speedy prospect of more. As I was leaving his office, feeling that at last I was launched safely upon the road to a good living, he said casually, 'I have an auto; and as my wife dðesn't care for that sort of thing, I shall expect you to accompany me frequently on pleasure trips.' That settled the doctor; I never appeared. After that experience I was ill for two weeks; a result of my hard work, suffering and discouragement." (2)

The incident illustrates a common occupational hazard of women in the labor force: sexual harassment. Sexual harassment, defined as any unwanted pressure for sexual activity, includes verbal innuendos and suggestive comments, leering, gestures, unwanted physical contact (touching, pinching, etc.), rape and attempted rape. It is a form of harassment mainly perpetrated by men against women. As in many other forms of violence

against women, the assertion of power and dominance is often more important than the sexual interaction. Sexual demands in the workplace, especially between boss and employee, become even more coercive because a woman's economic livelihood may be at stake.

Sexual harassment of women in the workplace is one manifestation of the wider issue of the oppression of women. Violence is central to that oppression, an essential part of establishing and maintaining the patriarchal family.

Until recently violence has only been studied psychologically, as an aberration, not as a norm. When violence occurs in the nuclear family, it is treated as the occasional act of a deviant rather than a prevalent and socially sanctioned way of enforcing the status quo. Statistical evidence shows violence to be pervasive, yet this is ignored. Rape, for example, despite repeated studies showing it is extremely common in many social settings, is still often described as the isolated act of a stranger. Wife-beating was treated as a similar infrequent (though regrettable) event.

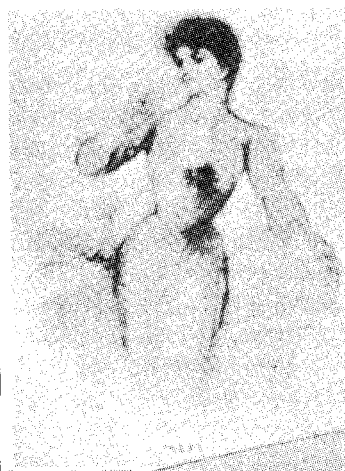
Sexual harassment at the workplace is, I would argue, an analogous problem. It is consistent, systematic, and pervasive, not a set of random isolated acts. The license to harass women workers, which many men feel they have, stems from notions that there is a "woman's place" which women in the labor force have left, thus leaving behind their personal integrity.

I would like to propose a model which sees violence, and more specifically the threat of violence, as a mechanism of social control. It is used to control women's access to certain jobs; to limit job success and mobility; and to compensate men for powerlessness in their own lives. It functions on two levels: the group control of women by men, and personal control of individual workers by bosses and co-workers. Violence is used to support and preserve the

institutions which guarantee the dominance of one group over others. Sexual harassment is one form. The threat of lynching hanging over Blacks in the South at the turn of the century was another such instance of the use of violence. So is rape. In neither case are the perpetrators of the "crime" totally condemned by society; though there are laws on the books against such behavior, it is clear to the victims that it may be dangerous to bring charges; and the victim is "marked" by the crime (or dead) while the attacker is considered "normal". Both "crimes" serve as warnings to certain groups not to walk the streets alone at night.

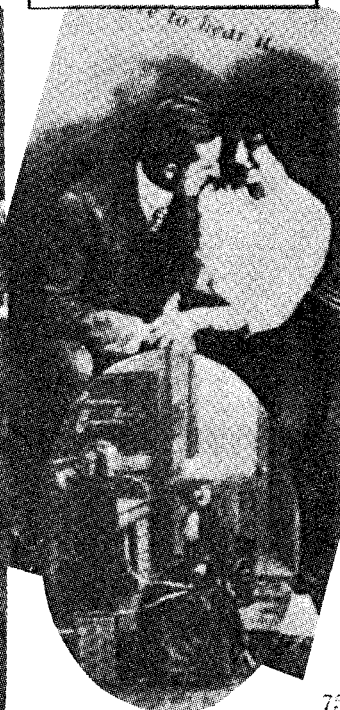
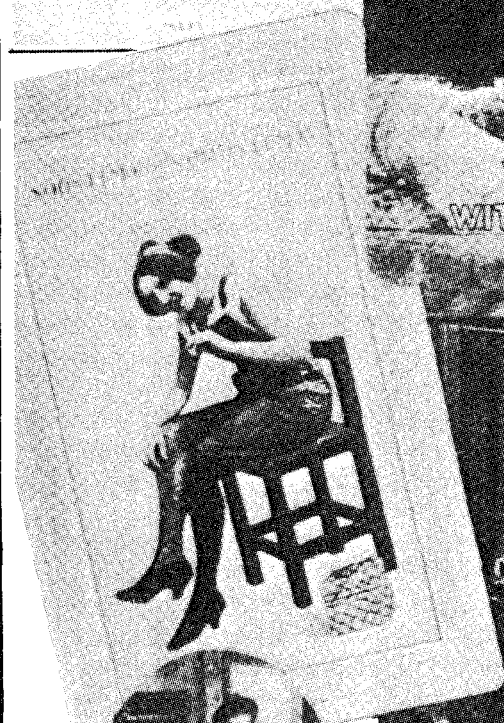
Words, gestures, comments can be used as threats of violence and to express dominance. Harassment often depends on this underlying violence — violence is implied as the ultimate response. Harassment is "little rape," an invasion of a person, by suggestion, by intimidation, by confronting a woman with her helplessness. It is an interaction in which one person purposefully seeks to discomfort another person. This discomfort serves to remind women of their helplessness in the face of male violence. To offer such a model is to suggest that it is not simply an individual interaction but a social one; not an act of deviance but a societally condoned mode of behavior that functions to preserve male dominance in the world of work.

The economic aspect of sexual harassment in the workplace differentiates it from other forms of violence against women. A rationalized capitalist economic order tended to separate spheres of sexual power (in the family) and economic power (in the workplace). Sexual coercion in the workplace reasserts the connection between the two. While the women involved did not see sexual favors as a right of their employers and male co-workers, their fear of losing jobs often stifled effective protest.



