

The Media and Social Change: Thirty Years of Magazine Coverage of Women and Work (1950-1977)¹

Gertrude Joch Robinson
McGill University

In the late 1970's one out of every two women works in North America (Sweet and Traeuber 1978, 50). Women are also going to school longer, marrying later, having fewer children and living decades beyond the life-span of their grandmothers. The forces which have shaped these changes - the industrial revolution, urbanization, higher levels of learning and rising living standards — have left their mark on everyone's lives. Yet, in spite of these massive changes in women's social role, the media descriptions of women's work are rudimentary and circumscribed. Television commercials rarely present women outside their homes (Courtney and Whipple, 1974, 56). Female characters in situation comedies and soap operas usually do not work (Tuchman and Daniels, 1978). Newscasts completely ignore working women (Robinson 1978, 93) and newspapers tend to define the content of their women's pages in traditional ways. (Guenin 1975, 66-69) If, as many protagonists claim, the media are capable of mirroring or influencing public opinions as well as social conditions, such an oversight is difficult to explain. Why do the media ignore women's

work outside the home when this is one of the greatest social changes which has recently occurred?

Research into the newsmaking process suggests that media contents are not mirrors of raw events. They are instead descriptions which seem to support socially accepted outlooks. This is a result of the fact that selection of topics, treatments, agendas, events and "definitions of the situation" are all guided by the wider socio-cultural and political system in which the media operate. The way in which the audience "reads" or interprets these messages, in turn, is guided by meaning contexts which they share in varying degrees with the producers.

Though it is generally accepted that media descriptions of events are not random, but determined by the bureaucratic working context in which information is produced, few studies make the epistemological distinction that media content is not a behavioral, but a symbolic input. Women on television are not "living women" but messages about women. Media content as

Hall notes is a “communicative” not merely a behavioral event (Hall, 1973, 2). To understand this communicative event, not only the raw occurrence which triggers it, but also the symbolic and linguistic rules of discourse formation must be taken into account. Such symbolic rules will help explain why newspapers, ads, and broadcasts portray women as not gainfully employed and why it systematically ignores the contribution of women to the working world.

To begin to explore the discourse formation rules requires us to go beyond a simple taxonomic classification of how many women work or do not work according to various media. We must instead look at the construction, ordering and evaluation of the women and work agenda as *a whole*. We need to find out what topics about women and work are featured and when and how these topics are stressed during a particular time period. We must additionally inquire whether changes in these descriptions have occurred over the years and how these are related to changing social conditions and public opinions. Only by paying attention to the interconnections between societal structures and process and symbolic structures is it possible to clarify the latent meaning contexts which generate the woman and work discourse.

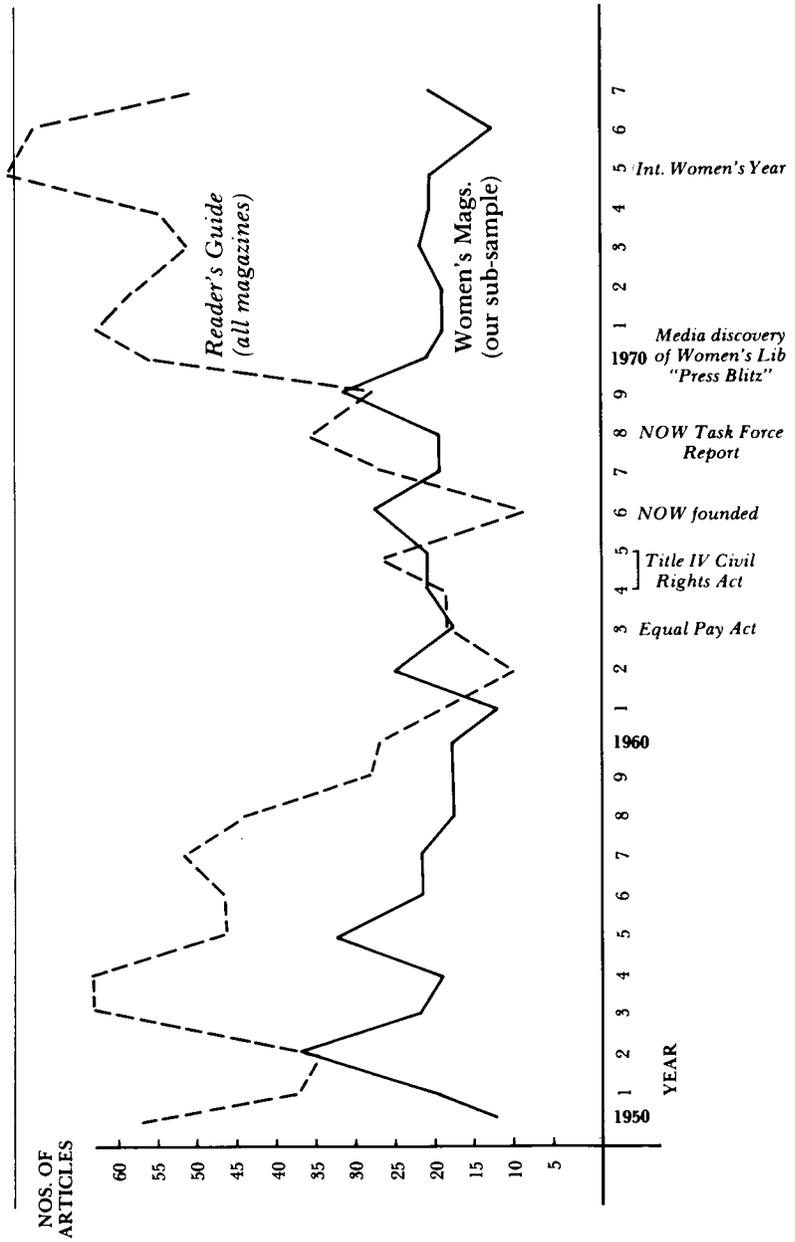
Determining whether and how media descriptions, public opinion and social trends are related provides answers to a secondary question of this paper, the interrelationship between society and culture. Four possible theories have been traditionally offered. Carlsson calls them respectively the interdependence, materialism, idealism and autonomy theories. (Carlsson, Dahlberg, Rosengren 1979) Each of them implies a different role for the media. Interdependence theories assume that the media do both: they sometimes “reflect” social structure and at other times they “mold” it. Idealist theories assert that the media “mold” society through their ability to define social issues. Materialist theories in contrast attribute only “reflection” capacities to the media, claim-

ing that people’s values and outlooks are products of social structure. Autonomous theories finally assert that no interrelationships exist between culture and social structure.

To clarify the women and work discourse and the culture/society relationships our study focuses on a thirty-year period between 1947 and 1977. This was selected because women’s working lives changed drastically during this interval. In order to pinpoint interconnections, the period was further subdivided into three decades: the fifties, sixties and seventies. In each the interrelationships between two societal and one media index are mapped. These are: labor force participation rates, public opinion about women’s work and magazine coverage of women and work. Labor force participation rates reflect the social reality of different groups of women entering and changing the labor force since World War II. Gallup, Harris and Roper polls provide indexes of public opinion trends concerning women’s work, access to jobs, mobility and pay. The *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature* provides an index of media concern during the thirty-year period.

