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WOMEN'S PLACE IN THE CLASS STRUCTURE

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In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class.

Karl Marx
18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte
(1852)

The family then, and to this very day, is engaged in a process of production: of babies, of educated and growing children, of adults who will both produce more children and as adult workers produce not only commodities but also surplus value. Seen from this point of view, the family is a factory or a cottage industry for the production and reproduction of labour power. Capitalism cannot manage without it—it is not an accident of history—and very economical it is too, as even socialist countries who have tried to produce its services elsewhere have perhaps discovered ... Women are often involved as proletarian workers in both micro and macro production systems, whereas it is often if not always the case that man is master in one while slave in the other.

Ronald Frankenberg,
'In the Production of their lives',
in Diana Barker & Sheila Allen
*Sexual Divisions and Society:
Process and Change*
(1976), pp.27-8

Sex Class is so deep as to be invisible.

Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, p.11.

MEN AND WOMEN in Australian society, as in other advanced industrial societies, are differentiated in their access to economic, political and social power: the bases of this differentiation are class, sex and race. This essay is concerned with the inter-connections between class position and sex position in the generation of inequalities which women experience. Race will not be considered in this account, not because its importance is underestimated, but because the particular manifestations of deprivation, super-ordination and subordination associated with race relations in Australian society require a separate analysis.

In this essay, economic-class position is held to be based upon ownership or non-ownership of property in the means of production, with the further addition of the concept of 'market capacity', or the forms of relative power which individuals bring to their bargaining encounters in the labour market. This leads to the recognition of differentiation in the ranks of the propertyless, based on the possession of marketable skills, usually acquired by education or training. Such qualifications provide the possessor with greater power in labour market relationships: the 'market capacity' to secure higher income, greater security of employment, prospects of career advancement, superannuation rights, in comparison with the relatively less powerful market capacity of those who have only their labour-power to sell. Thus, following Giddens, I adopt a scheme of three possible bases for class structuration in an advanced industrial capitalist society: 'ownership of property in the means of production, possession of educational or technical qualifications, and possession of manual labour-power'.¹ These forms of market capacity, tied to relatively closed patterns of inter- and intra-generational mobility, yield a three class system: an upper, middle and working class within which access to valued material and symbolic goods is unequally distributed. This scheme represents a departure from a Marxian class analysis of ownership/non-ownership of property in the means of production: a departure which provides useful distinctions in a study of women's relationships to the means of production and exchange.

Sex position refers to membership of a sex-class, and the life chances associated with this membership: men and women are differentiated by the division of labour in procreation, which is biological in origin; and by the division of labour in child-rearing, which is social in origin. In all human societies, women give birth to children, and are by custom or law or religious injunction (or by all three) expected to take prime responsibility for their care, while men are empowered to legitimise the wife's children, to provide them with an acknowledged place in the social structure.² Women as the basic commodity of exchange between men,³ women as mothers or potential mothers,⁴ are disadvantaged, because bearing and rearing small children renders them dependent (except in very exceptional circumstances) on the goodwill, protection and resources of men (husbands, brothers, fathers, the quasi-male organisation of the State) for a greater or lesser period of their young

adult lives. In all societies (even in matrilineal societies where group-membership and inheritance are transmitted through the mother), authority, leadership and control of households, lineages and local groups remain with the men.⁵ In complex, differentiated societies, where the apparatuses of the State centralise and delegate the 'legitimate' exercise of force in society, control by men is systematically co-ordinated in government, public administration, the legal system, the military, and in the organisation of the means of production.

It is not sufficient, or analytically fruitful, however, to remain at the level of a-historical, universal, dualistic categories of a sexual division of labour and a sexual division of control. The notion of sex-class is used to denote structured relations of inequality and superordination/subordination between men and women. The general notion of class, however, also implies a process of 'historical formation'—the development of a particular set of material and political conditions within which people who share a common relationship to the means of production, a common relationship to the structure of property-rights and the structure of authority, come to feel an identity of interests grounded in their common experience of deprivation and subordination.⁶ In other words, for sexual differentiation to become the basis for the formation of sex-classes, requires the existence of certain historical conditions, within which women's experience of deprivation and subordination becomes the focus of a shared consciousness, and of political mobilisation to change the relations of dominance and dependence.

The sexual differentiation based on the division of labour in childcare, and on the organisation of productive work within the household, which existed in pre-industrial Europe and European-colonised societies, acquired a particular dimension of *intensification* when married women's life-situation became closely identified with the duty to perform unpaid domestic labour.⁷ 'With the advent of industrial capitalism, the general labour process was split into two discrete units; a domestic, and an industrial unit.'⁸ In pre-industrial European societies, agriculture, commerce, the manufacture of cloth, clothing, foodstuffs, the artisan's workshop, were controlled by the kin group, within the spatial and social boundaries of family relationships within the household. Women—daughters, wives and domestic servants—were full participants in the processes of production, though still subject to the authority of their fathers, husbands and masters.⁹ The gradual removal of the processes of manufacture from the location of the household and from the control of the kin group is commonly attributed to 'industrialization'—to that process whereby manufacture was centralised in factory organisation; controlled by men with accumulated capital, harnessing a mechanised technology to the processes of production, and recruiting 'free' wage-labourers to produce goods for the commodity market.¹⁰

However, before the advent of mechanised, large-scale industrial manufacture, the growth of capitalist commercial enterprise was responsible for a critical change in the organisation of the business 'house'

and the domestic household: the separation of the *budgets* of these productive units—the separation of the book-keeping. It was the organisation of finance and accounting in the households of successful merchants and tradesmen where the separation of household and *enterprise* first emerged.¹¹ With this development, business and commercial activity were finally cut loose from other goals of family life, allowing the systematic accumulation of capital. Such expansion of the enterprise is not possible without the use of rational accounting, which in turn must use an all-purpose medium of exchange—money. Only then can any true calculation of input and output, of profit and loss be made.¹²

Thus, with the separation of the bourgeois household from the commercial enterprise (a gradual process through the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in England and Western Europe) emerged the prototype of the gender differentiation of spheres of life-activities. Men became the guardians of finance and commerce; women became the guardians of the household, where they engaged in the reproduction of children, the management of consumption and household production; the safeguarding of emotion and moral tradition from the incursion of market forces. The process of industrialization was a later stage in the separation of household and production; a stage which crucially affected working-class households, initially drawing not only husbands, but wives and children as well, as family units, into the processes of industrial production.¹³

In a study of domestic labour in Australia, it is essential to recognise the stages in the 'domestication' of women. The various Australian colonies began to industrialize in the 1860s and '70s, but a capitalist mode of production had been flourishing since the first decades of the colony of New South Wales, as a result of successful mercantile enterprise, the accumulation of land-holdings, and the importation of British capital.¹⁴ In the Australian colonies, as in England and Europe, it was the households of the bourgeoisie, and of urban middle class artisans and professional men (with the growth of free immigration after 1830) which provided the prototype of the division between domestic enterprise and business enterprise. In these households, wives, managing the 'domestic economy' with their servants and producing the heirs who would benefit from their parents' successful industriousness, safeguarded and augmented the prestige and social power won by their husbands in the market place. Many of these women were not only engaged in conspicuous consumption and a round of social events, they were also engaged in voluntary charitable work 'of a religious and humanitarian kind', organising committees to establish and administer hospitals, orphanages, schools, kindergartens, homes for unmarried mothers and destitute women, Church auxiliaries, the Women's Christian Temperance Union.¹⁵

These activities, as Beverly Kingston and Ann Summers emphasise, crystallised the role of women as the bearers and guardians of morality, charity and concern.¹⁶ Within the households of the bourgeoisie and

the urban middle-class, protected from the physical and moral taint of the market economy with its ethos of ruthless competition, wives were entrusted with the mission of safeguarding religious life and moral rectitude and the orderly, efficient habits of domestic economy. The objects of their civilising mission were not only those unfortunates who had contravened the message of thrift, hard work, temperance and abstinence by becoming drunk, destitute or pregnant without being married, but also their own husbands.

