HIDDEN INEQUALITIES: WOMEN AND MEN IN THE LABOUR PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

In the course of the nineteen seventies, large contingents of women workers were incorporated into industrial employment in Brazil, in the country's industrial centre, the state of São Paulo, women formed over one quarter of the labour in manufacturing by mid-decade.(1) Their incorporation was structured around a well-developed division of labour, which was particularly evident in large firms. Although women were increasingly employed in production jobs in non-traditional sectors of economy, such as electrical equipament, plastics and motor components sectors, they were often confined to exclusively or predomiantly female occupational categories and departments. Generally speaking, 'female' jobs were classified as unskilled and paid lower wages than male jobs in similar areas. Women workers were confined by and large to jobs classified as unskilled and semi-sklled and they did not enjoy the opportunities for promotion generally available to men. A survey of industrial establisments in the city of São Paulo at the end of the decade showed that two-thirds of female employees were employed as semi-skilled production workers, performing routine and repetitive tasks requiring concentration and motor coordnation.(2)

For the outside observer, and for some managers interviewed by the authors, the differential treatment of male and female workers by employers with regard to wages and general conditions of work and employment are quite easy to observe. It is less clear, however, how workers (both femele and male) perceive differences in treatment. Would it be clear to them, for example, that promotion opportunities are largely confined to male workers, and would they regard it as unjust? In this paper, we shall be studying how

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workers' perceptions of differential treatment by gender[3] are influenced by the division of labour along gender lines itself. It will be argued that the sexual division of labour and the segregation of men and women into largely single-sex departments makes comparisons between female and male workers quite difficult and obscures, or hides, the differential treatment of male and female workers by employers.

This analysis of the interaction between the mechanismis of segregation of workers by gender and attitudes and perceptions of workers has certain methodological implications. It aims to go beyond the type of analysis current in the sociology of work which relates attitudes, motivations and behaviour solely to the values by workers(masculine or feminine value, for example). Contrary to this, we start from the position that it is necessary to analyse concrete situations and see how these influence workers" attitudes and perceptions(see, example, Kergoat, 1982: 5-8). At the same time, this analysis is aimed specifically at the examination of the sexual division of labour and its effects rather than at the situation of women workers as such, since it is more than apparent that their situation can only be analysed within the context of a division of labour in the factory and a hierarchical ordering of the sexes. Therefore, we have analysed the situation and attitudes of both male and female workers.

Our analysis is based upon a case study of an electrical factory in the city of São Paulo, owned by a company of mixed Brazilian and foreign capital. An extensive survey of the plant was carried out in 1982 as part of wider separate studies by the two authors. At the time of survey the plant had just over 800 employees in total, and 100 hourly-paid workers(sixty women and forty men) in production and quality control departments were interviewed. A number of managers were also interviewed and a large quantity of company documentation was made available.

The analysis is divided into two main parts. In the next section of the paper we will analyse the differential treatment of female and male workers by the firm, starting with the sexual division of labour itself and the use of single-sex departments and them examining the types of control, wage levels, skill classification and recognition of skills within departments.

This will be followed by an an examination of the perceptions of female and male workers in these departments with regard to the differences in wages levels, promotion opportunities and supervisory attitude towards workers of the two sexes. We will attempt to show how the division of labour and the segregation of workers by departments helps to hide perceptions of differential and unequal treatment of women and men, and also to point to the situations in which these 'hidden inequalities' can become manifest.

Patterns of Segregation and Inequality

The factory upon which the case study is based produced a small quantity of finished consumer products, but the major part of its output was sent to the company's plant in the duty-free import zone of Manaus. There, they were assembled together with imported items to make television sets and music centers. Therefore, the work in the factory consisted mainly of making components and putting together sub-assemblies. The parts ranged from metal frames and cabinets of wood and plastic to coils, tuners and speakers, and the profuction encompassed a wide variety of operations, using very different materials and processes. The production side of the plant was divided into twelve departments, distinguished by both the product line and type of work performed. Both within and between the departments there was a well-established sexual division of labour.

In june 1982 five almost entirely female departments employed 185 women production workers and just two men, along with eight supervisory staff (three men and five women) and one female secretary. There were also five departments in which the production workers (136 of them) were all male. In these departments there were just two women, both employed as secretaries. Men and women worked together in only two departments. In one of them, there were seventeen women and seven men, but their jobs were quite distinct: the women worked on assembly and calibration of portable music centers, while the men worked as either labourers - doing fetching and carrying work - or as radio technicians repairing products found to be defective during final inspection. In the other mixed department there were twenty nine women and twelve men in production jobs. Eleven of the men worked as technicians and labourers, and just one worked alongside womwn workers as a celibrator. This was the only case found among the 323 production workers where men and women worked on equivalent jobs in the same department.[4] The only significant exception to the segregation of women and men was in quality control, where male and female materials checkers could work in the same area of the plant.