In the *Reader’s Guide* all article entries under “Women: Employment, Equal Rights and Occupations” were sampled between 1950 and 1977. In addition three women’s and three general news magazines were subjected to a detailed title and content analysis to determine the topics which constitute the work discussions agenda and to pinpoint topic changes during the three decades. They are: *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and *Chatelaine*, plus *Time*, *Reader’s Digest* and Canada’s *Maclean’s*. These magazines are a useful subsample because they have large circulation, prestige and their content has been previously studied. They also show the same entry profile as the larger index according to Figure 1, thus making our findings more secure. Though only about one-half of the total number of *Reader’s Guide* articles are found in

FIGURE 1
Total Reader's Guide Entries under "Women: Employment, Equal Rights, Occupations"
Compared with Women's Magazines Coverage of "Women and Work," 1950-1977



these magazines, their graph has a similar contour.

All together 27 years or 1,944 issues of the six magazines were classified by ten undergraduate researchers. These discovered a total of 1,046 "work" related articles. All of these articles were then headline and content analyzed by two researchers to determine sub-topic orientation and shifts over the three decades under investigation. The reliability here was 0.88.

The Social Setting: Women's Changing Participation in the Labor Force 1950-1977

As a prelude to understanding how social conditions are related to public opinions about working women and their magazine portrayal, labor force changes between 1950 and 1977 must be briefly sketched. Three of these are most important and have major implications for understanding women's employment in the 80's. To begin with there is the growth in women's paid employment which doubled their public work participation during the past thirty years. In America women workers increased from about

18 million in 1950 to 35 million, and in Canada they moved from a low of 1.5 million to a high of 3.7 million in 1976. The *1975 Handbook on Women Workers* gives three major reasons for this phenomenon: post-war prosperity, the swift growth of white collar service jobs and the 1956 switch from a predominantly blue to a white collar economy. (*1975 Handbook on Women Workers*, 10)

As Table 1 indicates, this spectacularly increased size of the female labor force was accomplished by many new groups of traditionally home-bound women wanting to work. Their labor market entry not only increased but changed the composition of the female labor force. Three of these changes stand out most clearly: firstly, the fact that married women outnumber single women among North American

female workers. (58% to 42%) Where previously only a small number of married women worked, in the seventies 44% of all U.S. and 41% of Canadian married women (husbands present) are gainfully employed. The five-fold increase since World War II suggests that coping with dual roles is no longer the exception but the rule for the majority of North American families. *1975 Handbook on Women Workers* 16) Not only women's but everyone's lives have been changed when housewifery is no longer the dominant norm.

Table 1 indicates that in the fifties and sixties two additional changes in the female labor force occurred. Where as this labor force was young (under 25) at the beginning of the century, it is now "middle aged" (over 25). This shift resulted from two factors: older women and mothers returning to work. In the fifties the participation rate of over forty-fives jumped about 10% in the U.S. and Canada. In the sixties, mothers' work participation went from 36% to 52% in Canada. More than half of all women with school-age children, as a consequence, work today. Armstrong attributes these trends to rising prices which adversely affect the living standards of the lower and middle income family. (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978, 19)

The final and most controversial change in women's work patterns is very recent. According to Table 1 it involves mothers with *pre-school* children, which were generally considered least likely to work. As late as 1970 the prestigious *Royal Commission Report on the Status of Women in Canada* underestimated this trend which, however, shows no diminution today (Lupri and Mills, 1979, 3). Between 1960 and 1975 the participation rates of young mothers nearly doubled from about 18% to between 30% and 35% in the U.S. and Canada. Though there is wide-spread public concern about the fate of children in families with working mothers, economic data indicate that most children are better off when their mothers work. U.S. husband-wife

Table 1
Participation Rate of Women in the Labor Force
U.S. and Canada 1950 - 1975 (in percent)

Social Structure Variables	U.S. 1950	Can. 1951	U.S. 1960	Can. 1961	U.S. 1970	Can. 1971	U.S. 1974	Can. 1975
By Age:*								
20-24	46.1	46.8	46.2	49.3	57.8	58.5	63.2	66.9
25-34	34.0	24.2	36.0	29.5	45.0	39.0	52.4	52.9
35-44	39.1	21.8	43.5	31.0	51.1	40.2	54.7	51.5
45-54	38.0	20.4	49.8	33.3	54.4	40.6	54.6	46.1
55-64	27.0	14.5	37.2	24.4	43.0	29.8	40.7	30.8
65+	9.7	5.1	10.8	6.7	9.7	5.0	8.2	4.8
<i>All</i>	33.9	24.4	37.8	29.5	43.4	35.5	45.7	44.2
By Marital Status:**								
Single	50.5	58.2	44.1	54.2		47.5	57.2	59.2
Married	24.8	11.2	31.7	22.0		32.0	44.0	41.6
Other	36.0	19.3	38.0	23.0		27.8	29.6	31.0
<i>Total</i>	31.4	24.1	34.8	29.5	43.0	35.5	45.2	44.2
By Presence + Age of Children:***								
				(1967)				
over 18 only	30.3		34.7		42.2	40.0	43.0	44.0
6 - 17(14)	12.6		18.9	28.0	30.5	39.9	32.9	43.0
under 6	11.2		18.2	19.0	30.2	28.1	35.7	30.0
<i>Total</i>	23.8		30.5	26.0	40.8	34.1	43.0	41.0

*U.S. Figures: Manpower Report of the President, April 1975 as quoted in Kreps, Juanita, *Women and the American Economy*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1976, p.66.

Canadian Figures: Census of Canada 1961, Vol. III, pt. I, Table 2 and *Women in the Labor Force*, 1976, part I, Table 8.

**U.S. Figures: *1975 Handbook on Women Workers*, Women's Bureau, U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bull. 297, chart D, p. 16.

Canadian Figures: Census of Canada 1967, Vol. III, pt. 1, Table 17 and Vol. VII, pt. I, Table 3, also *Women in the Labor Force* 1976, part I, Table 14.

***U.S. Figures: Manpower Report of the President 1975 as quoted in Kreps, p. 76.

Marital Status: U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *Women Workers Today*, 1976, p.3.

Canadian Figures: 1971/75: *Women in the Labor Force*, 1975 edition, Table 6, p.279, and Table 4, page 275.

1967: Boyd, Monica, Eichler, Margrit and Hofley, John R., "Family, Functions, Formation, and Fertility" in Gail A. Cook (ed.) *Opportunities for Choice*, Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1976, Table 26, p. 29.

families with children had a 1973 median income of \$15,000 when mothers worked, as compared to a median income of \$13,000 when they did not (1975 *Handbook on Women Workers*, 33). How these massive increases in the numbers and types of working women are publicly described and evaluated will concern us in the following section.

The Symbolic Environment: Three Decades of Magazine Reporting of Women and Work

To elucidate the meaning contexts through which women's work outside the home are interpreted, we have to look at the topics presented and how these have been classified and ordered. The classification and order of topics provides a map of interpretive preferences which, according to Hall, predisposes an audience to "preferred readings" of a social situation (Hall, 1973, 2). In addition to the classification and ordering of the work discourse, a mapping of the rise and fall of dominant topics provides a means for assessing whether and in what way media presentations have contributed to changes in outlook.

Though numbers of articles devoted to a particular theme are a very crude measure for estimating public interest, it does provide a useful starting point for understanding how important women's work has been as a public issue over the past thirty years. Here our data show that in spite of massive changes in women's working lives, the topic of work has received relatively little magazine attention. Over the past thirty years there were only 597 articles in the three women's magazines and another 449 in the general news publications for a total of 1,046. This constitutes about 7% of all content in women's magazines and 5% in the others. Topics such as children, health, home, food and beauty continue to make up the principle women's agenda to which about 80% of all women's magazine content is devoted. The final 13% of all articles focus on what Guenin calls "non-traditional" topics,

those relevant to women's changing life styles (Guenin, 1975).