To capture the boss,
designing Miss,
Is your fantastic
dream of bliss.
That you will trap him,
I much doubt —
The chances are
he'll fire you out.

—Verse from a valentine 1924



II

This paper will consider the historical conditions of sexual harassment and focus on white urban working women, primarily in Northern cities, and primarily in working class jobs. Most of the evidence concerns single women, who predominated in the female labor force before the 1940s. (The entrance of many more married women into the labor force during and after World War II added another dimension to the problem which will not be considered here.)

Sexual harassment was a problem faced by paid women workers in the United States from colonial days. Violence and sexual coercion did not originate with industrialization. However, the dynamics of these issues were different in a paid labor force than in a pre-industrial economy. The family setting of work in colonial days makes the incidents of sexual violence part of the history of violence in the family. In a capitalist industrial society, sexual harassment often became an interaction between strangers, not relatives or neighbors, which changed the psychological framework of the sexual violence.

There are scattered instances of women in colonial times protesting violence by male employers against women workers. In the January 28, 1734 issue of the N.Y. Weekly Journal, a group of women servants published a notice saying, "...we think it reasonable we should not be beat by our Mistresses Husband(s), they being too strong and perhaps may do tender women mischief." (3) Court records reveal many instances of servants being seduced by their employers. Since the status of domestic servants is complicated and little historical research has been done on their working conditions, I am not further considering them in this paper.

Much male public opinion didn't distinguish between women workers, prostitutes, the destitute, and the criminal classes in the industrial-

izing stages of the economy. This was due to a complex of factors such as the necessity for women from poor families to be in the labor force, the unusualness of women working outside the family, the analogy between the prostitute and the paid women worker, both in some sense "escaping" from male control, and both "unprotected" and thus fair game for male lust. More thoughtful observers saw that low wages and poor working conditions in factories might make the temptations of the better-paying job of prostitute too much for some working girls to resist (or a logical choice from an economic point of view). As early as 1829, Matthew Carey offered a prize for the best essay on "the inadequacy of the wages generally paid to seamstresses, spoolers, spinners, shoe binders, etc., to procure food, raiment, and lodging; on the effects of that inadequacy upon the happiness and morals of those females and their families, when they have any; and on the probability that those low wages frequently forced poor women to the choice between dishonor and absolute want of common necessities." (4) Thus from the early 19th century on, we have a series of studies and investigations of the connections between low wages and vice, culminating in the "Purity Crusade" of the Progressive era. The concern for the working girl shown by the middle class reformers who conducted these studies was double-edged; working women often saw it as condescension, and resented the implication that they were morally weak.(5)

The experience of the women workers in the Lowell mills is an example of the assumed connection between the working woman who sold her labor power and the prostitute who sold herself. The idea that factory girls had loose morals was a commonplace in England,(6) and this concept was also prevalent in the United States. Current work on the Lowell mills emphasizes the "protection" offered by the boarding

house system, and implies a concern for the moral welfare of their employees by the owners. However, some contemporary accounts indicate public concern about the behavior of the women in the mills. Newspapers carried accounts by physicians and other prominent citizens of immoral activities:

There used to be in Lowell an association of young men called the "Old Line" who had an understanding with a great many of the factory girls and who used to introduce young men of their acquaintance, visitors to the place, to the girls for immoral purposes. Balls were held at various places attended mostly by these young men and girls, with some others who did not know the object of the association, and after the dancing was over the girls were taken to infamous places of resort in Lowell and the vicinity, and were not returned to their homes until daylight. (7)

While these stories often were not verifiable (and were attacked by the women as lies), they do indicate an identification of the single working woman with the prostitute, and a refusal on the part of some men to distinguish the woman willing to sell her labor power with the woman willing to sell herself.

Other material shows evidence of sexual exploitation by supervisors. An article in the *Voice of Industry* told of a factory girl rumored to have saved \$3,000 from her work who purchased a farm for herself and son (a favorite Cinderella theme of the management.) The women's paper declared not only that the worker in question had less than half the sum, but that half of this "it was strongly suspected, was obtained as hush money of a prominent factory man who had been intimate with her and was the father of the boy now living in the country." (8)

Contrary to the view of the mill owners as concerned for the morality of the decent girls they hired, the reality may be that they "consciously fostered the idea that the operatives were 'bad' women. Their advertisements carried special pleas for 'respectable young women.' In fact, so prevalent did this idea become that the girls themselves issued a statement (which included) 'we beseech them not to asperse our characters or stigmatise us as disorderly persons!'" (9)

A theme in the study of sexual harassment begins to emerge here. The 19th century ideal of True Womanhood required women to be the guardians of purity; if a sexual episode occurred, it was the woman's fault, and she was "ruined for life." In practical terms, this meant she might be thrown out of her job and house. "Ladies" were not to know even of the existence of sexual passion. To admit that sexual contact, even conversation, occurred, was to be blamed for it. Thus the double bind — while women workers were often at the mercy of male supervisors, the repercussions of admitting incidents happened were often as bad as the original event. This conflict between the "lady" or "good girl" who is above sexuality, and the "bad girl" or "whore" who is involved with it, is a major theme in the history of sexual harassment. (10)

Another dilemma for working women was the conflict between labor force participation and the pressure to stay in the home. The way in which industry was organized required a source of cheap labor; in many cases this was furnished by women workers. But traditional masculine control in the family was threatened by waged women; thus the social pressure for women to stay in the home intensified along with early industrialization. The social pressure to stay home was strongest for middle class women as the ideology of the Home emerged as a companion ideology to True Womanhood in the

mid 19th century. The economic pressure to work, on the other hand, was strongest for working-class women, and of this group, for single, divorced, widowed women (ie., those not tied in marriage to an individual man.) Women were conflicted about being in the labor force; however, for working-class women, this conflict was not simply competing "attitudes" about their place, but in many situations a "choice" between starvation if unemployed and attempted rape on the job.

Sexual harassment served to reinforce those attitudes pushing women out of the labor force. Yet this was an untenable goal in an industrializing economy. A fall-back function of sexual harassment, then, was to reinforce women's feelings of powerlessness at work.

