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# THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ON WOMEN'S WORK IN SASKATCHEWAN

By

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the impact of an economic crisis on women's work in Saskatchewan, Canada, during the 1981-83 economic recession. The study describes the effects of the recession on the nature of women's everyday work experiences in the labour market and in the home.

Open-ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with thirty nine women in order to develop a qualitative understanding of their daily life experiences on the job, in the search for paid work, and as unpaid workers in the home. The sample of women interviewed included employed and unemployed women in clerical, sales, service, and blue collar occupations. Structural changes in the labour market were explored through an examination of government labour force statistics which revealed changing patterns of employment, unemployment and labour force participation.

Women's experiences during the recession were found to vary significantly depending upon their specific relationships to the labour market and within private households. The range of women's experiences revealed the need to specify the differential impact of recessions on

women in various parts of the reserve army, and in various segments of the employed workforce.

Rather than pushing women back into the home, the economic crisis drew more women into the labour market. Changes in households' relations to the labour market often generated changes in domestic workloads or the domestic division of labour.

Female unemployment rose during the recession. However, the actual proportion of the unemployed who were women declined. Unemployment had a major impact on women's material and emotional well-being. Unemployed women experienced increased economic dependence, financial hardships, low self-esteem, depression, and isolation.

Female employment increased during the recession, but job opportunities for women were concentrated in female job ghettos. Increased competition for jobs, employer strategies to reduce labour costs, and employer efforts to extend control over the workplace adversely affected women's access to jobs and their conditions of work.

Women's responses to conditions within the labour market involved both compliance and struggle, thus revealing the need to develop a more dialectical conception of women's conscious activity to replace the notion of women as manipulable victims.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In the past several years a growing number of women and men have contributed to the development of an historical, materialist theory of women's oppression (e.g. Mitchell, 1971; Rowbotham, 1973; Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978; Eisenstein, 1979; Sargent, 1981; Barrett, 1980). While recognizing some of the limitations of traditional Marxism and radical feminism, these theorists have attempted to combine Marxist analysis of class relations with feminist analysis of sexual inequality. Class relations and gender relations have sometimes been seen as operating within two separate, but related systems - the mode of production (capitalism) and the mode of reproduction (patriarchy) (Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978; Eisenstein, 1979). More recently, there have been attempts to overcome the artificial dualism of earlier work, which tended to reproduce the ideological separation of 'work' and 'the family', and to develop a theory of social relations which integrates class and gender and understands them as organizing principles throughout the various aspects of social life (Kelly, 1979; Young, 1981).

In order to develop theories which can adequately explain the nature of women's work and its roots in the

social structure, we need to integrate the analysis of class and gender. Women's work in the private household and women's work in the paid labour market are all part of an interconnected whole, which is characterized throughout by relations of dominance and subordinance based on class and gender (Sokoloff, 1980). In order to understand women's work it is therefore necessary to examine the dynamics of class and gender within the labour market and within the private household and to see how they interact (Beechey, 1978).

Women's contemporary experiences of work are the product of the historical development of the sexual division of labour in relation to the development of the mode of production. Although the subordination of women has an 'apparently transhistorical character' and is not confined to any one mode of production, the specific development of a mode of production shapes the concrete form and development of the sexual division of labour (Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978; Eisenstein, 1979). Numerous studies in recent years have examined the changing patterns of women's work in Canada in relation to the dynamic process of capitalist development (e.g. Acton, Goldsmith and Shepard, 1974; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978; Connelly, 1978; Phillips and Phillips, 1983). However, very little work has dealt specifically with the relationship between women's work and the economic crisis or with women's work in Saskatchewan.

This research project deals with the impact of the current economic crisis in Canada upon the everyday work lives of women in the Saskatchewan labour force. It explores the everyday work experiences of women in the labour market and in the home and attempts to place them within the context of current developments within the capitalist mode of production. It examines the interconnections between women's paid and unpaid work, female employment and unemployment, and women's responses to recent changes in the nature of their work. Many aspects of the sexual division of labour have persisted despite changes in the economy and women's increased participation in the labour market. Women continue to be responsible for the majority of childcare and domestic labour and are confined to certain types of jobs in the paid labour market. The work which most women perform yields little in the way of financial reward or status, thus perpetuating women's economic dependence and subordination. Nevertheless, women's work lives have been influenced by overall changes in economic conditions. Economic stagnation, high unemployment, declining real wages, cutbacks in social services, and policies of fiscal restraint all have an influence on the nature of women's work within the home and within the labour market. Since their work is central to our understanding of women's economic subordination, the question of the impact of the economic crisis on women's

work is central to our understanding of the historical forces perpetuating, altering, or generating new forms of sexual inequality.

A contemporary analysis of women's work in Saskatchewan needs to be situated within the historical context of a major economic crisis. For the past decade, the Canadian economy has struggled to cope with widespread unemployment, high inflation rates, unutilized productive capacity, high interest rates, declining real wages and cutbacks in social services (Gonick, 1978; Calvert, 1983). In attempts to restore profitability and reduce costs, private corporations have cut back production, laid off workers, reduced real wages, and sought investment in labour-displacing technology rather than the expansion of productive capacity. The federal government has responded to the crisis by attempting to protect capital accumulation and encouraging private investment. To that end the government has imposed wage controls (1975) and wage restraint guidelines (1982), has limited workers' right to strike, has cutback on social services, and has come to the rescue of corporations on the verge of bankruptcy. It has also been reluctant to press for any significant reforms such as affirmative action, equal pay for work of equal value, protection for part time workers, or extended maternity benefits.

In 1981, Canada entered its worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. According to the Toronto

Globe and Mail, October 11, 1983:

> The 1981-82 recession was the worst in living memory of most Canadians...No other major industrial country experienced such a vicious recession during this period...Apart from the catastrophic economic slump in the early 1930s, one has to go back to the deep and disruptive recession in 1920-21...to find any comparable setback in Canada's economic development...In this period (June 1981 - December 1982) Canadian industrial production plummeted 18 percent, employment declined by 5 percent, and the unemployment rate rose to nearly 13 percent (up nearly six percentage points).

The recession was widely felt throughout the economy. The real GNP declined by 7 percent, and 93 percent of Canadian industries experienced a decline in their gross domestic product. Unemployment was much more widely experienced than the 13 percent of the labour force which was officially counted as unemployed. People who lost jobs but were reemployed, people who became discouraged and left the labour market, people who were involuntarily employed in part time jobs greatly expand the portion of the population which was touched by unemployment (Toronto Globe and Mail, 11, 1983). Between December, 1981 and August, 1983, there were never fewer than one million Canadians receiving unemployment insurance benefits (Globe and Mail, December 1, 1983). In 1982, the average length of time for which unemployment insurance beneficiaries received benefits was 22.2 weeks (Globe and Mail, December 1, 1983). Although the economy began to 'recover' in 1983, unemployment continued at record highs. In September, 1983, the Conference Board

of Canada predicted sluggish economic growth over the next five years and an unemployment rate which would never drop below 10 percent (Globe and Mail, September 29, 1983).

While the recession pushed many people out of work, it also changed the types of job opportunities and terms of employment offered in the labour market. While full time employment dropped, part time jobs were added to the labour market. The increase in part time work was accelerated during the recession and more people were working shorter hours involuntarily because they could not find full time work (Globe and Mail, August 4, 1984). Both public and private sector employers held wage increases down below the level of inflation and employers engaged in contract negotiations sought numerous concessions from their unionized workers. Both unionized and nonunionized workers found themselves in a position of trying to defend their wages and working conditions from further erosion as employers attempted to shift the costs of the recession to the workers themselves.