Table 2 shows that the 597 work related articles were almost equally distributed over the three decades. There were 221 in the fifties, 216 in the sixties and 160 in the latest seven years sampled. Contrary to expectations, there was no drastic increase in magazine attention to women's work throughout the period in spite of the fact that every second woman is gainfully employed. It is also evident that though there were no great decadal changes in total coverage, there were considerable yearly fluctuations. The yearly average for the thirty years was 21, but peak years showed between 22 and 37 work related articles. The reasons for these peaks will be explored in the final section of this paper.

Total numbers of stories published in a particular year indicates the relative importance of the work discourse in public discussion. They do not indicate, however, how this discourse is structured. To illustrate more precisely what has been judged newsworthy and interesting about women and work, Table 3, which is based on the title analysis, enumerates the sub-topics which received attention between 1950-1977. Three findings emerge here. The first is that magazine selection of work reportage is focused on a very small range of eleven subjects, which together constitute the public discourse. Among these are: career profiles, career planning, equality of access, discrimination at the work-place, dual roles, volunteer work, labor force participation, re-evaluation of housework, part-time work, women's work motives and self-images. Most of these are self-explanatory though the first two require elucidation. "Career profiles" includes articles focusing on the life stories or biographies of individuals, while "career planning" focuses on working conditions, descriptions of particular professions or jobs as well as advice on how to adapt to particular working conditions. (See appendix for category descriptions.)

Table 2
 Numbers of Work-Related Articles
 in 3 Women's Magazines by Decade 1950-1977

Year	Good Housekeeping	Ladies Home Journal	Chatelaine	Totals
1950	2	9	1	12
1	7	9	4	20
2	2	23	12	<u>37</u>
3	6	6	10	22
4	5	7	7	19
5	20	9	4	<u>33</u>
6	11	7	3	21
7	11	5	5	21
8	7	2	9	18
9	12	1	5	18
<i>Sub-Totals:</i>	83	78	60	50's: 221 (94)*
1960	10	4	4	18
1	3	3	6	12
2	11	7	7	<u>25</u>
3	7	6	5	18
4	5	9	7	21
5	5	6	10	21
6	7	9	12	<u>28</u>
7	2	9	9	20
8	1	3	16	20
9	0	13	20	<u>33</u>
<i>Sub-Totals:</i>	51	69	96	60's: 216 (88)*
1970	4	4	13	21
1	4	9	6	19
2	4	9	6	19
3	6	11	6	<u>23</u>
4	6	7	8	21
5	6	10	5	21
6	4	6	3	13
7	4	6	11	21
<i>Sub-Totals:</i>	38	62	50	70's: 160 (88)*
<i>Grand Totals:</i>	172	209	206	597

* Work related articles in 3 general news magazines: *Time*, *Reader's Digest* and *Maclean's* (Canada).

In addition we see in Table 3 that the work discourse is clearly structured into three unequally covered sets of topics. We shall call them the major, secondary, and minor topics. The three major topics are: career profiles, career planning and equality of access. Together they are by far the most important focus of the discourse, receiving between one-half to four-fifths of all article mention depending on magazine type. News magazines devote almost all of their attention (78%-81%) to these three sub-topics. Women's magazines in contrast have a wider agenda. They divide their attention about equally between the major and the secondary topics, each of which receive about two-fifths of all coverage. Among these secondary topics are: discrimination at the work place, dual roles, volunteer work and labor force participation. Minor topics, in contrast, go virtually unnoticed in both news and women's magazines. They receive between 6% and 16% of all article mentions. Such an ordering of the women and work discourse suggests that the seven major and secondary topics constitute what Hall would call the "preferred mappings" of the situation, while the minor topics are in some sense "discrepant."

Discrepant topics, symbolic theory suggests, run counter to typical beliefs and everyday knowledge of "how things work in this culture." They may also be in conflict with the established order of power and interest in society. The following discussion will clarify this point. It has been widely documented that the general beliefs and everyday knowledge about the nature of women's work are crystallized in an ideology which defines woman as the home-maker. According to this ideology, which journalists share with other members of society, woman's proper job is the performance of personal services for husband and children. Such a view, Eichler notes, defines woman as a "personal dependent." Even if she works outside the home, a separate income *per se* does not dislodge a well internalized dependency relationship which is reinforced by other social institutions such as

marriage law, the census and the work hierarchy (Eichler, 1973, 50-51).

In the interpretation of the working scene, notions of women as dependents generate a number of assumptions. Among these are the beliefs that woman's work must not interfere with the family and that her proper labor force participation is in jobs which are extensions of her sex role, namely the service and teaching domains. They also justify the notion that she can be paid less because she is already being supported by her husband and that promotion is not necessary, because her "real" satisfactions derive from family, not work activities.

The three-tiered nature of the woman and work discourse indicates that those topics which harmonize with accepted role expectations for women receive more coverage than those which do not. Our title analysis of the major topics "career profiles" and "career planning" show that these articles portray women primarily as housekeepers, teachers and entertainers. Not only do these articles suggest that there is "female" and "male" work, but that it is proper that women are overwhelmingly found in certain kinds of work. Typical article headlines are: "What Hollywood does to Women," "Helen Keller: Teacher," and "Closing Time," about a woman buyer at a department store. Even "equal access" articles which might have questioned these assumptions, softens the potential challenge of women's entry into unusual professions. Such articles focus not on the average but the "first" or "token" woman entering and succeeding in a male domain. Titles like "Comely Cosmonaut," "Police-Woman on Patrol," "Lady in a Jet," and "Gentlewoman from Maine: Margaret Chase Smith," indicate that such women are so rare, and have intellectual and financial resources well above the norms that they are no threat to anyone. Interestingly, the "first woman" strategy is also found in the newspaper discourse where it helps support the myth that women have broken out of their dou-

Table 3
 General News and Women's Magazine Treatment of
 "Women and Work" by Decade and Sub-Topic
 1950 - 1977 (in percent)

Sub-Topic	1950's		1960's		1970's	
	General News (174)	Women's Mags (221)	General News (143)	Women's Mags (216)	General News (132)	Women's Mags (160)
Major Topics:						
Career Profiles	45	7	47	14	23	9
Career Planning	6	42	14	18	9	18
Equality of Access	27	10	20	12	38	13
<i>Sub-Totals</i>	78%	59%	81%	44%	70%	40%
Secondary Topics:						
Discrimination at Workplace	0	0	1	7	10	23
Dual Roles	6	12	7	12	7	14
Volunteer Work	5	21	5	9	6	2
Labour Force Participation	5	2	5	12	2	5
<i>Sub-Totals</i>	16%	35%	18%	40%	25%	43%
Minor Topics:						
Re-evaluating Housework	2	0	1	3	2	5
Part-time Work	0	2	0	7	0	3
Motives for Work	2	2	0	3	2	4
Self-Images	2	1	0	2	1	3
Other	0	1	0	1	0	1
<i>Sub-Totals</i>	6%	6%	1%	16%	5%	16%
TOTALS	100	100	100	100	100	100
					TOTAL 1046	

* 1978 and 1979 data missing

ble work ghetto (Guenin, 1975). Only one magazine, Canada's *Chatelaine* challenges these assumptions with articles which clearly indicate the under-representation of women in the top professions. "The House of Commons, Exclusive Male Club" and "Justice? One Woman to 263 Men?" illustrate this point and indicate that its one-time editor Doris Anderson was consciously presenting an oppositional perspective (Anderson, 1971, 5).