Working on the basis of this segregation by occupation and department, management were able to imposse markedly different conditions of

work and employment for female and male workers. In part, this was a result of the nature of the jobs actually performed by two sexes. All assembly-line work was performed by women, while the jobs that required using machinery, working with heavy or formal training were performed by men. Management had quite clearly decided that some jobs were "female" and others were "male", partly as a result of the working conditions they involved. Thus, women, almost without exception, worked sitting down and used small tools or just their hands. The men were likely to work with machinery, work together in groups, move around in the course of their and remain standing up for much of the day. Working conditions were noticeable worse in the male department. The noise of machines (saws and presses, for example) and the smells of strong glues, paint, varnish and galvanising chemicals were typical features of male working environments, whereas most of the female departments were quiet and clean.(5)

However, the selection of men and women for certain tasks within the plant was only the first step in the differentiation of conditions for the two sexes. Around this differentiation of tasks and segregation by department, management also constructed other important differences between the situations of men and women in the plant. Differences with respect to forms of control, wage levels, promotion opportunities and recognition of skills were also extremely evident in the plant, and they cannot be taken as natural consequences of the division of tasks by sex.

Forms of Discipline and Control

To a certain extent, the division of tasks between male and female in the plant also involved differences in the forms of discipline and control exercised over workers of the two sexes. The female assembly line worker is fixed to a given position and a given output, and her work can be closely supervised and controlled. The male worker in the woodworking department is less easily subject to close control as his work is more complicated and requires moving around and changing operations. The link between effort and output is less rigid. Clearly, such differences are built into the nature of the work to be performed, and managements both decide on the sex of the workers to be

employed with the jobs in mind and also be more likely to impose certain types of work on workers of one sex rather than other.

However, the differences in the treatment of male and female workers go far beyond this. Women's mobility, for example, was not only restricted by the exigencies of assembly line work. Even when there was no assembly line, they were tied to a given spot and their work was brought to them by the charge-hand or supervisor. The space and time of female workers was controlled to a much greater extent than male. The open lay-out of the female departments facilitated supervisory control, and this was underlined by the fact that the managers of female departments tended to have offices which gave a direct view onto the working area. Women were not expected to stop work-to stop the hands moving-and they were not expected to move around. Going to the toilet was strictly controlled by the use of the 'disc' (chapinha), which meant that only one woman out of a group which generally varied in size from seven to fifteen was allowed to go to the bathroom at the same time. Visits to the bathroom were limited to a fixed number of times per day to between seven and ten minutes per visit. Control over female time was also seen in the pressure that management exerted on women to fulfil and overfulfil production norms. Women workers were often expected to surpass production targets, and such targets were raised once they had been achieved. The women production workers not on assembly lines were probably more subject to harrassment over production than those on them. While management could not necessarilly achieve constant increases in output, workers were under continuous pressure to attemp them.

For the male workers control seemed to be less oppressive. A certain degree of mobility was defined into many jobs, even if the work generally required a stationary position at a machine. The male workers made use of areas set aside for smoking, which were not used by the women,(6) and their patterns of work were less closely defined. While it was certainly the case that male workers were espected to achieve certain levels of production, these appeared to be more flexible than was the case for the women workers Supervisors asked workers to cooperate in making an extra effort when back-logs built up of emergencies occurred, and however obligatory such cooperation might be, the tone and style of the worker-supervisor relation was rather different. The element of cajoling seen in the female departments (done by male and female

supervisors) was largely absent.

Wages, Skill and Promotion

As might be expected, the division between male and female jobs was also accompanied by a division between levels of wages and skill. Overall, wages for women in the plant were much lower than for men, and even when comparisons are restricted to production workers the difference in average hourly wage rates was thirty nine per cent. This difference was not related to length of employment. Female production workers were initially employed at a lower average wage than men, and as length of service increased the pay differential increased. For men and women production workers with between five and ten years employment in the factory, the pay differential was 40 per cent in December 1980.(7)

These differences in pay were related to pronounced differences in the structure of occupations for men and women. As has been noted, the job titles for men and women were almost entirely distinct, and in addition to this the mobility chains and skill classifications for men and women were quite separate and unequal. Three quarters of all hourly-paid production workers employed in December 1980 were classified(8) as 'assemblers'. This, together with the male job of 'labourer', was the lowest-paid adult occupation in the plant. More importantly, given the relatively small number of jobs at higher grades open to women workers, assembler was often their first and last job. Of sixty women workers interviewed only one had been recruited at a grade higher than assembler, and promotion took a long time. Two thirds of the women with more than one year's employment in December 1980 were still assemblers.(9)

The male workers, in contrast, enjoyed much better prospects of promotion and advancement within the company. Although thirty three per cent of male production workers (excluding charge-hands) were classified as 'labourers', this was in most cases a transitory occupation, and the worker could expect to move to a higher grade within a reasonable period of time. Sixty nine per cent of all the labourers in the production departments had been

employed for less than one year (in December 1980), and among workers with more than one year's experience there were six higher-grade workers for every one labourer. Male workers either entered the plant at higher grades-over half the male workers interviewed had entered the plant as semi-skilled workers-and even unskilled workers had good chances of promotion.