The economic situation in Saskatchewan, while not as dismal as some other regions of the country, was characterized by the same basic pattern of economic contraction, high unemployment, and government restraint policies. After several years of economic growth, the provincial gross domestic product declined in 1982 by 4.7 percent (Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, 1983). The

official number of unemployed workers in Saskatchewan rose from 21,000 in 1981 to 35,000 in 1983 and the provincial unemployment rate rose from 4.7 percent in 1981 to 7.4 percent in 1983 (Statistics Canada). Major layoffs in mining and manufacturing raised the level of unemployment even higher in major cities (CUPE News, 1983). In 1981 there were 56,270 people in the province collecting unemployment insurance. By 1983, the number of UIC beneficiaries had risen to 87,390 - an increase of over fifty percent (Statistics Canada). The Conservative provincial government responded to the recession by introducing wage restraint guidelines, freezing the minimum wage, cutting back on social programs, and amending the Trade Union Act to weaken the labour movement and make unionization more difficult. The number of jobs created through much publicized jobs creation programs fell far below the number of people seeking work and as unemployed people exhausted their unemployment insurance benefits, the number of 'unemployed employables' receiving welfare rose significantly (Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, January 8, July 26, 1983).

Within this climate of economic hard times, conditions within the labour market and conditions within private households changed in significant ways. The impact of the economic crisis on women's work needs to be documented and understood if we are to begin to formulate a program for economic recovery which would not perpetuate women's

economic subordination. Hopefully this research will contribute to that process.

In Chapter II, I present a discussion of my research methods, especially my use of a small number of interviews to probe the quality of women's everyday work experiences in Saskatchewan during the economic crisis. Chapter III presents a review of the literature on women and economic crises, with particular emphasis on the concept of women as a reserve army of labour. Chapters IV through XI present the results of my research, relying heavily upon the women's own descriptions of their work in order to provide a qualitative understanding of women's everyday lives which are often hidden in solely statistical analyses of economic changes. In these chapters I attempt to relate women's everyday work experiences, perceptions and feelings about their work to the patterns of changes taking place in the labour market and the family. In Chapter XII, I offer a brief summary and some suggestions for further research.

# CHAPTER II

## METHODS OF INQUIRY

This research project explored the impact of economic crises on women's everyday work experiences in Saskatchewan, Canada during the economic recession, 1981-1983. The goal of the research was to discover the "interplay of biography and history" (Mills,1959) by looking at women's everyday work lives as they were affected by changing economic conditions. The purpose of the research was to:

> develop for women analyses, descriptions and understandings of their situation, of their everyday world, and of its determinations in the larger socioeconomic organization to which it is articulated. (Smith, 1979, 173)

The goal of the research - to discover and comprehend women's daily work experiences during an economic crisis- determined both the general orientation of the inquiry and the specific research methods used in the study. Research which seeks to understand women's everyday work experiences requires a materialist approach to the problem, i.e. an approach which focuses on women's actual work activity and the material conditions surrounding it rather than focusing solely on the attitudes, beliefs, and norms surrounding work. Women's actual work experiences became the central problematic of the research but the comprehension of those

experiences required the researcher to look beyond the level of appearances to examine the underlying social relations. (Hartsock,1979; Smith,1979; Ng,1982)

> Locating the sociological problematic in the everyday world does not mean confining the inquiry to the everyday world. Indeed, as we shall see, it is essential to this that the everyday world be seen as organized by social relations not observable within it. Thus, an inquiry confining itself to the everyday world of direct experience is not adequate to explicate its social organization. (Smith, 1979, 174)

Since my goal was not simply to record women's immediate work experiences during the recession, but to comprehend them in relation to the underlying dynamics of class and gender relations, I sought to combine a structural analysis of the economy with an in-depth study of women's daily work. A combined analysis of in-depth interviews and government survey data, similar to the method used by Armstrong and Armstrong (1983), was used to explore the impact of the recession on women's wage and domestic labour. I examined broad structural changes in the social organization of work, particularly changes in labour market opportunities and activity, by analyzing sample survey data compiled by Statistics Canada, and by following the news coverage on the economy in one of the province's major daily newspapers. I investigated women's work experiences at home, on the job, and in the search for paid work through in-depth interviews with 39 women who had been active in the Saskatchewan labour force during the recession.

Sociological theory often fails to explain or illuminate everyday life experiences because the theories have not been 'grounded' in the observation of actual daily life activity (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The weaknesses of testing a priori hypotheses derived from existing abstract theories are particularly apparent when one is trying to understand the daily experiences of women (Smith,1979; Jacobsen,1979; Oakley,1981). By and large, sociological theories of work have reflected an inherent male bias (Acker, 1978). Fundamental sociological concepts such as 'work', 'occupation', and 'labour force' have been based upon the labour market experiences of men. By assuming that men's work experiences were the norm, these concepts have obscured women's work at home and defined women's work in the paid labour force as marginal or secondary (Marsden, 1981). Our overall conception of the working population has been distorted by ideological blinders which restricted our vision of 'workers' to male wage labourers.

By structuring the research to maximize its openness to new insights and to avoid premature closure of the investigation I have hopefully been able to avoid superimposing inappropriate pre-existing categories upon the experiences I hoped to illuminate. This research project was exploratory, designed to develop new theoretical insights into the relationship between women's daily work experiences and the changing structure of the economy. The

basic orientation toward the development of a grounded theory of women's work determined the specific research tools used in this study. The selection procedures for women to be interviewed, the nature of the interviews, the ongoing revision of questions and categories as the research proceeded, and the analysis of the material contained in the interview transcripts were all influenced by the basic theoretical goals of the research project.

## SAMPLE SELECTION

For the interviews, I selected women who were active in the paid labour force - who were employed or looking for work during the most recent recession, 1981-1983. I did not include women who were full time homemakers by choice, although some of the unemployed women were in fact full time homemakers as a result of their unemployment. Since 1980, the majority of adult women in Canada have been active in the officially recognized paid labour force. Most women in Saskatchewan spend major portions of their adult lives working at paid jobs or trying to find paid jobs. Since women who work for wages are also primarily responsible for housework and childcare, I did not think it was necessary to include full time housewives in the sample in order to learn about women's domestic labour. I therefore decided to interview women who worked both at home and in the paid

labour force (either employed or looking for work). An advantage of interviewing these women is the insight they provide into the daily experiences of working a double day and the interconnections between wage and domestic labour.

Since it was clear from the labour force data that female unemployment rose significantly during the recession, I wanted to include a large number of women who had been unable to find paid work. However, since it was equally clear that women were not being pushed out of employment en masse, I wanted to also interview employed women to find out whether the more competitive labour market conditions were creating any significant changes in their jobs.

As I proceeded in conducting the interviews, I often found that women had changed their employment status during the recession and were able to provide information both about their unemployment experiences and changes in working conditions. I also found that in order for women to be able to provide information on changes in working conditions, they had to have been employed at the same workplace both before and during the recession. Since I did not make this a selection criterion in drawing my sample of women, I cannot reach conclusions about the changing nature of work at a number of worksites where workers whom I interviewed were only employed on a short term or temporary basis. While this is admittedly a weakness in the method of sampling, the broad scope of the sample allowed me to

discover a range of experiences which I might have missed had I used a more selective sampling method. In particular, if I had selected only those women who were employed at one workplace before and during the recession I would have entirely missed the experiences of women who were hired to work on temporary government make work projects, a phenomenon of increasing importance during the recession.

I began with the rough idea that I would select a sample of women to interview which would include both employed and unemployed women in clerical, sales, service and blue collar jobs. As Braverman (1974) has shown, the growth of these occupations in the twentieth century has brought about a major change in the structure of the working class, and insight into the nature of work in these occupations is essential to understanding the labour process under advanced capitalism. The majority of working women in Saskatchewan are found in these occupations. And while the concrete form of labour is unique in each specific occupation, the social form of labour, i.e. its existence as labour under the domination of capital, creates similarities in the conditions of work which cut across occupational lines (Braverman, 1974).

Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) analyzed interviews with 65 working women across Canada who were employed in 15 different occupations drawn from clerical, sales, service and blue collar categories. They found similar patterns in

the experiences of most of the women in their study, e.g. repetition of boring tasks, lack of control over the pace or nature of the work, unreasonable workloads, close supervision, low pay, and lack of opportunities for advancement. They concluded that one could draw generalizations about women's work which cut across different occupational categories.