Secondary and minor themes, it becomes clear, are less covered because they provide a forum for questioning traditional assumptions about women's role and women's work. Among these are the acceptance of women as "dependent," the belief that women's work is secondary and that it must fit in with family needs. Dual roles, a theme which probes how working women cope with jobs and family, neutralizes the inegalitarian demands placed on women by discussing the problem in a historical time frame. Titles like "Organization is the Secret," and "When Mother was a War Worker" sidetrack the fairness issue. These articles condone the idea that women *alone* should be responsible for home and children in addition to their employment. "Dual role" articles stress that womans' work result from individual choice rather than economic necessity.

Even more potentially threatening to the patriarchal family set-up are the minor themes which consequently receive even less public discussion. Here *Chatelaine's* "Lets Raise House-keeping to a Professional Level" suggests that this work is demanding and socially undervalued. "Twenty-six Exciting Part-time Jobs for Women" and *Macleans'* "Freedom is where you find it" demystify the fact that women do not work for pleasure but because their husbands do not earn enough to satisfy middle class family expectations. *Time's* "Sex and Success" and *Chatelaine's* "Let's stop acting like a minority group," finally raise such controversial issues as women's supposed fear of success and low self-

image, all topics which challenge the ideology of dependency.

Public Opinion and Social Change

For the role of the media in social change the interrelationships between social structure to be understood, opinion and media variables now need scrutiny. Such an analysis will offer answers to some of the initial questions raised at the beginning of the paper. It will be possible for instance to indicate whether and in what way the media have taken note of the fact that over half of all North American women presently work outside the home. It will also be possible to sketch how the media discussion relates to the way in which North Americans feel about women's work. Furthermore, it will offer an opportunity to indicate how magazine portrayals have responded to liberalizing attitudes towards women's participation in the public realm in the thirty years since 1950. All of these interrelationships will finally provide evidence to answer the more fundamental question whether the media "lead" or "follow" structural and opinion change.

To come to any conclusions, our comparisons must focus on three interrelationships: (1) between social structure and public opinion; (2) between public opinion and media portrayals; and (3) between media portrayals and social situations. If all of these can be demonstrated to exist, we will have provided evidence for a particular theory of culture.

Public opinion surveys have used thousands of questions and dealt with hundreds of issues in the period between 1945 and 1977. Yet, women's changing role was not a topic of major public concern. In the past thirty years only 82 questions are devoted to it by U.S. and Canadian pollsters combined. Within this small group of women-related questions those pertaining to work are again less important than those tracing women's acceptability for political office. Only 30, or approximately one-third of all questions

focus on this aspect of women's changing public lives. The rest probes public attitudes about women's acceptability in the traditional male professions as well as women's skills, interests and attitudinal changes due to the Women's Movement (Boyd 1975, 156).

The 30 questions mapping public attitudes toward women and work have been subdivided into three topic areas for graphing and comparison. Appendix II lists the 9 questions reflecting attitudes towards wives working, which record a number of reversals. Appendix III presents another 9 questions pertinent to mothers working, where opinion is generally negative. And Appendix IV records the 13 questions dealing with Canadian and U.S. attitudes toward equal pay and equal opportunity, which are mixed. The chronological ordering of these questions enables us to plot trends and their variegated phrasing suggests that what pollsters do and what they say is itself a sign of the times. Polling questions far from being objective and neutral are based on prevalent value assumptions which are subject to change.

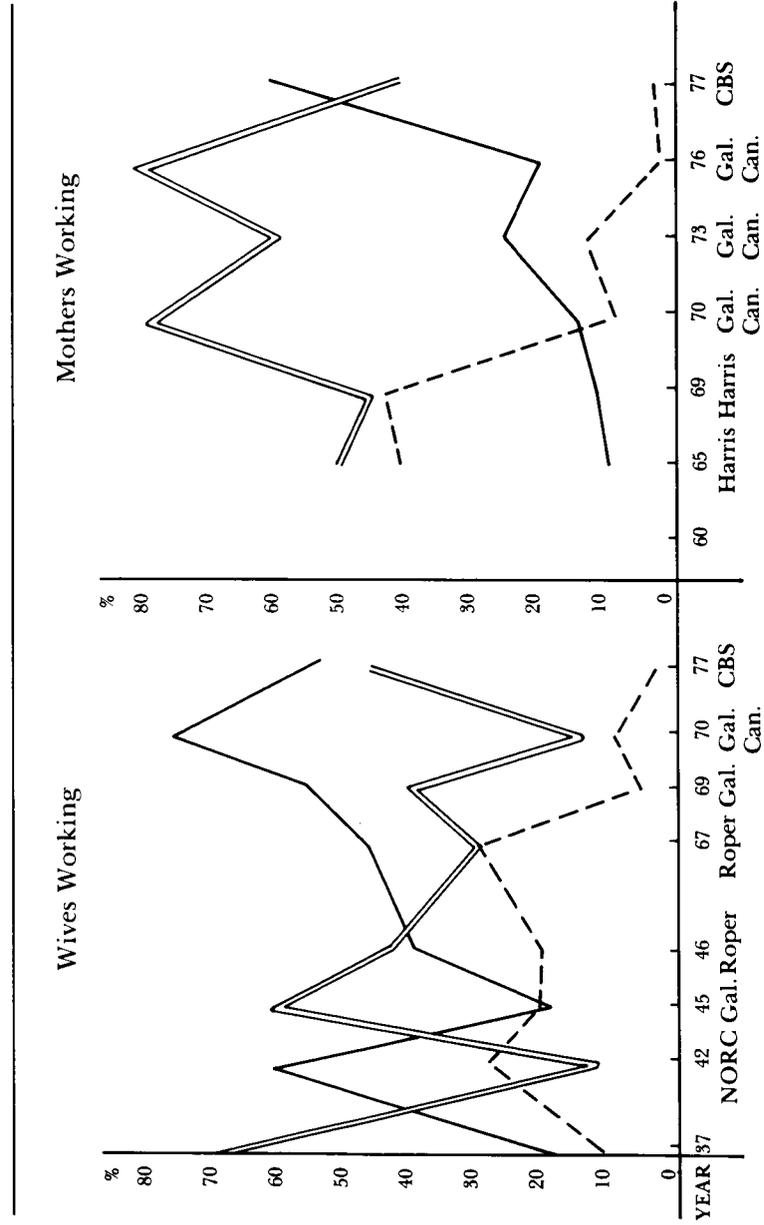
Figure 2, which graphs changes in American attitudes towards wives working, indicates that changing social conditions have affected public opinion, though the converse is more difficult to evaluate. Our evidence documents two attitude switches from approval to disapproval of married women working between 1942 and 1977. Both of these shifts are clearly a result of changing social conditions. Demographic data indicate that 7 million women entered the labor force during World War II, increasing their participation from 25.4% to 36.1% of the total (Handbook, 1975, II). The switch back to a negative evaluation of wives working, coincides with the return of servicemen in 1945 and the retirement of 3 million women, reducing their general labor force participation by 10% in the short space of two years. (Handbook, 1975, II) Women, as a matter of fact, were not to achieve this overall participation rate again until 1967 when the

Roper poll in Appendix II finds 43% in favor of married women working, while 20% are against and about 20% believe that it depends on the situation. This latest approval of married women working is correlated with 1960's labor force participation increases among: the young (from 46% to 57%), the marrieds (from 31% to 40%) and mothers (from 20% to 30%) (Figure 3).