Even when men and women worked in the same department, they had markedly different chances of promotion, as was seen in the quality control department. Although there was no physical segregation of male and female workers, there were different grades of work, ranging from labourer, to materials checkers and inspectors. A materials checker could earn forty per cent more than a labourer, and an inspector between 190 and 250 per cent more, depending on his grade. Women had access to the lower grades: in December 1980 there were two female and five male labourers, and nineteen female and fourteen male materials checkers. However, the grade of inspector was solely occupied by men, twenty four of them in December 1980. According to a (male) foreman in the quality control department, the lack of female inspectors could not be attributed to either the need for specialised courses (promotion to inspector was based predominantly on experience in the job) or lack of aptitude or interest on the part of the women checkers. The foreman admitted to being 'rather confused' about why there were no women in inspectors' jobs. Management's refusal to recruit female inspectors or promote women to this job was seen clearly in the case of a materials checker taken on in 1982. In spite of nine years experience in inspection work in the electrical industry she was still only recruited as a checker.

Recognition of Skills

The concentration of women in non-skilled jobs, compared to the distribution of male workers across a wide range of occupations and grades was the result of a systematic non-recognition of the skills and abilities acquired by women, which took four forms. Firstly, the firm did not reward the greater educational level of the women workers in the plant. Among the production workers interviewed, forty per cent of the men, but only four per cent of the

women had completed less than four year's schooling. Similarly, only three per cent of the men, but twenty per cent of the women had completed a full eight years at school. The firm had deliberately embarked on a policy of raising the educational standard of the women production workers yet further in the light of the surplus of labour produced by the 1981-1982 economic crisis, but this higher educational standard was not to be rewarded with better pay. Secondly, the firm neither recognised the skills and abilities that women brought to industry from the domestic sphere, nor rewarded the women's ability to submit to the discipline of assembly line work. Assembly-line work was classified as the least-skilled in the factory. This issue will be taken up again in the next section. Thirdly, the firm tended to put women onto more skilled work, such as coil-winder or celibrator, but waited a long time-up to a year or more-before actually promoting the worker to the more skilled occupation and paying the higher wage rate. This practice was not observed in the male departments. Fourthly, the firm did not recognise the skills, qualifications and experience acquired in previous employments by women. Whereas just over half of the male workers interviewed had been recruited as semi-skilled workers, only one of the sixty women interviewed had not been recruited as an unskilled assembler.(10)

An extreme example of the firm's non-recognition of women's skills was seen in 1981-1982, when the firm sacked and then re-hired workers as a result of a crisis in production. For the male workers taken on again, attempts were made to preserve their position within the company, and most were re-hired at the same grade as before the sacking. Of nine workers re-hired in the wood working department, for example, one was re-hired at a higher grade, five were taken on at the same grade, and three were re-employed on a slightly lower grade. The manager of the department stressed that they tried to avoid demoting the re-hired workers. In the female departments a different philosophy prevailed. All the female workers were re-hired as assemblers. This meant, firstly, that many higher-grade workers who had been dismissed were not taken back at all, and secondly that a number of workers were demoted. It led to a curious situation in the components department some eight months after the workers had been re-hired. Among the nine women doing calibration work only three were being paid the calibrator's wage. Of the other six, two were being paid as coil-winders, and four as assemblers, even though one of the latter had been classified as a calibrator and another as a coil-winder when they had

been previously employed bythe firm. The loss in wages this caused was from insignificant. An assembler could earn around cr$113 per hour in July 1983, while a coil-winder was paid about cr$160 and a calibrator cr$180. The firm was able to cut wages by not even paying for the skills it had recognised when the women were previously employed and which it was making use of once again. Management seemed to find no problem with this. In contrast with the manager of the male department who stressed the need not to demote workers, the head of the components department said that starting all the women at the level of assembler was a way of stimulating competition among them for promotion.