> However, while each job, and each woman is in many ways unique, the striking similarity in their work situations indicates that most women face common kinds and conditions of work. (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983, 3)

I was not particularly concerned with the specific occupations held by individual women as long as they fell within the broad occupational categories I had chosen: clerical, sales, service and blue collar categories. I excluded women from the sample who were working in professional and managerial occupations because I felt that these relatively privileged women workers had received a degree of attention both in the popular press and in academic research which was out of proportion to their numbers in the female workforce. I did make some special effort to interview a few women in non-traditional occupations to see whether they had experienced any particular effects of the recession as women working in male segregated jobs. By keeping the sample selection criteria quite broad, I hoped to be able to discover common patterns among women workers which cut across occupational groups.

Not knowing in advance how different women were affected by the recession, I felt that the only way to discover the impact of the recession on women's work was to talk with a broad range of working women.

Since the intention of the research project was exploratory and aimed at discovering new insights grounded in daily life experiences of women workers, I made no effort to select a representative sample which could be used to test specific hypotheses. The sample selection is based on the theoretical sampling procedure outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in which the researcher gathers material, analyses it for patterns, formulates new questions and seeks out new sources of information based on the knowledge already acquired. Obviously if one knew at the beginning of the research project what one knows at the end, then the selection of women to interview would proceed in a more straightforward manner. As it is, one begins in ignorance and proceeds with an inadequate set of questions and assumptions until one discovers new ways of asking questions which get at the variety of experience one encounters.

> Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his (sic) data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, 45)

The exploratory nature of the study to a certain degree dictated that I use broadly defined selection criteria.

Earlier discussions of the impact of changing economic conditions on women workers had also treated women workers as one broad category. While noting that women workers are differentiated by marital status, household type, occupation and industry, the literature has focused on the similarities shared by women workers, the patterns which characterize the female labour market per se (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983; Phillips and Phillips, 1983). Women workers as a group are concentrated in female segregated occupations, performing essentially different work from men. Women workers as a group are concentrated in the lower levels of occupational hierarchies and receive lower pay than men. Women workers as a group perform not only their paid job, but are responsible for the majority of unpaid domestic labour. I therefore began my research with a broad concern for the impact of the recession on women workers who were active in the paid labour force and selected my initial interview candidates using correspondingly broad selection criteria.

In the course of conducting the interviews and gathering women's individual work histories I found that over half the women had changed occupations during the past ten years. A woman currently employed as a daycare worker had previously worked cleaning private homes. A woman employed as a part time waitress and a part time sales clerk had previously organized recreation services for children

and senior citizens. A woman employed as a government clerk had previously worked in restaurants and retail stores. An unemployed woman had held a temporary job in a food processing factory after losing a job with a private cleaning company. This crossover between occupations seemed to reconfirm that there was no particular point to selecting women on the basis of their particular occupation at one point in time.

The broad scope of the sample also revealed the range of differentiation within the category women workers. In the beginning I had already excluded women in professional and managerial positions from the sample. I expected to find a great deal of similarity among the remaining women in the labour force. While in some ways broad generalizations about women workers are valid, the concrete descriptions of individuals' work experiences also reveal significant differences within the category. Most of the women interviewed were employed in sex segregated occupations, were underpaid and overworked, and had very little real chance for advancement. However, women employed as permanent, full time workers in unionized workplaces such as government offices, hospitals, and libraries enjoyed a measure of protection from their employers and greater job security than women working part time or temporary in unorganized workplaces. By interviewing women from a broad range of occupations and workplaces I was able to discover

not only the patterns of similarities among most women workers but also the very real differences which divide working women.

There was a feminist bias, I think, in my initial approach which sought to discover the commonalities in the experience of women workers which could provide a basis for a common program for a social movement organized around women's shared experiences. As I conducted the research I learned more about the divisions within the female labour force, divisions which are crucial to investigate in order to understand the barriers to the development of a common program for change. We need to go beyond rhetorical assertions of the common interests of women workers and begin to learn how women's different daily experiences lead them to different perceptions of the nature of their problems and their relationship to other women workers. This study does not offer any answers but it does suggest that we need to ask more specific questions. This is the purpose of research designed to help develop new theoretical insights. By using broad selection criteria I was able to sample theoretically, choosing women to interview who could provide insight into topics which arose in the source of the study. This type of flexibility enables the researcher to raise questions which were unanticipated at the outset of the research project (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The selection of women to interview was influenced by

the practical difficulties encountered in trying to find women who would participate in the research project. Many of my attempts to recruit women as potential interview candidates were relatively unproductive. I would have tried to interview a larger number of women if I had had easier access to the names of potential interviewees.

I made various attempts to recruit women to participate in the research project. Prior to beginning the data collection for this research project, I lived in Saskatchewan and participated in a provincial organization of working women. Through this organization I made contact with women and men in a variety of unions, workplaces and community organizations. I contacted several of these people and asked them to suggest potential interview candidates for the research project. I contacted people within trade unions, unemployment committees, women's employment projects and women's organizations. In some cases, people provided me with several names of potential contacts. However, in other cases, people were hesitant to provide names and offered instead to advertise the research to their membership or clients. As a result, I ran notices of the research with requests for volunteers in the newsletters of a provincial organization of working women and two major public sector unions. I also sent a mailing requesting volunteers to the former clients of a women's employment project and distributed posters soliciting

volunteers to unemployment committees, unions, and community organizations. What I found was that all of this advertising yielded very little in the way of actual contacts with women. People did not come forward in large numbers in response to public notices requesting volunteers. My most successful method of establishing contact with people was by going through a few individuals who were willing to give me names or mention the research to co-workers, fellow union members, or friends. As I established contact with more women in the course of the interviews, I was able to build up my sample by asking the interviewees for suggestions of other women to interview.

The hesitation of groups to give out membership lists or the names of clients is something which I respect. I did not want the women I interviewed to feel that their confidentiality had been violated or their privacy invaded without their consent. This was particularly important in the case of women who were subject to intrusions in their lives from social workers, employment counselors or others in positions of power over them. However, by failing to get lists of names and relying instead on having the women themselves initiate contact, I found that my access to women was seriously hindered. When I did get names and phoned women to see if they would be willing to participate in the interviews, I got a very favorable response. Women were very generous with their time and willing to discuss their

personal experiences with me. The problem was not therefore that women were unwilling to be interviewed, but that I did not succeed in finding a way of making contact with a larger number of women.

Despite these practical limitations in the selection of the sample I was able to interview 39 women from a broad range of occupations and workplaces. They came from a variety of household types and had a variety of experiences in the labour market. I spoke with women who were employed and unemployed, women in permanent full time unionized jobs and women in part time temporary jobs with no protection whatsoever from the arbitrary actions of their employers. I spoke with women working in both the public and private sectors, in female job ghettos and in traditionally male-segregated occupations. By covering a broad range of women rather than a particular sub-group, I was able to uncover not only common patterns which cut across occupation and workplace, but also to identify important differences in the kinds of problems experienced by women in different segments of the labour force or with different household ties to the labour market.

## SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Between January and October 1984, I conducted in depth interviews with 39 women who had been active in the Saskatchewan labour force during the 1981-1983 recession.

This included women who were employed throughout this period, women who were unemployed throughout this period and women who were unemployed for part of this period. The initial portion of each interview included a set of background questions designed to provide basic information on the individual characteristics of the women interviewed.

The women interviewed ranged in age from 22 to 62 years old. The majority of women in the sample were in their twenties and thirties. (See Table 1). The youngest woman was a part time waitress who had worked at a variety of jobs in stores and restaurants since leaving school at the end of grade 11. The oldest woman, a clerk stenographer, had reentered the paid labour force after nearly twenty years as a housewife.