More difficult to evaluate are the opinion data on working mothers because they include a number of different questions. Yet they too seem to lend partial support to our finding that public opinion is responsive to social changes. According to Appendix III, polls in both the United States and Canada agree that mothers should not work when their children are young. Yet, even here negative beliefs are losing some of their force in response to quintupled labor force participation rates among mothers with preschool children. The 1975 *Handbook* notes that by this date more than half of all U.S. mothers with preschool children were in the labor force and describes this as one of the most significant labor force changes North America has ever experienced. In Canada a similar shift is occurring. Between 1960 and 1970 the negative attitude toward mothers working outside the home when they have young children is reduced slightly from 93% to 80%. Even though the young generation is more approving, the overwhelming belief in North America is still that mothers of small children should stay home. This same attitude results in the minimal (2%) coverage of "day-care centers" revealed in a previous study (Robinson, 1979, 16).

We may conclude then that on the issue of married women working, public opinion is a good index of social conditions. It reflects the increased labor force participation of this group of women. On the issue of mothers working, however, this is not the case. Here the response is delayed. We do not know how long. On the issue of equal pay for equal work, finally, the fit between opinions and social conditions is rev-

FIGURE 2
Changes in North American Public Attitudes Towards
Wives and Mothers Working 1937-1977



ersed. 87% of all Americans according to Appendix IV affirmed this principle in 1954, though it was not incorporated in legislation till ten years later.

The Media and Social Change

Turning now to the nature of the relationships existing between opinion and media variables, our data show that the media are good indexes of public opinion but less reliable in mirroring social changes. This can be demonstrated by a decadal comparison of preferred topics as compared to public attitudes. Table 3 indicates that in the fifties when it was generally accepted that wives and mothers should not work, we find that two topics, career planning (42%) and volunteer work (21%) dominate the discussion agenda to the virtual exclusion of all others. Of these, the latter, which deals with work done altruistically and for good cause, fits well with the traditional home-bound role assigned to women at the time.

Much more difficult to explain is the high incidence of career planning articles, which seem to go counter to public attitudes. Symbolic analysis of career planning articles, however, indicates that these are addressed to a particular type of woman only: the woman who has worked during war-time and the mother whose children are school-age. Women's magazine coverage in this instance seems to be subtly responding to the entry or re-entry of older women 45-54 into the labor force. In the fifties this group increases its participation rate by over 10% in spite of the fact that there is an overall reduction of the total number of working women. On this issue then the media seem to be responding to social change and leading public opinion, which will not liberalize its outlook until the next decade.

In the sixties as we have seen, it is acceptable for married women and those mothers to work, who have children which are of school age. This

change in outlook goes hand in hand with an enlargement of the work agenda in the magazines. According to Table 3 the three major topics lose their preeminent status and their coverage drops by 31%. Instead such secondary topics as labor force participation go up from 2%-12%, discrimination at the work-place rises to 7% of all coverage and part-time work increases from 2%-7%. All of these topics are of interest to mature women entering or re-entering the labor force.

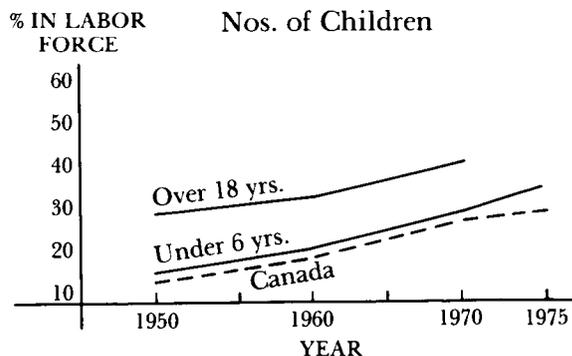
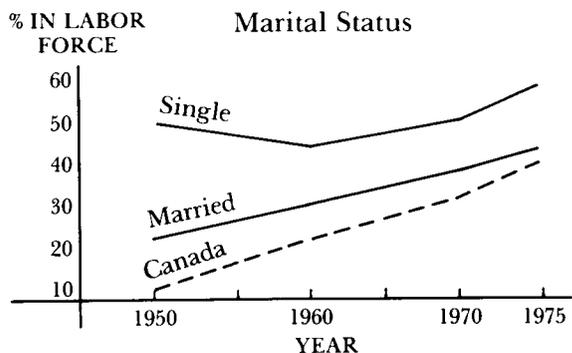
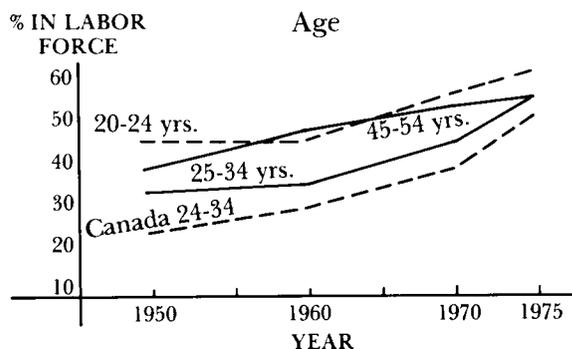
In the seventies finally, the acceptance of more egalitarian life styles, especially among the under thirties group, and the growing approval of mothers with older children working is reflected in yet another topic change. Here the meteoric rise of interest in "discrimination at the work place" articles which tripled from 7% to 23% in the period must be noted. For the first time sustained public attention is focused on unequal pay for the same work, sex stereotyped behavior at work as well as articles requesting an end to discrimination and informing women of their legal resources.

These decadal changes in women and work coverage clearly indicate that the relationship between media coverage and public opinion is close and reciprocal. Sometimes the media are ahead of public opinion, and sometimes they follow. Exactly when they do what still remains to be clarified. Our decadal graph of topic coverage in Figure 4 indicates that women's magazines were ahead of public opinion in the fifties, when their coverage of various aspects of career planning remained strong in spite of the fact that public opinion was generally in favor of women's home-bound role. In two additional topics, "equality of access" and "dual roles" the media also seem to have been responding to social conditions rather than to prevalent opinions. Both of these topics receive about 10-13% article attention without any decadal fluctuations. The sharp interest rise in the topic of "discrimination at the workplace" between the 60's and 70's and the drop in "volunteer work" as

well as "career profile" articles confirms the same point. As more women are gainfully employed the former loses interest and by the seventies "first women" which is the main focus of career profile articles have penetrated virtually every profession.

The final set of relationships to be explored are those between the media and society. How is the steadily increasing work participation of all groups of North American women portrayed in women's magazine coverage between 1950-77? Is this relationship close as in the case of public opinion where graphs match each other quite well, or is it more indirect? Figure 1 which plots total magazine entries,

FIGURE 3
Participation Rate of Different Groups
of Women in the Labour Force,
U.S. and Canada 1950-1975



indicates that media interest in women and work peaked twice in the thirty years under investigation, once in the early fifties (1953-54) and again in 1970-76. In between these peaks there is a trough of about fifteen years. Average numbers of articles per year were about 28 in the fifties and only 16 in the sixties, while peak years show 35 entries in the first and between 55-65 in the second peak. Figure 3 in contrast shows unbrokenly rising curves for the participation of different rising curves for the participation of women in the labour force.