DOMESTIC ECONOMY

- (1) *How may a good wife render her home attractive to her husband?*
- (2) *What causes induce husbands to frequent taverns?*

Questions such as those illustrated, set in an examination for trainee women teachers in New South Wales in 1868, highlight colonial attitudes to the training of girls for their future moral responsibilities as wives.¹⁷

The notion of married women as 'God's Police' has acquired a characteristically Australian connotation: its impetus derives from the urban middle-class, free migrant response to the taint of convictism and the presence of a foot-loose band of single male pastoral workers, forced by their propertylessness and the scarcity of women to forgo the security and services of marriage.¹⁸ But it was not only in Australia that middle-class women shouldered moral responsibility for the community. In nineteenth century England, middle-class wives maintained the boundaries of respectability, morality, purity and cleanliness, their domestic management geared to the maintenance of class position; demarcating the boundaries between the respectable, clean middle-classes and the poor, the 'great unwashed'. Wives were the guardians of order—housework safeguarded the husband and his family from physical and moral pollution. In the spheres of industrial production and the market economy, men might gear rationality and calculability to the end of the accumulation of profit, but in the sphere of domestic production, the ends were not material but symbolic; the production of a privatized moral order.¹⁹

In England, only a small group of wealthy and powerful men could command the attendance of numerous domestic servants. 'Below this group, men, middle class and to a certain extent, the best paid, most regularly employed of the working class were provided with an intensely personal form of ego-protection and enhancement by their wives (or daughters, nieces and unmarried sisters) aided by female general servants.'²⁰ This observation of English social structure is also valid for Australian society in the latter half of the nineteenth century, before the attractions of greater freedom, reduced isolation, better pay and shorter working hours enticed unmarried women out of domestic service and into factory work.²¹ With the scarcity of domestic servants

in the early decades of the twentieth century, the wives and daughters of the middle class, impelled by love, duty and dependence, became the sole providers of domestic labour within their own households, producing goods and services for their husbands, fathers and brothers. 'The domestic worker is divorced not only from the means of production, but also from the means of exchange. She is therefore materially dependant upon the redistribution of the wage to be conducted in private between her and her husband without the benefit of a contract other than the general contract of marriage in civil law.'²² But it is not only in wives that the duty to perform domestic labour has come to inhere, but in the feminine gender itself: unmarried daughters and sisters may also perform unpaid domestic duties, dependent upon remuneration from father or brother, without even the contract of marriage as an emotional bargaining position.²³

Working-class husbands and wives aspired to the gender differentiation in marriage characteristic of middle-class households, but they had fewer material resources to achieve this end. In the early years of settlement, before the growth of urbanization after the 1850s, working-class wives in rural districts were essentially involved in the process of production: 'White women performed domestic labour, ran the dairies and the barnyards, frequently worked as shepherds and supplied pastoral labour when the white male labour went to the goldfields'.²⁴

Ann Curthoys, discussing Eve Pownall's *Mary of Maranoa: Tales of Australian Pioneer Women*, emphasises that women were used in rural districts as a reserve labour force, working in non-domestic tasks when labour was scarce, returning to domestic tasks when the labour shortage was eased by the use of aboriginal labour.²⁵ However, where hardship continued, such as on the sheep and cattle runs of poor selectors, women continued to be part of the family's productive enterprise, as they still are on small and middle-range landholdings in contemporary rural Australia.²⁶

In the urban areas, women's capacity to augment the family diet or income by primary production was severely limited by the shortage of space and the introduction of sanitary regulations controlling the ownership of domestic animals (poultry, pigs, a cow) in city housing.²⁷ Urbanization and industrialization after the 1850s were accompanied by the formation of an urban proletariat dependent only upon labour power for family survival. However, the working class was differentiated by skill. Artisans in the boom conditions prior to the 1890s, supported by strong and confident craft unions, won the right to wages and hours of work which enabled them to purchase a home, with a building-society loan, to aspire to self-improvement through evening reading and adult education, and to maintain their wives as dependent housewives. 'In her kitchen, the working class wife was expected to provide an ample diet at low cost to enable the husband to continue the large amount of heavy manual labour still necessary in most trades.'²⁸ In other words, it was the wife's task to reproduce the labour-power of her husband.

It was also her task to bear visible testimony to their shared, successful struggle to live respectably on £3 per week—a struggle towards which she made considerable contributions. Not only did she bring, as a bride into the marital home, her 'box' of personal clothing and household linen, accumulated during her single days by careful saving and patient stitching, but she also contributed her domestic labour as seamstress, cook, nurse and cleaner, a contribution whose value is hidden if considered only within the wage-form.

In the sections of the working class in less secure circumstances, where men had fewer skills, or were invalid or unemployed, or where women were widowed or otherwise without a male breadwinner, wives and mothers were not only engaged in unpaid domestic labour, but were also employed as wage-labourers. They worked in factories, in textile, clothing, boot, food and drink manufacture, or, if commitments to small children precluded their 'going out to work', they took in washing, or became out-workers for the clothing and boot trades, outside even the rudimentary protection of factory regulations and inspection.²⁹ 'A Mrs. Adams and her two daughters, who sewed moleskin trousers at Messrs McIvor and Lincoln's Factory, worked from 8 a.m. until 11 p.m. each day, being assisted at home by "a little one who takes out tackings when she comes home from school"'. Between them, these four females some-times manage to earn £3 a week.'³⁰

It was widely believed in Australia from the 1880s to 1910s that factory-work was damaging to the physical health, moral well-being and reproductive capacities of women and girls, who therefore required protective legislation, restricting their entry into certain areas of the workforce, and their hours of work.³¹ On the one hand, all employees' interests were eventually served by the introduction of regulative factory legislation; but the final outcome was also the creation of sex-demarcated spheres of industrial labour and sex-demarcated wage differentials. Underlying industrial legislation and the opinions of medical practitioners, the legal profession, most male trade unionists, businessmen and clergymen, was the strong conviction that women's rightful function and duty was the reproduction and rearing of a vigorous and healthy population—and that employment which (allegedly) impaired their reproductive capacities should be regarded with suspicion. Forms of birth control, contraception and abortion, which enabled women to take charge of their own fertility, must also be rigidly controlled, so as to save women from falling into a sad dereliction of their duty.³² However, the hard domestic labour of the servantless, unmechanised household, often in very poor housing conditions, was not regarded with disapproval and did not become the object of regulation or inspection.

Such beliefs, about women's 'natural' place as dependent wives and mothers, and husbands' duty to support them, were incorporated into the concept of the 'family-wage', handed down by Mr Justice Higgins in the Harvester Judgement in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court

in 1907, which became the basis of subsequent wage-fixation decisions. 'I have based it, in the first instance, on the normal needs of the average employee regarded as a human being living in a civilized community ... if he had a wife and children, he is under an obligation, even a legal obligation, to maintain them.'³³ The Harvester Judgement and later judgements set the principles of wage-differentiation for males and females: the minimum wage for an adult male to be sufficient to keep himself, his wife and about three children 'in reasonable comfort', the minimum wage for an adult woman to be sufficient to keep a single woman in reasonable comfort.³⁴ These judgements enshrined and reinforced dominant Australian beliefs about the place of married women in the family, economically dependent on their husband's wage, their own work of child-care and household labour regarded as outside the sphere of production and hence outside the sphere of remuneration. The introduction of a 'living wage', designed to protect the poorer, male unskilled worker, seriously disadvantaged the considerable minority of women who continued to support themselves, and frequently dependent children, invalids and relatives in a sex-differentiated labour market within a sex-differentiated reward structure.

The implications of domestic labour for women

At a certain point in the development of industrial capitalism in Australia, married women were placed in the material conditions of economic dependence, engaged in domestic labour with a strong element of personal service, producing goods and services for their husbands and children. This life-situation, this sex-class position, cut across economic class lines: the wives of the bourgeoisie, of middle-class professionals, and of working-class husbands were placed under the ideological obligation to perform personal service in return for their maintenance.