TABLE 1

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE

| Age | Number of Women |
|---|---|
| 20-24 | 5 |
| 25-29 | 11 |
| 30-34 | 13 |
| 35-39 | 6 |
| 40-49 | 2 |
| 50+ | 1 |
| No Answer | 1 |

The women in the sample also covered a range of different marital statuses. The majority of women in the Saskatchewan labour force are married. In my sample, 14 out of 39 were currently married and living with their spouses. In addition, two of the single women were living with men and sharing income and expenses. The remaining 23 women were single, separated, or divorced and lived in a variety of household arrangements - as individuals, with lesbian partners, with their children, with other adults or combinations thereof. Increasingly, women who are married and women who are the mothers of young children are entering or remaining active in the paid labour force while continuing to shoulder the major responsibility for housework and childcare. As well, the proportion of women who head their own households has increased substantially in recent years. The following tables show the distribution of the sample by marital status and household type.

TABLE 2

SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION, MARITAL STATUS

| Marital Status | Number |
|---|---|
| Single | 12 |
| Divorced | 9 |
| Separated | 4 |
| Married | 14 |

TABLE 3

SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION, HOUSEHOLD TYPE

| Household Type | Number |
|---|---|
| Sole Provider Women | 23 |
| Self alone | 8 |
| Self and children | 7 |
| Self, children, and others | 3 |
| Self and other adults | 5 |
| Co-Provider Women | 16 |
| Self and male partner | 4 |
| Self, male partner, and children | 10 |
| Self, male partner, children and others | 2 |

The mothers whom I interviewed had between one and five children, ranging in age from four months to adult. Twenty two of the women interviewed had children under 18 living with them. Sixteen of the women had children at home under the age of 12.

Thirty of the 39 women were white Canadians. Three were Native Canadians and one was Chinese Canadian. Five of the women were immigrants from other countries. Thirty two of the women learned English as their first language. The others spoke English but had first spoken in another tongue, including German, Ukrainian, Spanish, Czech, and Cree.

The women in the sample came from a variety of educational backgrounds. Some had not finished high school. Some had completed grade 12 in their youth and others had stopped school before grade 12 but later acquired an adult equivalency diploma. Others went beyond grade 12 by attending business colleges, community colleges, and university. The educational background of the sample is shown in the following table. It was interesting to note in the course of the interviews that a university education was no guarantee of a job or decent wages. While women frequently went to school with the intention of improving their standing in the labour market, they sometimes found that their education or training was of little use on the job market. A woman with two years of technical training was working as a part time waitress and retail clerk. A woman with a university degree was working as a daycare provider. Another woman with a university degree was unemployed and unable to find work for over a year.

TABLE 4

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF SAMPLE

| Years of Education | Number |
|---|---|
| < grade 12 | 8 |
| 0-3 yrs beyond grade 12 | 22 |
| 4+ yrs beyond grade 12 | 8 |
| no answer | 1 |

The women whom I interviewed came from a variety of workplaces and occupations. Except for two women who both worked in the same hospital, each person provided information about a different worksite. In some cases women in different worksites had the same large employer, e.g a university, municipal government, or provincial government. Since I wanted to explore how different employers of women responded to the economic crisis it was important to me to avoid concentrating the sample in one particular worksite or with one particular employer.

As I discovered in the course of the interviews, I did not really know what categories of workers or employers were particularly relevant to understanding the differential impact of the recession on women workers. I had, for instance, assumed that fiscal restraint in the public sector would have created common problems among all women working for the government. In fact, I found that budget cutbacks and staff reductions were not applied equally across the board and that management introduced changes in a piecemeal fashion so that the effects were only felt by a portion of the workforce. I had also assumed that women working in similar workplaces would experience the same problems but I found that women's awareness of things like comparative levels of pay or deteriorating working conditions were affected by their own personal work histories. Women who had changed jobs were in a better position to draw

comparisons between employers but women who had stayed at one workplace were in a better position to observe changes over time. These differences in individual work histories affected women's perceptions of the problems they encountered on the job.

The women who were employed at the time of the interview worked in the following occupations: daycare workers, restaurant workers, healthcare workers, office workers, library workers, community project workers, sales clerks, mineworkers, technician, teaching assistant, corrections officer, and shipper-receiver. Of the 39 women interviewed, 26 were employed or had been employed during the recession in female job ghettos where most of their co-workers in similar positions were also women. These women worked as waitresses, clerk typists, nursing assistants, library assistants, daycare providers, etc. Five women had worked during the recession in occupations which had traditionally been male segregated reserves: mineworkers, a corrections officer, a shipper receiver, and a union staff worker.

At the time of the interview, 22 of the women were employed full time, four were employed part time, and 13 were not employed. Those who were not employed included women who had gone back to school in response to unemployment, women who were actively seeking work, discouraged workers who had given up looking for a job, a

woman involved in a labour dispute, and a woman on temporary maternity leave. Those who were employed included women who had worked steadily throughout the recession for the same employer, women who had changed jobs during the recession and women who had suffered extended periods of unemployment prior to their current job. Overall, 20 of the 39 women were unemployed at some time during the recession. Of those 20, several were out of work for many months and in some cases, years.

Among the women I interviewed the level of personal individual income ranged between nothing and approximately $30,000/year. The major sources of income for the women interviewed were their wages, unemployment insurance benefits, and welfare payments. The individual income of women at the time of the interview is recorded in Table 5. It is important to note however that changes in employment status seriously affected women's income level over time. For example, a woman who was called back temporarily from layoff at the time of the interview was making over $1500/month while she was working but she had been laid off for so long prior to that time that her unemployment insurance ran out and she was living on about $700/month from welfare. Other women who had been employed full time but were out of work at the time of the interview went from an income of several hundred dollars/month to nothing if they were not able to collect unemployment insurance.

Therefore, the following table represents the income of women at specific moments in their work histories and it would be a mistake to extrapolate from that to generalizations about their income over time.

TABLE 5

WOMEN'S INDIVIDUAL INCOME AT THE TIME OF INTERVIEW

| Monthly Income | Number of Women |
|---|---|
| Less than $500 | 6 |
| $500-$749 | 5 |
| $750-$999 | 2 |
| $1000-$1249 | 4 |
| $1250-$1499 | 5 |
| $1500-$1749 | 4 |
| $1750-$1999 | 7 |
| $2000 or more | 4 |
| not available | 2 |

Table 5 is based on women's answers to a request for an estimate of their income. If they replied with an annual salary figure, it was divided by twelve to get a monthly figure. If it was given by week, then I multiplied by 52 and divided by 12. If it was given by hourly rate, I multiplied by 40 and 52, then divided by 12. For women with irregular hours of work, I calculated a figure on the basis of their estimated average hours of work.

## NATURE OF INTERVIEWS

Most of the interviews took place in women's homes at a time which we had previously arranged over the telephone. Frequently we sat together in the kitchen or living room, drinking cups of tea or coffee while the tape recorder took down our conversation. Usually the interviews were conducted with the women alone although they frequently were interrupted briefly by children or other household members. Since many of the women were very busy trying to handle full time employment and raising a family, I felt that it was important to respect their shortage of time and their need to attend to other things during the course of the interview. I tried to keep the interviews under two hours and to make sure that the women felt free to respond to children who were hungry, tired, or needing attention. As a result, I think the women felt quite comfortable during the interviews and talked quite freely about their experiences. Often after the interviews, the women would mention that they had not known what to expect but that they had enjoyed our interaction, even when the interview had brought up painful and frustrating memories or experiences. I think that the interview setting --in women's homes, at a time arrranged to fit their schedules, with a relaxed atmosphere --facilitated the women's open discussion of their work.