If one compares the trends of media coverage with the realities of work participation one must conclude that the media have been bad indicators of the social changes taking place in the working world. They seem to reflect this change only indirectly and their attention is subject to faddish fluctuations. A similar conclusion is reached by Greenfield in a comparison of media interest in U.S. moral crises (Greenfield 1961) and by Beninger who compared drug entries with actual use of marijuana and LSD (Beninger 1978, 445). Such an interpretation is, however, challenged by another group of studies which find the media reflecting certain aspects of social situations quite accurately. Middleton notes that the size of fictional families in seven women's magazines parallel changes in actual fertility rates in the U.S. between 1916 and 1956 (Middleton, 1960, 140). Inglis notes that fictional heroines mirror the changes in gainfully employed women in the labor market between 1910 and 1930, but with a ten year delay (Inglis 1938).

How well the media "reflect" a social occurrence, our study suggests, depends on at least two factors, the saliency of the occurrence and whether it lends itself to event coverage or not. The saliency of an occurrence refers to the public attention and thus coverage it has already received from other media. Figure 1's *Reader's Guide* entries indicate that magazine coverage did not very accurately respond to women's increased labor force participation. The 1968 and 1970 surges in coverage are much more closely related

to the interest evidenced by other media. These occurred in 1968 when the *NOW Taskforce Reports* demonstrate media discrimination against women and the famous "press blitz" in 1970 when the media discover the women's movement for the first time (Robinson, 1978, 98).

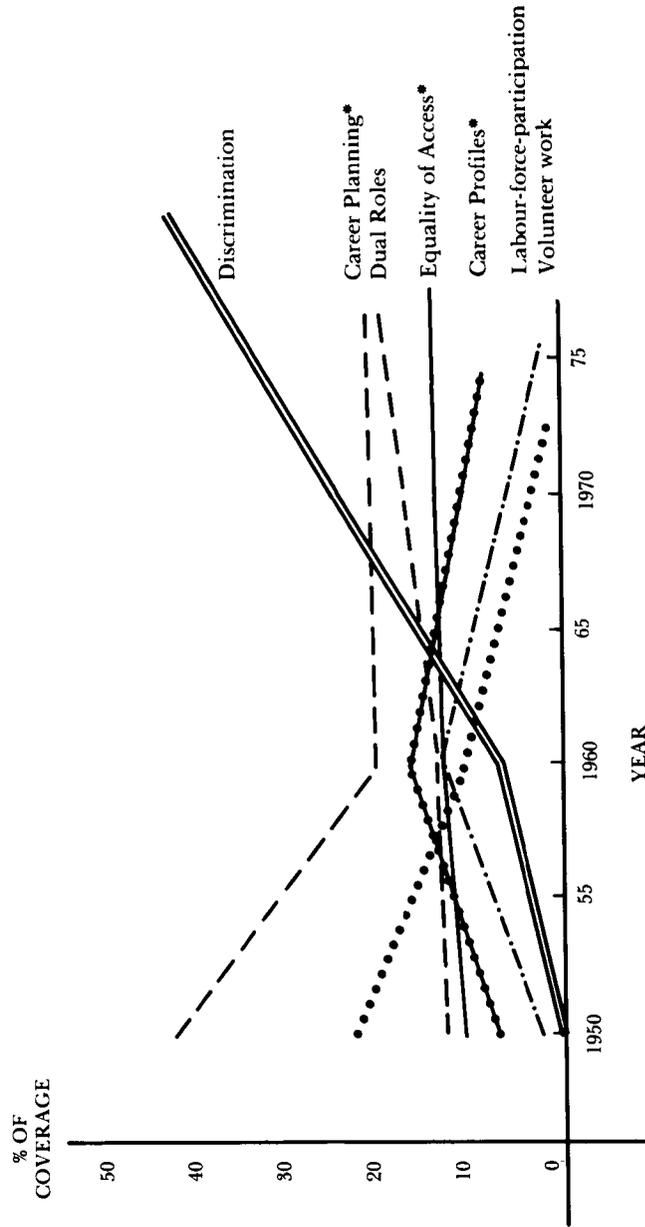
This snowball effect of "saliency" is reinforced if a social occurrence lends itself to "event coverage." Here the findings of Funkhouser are important. In an excellent comparative article he notes that news magazine coverage of drugs roughly parallels the rise of drug use, peaked a year or two earlier in the case of the Vietnam war, campus and urban riots and showed no relationship to such other 1960's social issues as race relations, crime, poverty, pollution and women's rights (Funkhouser, 1973, 72). An advertising sponsored media system which is event oriented produces a better "fit" between coverage of events like the Vietnam war, than social trends like pollution and consciousness raising, for which no "beats" exist. There is also no "beat" for women's work and the way in which this theme is covered is consequently open to the vagaries of chance.

Theories of Culture and Society

A number of conclusions emerge from the assembled material. On the theoretical level the social index comparisons have shown that multiple relationships exist between social, opinion and media variables. It is consequently necessary to adopt an interdependence theory of society and culture. Our evidence showed that in the issue of women and work, public opinion is more directly affected by changes in work conditions, than is media coverage. The change from positive to negative opinions on women working demonstrates this fact most clearly.

Media coverage in turn, however, is sensitive to both public attitudes and to social events. In the late sixties there is a sharp increase in the coverage of "Equal Rights" articles as registered

FIGURE 4
Selected "Woman and Work" Sub-Topic Coverage by
Decade in Women's Magazines



* These are three major (most covered) sub-topics.

in *Reader's Guide* entries (See Figure 5). This is virtually contemporaneous with the introduction of the Equal Pay Act, Title IV of Civil Rights Act and Executive Order 1246 in the United States. These prohibit pay discrimination and require affirmative action of U.S. federal employers (Wallace, 1978, 125-27). Such evidence suggests that the media both "reflect" and "lead" public attitudes and social change, depending on the issue and the time period investigated. A similar conclusion is reached by Swedish researchers who found that political opinions in the population are molded both by economic conditions and by media content, probably more forcefully by the former than by the latter (Carlsson, Dahlberg, Rosengren, 1979, 15).

An interdependence theory of society and culture furthermore need not postulate a simple correspondence between the three sets of social indicators. Our evidence suggests that the relationship between social, opinion and media variables is rarely a one-to-one "mirroring." There were no simple correspondences between women's growing work participation and increasing media interest in this theme over the thirty-year period. Total numbers of work articles remained approximately stable in the fifties, sixties and seventies. Our title analysis showed instead that these links are complex and often work in different time-frames. Topics covered in a particular decade do not reflect different kinds of working women entering the labor market, nor do they pay attention to the hundreds of issues potentially relevant to women's work outside the home.