Those women who are most likely to be involved in full-time domestic labour and therefore to be economically dependent on their husbands or on a state social services benefit, are usually responsible for the care of children. In other words, it is men's and women's unequal participation in child-care, women's major responsibility for the care of their children, which is the base of their full-time involvement in domestic labour, and their material dependence. In contemporary industrial societies, both capitalist and state socialist, women's child-bearing role is technologically capable of control, but in no society, even in those ideologically committed to sexual equality, have women failed to assume the major responsibility for child care.³⁵

Most married women with children (the typical life-situation for Australian women after World War II)³⁶ occupy a particular relationship to the means of domestic production: they carry out the tasks of domestic labour, labour which has no apparent exchange-value, within material conditions provided by the wage (or salary, or profit, or income from property) of other family members, usually their husbands, who are involved in industrial production or in investment in property *outside*

the domestic sphere of production. In other words, women as full-time domestic labourers, typically *do not control* their access to resources, but are dependent on their husbands to supply the money required for the purchase of commodities which are the raw materials of their domestic production. This dependence ties women closely to the class position of their husbands³⁷ and enables them to fulfil the life-style of a working-class, middle-class or upper-class housewife, according to their husband's relationship to the means of production and his market capacity.³⁸ To be more conceptually precise, the *status* affiliations of women as domestic labourers, and their patterns of consumption as encapsulated in the term 'life-style' are a derivative of their husband's class position in the processes of production: his ownership and control of productive property, or his possession of educational and technical qualifications, or his possession of manual labour-power.

The marked discrepancy between the economic power and command of resources derived from property ownership and control, and that derived from the other two forms of market capacity, must of course be emphasised. Control over productive property is of a different order from greater or lesser market capacity in the labour market, derived from the acquisition of 'scarce' skills.³⁹ The implications for women, of their husband's differential access to resources, will be discussed later.

Wives carry out their domestic labour within the material conditions generated by their husband's market capacity. Women supervise and bring to fruition the family's processes of consumption—converting raw materials into meals; soap-powder and hot water into cleansing agents; fabric into curtains; flour, icing-sugar, and paper streamers into children's birthday parties. Women's processes and relations of *production* take place within the sphere of consumption, from the point of view of a market economy; and the 'distributive-groupings' and relationships established in consumption are aspects of *status*, secondary to the relationships of class.⁴⁰ This is the basis of an essential contradiction in women's potential group affiliations: they are immersed in the shared conditions of housewifery and child-care which may generate a sense of sex-class identity; they carry out these tasks within material conditions conducive to the generation of status consciousness.

So, for men, and for male-oriented class theory: economic class is grounded in the relations of production outside the household, and *status* is grounded in the consumption-patterns and group-affiliations associated with the household. For women, and for feminist-inspired class theory: sex-class is grounded in the relations of domestic production and the rearing of children; and the material conditions within which domestic production takes place are derived from the resources of consumption generated by the market power of men (when the woman is not gainfully employed in her own right). Therefore, as pungently highlighted by the quotation from Frankenberg at the beginning of this paper, women are very often 'proletarian workers' in the micro-production of their household. And they are proletarian workers even

if they enjoy excellent relations with their husband, even if he hands over all his wage packet and is handed back his spending-money. They are proletarian workers because they do not have control over the generation of the material resources on which their own productive labour is based. And they are proletarian domestic labourers even if their husband's market capacity provides them with the resources to employ household help and serve pizza and scotch to their guests for lunch—their life-style, their status, within which they 'manage' their household production (as white-collar workers rather than manual labourers) is still dependent on the good-will and finance of their husbands—*which can be withdrawn*. Their own market capacity, on which they may have to depend in the event of separation, divorce, death of their husband, may be, and typically is, of much lower economic power and usually commands greatly reduced economic rewards.

Women, like men, may be involved in the paid labour force, producing commodities and services for the market economy. In 1973, the estimated labour force participation rate of women in Australia over the age of fifteen was 40.5 per cent and of married women was 37.2 per cent. Between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-nine the greatest proportion of women in the workforce were married women in 1971 (reflecting the almost universal rates of marriage in Australian society). For those women not involved in the paid labour force, the most likely major activity in 1972 was 'keeping house': 97.6 per cent of married women not in the labour force were keeping house in 1972; in contrast to 52.3 per cent of women who were never married, widowed or divorced; and in contrast to 1.4 per cent of men not in the labour force who were keeping house. The high involvement of never-married, widowed and divorced women in unpaid domestic labour suggests that they may have had child-care responsibilities which kept them from wage-earning employment even though they are heads of households. The relative absence of men from full-time domestic labour is clearly demonstrated. (In 1972, the ratio of men to women involved in full-time domestic labour was 1:200.)⁴¹

It is important to note that 60 per cent of all Australian women in 1972 were not labour force participants and the greatest majority of these women (84 per cent) were designated as 'keeping house'. In other words, the dominant life-activity of half of all Australian women, at any one time, is full-time domestic labour, while a further 40 per cent combine full-time or part-time employment with their domestic labour. The women most likely to be outside the labour force are those responsible for the care of young children. Women, as paid workers, are part of the economic class-structure by virtue of their relationship to the means of production and exchange. Their position in this class-structure is closely determined by the life-chances which they inherit from the material conditions of their family of origin (father's and mother's access to property and income) and by their sex-class. Sex-class is experienced initially in day-to-day relationships with the mother, whose

on-going activities of child-care and domestic labour provide her daughters with their first potent enactment of female gender identity, while, in the interplay of power and dependence between the parents, daughters experience the range of influence and authority connected with gender identity.

There are considerable Australian data which attest to the relative sense of powerlessness and incompetence which girls experience, in comparison with boys in similar class situations.⁴² In their journey through childhood, schooling and the sexual market of adolescence, girls typically internalise a sense of relative powerlessness which is a realistic assessment of the position of other women in their social environment. They translate their attitudes into the actions of earlier school-leaving compared with boys in their own social class, entry into sex-differentiated fields of job-training and post-secondary education, and entry into a sex-segregated labour market.⁴³ Margaret Power has shown, using census data on occupations from 1911 to 1971, that women's place in the family in Australia has been reproduced in economic institutions, particularly in the segmented labour market, where women typically are employed in a narrow range of disproportionately female occupations, whose status, conditions, rewards, and promotion possibilities compare unfavourably with conditions which pertain in the male sector of the workforce:⁴⁴ 'Female occupations are those in which work relationships require men to be in authority over women and where the nature of work is often derivative of housework, for instance, work associated with food, clothing and cleaning, and work which involves caring for the young and the sick'.⁴⁵ In other words, there are held to be 'natural' economic roles for women which parallel women's natural family roles. This is reinforced by a further internal segregation of occupations, by means of which the positions of control in the occupation are usually held by men, and the subordinate positions by women. Evidence of this has been documented for the academic workforce, the library profession, and the Australian Public Service.⁴⁶

Women, as paid workers in the labour market, typically occupy positions as wage-labourers in the clerical, sales, service and factory production sectors of the workforce. Only a small minority have the market capacity (educational and technical skills) to be employed in the professional and administrative sectors of the workforce (usually as nurses and teachers), while an even smaller minority are employers or self-employed (see Tables I and II). A part of this latter minority are likely to be members of the petit-bourgeoisie, owning shops and small businesses (e.g. dressmaking establishments) which they control in their own right. Another proportion of this group may be property-owners, partners and directors in business enterprises in nominal terms only, as *names* used as part of the financial arrangements of their husbands and kinship group, not uncommonly utilised for the purposes of taxation avoidance. These women may have little actual control of the means of production and little *independent* access to profits, although they

may well benefit substantially from their close family connection with property and wealth.

The typical and dominant pattern is for women workers to have no job qualification (80 per cent of the female workforce in 1971; see Table III); to be a wage-earner (88.4 per cent of the female workforce; see Table I); and to be employed in clerical, sales, production process and service occupational categories (76.4 per cent of the female workforce in 1976; see Table II). By the criteria of market capacity, these workers possess only their labour power, they are members of the working class. It has been mistakenly suggested that because women cluster in the white-collar sectors of the workforce (in sales, clerical work and service industries rather than in industrial manufacture) they occupy 'middle class jobs' in relation to men who are more predominantly involved in trades, heavy industry and labouring jobs. This is a false and misleading use of the concept of class—a term transferred from status-theories of occupational prestige. The majority of employed women are involved in working-class occupations because they have no access to ownership and control of the means of production; they enjoy no monopoly of scarce educational and technical skills and have only their labour-power to sell in the market place. The jobs which they enter are subject to the mechanisms of fragmentation, supervision and hierarchical control described by C. Wright Mills, in *White Collar*, and by Studs Terkel's informants, in *Working*.