Again, if sexual harassment was completely effective at driving women out of the workforce, it would work against the interests of management and capitalists as a whole; for an industrialized economy needs women as a source of cheap labor. According to this line of reasoning, one would expect to find some support by management for measures to reduce sexual harassment by supervisors against working women if it threatens the efficiency of the labor force. The individual benefits accruing to males from sexual harassment (personal power) are thus not identical with, and at times contradict, benefits to the capitalist class (of controlling the workforce). At other times these benefits reinforce each other, as it may be cheaper for companies to allow executives the "free" benefit of harassing their secretaries than to give them a raise.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the increasing participation of women in the labor force went along with a pattern of segregation into low-paying jobs. If, as previously argued, women's occupational mobility was checked by sexual harassment, one would expect to find

many instances of sexual harassment in this period. And indeed we do.

The most common description of the harassment victim at that time was — young, single, immigrant, uneducated, and unskilled.⁽¹¹⁾ This is of course also the description of the typical woman worker. Thus it suggests only that *most* women were harassed, not any particular type of women.

Furthermore, harassment victims could be found in a wide range of occupations. Not only waitresses and domestic servants, but also elevated railway cashiers, union organizers, garment workers, white-goods workers, home workers, doctors, dressmakers, shopgirls, laundry workers, models, office workers, cotton mill workers, cannery workers, broom factory workers, assistant foremen (sic), stenographers and typists, soap factory workers, hop-pickers, shoe-shine girls, barmaids, legal secretaries, actresses, sales demonstrators, art students, and would-be workers at employment interviews.

The severity of abuse ranged from verbal suggestions, threats and insults, to staring, touching, attempted rape and rape. Women were propositioned; promised money, jobs and automobiles (!); and then threatened with loss of jobs and blacklisting.

Harassment certainly crossed ethnic lines. Jewish, Italian, WASP, Southern White and black women were all harassed. Black women, however, often interpreted sexual harassment as racism, not sexism. Two Atlanta women talked about their experience in the 1930s:

Isabel: Some of the girls wanted to work downtown as waitresses, you know, and I asked my daddy if I could — to earn extra money. Daddy said, 'You will never work downtown. Not the way white men think about black women.'

Eva: Yes, a black woman was fair prey, you know.

Isabel: You see, a white man that might not dare accost a white girl is safe in his advances on a black girl. Why? Because in court her papa or brothers or any black man — even a black lawyer — wouldn't dare stand up against one white man.

Eva: The answer to all that was to protect us from it ever happening.

While this is both a middle-class and male-identified solution, the message is clear. As Eva pointed out, "the idea was that if you were a black girl outside your area, and a white man decided to insult you... nothing could be done." (12)

The reactions of women to the workplace hazard of sexual harassment can be divided into individual and group responses. There are several components of this problem. Women may have seen sexual harassment primarily as a social problem, or primarily an individual problem (i.e., one's personal bad luck to have a lecherous boss). Seeing it as a social problem led to group responses (unions, protective associations, settlement house organizations), and was a motivation for organizing. Another possible response was legal action. The joining of the group response with the attempt to achieve legal protection in the drive for protective legislation had as one motivating factor, the protection of women from sexual harassment.

The initial move for protective legislation came before the Civil War. However, these laws were overturned, and a second wave of agitation for protective legislation for women began in the 1870s. Not until the *Muller v. Oregon* decision of 1908, though, was the principle of legislative limitation of women's hours upheld by the Supreme Court.

What were the motivations of those pushing this legislation? The weakness of the woman worker was the main reason often given —

weaker in terms of physical strength, in terms of bargaining power, because of having other drains on their energy (housework), and having more to fear from factory employment.

Threats to morals were prominent among these "dangers" of employment to women. The general opinion was that women workers were subject to harassment of supervisors, and thus should be prohibited from certain occupations, and night work, for their own protection. Smuts, in *Women and Work in America*, writes:

Disrespect for the working girl sometimes led to sexual advances by supervisors or male workers. Girls complained of stolen embraces, pinches and vulgar remarks. It was widely believed that many prostitutes were former working girls, first corrupted by supervisors who had threatened to fire or promised to promote them. (13)

Current studies found it an issue of concern for Jewish garment workers and Italian cannery workers. (14)

Many of the "participant-observer" investigations of working women, as well as early sociological analyses, reached the same conclusion. Maud Nathan writes of salesclerks:

"Floor-walkers in the old days were veritable tsars; they often ruled with a rod of iron. Only the girls who were 'free-and-easy' with them, who consented to lunch or dine with them, who permitted certain liberties, were allowed any freedom of action or felt secure in their positions." (15)

Individual reactions of victims of sexual harassment encompassed a wide range of emotions. Many women felt guilt. S.H., a clerk in a store in Los Angeles wrote of this:

"I don't think there was one evening during that

time when I worked in that store that I went home unmolested. I have walked block after block through the business part of the city with a man at my side questioning me as to where I lived, and if I would not like to go to dinner, how I was going to spend the evening, etc. I never answered, except to threaten to speak to the police. That I was ashamed to do, thinking it must be my own fault in some way, and that I ought to possess dignity enough to make men understand they were mistaken." (16)



American Woolen Company, Boston, 1912.

And some women who had "made it" blamed those who didn't. M.C.P., a government worker in Washington, D.C., who made \$1,200 a year in 1908, commented:

"Referring to the moral dangers of city life, of course there are many dangers, but it largely depends on the girl, in my opinion, whether she is led into temptation or not." (17)

Fear was another dominant reaction. Elizabeth Hasanovitch was so afraid of her boss after he attempted to rape her, that she never returned to collect her pay.

"I felt what that glance in his eyes meant. It was quiet in the shop, everybody had left, even the

foreman. There in the office I sat on a chair, the boss stood near me with my pay in his hand, speaking to me in a velvety, soft voice. Alas! Nobody around. I sat trembling with fear."

