

Mid-American Review of Sociology

Ann Helton Stromberg and Shirley Harkess (eds.), *Women Working: Theories and Facts in Perspective*. 2nd ed. 1988. Mountain View, California: Mayfield. 431 pp. (paper).

This collection of articles on women's work in industrial society first appeared in 1978. The intervening decade has been tumultuous and, where female worklife is concerned, contradictory. On one hand, the volume of data and discourse on the subject has mushroomed. On the other hand, while some predictions made in the late 1970s--such as the continued expansion of female participation in wage labor--have come true, many of the policy initiatives which once seemed to promise solutions to women's worklife dilemmas, such as "comparable worth" legislation and the six-hour workday, have lost momentum. This second edition, substantially expanded and updated, conveys both the excitement of the new scholarship and the complexity of the social currents which shape female labor.

The articles are organized into four sections. The first provides historical and demographic background on women's workforce participation and its treatment in social science; the second, a range of theoretical approaches to the patterning of that participation, with special emphasis on the persistence of a "wage gap" and of gendered segments of the labor market; the third, discussions of specific categories of female labor (the professions, blue-collar and clerical jobs, and housework); and the fourth, remarks on policy options. The editors have been careful not to ignore women whose work experiences are all too often omitted from "mainstream" descriptions, including lesbians (discussed by Beth E. Schneider) and woman of color (discussed by Shelley A. Smith and Marta Tienda). Also, lest readers feel paralyzed by the often dismal statistics on female wage-work, they asked each contributor to suggest policy directions that could enhance women's status in the future. These suggestions are synthesized by Shirley Harkess in a final statement which concludes the volume on a hopeful note. For these efforts, for helpful, concise introductions to the four sections, and for eliciting from contributors a consistently clear, jargon-free style that will appeal to the undergraduate students whom form their target audience, the editors are to be commended.

Like almost any collection that tries to address a broad and variegated topic in a single volume, this work has its weaknesses. The historical time-frame is disappointingly shallow; most of the contributors seem to think that the subject of women and work became a focus of scholarly concern only in the 1970s, ignoring significant contributions by such earlier writers as Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Perkins Gillman, Alexandra Kollontai and Emma Goldmann or, more recently, Simone de Beauvoir and Margaret Mead. This may be an artifact of the heavily sociological slant of the volume; though the editors address it to students "in sociology, economics, and women's studies," all but six of the 24 contributors are sociologists. Also, though contributor Joan Acker cites Jessie Bernard's warning that the "living, moving actuality" of human existence gets lost in much quantitatively-based social science reportage (p. 13), the articles taken together adopt such a "bird's-eye" view of

their subject matter that one longs for a hint of the flesh-and-blood that lies behind the aggregate data on which their undeniably valuable conclusions are based--a case study, an interview, even just an occasional first-person quotation. And, while no one collection can be expected to cover the whole cross-cultural spectrum, a volume with the ambitious title *Women Working* might include at least a cursory summary of the rich accounts of women's worklives that have been accruing under the rubric of "anthropology of work," in order to suggest how non-Western and/or preliterate human groups have addressed or avoided the inequities which seem so stubbornly to plague female workers in most Western industrial states.

These are *lacunae* which can be addressed in a future third edition. But they in no way negate the very real merits of the articles assembled here. Cleanly written, intelligently edited, and full of significant findings on both progress and stagnation in the world of women's work, they will give the neophyte a sound initial grounding in the field and the specialist a useful overview of recent research and ongoing theoretical trends.

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