There is also a small middle-class (in the Giddens' sense) of workers with tertiary qualifications who are in professional, technical and administrative jobs (17 per cent of the female workforce). But these women usually occupy the subordinate positions in their professional and administrative hierarchies—hierarchies which reproduce, in microcosm, women's general position in the structure of the workforce.

TABLE I: OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF THE LABOUR FORCE AGED 15 YEARS AND OVER, 1971

Occupational Status	Males		Females	
	No.	%	No.	%
Employer	217,792	6.0	59,646	3.5
Self-Employed	300,422	8.3	77,636	4.6
Wage Earner	3,058,672	84.0	1,494,298	88.4
Unpaid Helper	9,640	0.3	22,321	1.3
Unemployed	44,876	1.2	29,123	1.7
Looking for First Job	8,237	0.2	7,824	0.5
Total in Labour Force	3,639,639	100.0	1,690,849	100.0

Source: CBCS 1971 Census.

NOTE: The majority of persons in the labour force are 'wage-earners'. Women are less likely to be 'employers' and 'self-employed' than are men.

TABLE II: LABOUR FORCE BY OCCUPATION GROUP (PER CENT)

Occupation group	February 1964			February 1976		
	Males	Married women	All females	Males	Married women	All females
Professional and technical	8.1	9.5	13.6	10.9	13.6	15.2
Administrative, executive and managerial	8.1	5.8	3.6	8.3	2.1	1.9
Clerical	8.0	20.3	28.1	8.3	31.3	33.7
Sales	6.3	14.0	12.9	6.1	12.0	12.5
Farmers, fishermen, timber-getters, etc.	13.3	6.7	4.4	9.0	4.2	3.3
Transport and communication	7.3	1.9	2.6	7.7	2.2	2.2
Tradesmen, production process workers and labourers, n.e.c.	44.3	20.5	16.5	43.9	15.8	13.0
Service, sport and recreation	4.2	21.0	17.3	5.2	18.8	17.2
Looking for first job	0.2		1.1	0.5		1.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: *Social Indicators*: no. 1 (1976). Australian Bureau of Statistics (Canberra), p.45.

TABLE III: DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYED POPULATION 15 YEARS AND OVER BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF QUALIFICATION OBTAINED, JUNE 1971

Level of Qualification Obtained	EMPLOYED POPULATION					
	Males		Females		Persons	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No qualification	2,422,548	67.6	1,334,757	80.7	3,757,305	71.7
Trade	727,165	20.3	31,833	1.9	758,998	14.5
Technician	141,837	4.0	84,423	5.1	226,260	4.3
Other tertiary	135,824	3.8	85,289	5.2	221,113	4.2
First degree	100,462	2.8	27,749	1.7	128,211	2.5
Higher degree	16,865	0.5	2,681	0.2	19,546	0.4
Not classifiable	41,815	1.2	87,166	5.3	128,981	2.5
Total	3,586,516	100.0	1,653,898	100.0	5,240,414	100.0

Source: CBCS 1971 Census.

Note: Almost three-quarters of employed persons have no vocational qualifications beyond formal schooling. Relatively more employed females than employed males have not obtained any qualifications. An overwhelmingly higher proportion of employed males than females have obtained trade level qualifications. The most common qualifications obtained by females are at technician or 'other tertiary' level. Completion of short specialised courses ('not classifiable' group) are also common qualifications obtained by women

Source: *Facts and Figures: Women and Work* no. 11, Women's Bureau, Department of Labour (Melbourne 1973), p.9.

What is the relationship between women's sex-class and the positions which they characteristically occupy as members of the working class in the processes of production? Women in Australia usually pursue marriage and motherhood as their major source of identity, and equip themselves for the workforce as a secondary consideration; they are, in a majority of instances, outside the paid workforce in their most vigorous adult years whilst they are occupied with full time child-rearing and domestic labour. For these reasons, when they return to the workforce (typically at ages thirty to thirty-five when their youngest child is of school age), they lack the necessary skills, work-experience and confidence to take up skilled occupations and professions. If they had initial professional training, they usually remain in the lower echelons of the professional workforce. The initial period of women's responsibility for the care of children, and their continuing responsibility for child-care and domestic labour even while they are employed in the workforce, usually constitutes a set of conditions which militate against the acquisition of a powerful market capacity, and militate against promotion in work hierarchies. At the same time, in the male networks of the controlling elites in the board-rooms of corporate capitalism, in government bureaucracies, in universities, in large businesses, in formal and informal professional associations, decisions are made which maintain strategies of recruitment and exclusion; strategies which discriminate against women. No matter how well qualified, women, because of their membership of a sex-class, represent a discordance with dominant

definitions of the appropriate qualities for suitable colleagues.⁴⁷

Women constitute, and are used as, a 'reserve army' of labour in industrial societies, both capitalist and state socialist. In the Australian post-war economy, married women, and Southern European migrant women in particular, have gained jobs when labour is scarce or when jobs are particularly poorly paid and unattractive (and when male workers are refusing to do them) and they are the first laid off in times of unemployment.⁴⁸ In February 1976, a greater proportion of women than of men in the labour force stated that they were unemployed and looking for work (see Table IV). This discrepancy is also highly likely to be understated because of women's traditional reluctance to see themselves as having a right to work, and therefore their reluctance to see themselves as unemployed when they have lost their job and are having difficulty finding another.

TABLE IV: UNEMPLOYED PERSONS; PERCENTAGE OF LABOUR FORCE IN EACH AGE-GROUP: FEBRUARY 1976

	Age 15-19	Age 20 & over	Original total	Seasonally adjusted
Males	12.8%	2.9%	3.9%	3.3%
Females	15.0%	4.3%	6.0%	4.8%

Source: *Unemployment and Employment*. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 1976), p.12.

From the perspective of the political economy of Australian post-war production, married women, as an industrial 'reserve army', have made a considerable contribution to capital accumulation and growth. The sex-segmented labour market in the Australian economy is one of the divisions in what Herb Gintis has called the general process of workforce 'fragmentation' in the social relations of production.⁴⁹ Fragmentation of the labour force into male and female workers, white-collar and blue-collar workers, native-born and migrant workers, white and black workers, functions as a process of control and legitimation. The workforce is controlled because it is divided by status differentiations, and these are legitimated by unequal income and unequal access to positions of authority on the basis of job skills. In this hierarchy of domination, women as a category usually occupy subordinate positions. Gintis claims that the criteria upon which workforce fragments form may not be generated at the point of production, but may be brought into the relations of production from an outside source. Clearly, the sexual cleavage, as one such form of workforce fragmentation, is derived from pre-capitalist social relations and has its structural source outside the work place.

In their analysis of sexual differentiation in the British labour market, Barron and Norris utilise a particular model of labour market segmen-

tation—the dual labour market model. They define a dual labour market as one in which:

1. There is a more or less pronounced division into higher-paying and lower-paying sectors.
2. Mobility across the boundary of these sectors is restricted.
3. Higher-paying jobs are tied into promotional or career ladders while lower-paid jobs offer few opportunities for vertical movements.
4. Higher-paying jobs are relatively stable, while lower-paid jobs are unstable.⁵⁰

The development of dualism in the labour market is seen to be the result of the increasing separation of the primary sector from a basically secondary labour market, a separation which takes place because of the employers' need to attract and retain skilled workers in jobs which require considerable manpower investment. The development of a primary sector also coincides with the increasing popularity of secondary schooling and post-secondary training in post-war industrial societies—in effect, with the production of specialist skilled workers and technologists, whose expectations are geared to better wages and conditions and who have been in a position to have their demands met. The promotional structure, increased rewards and better conditions of the primary sector are maintained against the instability and lower earnings of the secondary sector, which is dependent upon the availability of a supply of workers willing to accept poor pay and poor conditions. This duality militates against employee solidarity, since the interests of workers in different sectors of the labour market are unlikely to converge.