But looking for a new job was agony for her:

"The thought of a new job made me so uneasy that I could hardly sleep. My bitter experience with my last shop pictured me all the bosses as vulgar and rude as the one from whom I ran away on Saturday." (18)

Rose Cohen was too stunned at thirteen to respond effectively to her boss' proposition:

"After a moment or so he said quite abruptly, 'Come, Ruth, sit down here.' He motioned to his knee. I felt my face flush. I backed away towards the door and stood staring at him." (19)

A Russian Jewish shopgirl wrote to the Jewish Daily Foreword in 1907 after she had lost her job because she refused the foreman's "vulgar advances:"

"The girls in the shop were very upset over the foreman's vulgarity but they didn't want him to throw them out, so they are afraid to be witnesses against him. What can be done about this?" (20)

Sometimes their fear was replaced by anger. Elizabeth Hasanovitch expressed her rage:

"If only I could discredit that man so that he would never dare to insult a working girl again! If only I could complain of him in court!" [21]

But more often the major reaction was confusion: guilt, anger, fear, and a feeling that attention paid to one as a sexual being was supposed to be appreciated, all intermingled.

Even organizers were torn in their reactions. When her supervisor talked to her and asked her to be his girl, a young organizer in a garment shop laughed at him. But he persisted:

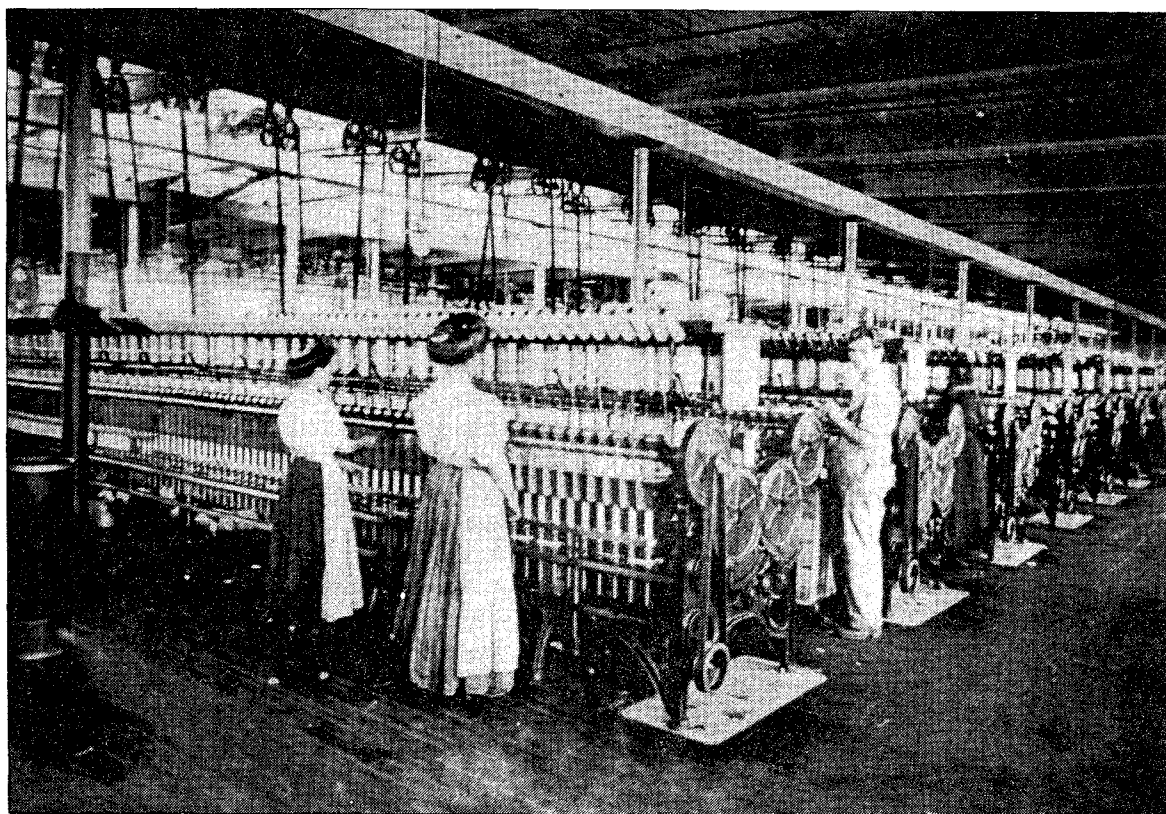
"He went on 'You know it's a rule not to pay the girls the first week, but I like you, and I'm going to pay you the first week.' When I came home from work I told my sister about it and said, 'I don't know if I should feel flattered or insulted'." (22)

A Cleveland manicurist reported an experience comparable to a 19th century potboiler. Alone in the city and propositioned by a friend

of a friend to whom she has applied for a job, she was totally traumatized:

"How I ever got out of the building I do not know, I was so blinded with confusion and shame. I did not take the elevator, but reached the street somehow by the long stairways, with the last words of this man ringing in my ears: 'You will be glad to take up with my offer, after you have searched elsewhere'."

Her subsequent failure to get work led her to plan suicide. On her way to drown herself in the harbor a young man whom she met at a restaurant offered her aid, lent her \$5 and



Lynn, Massachusetts, 1895. Photo by Frances B. Johnson

encouraged, she went back to the city and found a job.

"Later I married the young man who gave me a helping hand." (23)

While most reactions were not as melodramatic as this (and marriage as an escape from sexual harassment may be questionable), the problem of sexual harassment was a serious threat to the health and well-being of women workers. Power and domination outweighed the sensual or sexual aspect of these incidents in women's working lives.

Sexual harassment was addressed in *Life and Labor*, the publication of the National Women's Trade Union League. In a 1911 editorial on the clothing trade, a section on "The Tyranny of Foreman" claims that:

Abusive and insulting language is frequently used by those in authority in the shops. This is especially intolerable to the girls, who should have the right to work without surrendering their self-respect. No women should be subjected by fear of loss of her job to unwarranted insults. (24)

Stories of harassed women workers were published in the magazine. While these may be composite stories, they do indicate the range of harassment, the results, and the anger of women at being sexually as well as economically exploited on the job. An example is "Rosie's story", the account of a seventeen year old worker in the needle trades.