Segregation and Perceptions of Discrimination

After observing and analysing the differences in the situations and treatment of female and male workers described in this section, we came to the conclusion that the organisation of production and the employment policies in the factory were constructed around gender differences. The factory was one, perhaps extreme, example of the way in which policies with respect to the formation and control of labour and the organisation of work itself are built upon existing gender differences. At the same time, it seemed clear to us that the situation of women in the plant was notabily inferior to that of men. With regard to wage levels, promotion prospects and treatment by management, the male workers had a better deal than the female. This could not be justified on the basis of differences in skill or productivity or the work performed.

But if such inequalities were obvious to external observers, it was not so obvious that workers would perceive them in the same light. Therefore, we asked workers a number of questions designed to give an indication of their perceptions of, and attitudes to, inequalities in the treatment of women and men workers by the mangement. The sixty women and forty men in the production and quality control departments were asked the following questions:

> 'Do you think that men and women have the same chance of obtaining promotion?'

'Do you think that men and women gain equal pay for equal work in this plant?'

'Do you think that the management(chefia) treat men and women in the same way?'

In addition, to this we asked a further series of questions about the nature of work performed by women and men in the plant and about their preferences in relation to and capacity for doing certain jobs. The answers to the first three questions are tabulated in Tables one, two and three.

The main factor to emerge from the questions was that neither the female nor the male workers stated that there were significant differences with regard to promotion, wages and work. The most notable features of Tables one, two and three, is precisely the fact that the clear majority of the male and female respondents did not claim to perceive discrimination against women workers in respect of either promotion possibilities, equal pay for equal work or treatment by management in general. In response to the three questions approximately sixty to sixty five per cent of the women workers interviewed were clearly of the opinion that such discrimination did not exist. This is compared to around fifteen per cent of women who stated that men had more chance of promotion or received higher wages for equal work, or felt that management did not treat workers equally.

A similar picture is presented by the answers of male workers to the same questions. A clear majority of those men having clear opinions on the questions asked did not believe that women suffer discrimination. While a greater percentage of male workers believed that women have more chance of promotion than men, they were also more likely than women to say that male workers were paid higher wages for equal work(particulary when the 'don't knows' are excluded from the calculations in table two). On the question of equal treatment, too, male answers matched those of the women workers.

In the light of the situation described in the previous section, these responses are perhaps a little surprising. Why was there no outrage about the palpable lack of promotion opportunities for women in the plant? Why did women not complain about their low wages in relation to men? Even if one might not expect outrage from the men, a significant minority of the

Table 1. 'Do you think men and women have the same chance of obtaining promotion?

(percentages)

Sex	Men More Chance	Equal Chances	Women More Chance	Do Not Know/No Response
Women (n=60)	14,4	68,9	4,4	12,2
Men (n=40)	15,0	57,5	12,5	15,0

Table 2. 'Do you think that men and women gain equal pay for equal work in this plant?
(percentages)

Sex	Men Paid More	Equal Pay	Women Paid More	Unequal[a]	Do Not Know/No Response
Women (n=60)	16.7	57.8	6.7	8.9	10.0
Men (n=40)	20.0	47.5	0	2.5	30.0

(a) The nature of the inequality was specified by the respondents as not being between men and women. It was sometimes stated, for example, that some men did not earn equal pay to other men for equal work.

Table 3. 'Do you think that the bosses treat men and women in an equal way?

Sex	Yes	No	Do Not Know[a]
Women (n=60)	68.8	12.2	18.9
Men (n=40)	65.0	7.5	27.5

(a) This conclusion includes one male workers who answered 'depends'.

women might well have expressed some dismay about the situation. The problem is not that workers were unwilling to make complaints or criticisms about the firm and their jobs. Indeed, there were quite strong criticisms made by many workers about a wide range of matters, including matters which affected women much more than men. For example, some women thought that it was wrong for the firm to regard taking children to see to the doctor or have vaccinations as being an unjustifiable absence(and hence punishable by loss of earnings). Similarly, the use of the 'disc' to control visits to the bathroom was greatly resented by women workers, and quite a number of women complained about the constant pressure to increase production. A significant proportion of female workers were also willing to discuss sexual harrassment, and there is no reason to suppose the responses in the three tables merely reflect an unwillingness to comment. What does explain the responses, then?

One obvious reason for the lack of what might be considered the 'expected' responses in the tables must be the nature of the questions themselves. Firtly, they were formulated to elicit general considerations by workers about aspects of differential treatment of men and women in the plant. They were deliberately left vague in order to stimulate general reflections, to provoke comments rather than to register fixed opinions. Secondly, they were put in the affirmative, and therefore invited the answers that wages, promotion and treatment were equal for men and women. Thirdly, when abstract questions are posed there is always the risk that workers will respond with views that represent prevailing ideology rather than a specific evaluation of the situation being studied. Thus, for example, the response that men and women have equal chances of promotion may be more a reflection of the prevaillingopinion that workers are promoted according to their individual merits (and hence there are no real differences between men and women) rather than an assessment of the situation in the plant.