Barron and Norris isolate five main conditions which make a particular social category a likely source of secondary workers: their labour is seen as legitimately dispensable; they exhibit clearly visible social differences; they appear to have little interest in acquiring training (or little opportunity to do so); they do not energetically pursue high monetary rewards; and they lack solidarity as workers.⁵¹ Women, clearly, are prime candidates for the secondary labour market, because their major life-project is seen by employers, by most trade union leaders and by many women themselves, to lie outside the reward structure of the labour market. It is commonly accepted that for most single women, the job is a stop-gap before marriage, while for married women, the job is a means for augmenting family income, but because of these same family commitments, their job mobility, their movement into and out of the workforce, may be high. For single women, women without a male bread-winner, and women with high job-commitment, these considerations are not applicable, but the conditions of the stereotype are applied to them also, and they labour under its disadvantages.

The probability that a worker will enter and remain in the secondary labour market is a result of the work opportunities available, the conditions of that work, and qualities shaped elsewhere in the social structure

and brought to the labour market. What appears to be a high level of voluntary job mobility on the part of women may actually be created by the conditions of poor pay and work which lacks intrinsic interest, and offers little prospect for job-security, promotion, or autonomous control—a set of conditions which offers little incentive for job stability.

Clearly, however, sex-segmentation of the labour force gains its ideological impetus and its human recruits from men and women inducted into sex-role relationships in their families, where unequal power relations between the sexes are reproduced and maintained. The family, where women carry out domestic labour, produces not only goods and services for family consumption, it reproduces the sexual division of labour. Women's dependence in child-care, and men's control in bread-winning, produces not only a conjugal relationship of control and dependence, but also children inculcated with the ideology of the sexual division of labour. The family, with the conjugal division of labour which now pertains, is the structural base in which the sexual segmentation of the industrial workforce is maintained. However, sexual segmentation gains another dimension, and a structure of support, in the relations of control between the sexes in the workplace, in the processes of production.

Some additional considerations of domestic labour in Australian society

There is a considerable debate being waged about the relationship between domestic labour and the industrial processes of production. There is general agreement that the household is a unit of production, where labour is performed which is outside the sphere of the market economy, and therefore outside the sphere of exchange-value; but that the housewife's job is to reproduce (refresh, replenish, sustain, both materially and psychologically), the labour-power of her husband.⁵² Secombe claims that the wage which a husband is paid contains a component which is due to the wife for her unpaid labours.⁵³ Although he endorses Marx's point that the wage paid to the male is not equivalent to the value of his labour (surplus value having been extracted) he does not make the same observation about the component of the wage due to the wife—apparently this represents the true value of her labour. Again, he suggests that the marriage contract is sufficient basis to ensure that women will be maintained (i.e. will be adequately reimbursed for their domestic labour) through the good agencies of their husband.

Gardiner makes two important criticisms of Secombe's analysis which add substantially to the exercise of placing housework within the labour theory of value.⁵⁴ She demonstrates that women's unpaid domestic labour contributes to the value of her husband's wage extending, stretching its exchange value. In other words, the overall standard of living of workers is not determined just by the wage bargain between capital and labour, as it appears to be in Marx's analysis, but also by the contribution of domestic labour. At the same time however, the family is an unequal

power distribution, in which women's dependence is ensured by their lack of resources.

Taking up Gardiner's point that domestic labour contributes to the value of the husband's wage by extending its exchange value, it is essential to move from the theoretical level to an actual, empirical situation. In Australian society, there has been a tradition of the 'good housewife and mother' who 'managed', 'struggled', 'made ends meet'; cut down her husband's trousers for her sons; kept a stock pot on the stove so as not to waste the cooking water of vegetables and meat; turned the faded curtains; made her daughters' dresses; baked all her own cakes; preserved her own jams and fruit—in short, supplied the domestic labour which enabled the family wage 'to support a man, his wife and three children, according to the normal needs of the average employee regarded as a human being living in a civilized community'.

Women's unpaid domestic labour supports, like an infrastructure, the wage structures and profits of the industrial-capitalist economy. The goods and services which women produce and provide in domestic labour (even when they also have paid employment) if purchased in the market place, would add substantially to the cost of maintaining a household. This means that the wage paid to the male breadwinner is actually subsidised by the unpaid domestic labour of his wife. Domestic labourers are not only major agents of consumption in a market economy, but also provide a pool of labour which may be recruited into the secondary labour market.

In her most recent article, Jean Gardiner contends that women do not constitute a class on the basis of their gender, but there is a case for arguing that 'those engaged in unpaid domestic labour share a common class position'.⁵⁵ There is an even stronger case for equating unpaid domestic labour with responsibility for child-care and with the maintenance of low market capacity in the dual labour market. It is not domestic labour alone which needs to be considered in assessing women's position in the class structure, but the cluster of conditions which accompany it.

The political economy of housework debate is essentially concerned with the relationship between domestic labour and the economic organisation of industrial capitalism. The consequences of domestic labour for women are even more pertinent for this discussion. When men are paid a 'family-wage' in order to support and maintain a sex-based division of labour in the family (and this was rightly seen as a gain of considerable significance by the Australian labour movement), then women are rendered economically dependent—a dependence legitimated by law, religion and community morality. They are then subject to the processes of power and authority which are incumbent upon people who are economically dependent, as Fallding's study of some Australian-born families, and as Bottomley's study of some Greek families in Sydney, demonstrate.⁵⁶

One of the crucial issues *not* adequately confronted in the pages of

the political economy of housework debate is that the association of women with unpaid domestic labour is a consequence of their relationship to child-care. To recognise this sexual cleavage would mean confronting the possibility that men and women may not have an identity of interests, either in the family or in the labour force. The industrial interests of women workers may sometimes appear to be in opposition to those of their male co-workers, particularly when women perceive their trade unions to be male-dominated, suspicious of the movement of women into previously male occupations, and especially suspicious of the movement of women into trade union activities. Women's interest in part-time work is a particular instance, which highlights the potential differences which can arise between male and female employees: the claim of some women with dependent children for part-time work has, in some cases, been seen by male trade unionists as undermining the existence, conditions and status of their own jobs.

A particular case in point was the appeal by the Australian Bank Officers' Association, in 1975, to a full bench of the Arbitration Commission, against a decision made by a member of the Commission in favour of the employment of part-time labour as tellers in peak banking hours. It was women with dependents who were likely to benefit from the availability of part-time work. The officials of the A.B.O.A. claimed that the use of part-time labour would be a denial of the career opportunities and expectations of bank officers in all recruitment grades, but the appeal was dismissed. The arguments in this particular case highlight a special instance of a dual labour market within an industry—and highlight the general relationship between women's responsibility for child-care and domestic labour and their availability for recruitment into the secondary labour market. The changes sought and won by management were to facilitate the entry of women into the non-career, non-promotion, secondary sector of the bank labour force; however, here they would be employed in jobs which men, with aspirations to the career rankings of the primary labour force, saw as their career entry-point. But many women who have responsibility for the care of children see themselves having no choice but to take part-time work in the non-career ranks of the labour force. Frequently, their late re-entry into the workforce precludes their recruitment into career-rankings, and their continuing responsibility for the care of children (after school, in school-holidays, when children are sick) militates against their involvement in full time work. Women's identification with motherhood is not the only source of their continuing close alliance with child-care—there is a scarcity of substitute child-care facilities provided on a community basis—and, even more pertinently, most organised groups of men in society, including unions, management, and political parties, show little interest in challenging women's monopoly of child-care responsibilities. 'For all the talk of the joys of parenthood, men do not find childcare sufficiently enjoyable to seize it for themselves'.⁵⁷

Despite their continuing responsibility for children and domestic

labour, married women's workforce participation rate has increased markedly in the post-war period (6.5 per cent of married women were in the labour force in 1947, 37 per cent in 1973, according to the O.E.C.D. study, *The Role of Women in the Economy*). It was against this background of women's contribution to the economy, and the vocal advocacy of women's groups, that women were granted 'equal pay for work of equal value' in December 1972 by the Commonwealth Arbitration Commission, and the male minimum wage was extended to women in 1974.⁵⁸ However, these changes have not been sufficient to eradicate a long history of sex differentials in pay structures, especially when women continue to be employed in a sex-segmented secondary sector of the labour market. In 1975, the gross weekly earnings of full-time male and female workers, twenty years of age and over, showed a bimodal distribution—further evidence of the existence of a dual labour market. Women cluster in the lower levels of the income range: 80 per cent of women earned less than \$140 per week, in comparison with 45 per cent of men. Earnings at the upper levels do not include the value of non-monetary rewards such as the use of a car, expense accounts, which workers in the primary sector are likely to enjoy (see Table V).