"The boss from the shop was always fresh with the girls. He liked to see us blush, so we made a society, called 'The Young Ladies Educational Society,' and we was not to stand the freshness of the boss. But we was afraid of him, and so we

couldn't help each other. Once he touched me, very fresh like, and I cried, and he said, 'Lets be good friends, Rosie, and to show you how good I means it, you take supper mit me in a swell hotel, with music and flowers, see?' And I says, 'So! Supper mit you — swell hotel! Well I ask my ma,' and he said, 'Don't do it. You say you going to sleep at a friend's house' and I was trembling so I couldn't nearly do my work, and when my ma sees me, she says, 'What's the matter, Rosie?' and I says, 'Nothing,' because she's sad, my ma is, 'cause I have to work so hard and can't have no education, and she says, 'Rosie, you got to tell your ma what's wrong,' and we both cried together, and so the next day I went to another shop, and I told the first lie I ever told in my life. I told the boss I come from another city. I liked this new boss; he was not so fresh and I had a seat by a window, and my ma and me, we was so happy we laughed when I told her about the nice shop and fresh air, and then the next day the boss he come to me and he says, 'I'm sorry, Rosie, we like your work, but your other boss he telephoned he no discharged you and so we can't keep you here.'" (25)

As did Rosie, many women reacted on an individual level. But Rosie and her friends also saw that this problem wasn't something they were asking for, and did try to meet it on a group level; they formed a "Young Ladies Educational Society" with the purpose of resisting the boss' harassment. The fact that their boss was a habitual harasser, and recognized as such by the group, was not that uncommon a situation. Dorothy Richardson in *The Long Day* (her account of how women workers were exploited at the turn of the century) wrote that after her boss approached her ("...in a moment he had grasped my bare arm and given it a rude pinch"), "...the rest of my companions repeated divers terrible tales of moral ruin and

betrayal, . . . wherein the boss was inevitably the villain." (26) S.R., a saleswoman, suffered repeated harassment and propositioning on a new job before she discovered that she was not the only one:

"I never heard the other girls complain, so supposed for some time that they were not bothered; but when I knew them better I found they had the same trouble. . . ." (27)

There were other instances of groups being formed. In some cases these were more successful than the attempt of Rosie and her friends. Alice Woodbridge, the "moving force and guiding spirit of the Working Women's Society" (the forerunner of the WTUL), was politicized as the result of such experiences,

"She had held at various times positions in offices; these positions had promised to be lucrative, but because of insulting proposals from employers she had been obliged to give them up; she had been buffeted about for many a year, trying to earn an honest living and trying to live on the low wages offered her."

Protection of working women from unwanted sexual advances was a major aim of the Society.

" . . . it was her purpose to endeavor to shield other working girls from the hideous experiences which had been hers, in her efforts to lead an honest, upright, independent life." (28)

But what could be done to stop sexual harassment? The sisterly support of Rosie's group ("we was not to stand the freshness of the boss") had its obvious limits. The women were afraid of the power of the boss, and with good reason; even more than today, he had the power to fire them at will. As in Rosie's case, he could force them

into a position where they felt if they didn't quit they'd be raped. Alice Woodbridge was forced to leave many jobs. When Dorothy Richardson's boss returned and "after looking me over thoughtfully, informed me that I was supposed to be promoted Monday morning to the wrappers' counter," she feared for her own safety and quit. Elizabeth Hasanovitch was so afraid of her former boss after his attempted rape that she never returned to collect her week's wages, although she was at that point almost penniless.(29) But groups to combat harassment were not common, which suggests that women had little faith in their power to change their own lives.

In the short run, less politicized women looked for ways to protect their individual personal safety. This is not to say that they denied the group aspects of the problem, for they often tried to share such knowledge. Their coping strategies included warning other women about "fresh" bosses and supervisors, quitting, finding new jobs, sharing verbal ways to reject passes, staying out of empty offices, and giving in to keep a job. In her first job in a garment shop at the age of twelve, Rose Cohen often felt uncomfortable because the men told dirty jokes.

"I could never keep my face from turning red. One day when Atta (the only other woman worker) and I were alone at our table she said: 'It is too bad that you have a tell-tale face. You better learn to hide your feelings. What you hear in this shop is nothing compared with what you will hear in other shops. Look at me.'"

Atta was an expert at dodging the boss and threatening him with her needle when he tried to grab her. The first English sentence Rosa learned from her was:

"Keep your hands off please." (30)

A social worker posing as a cannery worker to investigate working conditions for the New York State Factory Investigating Commission (1912), was warned by sister workers to stay away from the men:

"...an Italian girl told me that one must be careful not to get fresh with the Italian boys, because they were dangerous.

She herself was offered an opportunity to make

"two or three dollars on the side any time, if you come up here to work at night, we can go for a stroll. That was the timekeeper and his name was Gillette."

The other workers corroborated her experiences.

"A great many girls told me he was fresh, and he was boss, and it was best to keep away from him." (31)

Occasionally women took harassers to court. In 1908, Grace Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge took a saloon-keeper to court in behalf of Bozena, a young Bohemian Immigrant. Her employer had "abused her shamefully and then turned her out when he found that she was to become the mother of his illegitimate child." They lost the case, "because the charge was a penitentiary offense, and the judge was lenient." Not surprisingly, the judge empathized with the defendant rather than the victim.

Grace Abbott had such cases in mind when she started immigrant protection associations in Chicago. Protecting immigrant girls from lecherous bosses was, again, a major theme in organizing. (32) In this case it was because of the middle-class social workers' intervention that Bozena's case was taken to court at all; most women, feeling less able to cope with the

male-dominated legal system, would hesitate to bring their case to court. And even the feminist solidarity of the Hull House activists with Bozena did not win her case.