However, it is our belief that the responses are more significant than this. They indicate much more than the inability of the questions to capture the discriminations and inequalities that workers did, in fact, perceive. It is our belief that the answers reflect, firstly, the difficulties in making comparisons between men and women that result from the segregation of male and female workers into single-sex departments and, secondly, the

ideological evaluations made by men and women of the relative worth of male and female work. We shall attempt to demonstrate these by examining the following factors:

1. the complexity of the wages structure,
2. the segregation of men and women by department,
3. the evaluations that workers make of male and female jobs, and
4. what happens when men and women do work side-by-side, as in the quality control department.

The Wage Structure

One factor which complicates overall comparisons between any two groups of workers is the wage structure itself. In common with many Brazilian companies, the firm studied had a complex wage structure for its employees, about which a certain of secrecy was maintained. Levels of wages varied according to both the occupation and the length of time the worker had been classified in it.(11) This had two effects. Firstly, workers did not normally have clear notions of what wages were being earned in the plant. This was complicated by the fact that there were fifty different wage scales for the sixty five hourly-paid occupations in the plant. Neither was there union negotiation at plant level that might have clarified the wages structure for workers. A female calibrator, for example, would earn more than a male press operator, but less than a galvaniser or a woodworking machine operator.(12) Secondly, there was a difference of thirty six per cent between the starting wage for any given occupation and the top wage rate that could be paid to a worker with sufficient time and merit rises. Therefore, there was considerable overlap in the wages that could be paid for different occupations. These differences explain, in part, the small percentages of men and women in Table two who said that there were differences between men and between women with respect to pay for equal work.

The Segregation of Male and Female Workers by Department

The segregation of workers into single-sex departments also impeded male-female comparisons. It meant that workers had relatively litle understanding or information about wages and working conditions in other parts of the plant. Internal mobility was severely restricted for most workers - only maintenance and quality control workers appeared to move around the factory— while one other potential source of information, shop stewards or their equivalent did not exist. Therefore, workers were not given a reference point for making comparisons. It was difficult for a worker in an all-female or all-male department to have much of an idea about whether or not the managers treated men and women differently, or about promotion and wage differences. Workers who answered 'don't know' to the questions often made spontaneous comments of the type, 'There are only men in my department' in order to explain why they could not answer the question. A further effect of this segregation is that some workers gave answers to the questions that were based on their own single-sex knowledge. For example, three of the five male workers who said that it was easier for women than for men to obtain promotion, justified their opinions with statements to the effect that in their all-male departments promotion was so hard to come by that it must be easier in the female departments. Finally, it should be neted that in the few cases where men work in female departments, the jobs they perform are not a cross-section of all male occupations. Eleven of the nineteen male workers in the two departments, for example, were recently-recruited unskilled labourers, whose wages would have been below those of many of the assemblers. This would also complicate comparisons that might be made.

The Division of Functions

Comparisons between women and men in the factory were made even more difficult by the differences in the types of work performed by the two sexes. Women, in general, did the lighter work. Although this meant cleaner and quieter working conditions, it also meant the pressures of assembly line

work with repetitive tasks. The male workers, in contrast, tended to carry out heavier work in worse working conditions. As a result of these differences, answers to the question about equal pay and equal work must involve evaluations of the worth of the work performed, since male and female tasks are not identical. Assessments of the value of different jobs, particularly when performed by different sexes, allow ample scope for the operation of sexual stereotypes and the undervaluation of female attributes, skills and experience. In the course of the interviews we tried to gauge some of the evaluations made by male and female workers.

We asked the workers whether or not they thought male work was better than female, or vice versa, as can be seen in table four. A majority of both female and male workers said that the female work was better, and for the same reasons. Women workers said that their work was better than the men's because male work was heavy and dirty. To a lesser extent it was also considered to be more dangerous and to involve greater responsibility. One of the two women who said that male work was better did so because she preferred doing dirty work. These responses by the women were reinforced by their answers to another question. 'Do you think that you could do the job of a press operator?' Although this job is carried out by women in quite a lot of factories in São Paulo, in the plant studied it was an entirely male occupation. Although opinion was split on this issue - the older and more experienced women in the plant though that could do this job, while a similar proportion of the less experienced women (fifty seven per cent) thought that they could not-both the less experienced and more experienced women workers who did not feel able to do the press operator job gave equal weight to lack of experience and to the dangerousnes and dirtness of the work.