Under the employment conditions and reward structure of the secondary labour market, employed married women may gain a measure of economic independence, but their obligation to perform domestic labour and to remain responsible for child care is unlikely to be altered. Similarly, the authority structure within the family may not be changed merely because the wife is an income earner. There is a psycho-sexual dimension in the relations of authority and deference in marriage, which reinforces economic dependence.⁵⁹ The wife's inclination towards deference may not be affected by her work experience, particularly if she is involved in a relationship of authority and deference in the work place. However, paid employment and the gaining of some economic power may, for some women, constitute a base for confidence and moral independence, as elaborated in the concluding section of this essay.

The conditional nature of women's alliance with a dependable source of income is illustrated with particular clarity when that alliance ends. *The First Main Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty*, April 1975, contains evidence of the position of women in female-headed households, created by separation, divorce or the death of the husband.⁶⁰ The poverty of these women and their children is exacerbated (or caused), by the sudden drop in income attendant upon the withdrawal of the husband's wage. Their poverty is due to the conjunction of the disadvantages of their economic class position and the disadvantages of their sex-class position. As women, responsible for the care of children, employed in the secondary labour market, or struggling to perform domestic labour within the material conditions provided by a social security benefit, they are placed in a position of low social and economic power.

Until the introduction of the Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975-

TABLE V: ALL EMPLOYEES—WEEKLY EARNINGS, AGE AND FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME STATUS, PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION BY SIZE, AUGUST 1975 (PER CENT)

Weekly earnings (\$)—	Males			Females			Persons		
	Aged 15-19 years	Aged 20 years and over	Total	Aged 15-19 years	Aged 20 years and over	Total	Aged 15-19 years	Aged 20 years and over	Total
Under 60	22.2	0.8	2.7	23.6	1.8	6.0	22.9	1.1	3.7
60 and under	26.6	0.7	3.0	35.0	3.2	9.2	30.5	1.3	4.8
80	23.9	3.8	5.6	26.6	16.6	18.5	25.1	7.2	9.3
100	16.7	17.5	17.4	9.7	34.3	29.6	13.4	22.0	20.9
120	5.6	22.9	21.4	3.3	23.4	19.6	4.6	23.0	20.9
140	2.7	18.3	16.9	1.1	10.0	8.3	1.9	16.1	14.4
160	0.9	10.5	9.6	0.4	4.3	3.6	0.7	8.8	7.9
180	0.7	7.1	6.6	0.2	2.9	2.3	0.5	6.1	5.3
200	0.2	5.8	5.3		1.2	1.1	0.1	4.6	4.1
220	0.2	3.1	2.9		1.0	0.7	0.1	2.5	2.2
240	0.2	3.2	2.8		0.4	0.4	0.1	2.4	2.2
260		2.7	2.5	0.1	0.5	0.4		2.1	1.8
300	0.1	1.6	1.5		0.3	0.2		1.3	1.2
340		2.0	1.8		0.1	0.1		1.5	1.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

FULL-TIME WORKERS

76, husbands were legally obliged to support their wives, an obligation which they were usually ordered to maintain on separation or divorce. However, 'not all husbands are conscientious in keeping up regular maintenance payments and it is notoriously difficult to enforce a maintenance order'.⁶¹

Under the maintenance provisions of the Family Law Act, the liability of one party to a marriage... to maintain the other party is not worded in gender terms: the key concept in deciding maintenance is the inability of a spouse to support herself or himself adequately, for a variety of reasons, such as:

- (a) the age and state of health of each of the parties;
- (b) the income, property and financial resources of each of the parties and the physical and mental capacity of each of them for appropriate gainful employment;
- (c) whether either party has the care or control of a child of the marriage who has not attained the age of 18 years;
- (j) the extent to which the party whose maintenance is under consideration has contributed to the income, earning capacity, property and financial resources of the other party;
- (k) the duration of the marriage and the extent to which it has affected the earning capacity of the party whose maintenance is under consideration; and
- (l) the need to protect the position of a woman who wishes only to continue her role as a wife and mother.⁶²

The last of these items fits awkwardly into the general spirit of the Act as it is the only place where sex differentiation is expressed. However, in effect, because of the husband's usually greater market capacity and income-earning potential, and particularly if the wife has responsibility for children and has been out of the workforce for a considerable number of years, the wife is more likely to be awarded maintenance. The emphasis is shifted from the rights and duties entailed in gender, to the relative economic strengths of the spouses, and responsibility for the care of children.

The provisions of the Act in respect of the distribution of marital property draw the attention of the court to the contributions made by the *homemaker* and *parent* to the 'acquisition, conservation or improvement of the property'.⁶³ In the past, the distribution of marital property at divorce traditionally favoured the husband, because his earnings usually provided the principal source of funds for the purchase of family assets. Most women, having spent a considerable proportion of their married lives outside the workforce, were prejudiced by rules that emphasized material contributions to the acquisition of assets.⁶⁴ The Family Law Act, in drawing attention to the contribution of domestic labour to the accumulation of assets, and therefore establishing for the homemaker an entitlement to property rights, is highlighting the economic relationships of domestic labour, economic relationships long shrouded in mystical veils of obligation and duty. **The extent** to which, and the

manner in which, the Family Court will take the home-maker role into account in property settlements remains to be studied.⁶⁵

It is important to emphasize that property ownership, on a large scale, is applicable to only a small portion of the Australian population. The family home is the only major item of property which most married couples accumulate, and the property problem at separation may be mainly concerned with the payment of debts, including mortgage repayments. The Poverty Commission Report notes that women in single-parent families, particularly those who have been deserted or widowed, are often faced with high debt commitments.⁶⁶ On the one hand, recent legal provisions applying to maintenance and the distribution of marital property point towards a re-evaluation of men's and women's work. But, in taking relative earning power into account, the Act shows that the base of economic inequality between husbands and wives is to be found in their unequal duty to perform domestic labour and child care, and in their subsequent unequal opportunity to acquire a secure position in the labour market. Women whose husbands were in the secondary labour market themselves, are extremely disadvantaged if they are separated, divorced or widowed, because they have usually been unable to accumulate savings or assets.⁶⁷

In making a systematic case for establishing the interconnections between sex-class and economic class, as women experience them, it is not suggested here that domestic labour and child care have no intrinsic reward and provide no emotional gratification. Clearly, these activities may provide women with a source of great satisfaction. Child-care, particularly, is a human activity whose importance cannot be over-estimated, both from the point of view of the child, and of those who are doing the caring. This essay is concerned with the economic, social and political implications which flow from men's and women's unequal participation in child-care and domestic labour, from women's enforced monopoly of what is intrinsically a human activity, capable of providing both sexes with gratification.

The Potential for Sex-Class Consciousness

Do women—or can they—constitute a class, in the sense of consciousness of their common situation, and mobilisation for political action to change their situation? E.P. Thompson, in the introduction to his monumental study of the *making* of the English working-class, stresses that:

class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily.⁶⁸

Thompson sees class-consciousness as a historical formation, occurring in a particular place at a particular time because, for a variety of reasons, people who share a common relationship to the structure of property-rights and the structure of authority, come to feel an identity of interests

as between themselves, and as against their rulers and employers, an identity of interests grounded in their common experience of deprivation and oppression. Is such a class-awareness occurring, or likely to occur, amongst women in Australia, who, as suggested in this essay, constitute a sex-class in the objective sense of their relationship to the means of child-care and domestic labour?