Working women themselves wanted to resist. Elizabeth Hasanovitch's fear was replaced by anger:

"If I could only discredit that man so that he would never dare to insult a working-girl again! If only I could complain of him in court! But I had no witnesses to testify the truth; with my broken English I could give very little explanation. Besides that, if I were working in a shop and were called to court, the firm might suspect some evil in me and send me away." (33)

Her confrontation with this dilemma led her to the conclusion that working women must organize; this seems to have been one of her personal motivations for joining the Waist and Dressmakers Union. As an individual member of a union in a basically non-unionized industry, a woman might not immediately improve her own conditions. Elizabeth Hasanovitch's new foreman, who had previously treated her in a friendly if condescending manner and called her "little daughter" (though she adds he's "too young to be my father") began to criticize her work and harass her until she got terrible headaches and ultimately quit. Unions, then, did not always protect women workers. But the issue of women in unions is complex, and needs to be looked at specifically.

III

UNIONS AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT FROM CO-WORKERS

Looking at unions' role in combatting sexual harassment will also focus our attention on the relation of co-workers to sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment was not simply a boss-employee interaction, but in many cases an interaction between co-workers. Here, of course, the dynamic was somewhat different, as co-workers do not have the power to fire a woman or offer promotions. However, sexual harassment by co-workers can make a job unbearable for a woman; if she publicly complained, she was as likely to be blamed as the harasser, for "leading him on." To the extent a woman internalized the socially conditioned guilt of being responsible for controlling sexuality (while males were allowed to initiate it), she was vulnerable to this kind of manipulation. And real consequences ensue; Brodsky's study of workers victimized at work showed that employers tended to lay them off:

"Employers are not disturbed by the fact that their female employees have been spoiled or contaminated, but they are concerned that this employee might make for further 'trouble.' Employers want peace. They do not want workers who disturb the tranquility of the organization in any way, not even as a result of bad luck. Employers whose workers are raped would like to have the victim disappear and not disturb the smooth functioning of their organization." (34)

Because of this tendency to "blame the victim," co-workers do have power over women's jobs and economic security. This division in the workforce, like any division, can also benefit employers.

Unions' position on women workers have been contradictory. On the one hand, unions have tried to keep women out of their occupations, or struck to avoid working with women. On the other hand, some male union organizers have been aware of the danger to workers' solidarity in ignoring women as potentially organizable

workers, and have attempted to organize them. Gompers and the AFL held officially (at times) to this second position, but in practice did the opposite — ignored women workers, denied women's locals charters, or sought to exclude women from men's locals by complex rules. (35)

Union members harassed women potential members in various ways which preyed upon their anxieties and kept them home. One example was union meetings. Mary Anderson, later head of the U.S. Women's Bureau, wrote of early union meetings:

"The men met in halls that were often in back of a saloon, or in questionable districts, dirty and not well kept. I remember the so-called labor temples that were anything but temples. The girls would not go to meetings in these places and we could not ask them to go under the circumstances. Then, when it came to paying dues at the headquarters of the union, the girls found it very distasteful to go where there were large groups of men playing cards and hanging about..." (36)

This is a good instance of the implied threat of violence operating as a social control mechanism. It also shows the connection of workplace-union-street violence in women's actual experience.

Women organizers "realistically" evaluated the ways in which they themselves were treated by their co-workers (ie., male union officials). After a dispute with the male leadership of the ILG in Cleveland, over the issue of equal pay for women organizers, Pauline Newman described the women that John Dyche (the unions' executive secretary) selected to replace her: "Well they are not too bad looking and one is rather liberal with her body. That is more than enough for Dyche." (37)

She, like other women organizers, also tried to

solve problems of sexual harassment outside the union grievance structure. Faced with a complaint that a factory owner's son and his superintendent had taken liberties with female employees, she argued:

"There is not a factory today where the same immoral conditions [do] not exist... this to my mind can be done away with by educating the girls instead of attacking the company." (38)

Rose Schneiderman, however, tried to use the unions to fight sexual harassment. Having organized the Aptheker shop she received a complaint from the chairwoman.

She said that Mr. Aptheker had a habit of pinching the girls whenever he passed them and they wanted it stopped. I went to see him, and in the presence of the chairwoman told him that this business of pinching the girls in the rear was not nice, that the girls resented it, and would he please stop it. He was a rather earthy man and looking at me in great amazement, he said, 'Why Miss Schneiderman, these girls are like my children.' The chairwoman without a blink answered, 'Mrs. Aptheker we'd rather be orphans.' Of course it was stopped." (39)

Mary Anderson also wrote of a strike in a broom factory in which sexual harassment of the workers by the foreman was a major issue. Since the foreman was one who "did not stop at anything," some of the women carried knives to protect themselves. She went to talk with the employer:

"I told him that I had heard stories about one of his foremen, not only of his brutality in dealing with the women, but also that he was immoral and that immoral conditions existed in the plant because of him. The employer said he knew this

was so... finally the strike was settled, the foreman was fired, and the wages raised a little." (40)

Unions, then, have at times provided protection from sexual harassment for women. However, they have also been simply additional places where women experienced sexual harassment. This is one reason why women turned from strategies of group action to protective legislation to protect their interests at work.

CLASS DIFFERENCES AND WOMEN'S CULTURE

What type of women are harassed? The simplest answer is all types of women. No socio-demographic characteristic saved a woman in a sexist society from the possibility of sexual harassment, and the implicit threat of violence. However, there is evidence that the specific forms of sexual harassment did vary according to occupation and social class. All women were subject to at least the subtler forms of sexual harassment (verbal suggestive remarks, dress codes) but physical violence was more common and expected by women in menial jobs.

An examination of the kind of sexual harassment faced by early women doctors shows a pattern of harassment used to force women out of privileged, male-defined jobs. Women's role as professionals in the healing professions had been systematically eliminated by the mid 19th century.

The first women to attempt to become licensed physicians in the United States faced much harassment — psychological, verbal and physical. Most of it came from male co-students (with the tacit approval of their supervisors?), an example of the power co-workers have over a woman's job. Alice Hamilton, an early pioneer in industrial health, suffered from similar treatment as a sex object. (41)

Emily Barringer, the first woman doctor to with an appointment to the staff of Gouvernor Hospital, the downtown branch of Bellevue (N.Y.) found her appointment was resented and opposed by the male appointees:

"But it came to me as a sickening realization that the real opposition I was to meet was to come from my own peers, educated brothers with medical degrees."