The male workers also considered the women's jobs to be better, because they were supposedly cleaner, lighter and easier. Similarly, when the male workers who did not work in the Press Shop were asked if they could do the job of a press operator, those who said they could not do it argued that this was owing to lack of knowledge of the job. Male workers regarded the strength involved in their jobs as being an important feature, and strength (along with the willingness to expose oneself to danger) are masculine traits are deemed worthy of higher pay, not only by male workers but by female workers

as well. The importance of such factors in male workers' evaluations was also revealed when they were asked 'Could a woman do your job?'[13] In the press shop the main reason given for saying that a woman could do the job was the knowledge that women do work as press operators in other firms: in contrast, the main reason for saying 'no' was the heaviness and danger of the work. In the woodworking department, the heaviness of the work was the main factor in male evaluations. This meant that the skilled workers were more likely than the unskilled to regard women as being able to do their jobs. The workers in the most skilled jobs split five-to-three in favour of women being able to do the work, while the less skilled divided thisteen-to-two against. There seems litle doubt that when it comes to equal pay for equal work, the lightness of female work is considered a more than adequate reason by many male workers for paying women lower wages.[14]

The male workers were also asked if they could do the work of the calibrators and assemblers (both strongly identified as female jobs), and whether or not they would accept an assembler's job. A third of the men thought that they would not be able to work as calibrators because of the educational level required, but eighty five per cent of them thought that they could do an assembler's job. Although some men were far from willing to actually do such work, the reasons given were couched in terms of the low wages and the fall in status that such an occupation would imply. Only two male workers in forty said that they would not have the manua dexterity or speed to do the work, just as only three of them said that female work was worse than male because of the pressure to work faster and the lack of freedom suffered by the women.

These opinions reveal that manual dexterity and the pressures of assembly line work and highly repetitive, routine production were not taken into account by the male workers when they evaluated women's work. The male workers just assumed that thay could do female work without great difficulties. It might also be the case that the women took their own skills for granted and did not see manual dexterity or submission to the discipline in the female departments as anything other than normal working procedure. It is quite clear that these evaluations were entirely wrong. Managers are in no doubt that women 'adapt' to the rigours of assembly line and routine production rather

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Table 4. FOR WOMEN WORKERS, 'Do you think that the work men do is better than, worse than or equal to the work done by women?
FOR MEN WORKERS, 'Do you think that the work women do is better than, worse than or equal to the work done by men?

(percentages)

Sex	Women's Work Better	Equal	Men's Work Better	Do Not Know/No Response/Depends
Women (n=60)	54.4	16.7	3.3	25.6
Men (n=40)	65.0	12.5	7.5	15.0

better than men, and that they more 'submissive' and 'docile'.[15] Women neither passively accept management control, nor are they incapable of resisting it — the bitterness of the disputes over the disc and other forms of control bear witness to this — but they may provide resistance to routine and repetitive work which is of a more manageable form. Women's greater productivity in such jobs is not recognised by management as involving a skill or special aptitudes and training[16] that might be rewarded with higher wages, and workers tend to share this devaluation of female work. Given the division of labour in the plant, comparisons of male and female performance in different jobs would be difficult, but the comments of a long-standing quality control manager in another large electrical company in São Paulo are worth noting. He was asked why the firm only employed women on the inspection of car radios:

> 'The work is very repetitive. The male workers get fed up and start to approve defective radios. On the lines that had men, a lot of faulty radios used to go through... The men work more as radio technicians, as trouble-shooters, where is less repetitive. You would never, for example, put a man on inserting parts (into radios). They would do it all wrong'.

The combination of a possible lack of dexterity and the definite unwillingness to submit to repetitive work make male workers particulary difficult for management to control and discipline when they are put ont this kind of job. It was quite unrealistic for the male workers interviewed to think that they could do it. Women have abilities not possessed by men for this kind of work, but whereas dual labour market theory suggests that higher wages in primary labour markets can be a premium paid to workers who show the necessary discipline, attention, education etc., it is quite clear that this only applies in the case of male workers. When women exhibit such qualities they are free to management and often undervalued by the workers themselves.

More generally, it can be suggested that the division between male and female occupations and types of work gave greater scope for the intervention of gender stereotypes in the process of workers' own evaluations. When the sexual division of labour takes the 'classic' form of the division into light and heavy jobs and the confinement of women to repetitive operations, then

the normal valuation of strength and the devaluation of dexterity is free to influence comparisons of the worth of male and female jobs. This does not mean that inequalities of treatment will disapper once women start to perform non-traditional types of work, far from it. But it does mean that the justifications for inequality have to be reworked by both employers and male employees. They may also become less acceptable to female employees, as the case of the female workers in the quality control department illustrates.

Quality Control

In the quality control department, men and women did work side-by-side in identical functions. Leaving aside the few unskilled labourers (men and women) attached to the department, the workers were divided into two basic grades: materials checker and inspector (inspector having two levels). As was noted in the previous section, promotion to inspector was reserved for men, even though no formal training or diplomas were required and some of the women had been in the department long enough to acquire the relevant experience. Although only five women were interviewed in the department, the degree of discontent was obvious enough.