Firstly, some of the structural processes militating against the formation of sex-class consciousness should be examined. Women may be viewed as a subordinate class in relation to men, but they take on the status of their husbands, they carry out domestic labour and child-care, and enter the workforce within the material conditions provided by their husband's command of income and property. Their life-style, their consumption patterns, are commensurate with their husband's labour-power, or his control of the means of production, and hence we have the commonly perceived and accepted scheme of working-class women, middle-class women, and upper-class women. As demonstrated, these are actually status categories based on consumption, but these categorisations act as cleavages between women, allying their interests with the status position of their husbands. Working class women do not see themselves having much identity of interests with middle-class women; working-class women *must* work, middle-class women may choose to; working-class women usually perform all of the domestic labour, middle-class women may employ household help. Women of the upper class enjoy the privileges connected with their husband's access to wealth and property, and may have property in their own right, through their own kinship connections. Thus status divisions between women (and in some cases, real class divisions) are highly likely to obscure those life-conditions which women share, child-bearing, responsibility for child-care and responsibility for (and usually the actual carrying out of) domestic labour. Such divisions militate strongly against the formation of a feminist consciousness which goes beyond the individual experience of discontent or discrimination. There is an analogy here with the way in which status divisions between workers at the point of production militate against class consciousness.⁶⁹

It must also be emphasised that women's potential awareness of the shared, or class, nature of their situation is even more likely to be minimised by the privatised nature of their every-day labour (immersion in the family, close connection with housewife identity), than it is by their social class identifications. In their isolated domestic labour, women are likely to form neither economic nor sex-class awareness because they do not have the opportunity to share and accumulate common experiences with other workers and with other women. In this situation, any awareness of grievance or sense of deprivation which they experience can be attributed by themselves, by close family members and by the 'helping professions' to their personal 'failure to cope'. In economic class relations, there is a hegemony of beliefs arising from the interests of the dominant class; that through hard work, men may aspire to social

mobility; that there are classes in society, but their structures are open. In sex-class relations, the hegemony of beliefs is that there is no sex class, because women's interests are the same as those of their men: men and women live in such close emotional interdependence that their interests cannot be separated, therefore women of different classes have little in common.

Conservative thought encourages women (usually successfully) to continue their life project of refreshing and refurbishing the male workforce, reproducing the future workforce and consuming the products of the market economy. Marxian and other varieties of socialist thought make a similar analysis of the family in its current form, but turn the moral content on its head, advocating concerted working class action to change the relations of production in which the family is embedded, because this change will, of itself, produce changes in family relationships. This is a highly doubtful proposition, given the pre-capitalist existence of sexual differentiation and male authority, and the persistence of women's involvement in domestic labour and their continuing responsibility for child-care in state socialist societies.

The liberal position is even more pertinent because it probably comes closest to that held by men and women sympathetic to women's issues. In the liberal analysis, it is held that women do tend to occupy sex-stereotyped positions in domestic labour and in the lower ranks of the workforce, but sex-class mobility is possible. Within the unequal structures of opportunities open to men and women, a small minority of women control their fertility, choose not to marry, or if they marry and have children, they utilise substitute child-care and reject most of the chores of domestic labour as ritualistic and unnecessary. They work hard at school, are not afraid of success or competition with their male peers, enter careers and professions, and through persistence and struggle move into the upper ranks of their occupational hierarchy. The ideology of sex-class mobility operates like the ideology of social class mobility: the movement of a minority through the structures of inequality appears to show that there is room for the expression of talent and merit. This ethic of success through individual action justifies the subordination of those without such energy and drive. Alice Rossi calls this model of equal opportunity an 'assimilationist model', in which women are encouraged to pursue the life-projects usually monopolised by men, without any corresponding change in the life-projects of men and without any change in the hierarchical values of the structures which talented women are striving to enter.⁷⁰

Are there any structural processes conducive to the 'making' of sex-class consciousness at this point in history in western industrial societies? The formation of various women's liberation groups with diverse political beliefs, forms of organisation, analyses of the sources of sexual inequality and strategies for change, which began to develop in the second half of the 1960s in the U.S.A. and in the early 1970s in Australia, is but the most public and visible manifestation of women's potential consciousness.

This wave of feminism of the last decade, which emerged in many western industrial societies, particularly Britain, U.S.A., Canada, New Zealand, France, Italy, Scandinavia and Australia requires a more detailed careful analysis than is feasible here. It is important to note however, that women's organisations, voluntary associations which may not, and very likely do not, see themselves as specifically 'feminist' but which have organised around the particular life-conditions of women, have long been a feature of Australian social life.⁷¹ They have acted as a source of support for women and as political lobby groups—very often, like the women's suffragist and temperance groups in the nineteenth century, emphasising women's specific 'civilising' role and urging political and legal change to protect the interests of women and children. This wave of feminism was not born in a social vacuum, despite the two generations which separated it from the first wave of feminism whose impetus was defused by the massive social disturbances of two wars and a depression. In the experience of two wars and an intervening period of economic hardship and struggle, women were mobilised for the war effort and demobilised again into energetic family formation in the post World War II period.

In tracing the roots of the formation of the women's movement in the U.S.A., Jo Freeman stresses the immediate origins of the two major groupings; the 'reform' grouping stressing women's rights and the 'radical' grouping stressing 'women's liberation' which emerged in the late 1960s.⁷² She analyses the need for a pre-existing communications network of like-minded people who can be co-opted to the ideas of a new movement because their background, experiences or location in the social structure give them a common basis for awareness and action, and who are galvanised into action by a crisis situation. The roots of the reform groupings were in the various women's lobbyist groups, and women's professional and occupational organisations, which had been attempting to promote legal and political changes in the status of women, equal rights to employment, equal pay and equal work conditions—groups set in motion by the President's Commission on the Status of Women, 1961. She traces the roots of the younger groupings, with a more 'radical' style of organisation and a more 'total' utopian vision, to the women 'under 30, who had received their political education as participants or concerned observers of the social action projects' of the 1960s, particularly 'new left' and civil rights organisations. Their political education had included not only a heightened consciousness of social inequalities, but also experience of men's attitudes towards the place of women in the movement, and their dismissal of women's rights as of lesser consequence than other causes.

The 'immediate' roots of the various women's movements and the particular events and personalities which contributed to their mobilisation, objectives and strategies require a similar analysis in Australian society. But in a more long range perspective there are certain highly significant structural changes which have altered the life-conditions of

women in the twentieth century and which, in the post second-world war period in particular, provide the bases within which women have the potential to form a sex-class consciousness. These are:

1. The widespread dissemination and use of contraception (and abortion) which has enabled women to control their fertility and reduce their family size from an average issue of six children in 1901 to three children in 1942, with a continuing reduction in family size since then.⁷³
2. The increased longevity of women, as well as men, and the decrease in child mortality. Not only do women bear fewer children in order to have a living issue of two or three, but they have a long span of life ahead when their child-bearing and early child-rearing years are complete. Early marriage, a concentrated period of child-bearing, and return to the workforce at ages thirty to thirty-five has become a typical pattern.
3. The dissemination of education, of longer years of schooling, to more groups in the community, particularly to women, whose retention rate in secondary schools has increased substantially in the post war period. In 1954, 6.8 per cent of girls age seventeen were still at school, in 1970, 23.7 per cent.⁷⁴ In addition, women in their late twenties and thirties are returning to secondary and tertiary education in the 1970s, taking up opportunities not available to them in their adolescence.
4. The increased opportunities for women's employment which were opened up with the post-war expansion of the tertiary sectors of the economy. Women's workforce experience is a factor in their release from isolated, housebound activities which requires particular emphasis in the study of the formation of sex-class consciousness. It is not only an independent source of income, but an independent set of group-affiliations outside the concentric circles of domesticity—group-affiliations which are the precursors of women's individualistic action (in one sense) and collectivist action in relation to women's needs.
5. Women with higher levels of education, with careers or professional occupations, are the group most likely to postpone marriage, to choose not to marry at all or when married, to have fewer children.⁷⁵ In other words, the conditions exist for more women to move out of the set of material conditions within which most women have been immersed, and still are immersed.