I began each interview by introducing myself and

talking about the general aim of the research - to find out about women's daily work experiences during a time of economic crisis. I explained that I was interested in their experiences in the paid labour market and their work at home. I explained that their identity and their specific workplaces would be kept confidential and I asked their permission to tape record our conversation. (The names used to identify women in the following account of their interviews are fictional although they correspond to real individuals and not a composite of various individuals' experiences.) I gave each woman a consent form (See Appendix 1) to read over and sign, and I assured women that they were free to not answer any questions which they chose. Finally, I invited them to talk about important experiences or topics which I might have failed to ask directly about.

With these preliminary ground rules established, I began to ask each woman for certain basic background information. I gathered data on age, marital status, nationality, language, education, household type, income, employment status, and current or most recent paid job. After making notes on their responses on a background information sheet (See Appendix 2), I began the open-ended portion of the interview by inviting them to describe the various paid jobs they had held over the past ten years and the periods during which they were out of work. I began with something like this:

> My main interest in doing this research is to find out what your everyday work experiences have been like over the past few years and how they have been affected, if at all, by changing economic conditions. I'd like you to begin by telling me about your paid work history over the past ten years. When were you employed and what kind of jobs did you have? When were you unemployed and looking for work? You can either start now and go backwards or begin ten years ago in 1974.

After taking notes on a rough chronology of their employment histories, I asked each woman for more detailed descriptions of their work experiences during the recession, 1981-1983. Following the advice of Gordon (1980) I started the interviews with questions which were clearly related to the research topic, which were focused on the women's own experiences and which were easy to answer. I explained what I meant by 'work' and 'recession' and I gave specific time frames for questions in order to make the interview questions clear to the women interviewed. I asked questions in a "funnel sequence" (Gordon, 1980): broad, general questions were initially posed in order to give the respondant control over the discussion of her experience without imposing the researcher's own frame of reference. These were followed by more specific probes. The funnel sequence enabled me to collect accounts of women's own understanding of their experience rather than separated fragments of data. The women interviewed were considered co-participants in the endeavor of trying to make sense of their everyday work lives and their relationship to the

broader political economy. I attempted to conduct the interviews in a manner which flowed logically from the feminist and materialist orientation of the research project.

In the first few interviews I relied on a set of specific questions to guide me through the topics I wanted to cover. However, I found that as time went on and I became more comfortable with the interview process, I was able to adjust my questions and probe specific topics more spontaneously, allowing the women more freedom to discuss their work in their own terms. Each interview was therefore unique, following a sequence and probing topics which were particularly relevant to each individual.

Initially, I used a detailed Interview Guide (See Appendix 3) to ensure that certain topics were covered. I found that the original Interview Guide was too lengthy and cumbersome to be easily used and still maintain a free-flowing conversation. I reduced the number of specific questions I asked and tried in the subsequent interviews to pose questions on the all the major topics and follow them with specific probes to elicit more detailed descriptions. This gave me more freedom to pursue topics which were particularly relevant to an individual, but it also meant that I faced the problem of having to code and analyze widely divergent experiences. This approach enabled me to draw out the qualitative richness of individual experiences

but at the same time it made the task of synthesizing these various experiences into a coherent whole more challenging.

The interviews were designed to elicit from women an accurate and detailed description of their work experiences at home and in the labour market. The non-standardized, open-ended nature of the interviews was chosen in order to maximize the potential for discovering important aspects of women's work experiences by allowing the women to discuss their work in their own terms.

The open, relatively unstructured interview method also enabled me to reformulate the problem, modify questions and pursue new topics as I learned more during the course of the investigation. For example, in response to a general inquiry about the impact of the recession, one woman described the increased difficulty of getting jobs reclassified so that the wage levels were upgraded to correspond to the level of duties. In subsequent interviews, I therefore asked women if they also had that experience or if job mobility and promotions in their workplaces were at all affected by the recession. While in hindsight this seems like an obvious area of potential impact of the recession, it wasn't until a woman actually described her experience that this occured to me. There were other examples of ways in which I modified the interviews as I learned more from the women I spoke with. Since I didn't have time to go back and reinterview the women in the study,

there are topics which were not included in some of the earliest interviews.

In depth interviews have been used by several feminist scholars in order to conduct research in a way which draws upon the richness of women's experiences and gives women the power to participate on a more equal basis with the researcher in the mutual exploration and definition of the subject (Oakley, 1981; Jacobsen, 1979; Light, 1979). A feminist researcher conducting interviews with women takes a fundamentally different approach from the standard "masculine" protocol for conducting sociological interviews which stresses quantification, control of the interview by the interviewer, unequal exchange of information, and detachment (Oakley, 1981). In feminist research there is a commitment to establishing non-hierarchical relations between the researcher and the respondants in which information is shared and detachment is seen as a barrier to communication (Oakley, 1981; Light, 1979). I tried to establish this type of relationship between myself and the women whom I interviewed by posing fairly broad, general questions in the beginning and giving the women some measure of control over the direction of the conversation. The benefits of this were the wealth of descriptive information which women shared with me and their willingness to think about and raise important topics of their own. The disadvantage of this lack of control on the part of the

interviewer was the difficulty I had in moving the conversation in particular directions, but I think that benefits outweighed the disadvantages because I developed a clearer idea of how the women saw their own experiences and not simply whether they agreed or disagreed with my preconceived ideas of what might be occuring in their worklives.

In the standard interview protocol, information flows in one direction, from the "respondant" to the researcher. While I was indeed interested in gathering information from the women in the interviews, I also tried to share my thoughts with them and engage them in a mutual dialogue where we speculated about the impact of the recession on their work, compared their experiences with those of other women I had interviewed, and talked over the similarities and differences which we discovered. In a very real sense, the gathering of data and the analysis of data were not split apart. The analysis of the data took place within the interviews themselves and the identification of patterns of experience was the result of a dialogue with the women involved, rather than a post-interview activity conducted by the researcher alone. Developing theory in this way, as part of a dialogue between sociologist and research participants, is essential in the creation of theory which belongs to the people studied. It is a process of developing knowledge which speaks to people in their own

language, is rooted in their own experiences, and which enables them to better understand their world. Such knowledge is never the result of theorizing which is disconnected from the people being studied. "Theorizing is not a one-way activity." (Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978) I offered to provide each interview participant with a summary of the research results and notification of any publications which might arise from the research.

In-depth interviews with a small number of women have been used by other researchers to probe the nature of women's daily work lives. In Canada, women's domestic labour experiences were explored by Luxton (1980) and their experiences in the paid labour market were explored by Armstrong and Armstrong (1983). In this research project, I used the interview method to explore women's daily work experiences both at home and in the labour market. There is a growing recognition that the home and the labour market are not separate spheres and that women's work lives can only be understood by attending to the interconnections between domestic and wage labour. In the interviews I asked women to talk about their paid employment experiences, their unemployment experiences, and their work at home. The interconnections between the family and the labour market were clear as women interwove the histories of their paid work with discussions of having children, moving to be with partners, finding or not finding alternative childcare,

coping or not coping with prescriptions that a woman should be at home.

> Wage work and household work are two sides of the same coin. Scratch one side deeply enough and the other will be blemished. (Kessler-Harris, 1981, 17)

## ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

After I had completed an interview, or several interviews, I went back and listened to the tape recording of the interview. I typed up partial transcriptions of the interviews including all the portions of the interview which I thought might be relevant. I also took notes of some of my thoughts as I listened to the interviews and of connections between interviews - either similarities or differences in women's experiences.

When I had completed several transcriptions, I read through all of them and took notes on the various themes or topics which seemed to be contained in the interview material. I organized a rough outline of the topics to provide an overall framework for discussing the nature of women's everyday work experiences during the recession. When I had decided on an overall framework which would encompass the data I had gathered, I then re-read the transcripts again and 'coded' each one to be sure that all the information relevant to a particular topic was included in files arranged by topic. Life does not occur in neatly

divided categories but spills across categories with a complexity and interconnection that makes the separation of experience into discrete categories somewhat difficult. For instance, I often found that women would talk about working conditions, their financial need for work and the impact of their work on their children all in the same breath. I also found that as I re-read the transcripts and thought about the interviews I would start to see things from a different perspective and wonder whether the topics I had chosen were the most useful ones for providing insight into women's experiences.