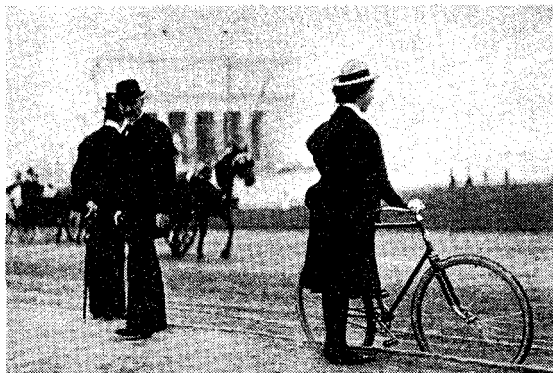
An intense campaign of psychological and verbal harassment ensued. For example, other male co-workers discussed graphic details of rape cases at the dinner table, with obvious enjoyment at her discomfort. What she wrote of this experience is revealing of the differences between the experiences of a middle-class professional and an immigrant worker in withstanding sexual harassment. She didn't expect physical violence, a reality to immigrant workers; yet her life was constrained and controlled by this harassment:

"Yes, I could and would endure any taunts or gibes or outrageous insults that these ingenious young men could think of. No matter how degrading their onslaught was, I would stand for it. But if ever in their machinations they should as much as lay a finger on me physically, there would be an immediate reckoning. They knew this perfectly well and always kept completely within bounds. I was as safe in their midst as if I had been surrounded by the strongest iron cage."

Despite this 'confidence,' she kept her door locked nights, and wouldn't open it to any "fellow" male students. (42)

The weight of the evidence indicates that women in working-class jobs, on the bottom of the workplace hierarchy, and also on the bottom

of the social hierarchy, were the most likely victims of harassment. While this is plausible, the way the evidence is recorded also biases the sample. Much of the recorded instances of harassment are reported by middle-class observers, who would, because of the consequences and implications, be less likely to report their own similar experiences. During this period, middle-class women were ladies who were considered "above" sexuality, and thus would be "tainted" by being involved in incidents of sexual harassment. To the extent that they accepted the idea that women were responsible for controlling sexuality, they would have trouble recognizing and dealing with such incidents in their own lives.



The language used by many women in reporting such incidents in the late 19th century and early 20th century indicates the inability of Victorian society to deal directly with sexuality. Women reported their boss' and co-workers' conduct as "vulgar remarks," "shameful behavior," "unspeakable suggestions," "things no lady should bear." When Grace Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge accompanied Bozena to court, they transgressed these bounds of lady-like behavior:

"... a young lawyer on the State's Attorney's

staff who had known Miss Breckinridge at the University rushed over to her and said, 'Oh, Miss Breckinridge, you and Miss Abbott must not stay here. This just isn't a fit place for women like you. It's a terrible case for you to hear.' (43)

This inability of women to speak directly of their experiences had several implications. It led to sexual harassment being greatly under-reported along with other instances of sexual violence, as rape. Women felt guilt rather than anger after such incidents; and fear, not without reason, that the stigma resulting from public association with sexual issues would outweigh any "justice" they might get by reporting the incident. If they had been friendly to the male involved, they would be accused of complicity; when a more likely explanation of what was going on was that the women were looking for husbands, and were responded to as prostitutes. This leaves us with the problem of interpreting vague accounts of behavior, and occasionally makes it hard to determine whether a specific incident really is "unspeakable behavior" or an off-hand vulgar remark.

The other issue this raises is whether women were over-reacting to typical male language. If women and men in the 19th century were raised in separate spheres — in homosocial networks — with different customs, ways of interaction, speech patterns, and expectations, then such a response on the part of women to men's "normal" behavior seems plausible. For immigrant women to respond to the more open social mores of the United States in the same horrified manner is also plausible. This explanation implies that much of what is considered "harassment" behavior by women is simply "teasing" or "humor" or "informality" on the part of men. (44) While this may occasionally be true, this explanation fails to account for the

majority of cases; doesn't account for the overtones of terror, force, domination and violence felt by the women in such situations; and doesn't account for the many cases in which severe reprisals (firing, blacklisting, refused promotions, attempted rape, rape) were perpetrated on women who refused to accept such "teasing" as part of the job. It is also clear that sexual harassment is basically a man-against-woman interaction; there are few reported cases of either men-against-men or women-against-men harassment. Although men "tease" other men in the workplace, and use non-sexual types of harassment against each other, neither historically nor currently is there evidence that sex is a common component of this harassment. (45)

The major function of sexual harassment is to preserve the dominance of patriarchy. The use of sexual harassment to push women out of specific jobs may well be a new version of an old phenomenon. Even for older societies which accepted a "men's sphere" and a "women's sphere" as both equally necessary to the survival of the community, there is evidence that women were sexually harassed to keep them from stepping out of line in other ways.

Sexual harassment is a phenomenon that crosses class lines, though it does have a class dimension. It cannot be reduced to bosses exploiting workers, because the problem of harassment by co-workers is so extensive. In addition, harassment by supervisors and co-workers does not necessarily support the needs of a rationalized, profit-oriented production system, and may even work at cross-purposes to it. Furthermore, for many men, sexuality and domination were not entirely separate; thus social control and sexuality are not totally distinct phenomena. And for many women, being defined as sexual beings meant that sexual harassment posed both a "compliment" and a threat to their autonomy and safety.

This suggests that to understand the problems of sexual harassment we must analyze both the organization of capitalism and the organization of male dominance.

I would like to thank Roslyn Feldberg, Susan Forbes, Alexander Keyssar and the members of the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion for their helpful criticism and discussion of the ideas presented in this paper; and Elizabeth Pleck and Judith Smith for supplying references and supporting my interest in this topic.



Lunchtime, 1915. Photo by Lewis Hine.