This analysis suggests that women's movements will be largely composed of educated women with middle-class occupations, which is certainly the profile of many women in the 'reformist' and 'radical' groupings of the various women's movements in Australia.⁷⁶ However, trade-union and working-women's groups also exist, and have been organising support, fighting for women's conditions inside industry,

inside the unions and inside the labour movement. There is a variety of visions of a feminist utopia, fore-shadowing different combinations of social, sexual, economic, political and racial equality, according to the political beliefs and interests of the various feminist groups. The following formula abstracts out a common core of aspirations only in the dimension of sexual equality: equal expectation and opportunity for men and women to participate in child-care, domestic labour, education, the workforce, leisure, politics, public administration, public decision-making. It has been suggested that such a vision does not represent the aspirations of working class women, but more closely expresses the interests of middle class women.

Juliet Mitchell claims that middle-class women are placed in the position of experiencing the contradictions between the privileges connected with their class position (derived from their connection with father and husband) and the deprivations and subordination connected with their situation as women.⁷⁷ Middle-class women experience a contradiction between their economic class position and their sex-class position. In this contradiction lie the seeds of their potential feminist consciousness, their potential awareness of the situation of *all* women in relation to child care, housework, schooling, paid work, politics, the law, health. The middle class composition of the women's movement cannot be dismissed as an 'unhappy fact', but must be recognised as an intrinsic part of the making of sex-class consciousness, just as the skilled artisans were the first groups to organise in the making of the English (and the Australian) working class.

Women share with men the social and economic privileges and deprivations determined by their class position. Working-class men, who have not had the opportunity to acquire job skills, may be employed (or unemployed) in the secondary labour market; women from middle-class families may acquire professional skills and a position in the primary labour market. But men and women are differentiated by their unequal obligation to take care of children and perform domestic labour—a set of obligations intrinsically connected with women's position in the labour market and their economic and social power. Class analysis alone will not elucidate the ramifications of economic and sexual inequalities; we require an analysis which explores the nature of domestic labour and of the sex-segmented dual labour market, and their implications for the position of women in the Australian economy.

NOTES

- 1 A. Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (London, 1973), p.107.
- 2 B. Malinowski, 'The Principle of Legitimacy', in J. Goody, *Kinship* (Harmondsworth, 1971); L. Mair, *Marriage* (Harmondsworth, 1971).
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- 10 Oakley attributes the domestication of women to the process of 'industrialization', using mechanisation of production as the prime mover in the eventual placement of women outside the sphere of industrial production. However, there is a historically prior phase in the development of capitalism which she has not considered, the split between the organisation of business enterprise and the organisation of family-life, in the households of the bourgeoisie. M. Weber, *General Economic History* (New York, 1961), is most useful on this point.
- 11 L. Davidoff, 'The Rationalization of Housework', D.L. Barker & S. Allen (edd.), *Dependence and Exploitation in Work and Marriage* (London, 1976). Davidoff extends Weber's ideas and their implications for the organisation of domestic life in bourgeois households in England in the nineteenth century.
- 12 *ibid.*, p.131.
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- 15 B. Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann* (Melbourne, 1975).
- 16 *ibid.*, and A. Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (Ringwood, 1975).
- 17 F.H. Christie, 'Woman in School Texts', *Education News* 15, 4 and 5 (1975).
- 18 A. Summers, *op. cit.*
- 19 L. Davidoff, *loc. cit.*
- 20 *ibid.*, p.130.
- 21 B. Kingston, *op. cit.*
- 22 W. Secombe, *loc. cit.*, p.6.
- 23 B. Kingston, *op. cit.*
- 24 A. Curthoys, 'Towards a Feminist Labour History', A. Curthoys, S. Eade & P. Spearritt (edd.), *Women at Work* (Canberra, 1975).
- 25 *ibid.*
- 26 F. Williamson, *Towards a Geography of the Human Condition: A Study of Farmers' Behaviour within Agricultural Change* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney, March 1975), shows the position of women on dairy farms in northern New South Wales.
- 27 M. Cannon, *Life in the Cities* (Melbourne, 1975).
- 28 *ibid.*, pp.261-262.
- 29 B. Kingston, *op. cit.*
- 30 M. Cannon, *op. cit.*, p.276.
- 31 B. Kingston, *op. cit.*
- 32 R. Pringle, 'Octavius Beale and the Ideology of the Birth-Rate', *Refractory Girl*, no. 3 (Winter 1973), pp.19-27.
- 33 E. Ryan & A. Conlon, *Gentle Invaders: 1788-1974. Australian Women at Work* (Sydney, 1975), p.92.
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- 35 E. Sullerot, *Woman, Society and Change* (London, 1971), and 'China Symposium', *A.N.Z. Journal of Sociology* 12, 1 (February 1976).
- 36 L. Ruzicka & L. Day, 'Australian Patterns of Family Formation', M. Dawson (ed.), *Searchlight—Families* (Sydney, 1974).
- 37 F. Parkin, *Class Inequality and Political Order* (London, 1971); M. Benston, 'The Political Economy of Women's Liberation', *Monthly Review* 83 (January-February 1973); W. Secombe, *loc. cit.*
- 38 A. Giddens, *op. cit.*
- 39 The 'scarcity value' of certain occupational skills which provide their possessors with a strong market capacity (e.g. in the professions of medicine, law, engineering) is artificially created and maintained over time by processes of recruitment and exclusion: stiff entrance qualifications, long and expensive periods of training. F. Parkin, *op. cit.*, discusses this point. There may also be an overlap between strong market capacity and property ownership, because of the opportunity of those who command high rewards to invest surplus income. The implications of Giddens' class scheme would require a separate paper. For the purposes of this analysis, I adopt it because it provides an analytical tool for assessing the impact of the major differentiating factor in women's position in the labour market—their possession, or lack, of marketable

- skills.
- 40 A. Giddens, *op. cit.* Here Giddens is following Marx and Weber.
- 41 Data from *The Role of Women in the Economy; Background Information Australia*, O.E.C.D. Study, Women and Work no. 12, Women's Bureau, Department of Labour (Canberra, 1974).
- 42 W.F. Connell, R.E. Stroobant, K.E. Sinclair, R.W. Connell & K.W. Rogers, *12 to 20: Studies of City Youth* (Sydney, 1975); D.E. Edgar, 'Adolescent Competence and Sexual Disadvantage', *La Trobe Sociology Papers*, no. 10 (June 1974).
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- 44 M. Power, 'A Woman's work is never done—by men: a socio-economic model of sex-typing in occupations', *Journal of Industrial Relations* 17, 3 (September 1975).
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- 46 B. Cass, 'Women in Academic Institutions', in *The Changing Role of Women in Society*, Australian Frontier Consultation Report (Sydney, 1975); F.M.B. Cass, 'W(h)ither a female profession', *Australian Library Journal*, 22 (March 1973); J. Bielski, 'Women in the Public Service', in *The Changing Role of Women in Society*. For extensive evidence of dual labour markets in the Australian Public Service, with men predominantly employed in the Third Division and above, women in the Fourth Division, see *The Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration*, Appendix Volume three (Canberra, 1976). See especially, 'The Career Service Survey', pp.1-183. Readily identifiable is the existence of a more highly educated well paid third division heavily male career elite in the A.C.T. serviced by a much younger lowly paid female support staff where job opportunities in terms of number of jobs available are increasing but whose career prospects are minimal in contrast to the group they serve. (p.96).
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- 52 M. Dalla Costa, 'Women and the Subversion of the Community', in Dalla Costa & S. James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol, 1972); M. Benston, *loc. cit.*; W. Secombe, *loc. cit.*; Gardiner, J., 'Women's Domestic Labour', *New Left Review* 89 (January-February 1975); Gardiner, J., 'The Political economy of domestic labour in capitalist society', in D.L. Barker & S. Allen, *op. cit.*
- 53 Secombe, *loc. cit.*
- 54 J. Gardiner, 'Women's Domestic Labour', *loc. cit.*
- 55 J. Gardiner, 'Political Economy of domestic labour in Capitalist Society', in Barker & Allen, *op. cit.* p.119.
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- 62 A selection of 'matters to be taken into consideration in proceedings with respect to maintenance' in Family Law Act 1975, Part VIII—'Maintenance and Property', Section 75, p.32.
- 63 *ibid.*, Section 79, 'Alteration of property interests', p.34.
- 64 Sackville, *loc. cit.*
- 65 I wish to thank Richard Chisholm for his comments on the implications of the Family Law Act.

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