After transcribing and coding many interviews I conducted further interviews and coded them according to the same scheme. Throughout the period of data collection, I was engaged in intellectual effort to make sense of the interviews, to avoid overgeneralizations, to identify significant patterns and variations in women's experiences.

In analyzing the interviews, it became clear that the everyday work experiences of women were influenced by a number of different factors - some of which were related to the recession and some of which were not. I wanted to focus on the impact of the recession on women's work but it was not always possible to determine whether a certain condition was 'caused' by the recession or some other set of circumstances. I wanted to identify common patterns of experience among women but it became obvious that individual

cases could run counter to general trends or tendencies. While I knew that labour market conditions made jobs hard to find, there were individual women who found work easily during the recession. While I knew that governments were committed to a program of fiscal restraint which put pressure on public sector workers' wages and working conditions, there were individuals within the public sector who were relatively unaffected by these policies. What this indicates is that individuals do not necessarily experience or perceive the broad impact of the recession because it does not affect them directly. While some women saw the impact of changing economic conditions on their own access to paid work, their wages and their working conditions, others felt relatively untouched by the recession in their workplace and attributed their situation to other factors.

I was not particularly interested in categorizing the women whom I interviewed but in categorizing the range of problems which women experienced during the recession. Some of those problems were perceived by the women as stemming from the slowdown in the economy and others were attributed to other causes. I wanted to provide an overview of the range of experience among women workers which would provide a reasonable basis for determining why some women perceive the economic crisis as a major force in their lives whereas other women do not. Broad generalizations about attacks on women workers and the impact of the crisis on women obscure

the extent to which individual women vary in their perception of the economic crisis as a determining factor in their daily work lives.

# CHAPTER III

## A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### WOMEN AS A RESERVE ARMY OF LABOUR?

Several authors have argued that women, particularly married women, have constituted an important reserve army of labour which was available for capital to draw into the labour market as the sphere of commodity production expanded throughout the twentieth century (Braverman, 1974; Szymanski, 1976 - for the U.S.; Rowbotham, 1973; Beechey, 1978 - for Britain; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978; Connelly, 1978 - for Canada).

According to Marx (1967), a reserve army of labour is both a consequence of capitalist development (which through the development of the means of production 'sets free' a portion of the working population) and a necessary condition for capitalist development (since the investment of capital in new or expanded areas of production requires the availability of new sources of labour power). Women are seen as a reserve army which has been 'set free' from domestic work by the industrialization of production processes formerly performed in the home. And they are seen a reserve which has provided a cheap source of labour for the clerical, sales, and service occupations whose growth

has been a characteristic of twentieth century capitalism (Braverman, 1974; Connelly, 1978; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978).

Connelly (1978) argues that, as a consequence of early capitalist industrialization in Canada, the majority of married women were excluded from the paid labour force and relegated to unpaid domestic labour, where as full time housewives they constituted an "institutionalized inactive reserve army of labour." Seccombe (1980) questions the extent to which married women have been set free from domestic work and argues that they are a currently active workforce within the domestic sphere of production, not simply a potential workforce for the paid labour market. Kessler-Harris (1981), Armstrong and Armstrong (1983), and Connelly and MacDonald (1983) emphasize that the exclusion of women from the paid labour force was never complete and that those women who were considered to be outside the paid labour force were still working to provide for the economic needs of their households. Working class women, in particular, have worked to provide for their families by unpaid domestic production, income-producing work performed at home, or paid work in the recognized labour force. The notion that women have been an inactive reserve army of labour should therefore be taken to refer only to women's absence in large numbers from paid employment and not women's absence from important economic roles of providing

for the material needs of their families.

Basic structural changes in the Canadian economy since the Second World War have led to a major influx of women into the paid labour market. The expansion of office work, the growth of the service industries, and the increased marketing of consumer goods created new clerical, sales and service occupations which increased the demand for cheap female labour. The growing dependence of households on the purchase of consumer goods reduced some of the domestic workload while increasing the families' need for cash income. These developments, along with the reduction in family size and an increase in female headed households, led to an increased supply of women seeking paid employment (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978).

As a result of these changes in the economy, the proportion of married women outside the labour market (i.e. the 'institutionalized inactive reserve army of labour') declined. The level of female employment increased, but so did female representation in the segments of the reserve army which were out of work but not outside the labour market. Connelly (1978) has taken Marx's typology of various forms of the reserve army and adapted it to women, identifying three types: the institutionalized inactive reserve (married women outside the labour market), the active floating reserve (women who go in and out of work or move from job to job) and the stagnant reserve (women

employed in part-time, irregular, marginal jobs or women on welfare).

So far I have dealt only with the female reserve army as a supply of labour available for employment in an expanding labour market, i.e. the reserve which is a precondition for capitalist development. But there is another side to the Marxian concept of the reserve army which identifies a surplus population of unemployed workers as a consequence of capitalist development. As capitalism develops the means of production and increases productivity, a portion of the workforce becomes redundant and is thrown out of work. Similarly, when profits decline and investment in production is curtailed, the ensuing recession reduces the demand for labour and unemployment rises. The concept of the reserve army therefore includes both the sources of labour available for capitalist development and the destination of labour made redundant by capitalist development (Sweezy, 1942).

The concept of women as a reserve army which has been a cheap available source of labour for expanding occupations is consistent with the patterns of growing female employment and labour force participation. However, it does not automatically follow that women also constitute a reserve army in the sense that they will be the workers most likely to be made redundant when the demand for labour declines. During a recession, the reserve army of unemployed workers

expands, but it is not necessarily women who are pushed out of work or out of the labour force. The literature on women as a reserve army is important, in part, because it draws our attention to the relationship between economic cycles of expansion and recession and women's labour force activity (Fox, 1981). However, uncovering the nature of that relationship requires further research.

## RECESSION AND FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Benston (1969) was the first to argue that women were a reserve army of labour which capital could draw into the labour force during periods of economic expansion and expel from the labour force during periods of economic contraction. Benston argued that the sexual division of labour which assigned women primary responsibility for childcare and domestic labour led to the primary identification of women as wives and mothers with only a marginal attachment to the labour force. This marginal attachment to the labour force, it was argued, caused women who were unemployed to drop out of the labour force and out of sight. Married women who disappeared back into the family as full time housewives enabled the reserve army to expand without an increase in the socially acknowledged level of unemployment. Thus a female reserve army was seen as functional to the needs of capital for a flexible supply of labour which could be expelled from employment when

demand for labour declined without causing social unrest.

> Women function as a massive reserve army of labour. When labour is scarce (early industrialization, the two world wars, etc.) then women form an important part of the labour force. When there is less demand for labour (as now under neocapitalism) women become a surplus labour force -- but one for which their husbands and not society are economically responsible. The 'cult of the home' makes its reappearance during times of labour surplus and is used to channel women out of the market economy. This is relatively easy since the pervading ideology ensures that no one, man or woman, takes women's participation in the labour force very seriously. Women's real work, we are taught, is in the home. (Benston, 1969, 200)

Goldberg (1970) and Beechey (1978) concur with Benston's argument that women can be pushed out of the labour market more easily than men, since women can be reabsorbed into the family. Women's responsibilities within the home and the cultural identification of women primarily in terms of their family roles are seen as factors which cause women to withdraw from the labour market during periods of economic contraction when the demand for labour is reduced.