Two of the five women interviewed had entered the department as labourers six months prior to the time of the study, and neither registered any complaint, but the other three were in a different position. Two of Them had worked in quality control for some time, four and a half and seven years respectively, and the third had worked as an inspector in the electrical industry for nine years before losing her job during the economic crisis in 1981 and finding work in the firm studied. Their comments on the questions of promotion and wages are worth quoting at length:

'The men earn more. In quality control there are chekers, inspector I and inspector 2. The men are mostly on inspector 1 grade, while the women are all checkers. I think that I do the same work as they do. There are lads who came in here after me earning a lot more. We talk about this. We're angry about this because they come in earning more than we do'.

'In quality control the men work less and earn more. The women do the same job and the only difference is that is is that they are technicians. Even when the work's the same, the men earn more... Sometimes the man's work is heavier, but in quality control ist's the same'.

'For example, there are only (male) inspectors here. There are no women inspectors. In the other firm I worked in we had women inspectors. I don't see why women cannot do the same job'.

In all three cases the women perceived and clearly expressed the blatant injustice of the grade of inspector only being available to men.

The male workers in the quality control department did not see the matter in the same light. All eight of those who were interviewed thought that equal pay was given for equal work, and six of them thought that men and women had not questioned. When noted at all, this fact was attributed to women's lack of special training and their supposed inability to use the measuring instruments necessary for the job. Although such distinctions in male and female quality control work are quite common in the metalworking industries,(17) the women themselves were not at all impressed by this. They thought that the men did not do more qualified work, and they were familiar enough with what the men did not to be impressed by male claims of greater skill. As was noted in the previous section, the foreman in the department agreed with the women.(18)

Conclusions

In this paper we have examined the sexual division of labour and its impact on workers' perceptions of discrimination, taking as a case study workers in production and quality control functions in a Brazilian electrical factory. We heve tried to show that women workers suffered from lower pay than men, lack of promotion opportunities, a systematic non-recognition of their skills and abilities, and more oppressive forms of discipline and control. However, workers' perceptions of these differences were restricted by the complexity of the wages structure, the segregation of male and female workers into single-sex departments, and the division into 'male' and 'female' types

of work. We looked specifically at the situation in the quality control department-where men and women do work side-by-side in comparable functions—to indicate how discrimination was much more easily perceived by the women workers and resented by them. This indicates how important segregation and the sexual division of labour along the lines of 'masculine' and 'feminine' jobs are for the success of discrimination against women (or in favour of men). With such divisions, workers justify to themselves observed differences in wages and promotion prospects through their evaluations of the worth of male and female work.

Another conclusion arrived at concerns the extreme segregation observed in this case, which reinforces rather than breaks down stereotypes, and leads to the obscuring of the many discriminations to which women are subject. Such discriminations could be exposed or located only throught the organisation of the workers themselves. As we have already noted above, the lack of a trade union structure in the plant resulting from Brazilian labour legislation does not permit a circulation of information between departments about conditions and wages. In the same way, wage negotations in Brazil permit employers to remain secretive about wages paid within the firm. Thus, the state's intervention in the relation between labour and capital leads to the suppression of information that could be to partially reveal the inequalities hidden by the labour process. The impulse given to women's struggles against discrimination in Europe as a result of the impact of the feminist movement on trade unions is a good indication of how information can be used.

These findings have some implications for the form that struggles which aim to change radically the employment and working situation of women might take. While, on the one hand, there in no doubt that discrimination against women takes place in dustrial employment, it is not necessarily the case that women's struggles should be structured around this issue. Certainly, there was no lack of problems that solely or mainly affected women workers. The use of the disc in the female departments, or managements practice of deducting Sunday's pay[19] when women were absent from work to take children to the doctor or for vaccnations (and no men had this problem, given the sexual division of labour in the domestic sphere) can be considered female problems. Similary, there was ample room for struggles around the questions of the

delay in promoting women to more skilled tasks even after they had started to perform them, and around the question of sexual harrassment. However, it was not clear whether or not these should be raised as questions relating to discrimination - and involving a direct comparison to the situation of men - or taken up only as issues concerning women. As a result of the sexual division of labour itself, the main points of reference of the female workers expressed in the interviews were not the situations of men, but either the position of women in other firms or some sense of what a just position might be. Thus, for example, resentment about the disc was not couched in terms of women having to use it and men being free from it, but rather in terms of the injustness of the disc per se. In these circumstances, a campaign about the disc could be taken forward without any reference or comparison to its non-use in male departments.