NOTES

1. "The Girl Who Comes to the City, A Symposium," *Harper's Bazar*, March 1908, p. 277.
 2. Sources for this topic are scattered yet cumulatively persuasive. They include autobiographies, letters, social worker's reports, state investigating commissions, labor newspapers, women's magazines, oral histories, surveys of women's work, studies of women in history, studies of women in ethnic communities. Future sources include union records, personnel records, workmen's compensation claims and legal records. All require vast amounts of reading for small bits of evidence.

I also looked at works on protective legislation and prostitution to make connections between sexual morality, economics, and violence in society. I investigated incidents as case studies in the dynamic of sexual harassment, in order to develop a theory of sexual harassment as a mechanism of social control, which theory can be tested by further historical research.

3. Phillip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in The United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), V. 1, 26.
 4. Frank Carlton, "Crusade To Improve Working Conditions," *Life & Labor*, Vol. 4 No. 4, 108-9.
 5. Leonora O'Reilly resigned from the WTUL in 1905-7 over such a dispute. See Lieberman, "Their Sisters' Keepers: The Women's Hours and Wages Movement in the U.S., 1890-1925," Ph.D. diss., Columbia, 1971, pp. 87-88. Also see Rosen, ed; *The Maimie Papers* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1977), Introduction.
 6. Neff, *Victorian Working Women* (New York: Columbia University, 1929), pp. 54-5.
 7. Boston *Daily Times*, Jan. 16, 1839. There were other articles in the *Times*, the Boston *Quarterly Review*, and The Lowell *Courier* similar to this. Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964), p. 81.
 8. "Vox Populi," *Voice of Industry*, Sept. 11, 1845. Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker*.
 9. Theresa Wolfson, *Women Workers & Trade Unions*, p. 103.

10. For discussion of the "Nice Girl" construct and social control, see Greer Litton Fox, "Nice Girl: Social Control of Women Through a Value Construct," *Signs* V. 2 No. 4, pp. 805-817, especially pp. 805 & 809.

11. See, for example, Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow* (New York: George Dovan, 1918), Elizabeth Hasanovitch, *One of Them* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), Helen Campbell, *Prisoners of Poverty* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1900), Mrs. John & Marie Von Vorst, *The Woman Who Toils* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1904).

12. Jeanne Westin, *Making Do* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Company, 1976), p. 96.

13. Robert Smuts, *Women and Work in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 88.

14. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, *Family and Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977), p. 199 and Alice Kessler-Harris, "Organizing the Unorganizable", *Labor History* V. 17 No. 1: 5-23.

15. Maud Nathan, *The Story Of An Epoch-Making Movement* (New York: Doubleday, 1926), . 7.

16. *Harper's Bazar*, July 1908, p. 693. Also see *One of Them*, pp. 108-110, and *Out Of The Shadow*, pp. 127-9.

17. *Harper's Bazaar*, November 1908, p. 1141.

18. *One of Them*, pp. 108-10-11.

19. *Out Of The Shadow*, pp. 127-9.

20. Isaac Metzger, ed. *A Bintel Brief, Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 72.

21. *One of Them*, p. 110.

22. Andria Hourwich, ed., *I Am A Woman Worker* (New York: Affiliated Schools For Workers, 1930s(?)), p. 86.

23. *Ibid*, December 1908, pp. 1230.

24. *Life and Labor*, Vol. 1 No. 1, January 1911, p. 14.

25. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4 No. 8, August 1914, p. 242.

26. Dorothy Richardson, *The Long Day*, p. 260.

27. *Harper's Bazaar*, July 1908, p. 693.

28. Maud Nathan, *Epoch-Making Movement*, pp. 15-16.

29. Dorothy Richardson, *The Long Day*, p. 263; Elizabeth Hasanovitch, *One of Them*, p. 110.

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30. Rose Cohen, *Out Of The Shadow*, p. 851.
 31. *New York State Factory Investigating Comm.*, 2nd Report, Vol. 3, 1913, Testimony of Mary Chamberlain, pp. 1016, 1004.
 32. Edith Abbott, *Unpublished Biography of Grace Abbott*, Chapter Two, "Lost Immigrant Girls", The Abbott Papers, University of Chicago, Box 1, Folder 16, Addenda 2.
 33. Elizabeth Hasanovitch, *One Of Them*, p. 110.
 34. Carroll Brodsky, "Rape At Work," in Walker, *Sexual Assault*, (Lexington: DC Heath & Co., 1976), p. 48.
 35. Lieberman, p. 84. Also, for example, See Gompers, S., "Don't Sacrifice Womanhood," *American Federationist* 4:186-187 October 1897 and "Female Labor Arouses Hostility And Apprehension in Union Ranks," *Current Opinion*, 64: 292-4, April 1910.
 36. Mary Anderson, *Woman At Work* (Minneapolis: U. of Minn., 1951) p. 66. Also see, *Life & Labor* V. 3 No. 4, p. 103 and Theresa Wolfson, *Woman Worker and Trade Unions*, p. 55.
 37. P.N. to R.S. Nov. 14, 1911. R.S., A 94 quoted in Harris, *Labor History* article.
 38. P.N. to R.S., July 11, 1912, R.S. A 94.
 39. Rose Schneiderman, *All For One* (New York: Paul S. Erikson, 1967), p. 86.
 40. Mary Anderson, *Woman At Work*, p. 56, incident about 1915.
 41. Alice Hamilton, *Exploring The Dangerous Trades*.
 42. Emily Dunning Barringer, M.D., *Bowery To Bellevue* (New York: Norton, 1950), p. 184.
 43. "Lost Immigrant Girls", *Abbott Papers*, pp. 2-3.
 44. On homosocial networks and sisterhood, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual," and Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*. For differing perceptions of harasser and victim, see Carroll Brodsky, *The Harassed Worker*.
 45. On current conditions, Brodsky, *The Harassed Worker*, and interview with members of the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, a Boston group working on this issue. Prison may be a significant exception to this as a situation in which men are frequently subjected to sexual harassment. See, for example, the interviews with prisoners in the film *Rape Culture* (Cambridge Documentary Films).

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