> I would argue that married women function as a disposable and flexible labour force in particular ways, and that the specificity of the position of women arises from their domestic role in the family and the prevalent assumption that this is their primary role. There are several ways in which married women can more easily be made redundant - disposed of - than men....Thus women who are made redundant are able to disappear virtually without trace back into the family. (Beechey, 1978, 190)

This thesis that women constitute a reserve army of labour which can be easily channelled out of the labour market rests upon the assumption that women's participation in the labour force is influenced by the aggregate level of demand for labour and the assumption that women are able to withdraw from the labour force because paid work is not as central to women's lives as it is to men's. Thus women's position within the family is seen as determining women's attitudes toward paid work and their apparent willingness to forego paid employment if jobs are not readily available. According to Benston, a 'cult of domesticity' and an ideology which separates women from the 'masculine' sphere of paid work, results in women not taking their access to paid work 'very seriously.' Porter (1982) found in interviews with working class couples that they still adhered to an ideology which defined paid work as the man's responsibility and the family as the woman's responsibility, even when their behavior deviated from their 'norm'. Porter argues that even when women assume the role of providing income from paid work, they remain more detached from their paid work. "When women enter the labour market, they do so as migrants from the domestic domain." (Porter, 1982, 118) Rubin (1983) also suggests that despite the growth of female labour force participation and the increased reliance of families on women's employment, 'breadwinning' is still felt to be the responsibility of men rather than women.

As Hood (1983) points out, there is a distinction between women's actual participation in paid work and their assessment of whether or not paid work is or should be their responsibility. Women's attitudes toward their paid employment and their assumption of responsibility for providing income for their families cannot therefore be measured by references to women's employment status. While Hood is primarily concerned with changes in women's adoption of provider roles as that affects the domestic division of labour, women's adoption of provider roles is also significant in shaping women's attitudes toward participation in the labour force and their response to changes in the demand for labour. The extent to which women see themselves as economic providers as well as homemakers may influence their flexibility in going in and out of the labour force. This in turn determines whether women are a reserve army which can be channelled out of the labour force in times of labour surplus.

There is certainly historical evidence from the Great Depression to indicate that 'breadwinning' was defined as a male responsibility and married women were expected to forego paid employment in deference to men who needed to support their families. During the 1930's, public opinion polls, government lesiglation, private hiring policies and union positions all displayed a widespread antagonism to married women working outside the home. Women were

encouraged to leave the labour force and many women lost their jobs upon marriage (Humphries, 1976; Scharf, 1980; Kessler-Harris, 1981 - for the U.S.; Macleod, 1974 - for Ontario).

> Social pressures emanating from the depression-racked economy increased the problems of working women. Women became scapegoats for capitalism's instability, their transcendence of traditional roles allegedly exacerbating the crisis. Consequently, there was mounting hostility to women working, and strong social approbation of the traditional division of labour (Humphries, 1976, 99).

While the dominant cultural influences encouraged women to go back into the home during the Depression in order to alleviate high levels of unemployment, there were other cultural and material forces which pressed women into the labour market. As Scott and Tilly (1975) have shown, the cultural expectations regarding women and paid work have varied by class and historical circumstances. Far from being an alternative to women's family roles, paid work has often been expected of working class wives and mothers. The ideological separation of work and family has never been an accurate representation of the experience of those women who have worked to provide income for their families and for whom the roles of mother and worker were combined.

During the Depression, more women entered the labour market in order to provide for their families despite a dominant ideology which defined 'breadwinning' as a male responsibility. Opposition to women working for wages and

blatant discrimination against women in the labour market did not result in the expulsion of women from the paid labour force. Women's identification as wives and mothers did not cause them to withdraw from the labour market when the economy contracted and jobs were hard to find (Milkman, 1976; Kessler-Harris, 1981).

> When figures from the census of 1940 are compared with those from 1930, they reveal some startling facts. The proportion of women among all workers climbed slightly. By 1940, more than a quarter of the nation's workers were women. Even more important, the proportion of wage-earning women who were married had leaped from less than 29 percent in 1930 to 35.5 percent in 1940. Far from driving married women out of the labor market, the depression seemed to have pulled them into it. Despite public policy, as women weighed their families needs for income against the contributions they could make by staying at home, many chose to work for pay. (Kessler-Harris, 1981, 139 - for the U.S.)

During the Depression in Ontario, widespread opposition to married women in the labour market generated various responses from working women. Macleod (1974) describes how many women in the garment industry were able to secure paid employment by working out of their own homes rather than in factories. Other women used their maiden names and concealed the fact that they were married in order to get or keep paid employment. There is also evidence which suggests that married women who lost their jobs remained in the labour force seeking other paid work.

Overall, the literature on women's work during the

Depression does not support the thesis that women are channelled out of the labour market in times of economic contraction. While the Depression generated increased competition and antagonism toward women in the paid labour force, women did not respond by passively withdrawing from the labour market and disappearing into the home.

The literature on women's labour force participation in more recent, less severe periods of economic contraction is contradictory and inconclusive. Some women (additional workers) enter the labour force during a recession in order to maintain their families' standard of living in the face of unemployment or reduced income among other household income providers. Other women (discouraged workers) leave or remain outside the labour market because of the lack of job opportunities or childcare services which would enable them to seek paid work.

A survey of several studies on women in the U.S. labour market concluded that "the group of discouraged workers predominates so that the female labor force either declines or grows more slowly during periods of high unemployment." (Exploitation from Nine to Five, 1975, 47) A similar conclusion was reached by Ferber and Lowry who argued that women "tend to leave and remain out of the labor force during recessions and enter the labor force when unemployment is low" (Ferber and Lowry, 1976, 228). Finegan (1975) concluded that the long term trend in women's

increased labour force participation was slowed down by the 1958-61 recession in the U.S. Szymanski (1976) reached opposite conclusions and argued that:

> In times of slow or negative economic growth women are, if anything, more likely to be seeking work outside the home than in times of prosperity. This may well be because it is during the hard times that women must compensate for their husband's or father's loss of work (Szymanski, 1976, 42).

A study of the 1974-75 recession and its impact on women in sixteen capitalist countries concluded that the female labour force continued to grow but "the recession interrupted the strong underlying trend in labour force growth of women" (OECD, 1976, 21). Swan (1982) cites a 1980 study for the Canada Department of Finance which concluded that cyclical changes in the economy did not appear to be significant factors in determining women's labour force participation. Thus there is no clear evidence to support the thesis that women have responded to periods of economic contraction by withdrawing from the labour force and disappearing into the home.

This literature on the relationship between recessions and female labour force participation is based on analysis of aggregate data compiled by the government. This poses a number of problems. First of all, aggregate data on female labour force participation obscures possible class differences in women's responses to periods of high unemployment. As Rapp (1978) has shown, class differences

in households' access to wealth, wages or welfare have an effect on household members' participation in the labour force and the division of domestic work. Since private households are the primary economic units within which people distribute the wage earned in the labour market, we could expect women from households whose income was reduced by the recession to respond differently from women in other households. In addition, gross measures of economic activity such as the gross domestic product, the level of employment, and the unemployment rate cannot be taken as measures of the demand for female labour. Given the sex segregation of the labour market, a decline in economic activity and the number of jobs does not necessarily mean a decline in the demand for female labour. Female labour force participation might prove to be more sensitive to shifts in demand for 'female' jobs rather than overall measures of the economy. The definitions of categories and the types of questions used in gathering labour force statistics also present certain problems. The categorization of large numbers of women as being 'not in the labour force' obscures the real extent of female unemployment (Gonick, 1978; Stirling and Kouri, 1979). Finally, studies of women's response to recessions which rely solely on measures of labour force activity tell us nothing about how women experience the labour market and whether they see the recession as a factor shaping those experiences.