The situation might, indeed, vary from industry to industry. One might hypothesise, for example, that in industries where the segregation of women and men is relatively limited (in plastics, for example) or in a state of flux, direct comparisons between men and women will be more easily grounded in experience than was the case in the factory studied, where the degree of segregation and division was extreme. In this last case and it similar factories we cannot exclude the possibility that women workers' struggles will be most easily organised (initially, at last) around issues which affect women in a different way to men, but which do not involve direct comparisons between the situations of male and female workers.

However, we think that it is essential to reflect on the fact that when union activists and researchers go to the gates of factories to talk to women workers about the discrimination they suffer in relation to men the women's responses are often free-flowing and extensive. This indicates that a consciousness about discrimination could emerge quite easily as a result of collective discussion and efforts at organisation (as was evidenced by the emergence of struggles against discrimination during more generalised strikes in São Paulo in the period after 1978). At the same time, it should be noted that issues such as the 'disc', promotion, creches and sexual harassment have been raised as issues for struggles by both the unions and the feminist movement in recent years. Demands in relation such questions have been widely

diffused among workers, in paeticular metalworkers, in the São Paulo area.

Therefore, with respect both to women who have had a direct experience of discrimination and to those whose experience of it has been hidden by segregation and the division of labour, it is for the feminist movement and the women's commitees in the unions to point to the specificity of female oppression compared to male in order to struggle for radical changes in the situation. Only they can show that the injustices (such as the disc) which are ressented as such by women workers are not natural givens, but part of a set of social relationships which cast women into a subordinate position in relation to men.

Notes

1. This figure is taken from the Industrial Census for 1975. For a criticism and evaluation of those writers who predicted that industrialisation would lead to an expulsion of women from the industrial labour force, see Humphrey(1983).
2. This data is from an unpublished survey of female employment in industrial establisments of more than fifty employees in the city of Sao Paulo, undertakem at the end of the nineteen seventies. We are grateful to the Departamento de Pesquisa, Estudos e Avaliação of the state industrial training service, SENAI, for making this information available to us. For a definition of categories used by SENAI, see Fararone (1978).
3. The term 'differential treatment' is used here rather than 'discrimination' because employers treat women and men in such fundamentally different ways that the basis of inequality within a reference point of comparability suggested by the term discrimination is applicable.
4. It should be noted that in this department, exceptionally, some men also worked under a female supervisor.
5. Not all women work in such conditions, of course. The textile industry is one obvious case where women not only tend to work standing up at machines but also suffer very poor working conditions, such as excessive noise and dust-laden atmospheres.
6. In pratice, at least, the women did not use the smoking areas. It is not clear whether or not there was a formal prohibition on women using them or whether there were no designated areas in the female departments.
7. Some of the figures on the labour force in the factory are for December 1980, not the time of the study, 1982. This is because, firstly, the data provied by management are more complete for this date, and secondly employment after 1980 was distorted by a severe economic crisis in 1981 and 1982. For an account of the effects of this crisis see Hirata and Humphrey, (1984).
8. The term 'classified' is used here to denote the fact that the occupational category of workers may not correspond to the work they actually do.
9. These calculations refer to 341 hourly-paid female production workers, excluding fifteen salaried female workers in the production departments (secretaries and supervisors) and also nine charge-hands.

10. On the question of sex and skill, see Philips and Taylor, (1980).
11. This is not the same as the time actually spent doing the job, as was seen in the previous section.
12. It is not at all uncommon in Brazilian industry for workers of the same sex and in the same department to be unsure of what their colleagues are being paid, let alone of rates of pay in other departments.
13. This was question was not, unfortunatelly, put to female workers in a complementary fashion, as we concentrated on trying to find evidence of male prejudice in relation to the jobs women could do.
14. This view is also shared by managers and trade unionists.
15. These terms are all commonly used by managers in Brazilian firms when they talk about the advantages of using female labour.
16. On the non-recognition and reward of female skills brought into industrial employment from the domestic sphere and elsewhere, see Kergoat(1982: 54-55 and 62-63) and Elson and Pearson(1981: 93-94).
17. See Madeleine Guilbert(1966: 66-68) for a discussion of this issue in a European context.
18. In some other factories visited by the authors there was a clearer division made between male and female workers in quality control. In one plant, for example, the female attached to the department and used this as their frame of reference. When asked about the possibility of promotion, the women mentioned the of charge-hand, but not the better-paid and largely male jobs higher up the quality control hierarchy.
19. The labour legislation current in Brazil determines that workers should be paid for the hours they work each week, plus eight hours for their 'rest day' on Sundays. Most firms work a forty-eight hour week over five or six days. The eight hours paid for Sunday can be forfeited at the discretion of the employer if the worker is absent or late without due reason during the week.

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