How topics are selected and interpreted is much more directly affected by a belief system. We have shown this to be an ideology of woman as an economic and social "dependent." This belief system produces preferred descriptions which according to Hall, encourage the audience to make special kinds of "preferred readings" of the female work situation (Hall 1973). Discourse

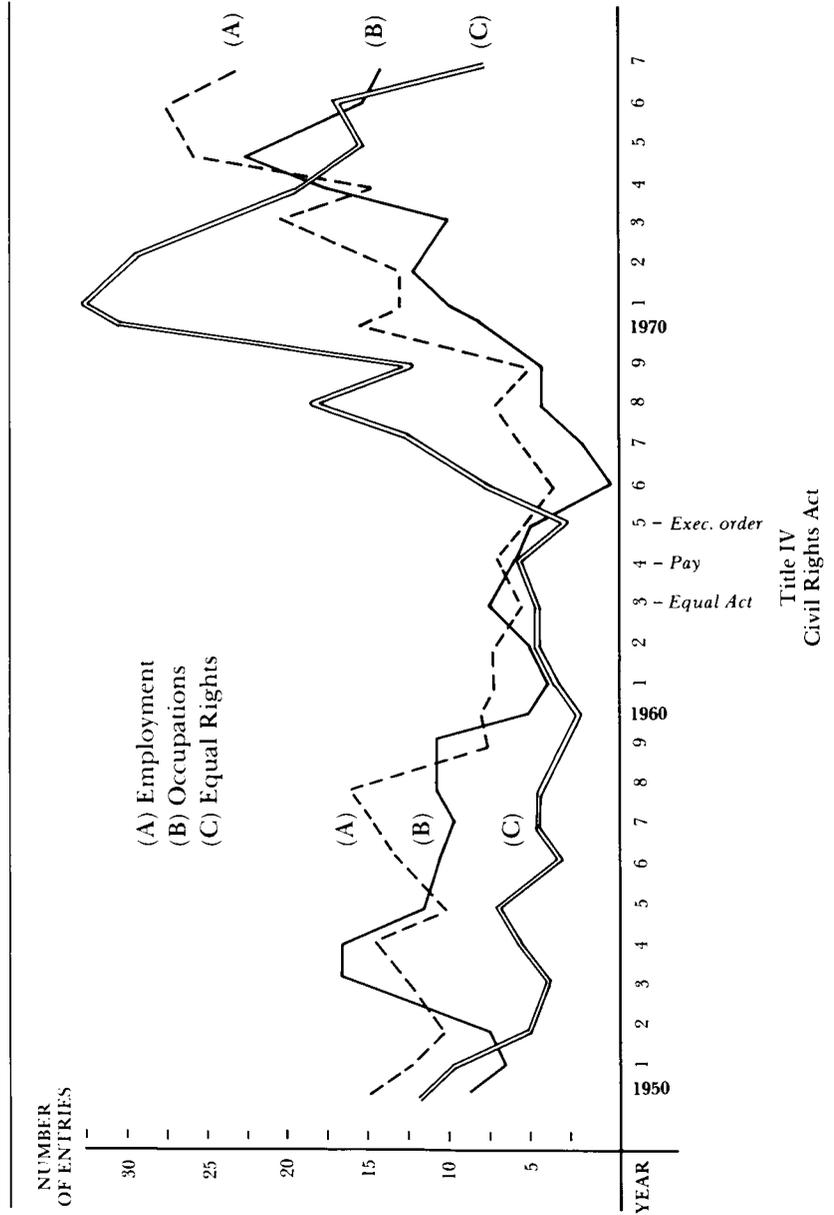
analysis illuminates that the "preferred descriptions" tend to show only single or married women with older children working. Other groups of women, especially young mothers are subtly encouraged to stay at home. They and their day-care needs are rarely described. The discourse analysis additionally shows women working for only a small number of specified reasons. They may work to support themselves or to supplement their family's income. They may work in war-time and if it does not interfere with family responsibilities. Rarely are any women shown to work for self-fulfillment or for their own enjoyment.

The discourse also portrays women in sex-segregated positions which are extensions of women's nurturing role. If she is found in unusual male dominated professions, she is presented as an exceptional case, as a "first." Her choice of such a profession is usually justified by unique experiences or conditions which are not typical. It is consequently more difficult for the audience to identify with such a woman. We may conclude that these "preferred" descriptions prepare females to be satisfied with fewer work opportunities, unequal pay and segregated jobs, simply because they are women.

Yet within this traditionally oriented public work discourse, new perspectives are being forged by the introduction of topics which challenge the notion of "woman as dependent." Among these is approval of equal pay for equal work, access to traditionally male dominated jobs and support for a chance at promotion, which are the primary foci of "discrimination" articles. For the first time also, public attention is drawn to the need to reevaluate housework, to inquire about women's motives for work and to take account of the satisfactions which may be derived from gainful employment.

Such divergent descriptions in turn support divergent "readings." These are becoming increasingly important as reference points to a

FIGURE 5
Reader's Guide Entries under "Women: Employment, Equal Rights, Occupations,"
1950-1977



growing number of North American women. According to a systematic survey of U.S. women, more than two thirds of all Americans now hold what may be called a “balancing” or an “expanding” outlook on women’s roles. This means according to the survey that 38% of all women want some aspects of their traditional lives to change, while an additional 30% are in favor of much greater egalitarianism in women’s status. “They want lives which offer options of home, marriage and careers outside the home in all possible combinations.” (Bryant, 1977, 4).

“Traditional” outlook women are for the first time in the minority in North America. The fact that this group tends to be composed of homemakers, older (over 45) women who are either married or widowed, and often have less than highschool education, indicates that their belief patterns will be declining in the future (Bryant, 1977, 6-11). In spite of the fact that “traditional,” “balanced,” and “expanding” outlook women are evenly distributed across the spectrum, the movement to change women’s role is now part of the mainstream of opinion. Bryant concludes: “for American women the pace of attitudinal change has been rapid in recent years. They are preparing themselves with training for more diverse job roles than in the past. They are seeking ways to combine the traditional role of homemaker with the chance to hold jobs which utilize all of their talents and capabilities. They are expanding their view of what the lives of women could and should be. When outlooks change, behavior follows.” (Bryant, 1977, 47). And with this will come as well a re-working of the public discourse on women and work.

Appendix I

Definitions of Work-Related Content Categories

Career Profiles:

- (personal lifestories and biographies);
- which look at an individual’s career
- focus on the whole career or an aspect of it, but not simply gossip or anecdote
- doesn’t include a look at the product of her work - the focus is on her life/work
- includes “jobs” as well as “careers”
- the focus is on the individual

Career Planning:

- advice and ideas for women about to enter the workforce or for women already working
- familiarization with working conditions, availability of jobs, how to apply
- descriptions of what is involved in a specific profession or job; (stories about individuals can be here - are here rather than in “career profiles” if the emphasis is on the job and the individual is used as a typical illustration)
- includes involvement in union organization, information about unions (except where the story is that unions are sexist: then it’s in “discrimination at the workplace”)

Women’s Motives for Working:

- why they enter the labor force or not (this category takes precedence over “labor force participation”)
- what motivated someone to change a job (overlaps with career profiles and career planning, but if the story clearly deals with motives *explicitly* then I put it here)

Self-Images and Self-Limitation:

- due to their own self-images (learned through socialization or whatever) as being suited for only certain types of work, or that

achievement is “unfeminine,” women are seen limiting their own participation in the workforce or their advancement (this must be explicit in the story for it to be put here)

- stories about how women overcome the above
- (borders on feminism category)

Part-Time Work:

- all stories about part-time work, where conflicts this takes precedence over other categories (except volunteer work)
- important indicator:
- as a means of solving dual role conflict
- toward equalization of social roles of men and women

Volunteer Work:

- all stories about work done by volunteers (category takes precedence over all others)
- doesn't have to be a 50's bakesale, but needs element of altruism, a good cause
- (often presented as appropriate for women-traditional role as nurturer)

Labor Force Participation:

- the macro picture
- statistics (not necessarily) or reports
- exhortations to women to enter or not enter the labor force
- “labor force” means paid work (GNP contributor)

Dual Roles:

- dropping work “conflict” because not always portrayed as such
- women portrayed as working and as married and/or with children, the effects of working wives, mothers, on their husbands, children
- (anything with “working wives” or “working mothers” in the title is usually a good clue)
- advice on how better to handle a job and family (here rather than in career planning)

- stories about women having to choose between job and family/marriage

Re-Evaluating Housework:

- anything negative about housework
- suggestions that it be a paid job, contribution to GNP
- suggestions that it is not automatically the woman's responsibility

Equality of Access:

- where women are not hired for or not promoted to a job that has traditionally been done by men; or where men are excluded from “women's” jobs
- (overlaps with other categories - esp. career profiles - but main criterion is the focus - is the woman still a novelty?)
- especially stories about “the first” or “token” woman

Discrimination at the Workplace

- where the story is about inequalities between men and women and the workplace which are simply a function of their sex: unequal pay for equal work; sex-stereotyped behavior at work; any unequal treatment (having to go for coffee, etc.) being expected to “act like a man”
- includes stories asking that discrimination be ended or reporting that it has ended in a certain field
- includes articles about legal recourses to discrimination (here rather than in career planning)

Appendix II
Public Attitudes Towards Wives Working
U.S. and Canada (percentages)
1942 - 1978

Year	Polling Institution	Phrasing	Yes	No	No Opin.	Question Total
1942	NORC U.S.	As things are now, do you think married women should or should not work in war industries?	60	13	27	
1945	Gallup U.S.	Do you approve of a married woman earning money in business or industry if she has a husband capable of supporting her?	18	62	20	
1969	"	"	55	40	5	
1946	Roper U.S.	Do you think a married woman who has no children under 16 and whose husband makes enough to support her should or should not be allowed to take a job if she wants to?	38	42	20	
1967	Roper U.S.	In general, do you favor or oppose wives working and contributing to family income?	44	27	29	
1970	Gallup Canada	Do you think married women should take a job outside the home if they have no young children?	77	15	8	
1976	Gallup Canada	Although a wife's career may be important, she should give priority to helping her husband in his career.	68	32	0	
1977	CBS U.S.	Should a woman work even if she has a husband capable of supporting her?	52	45	3	
1978	Gallup Canada	There are more married women - with families - in the working world than ever before. Do you think this has a harmful effect on family life or not?	57	31	12	

Appendix III
Public Attitudes Towards Mothers Working
U.S. and Canada (percentages)
1960 - 1977

Year	Polling Institution	Phrasing	Yes	No	No Opin.	Question Total
1960	Gallup Canada	Do you think married women should take a job outside the home if they want to or should they concentrate on looking after the home, if they have no young children?	65	30	5	
1960	Gallup Canada	Do you think married women should take a job outside the home if they want to or should they concentrate on looking after the home, when they have young children?	5	93	2	
1965	Harris U.S.	America has many different types of people in it. We would like to know whether you think each is more helpful or more harmful to American life, or don't they help or harm? Working career women with young children?	8	50	42	
1969	"	"	10	46	44	
1970	Gallup Canada	Do you think married women should take a job outside home if they have young children?	13	80	7	
1973	Gallup Canada	There are more married women with families in the working world than ever before. Do you think this has had a harmful effect on family life or not?	25	62	13	
1975	Gallup Canada	Do you think that married women should take a job outside the home if: (a) they have young children? (b) they have no young children?	18 76	72 12	10 12	
1976	Gallup Canada	When children are young a mother's place is in the home.	81	19	0	
1977	CBS U.S.	Do working women make better or worse mothers than non-working women?	(bet.) 60	(worse) 40	0	

Appendix IV
U.S. and Canadian Attitudes
on Equal Pay and Equal Opportunities
(in percent)

Year	Polling Institution	Phrasing	Yes	No	No Opin.	Question Total
1945	Gallup U.S.	If a young single woman is doing exactly the same kind of work as a married man with children, do you think she should receive the same rate of pay?	66	28	6	
1945	Gallup U.S.	Do you think women should receive the same rate of pay as men for the same work?	76	17	7	
1946	Roper U.S.	Sometimes women get paid less than men for doing exactly the same jobs. Do you think there is often a good reason for this or that women should always be paid the same as men?	(good reason) 65	(same) 28	7	
1954	Gallup U.S.	Do you approve or disapprove of paying women the same salaries as men if they are doing the same work?	87	13	0	
1946	Roper U.S.	Which of these statements comes closest to your opinions: All women should have an equal chance with men for any job in business or industry regardless whether they have to support themselves. Only women who have to support themselves should have an equal chance with men for jobs in business or industry. A man should have preference over all women for any job he can fill satisfactorily.	22	46	28	4
1968	Minn.	Do you think women should or should not have the same opportunities for advancement in business that men have?	70	22	8	6 U.S.

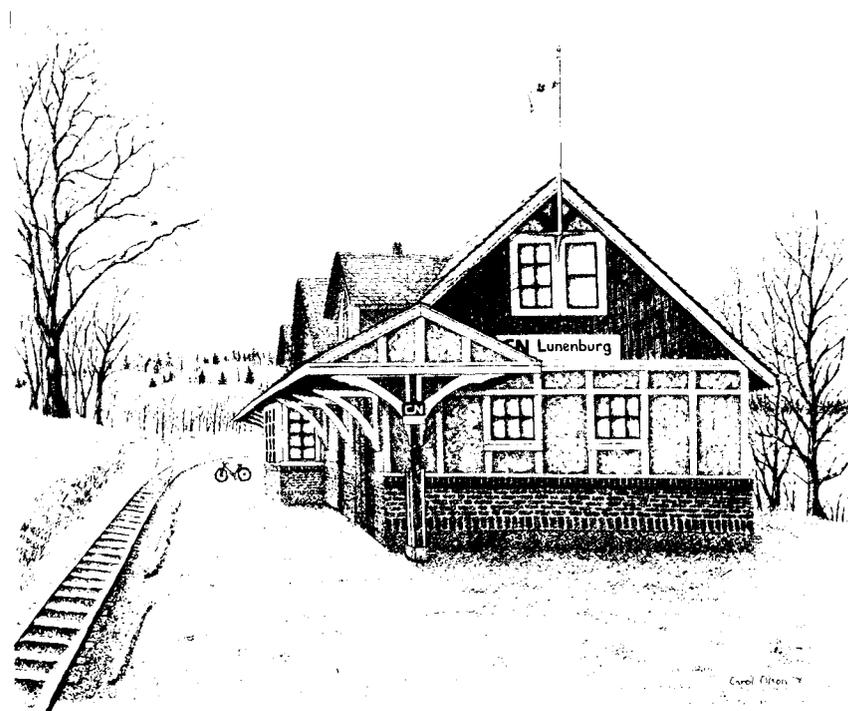
Year	Polling Institution	Phrasing	Yes	No	No Opin.	Question Total
1954	Gallup Canada	Generally speaking, do you think women who work should receive equal pay with men for the same kind of work, or do you think men should receive more?	56	33	11	
1956 1960 1965	Gallup Canada	Do you think married women should be given equal opportunity to compete for jobs or do you think employers should give men first chance?			(men first)	
1956			32	59	8	
1960			23	70	8	
1965			39	53	8	
1971	Gallup Canada	If a woman has the same ability as a man, does she have as good a chance to become the executive of a company or not?	41	52	7	
1971	Gallup Canada	Will you tell me if you approve or disapprove of this suggestion: that women who work should receive equal pay with men for the same kind of work.	86	11	3	

NOTES

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**"Railway Station Lunenburg" by Carol Olson, Blue Rocks Studio Gallery
Blue Rocks, Nova Scotia**