There is substantial evidence in the sociological literature which indicates that most women in the Canadian labour force work out of economic need. It has been estimated that two thirds of the women in the Saskatchewan labour force have to work because they are sole providers or are married to men whose income is below a family wage (Saskatchewan Labour, Women's Division, 1980). The growing importance of women's employment as a source of family income has increased the likelihood of women remaining in the labour market (MacDonald, 1982). Despite the lack of jobs, lack of daycare, and low level of pay, married women have increasingly entered the labour force because they needed the income from paid employment (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1982). As more women have become significant income providers within their families, their need for paid employment and their attachment to the labour force has increased. The growing importance of paid work in women's lives raises serious doubts about whether women today would disappear into the home. One of the most recent studies of women in the Canadian labour market concluded that:

> Now women are staying in the labour market when they find themselves without a job at least in part because economic need makes it more difficult to disappear back into the home (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983, 32)

While women's dependence on paid employment reduces the likelihood that they would withdraw from the labour market during a recession, employers' dependence on female workers

in the feminized segment of the labour market also reduces the likelihood that women will be channelled out of the labour force during a recession. The presence of large numbers of women in the labour market exerts a downward pressure on wages and thereby benefits employers. In this sense, unemployed women are an active reserve army of labour which seeks employment and competes with other workers for jobs rather than an inactive reserve which drops out of the labour force entirely.

> Capitalists are not interested in the wholesale maneuver of women out of the labour force. What they are interested in is the maintenance of women in the labor force under the old conditions; indeed, they would like more women to seek work under these terms. (Humphries, 1976, 117)

The needs of capital are contradictory. On the one hand, the continued presence of women in the labour force provides capital with a cheap available supply of labour. On the other hand, high unemployment, which threatens the legitimacy of the capitalist economy, could be partially alleviated by restricting women's entry into the labour force. Given the surplus of both male and female labour available during periods of high unemployment, some sociologists have suggested that capitalist governments would opt to reduce the legitimacy crisis by taking deliberate steps to restrict women's labour force participation.

Historically, daycare policies have been instituted by governments in order to manipulate the supply of female labour. In Canada, the provision and subsequent removal of government funded childcare services were intended to move women in and out of the labour force during and after the Second World War (Pierson, 1977; Leah, 1981). The large influx of women into the labour force in the past twenty years has taken place despite the lack of universally accessible childcare, although the lack of childcare services clearly remains a barrier for many women who would like paid employment. Further restriction of childcare services may be intended to reduce female labour force participation, but whether women will in fact drop out of the labour force depends on more than the availability of childcare. Nevertheless, policy makers may attempt to reduce the visible level of female unemployment by discouraging women from entering the labour force.

> As the economic situation in Canada and the United States deteriorates, there are indications that cutbacks in daycare may be used to make it harder for married women to work (Benston, 1978, 4).

> Given the current economic stagnation and the surplus of labour for women's traditional jobs, it is evident that women are again to be considered surplus to the needs of the economy and encouraged to return to being full-time housewives. One means of 'encouragement' is by making daycare difficult to obtain - either through an absolute lack of places or through prohibitive fees (Leah, 1981, 42).

While the expulsion of women from the labour force could reduce the visible level of unemployment, women's reliance on paid employment and employers' dependence on a female workforce suggest that a recession would have more complex results than an attempt by governments to channel women back into the home. There is no neat functional fit between capital's need to reduce unemployment and the expulsion of women from the labour market. Women's reliance on paid employment and conflicting interests within the capitalist class are more likely to result in a) women struggling to defend their position within the labour market, and b) employers of women taking advantage of the labour surplus to launch attacks on women's wages and working conditions.

## RECESSION AND FEMALE UNEMPLOYMENT

Some literature on the relationship between economic contractions and female unemployment indicates male unemployment is likely to increase more than female unemployment during recessions. During the early years of the Depression, the female unemployment rate in the U.S. was substantially lower than the male unemployment rate (Milkman, 1976). Since World War II, the official U.S. unemployment rate for women has been higher than the male unemployment rate, but the gap between male and female unemployment rates has actually declined during recessions,

as male unemployment increased more rapidly (Niemi, 1975; Ferber and Lowry, 1976). A study of the 1974-75 recession found that male unemployment rose as much or more than female unemployment in ten out of sixteen countries, while the reverse pattern was true in the remaining six countries, including Canada (OECD, 1976).

A variety of factors influence the distribution of unemployment during economic crises. A number of studies have shown that male segregated industrial jobs are more susceptible to recessionary layoffs than female segregated clerical and service jobs. The unemployment rate in male segregated occupations was higher than in female segregated occupations in the U.S. both during the Depression (Milkman, 1976) and the 1974-75 recession (Women's Work Project, 1978). A comparative study of sixteen countries during the 1974-75 recession concluded that women enjoyed a measure of protection from unemployment because they were employed in service occupations where the demand for labour continued to grow, while demand for industrial labour declined (OECD, 1976). In her study of unemployment among Canadian women, Marsden (1977) argued that women were often the first to lose their jobs during a recession because they were low skilled and easily replaceable. But Marsden also argued that traditionally female occupations such as clerical, sales, and service workers were less affected by recessions than traditionally male occupations in mining, construction,

and manufacturing. These studies suggest that men's jobs are hardest hit by job losses during a recession and that male unemployment is more responsive to cyclical changes in the economy.

The level of female unemployment may also be affected by the types of jobs which are available and whether women are seen as the most desirable workers for those positions. Kessler-Harris (1981) argued that employers in the U.S. reorganized production processes during the Depression in order to replace skilled workers with cheaper, less skilled workers. These deskilled, low-wage positions were frequently filled with women who were thought of as economic dependents and therefore not entitled to a living wage. Employers' willingness to hire women for low wage, deskilled and marginal jobs may have enabled some women to find employment more easily than men. A study of Toronto garment workers during the Depression also indicates that employers preferred to hire women for their low wage and temporary jobs which meant that women found it easier than men to find work, but that the work they found was unstable (Macleod, 1974).

Susceptibility to unemployment has also been linked to level of skill, with the presumption being that employers prefer to layoff their less skilled workers and retain their predominantly male skilled workers (Niemi, 1975; Marsden, 1977). Peter Armstrong (1982) rejects the explanation which

relies on skill differences and maintains instead that women are more susceptible to lay offs because they are concentrated in labour intensive production processes.

Within traditionally male occupations, women may be more susceptible to layoffs because they lack seniority. Bedell (1980) found that women who had only recently gained access to production jobs in the auto industry were affected disproportionately when layoffs occurred there. In the 1974-75 recession, women in non-traditional occupations suffered higher rates of unemployment than men in those occupations so that:

> the effect of the recession on the employment of women has therefore been to slow down the growth of their employment in those industries in which they have been traditionally underrepresented (OECD, 1976, 31).

The literature on the dual labour market identifies women primarily as a secondary labour force which is prevented from gaining access to well-paid, permanent, stable employment. Barron and Norris (1976) argue that women are more susceptible to job loss than men because they are found disproportionately in unstable jobs with little job security or union protection. The location of women within secondary labour market jobs may mean that they lose their jobs more readily when the demand for labour declines. However, if the demand for labour in the primary labour market continues to decline and demand for cheaper, less

skilled workers in the secondary labour market continues to rise, it may be the male primary workforce which bears the brunt of rising unemployment (MacDonald, 1982). However, the development of microcomputers in recent years offers employers the possibility of displacing workers in the predominantly female segregated occupations (Saskatchewan. Labour. Women's Division, 1981). Menzies (1981) study of the adoption of computer technology within Canadian industries concluded that technological change could result in the loss of over one million jobs in the Canadian labour market - primarily in traditionally female occupations. If such predictions hold up, women employed in these occupations will no longer enjoy protection from high levels of unemployment. As technological change limits the creation of new jobs in clerical, sales and service occupations and as women continue to enter the labour market seeking work, the high level of female unemployment can be expected to continue.

While female unemployment has historically been ignored by government policymakers and academics alike, there have been studies in recent years which have begun to identify female unemployment as a problem and as an important area of research. In a study of Canadian official unemployment measures, Stirling and Kouri (1979) found that the level of hidden unemployment among women is very high. Noting the increase in the official level of unemployment among women,

Marsden (1977) cited the need for further sociological work to develop an analysis of the structural changes producing higher unemployment among women. Five years later Armstrong and Armstrong were still decrying the lack of research into the underlying economic conditions which have raised female unemployment in recent years.

> More effort has been directed toward dismissing women's unemployment as insignificant - because they do not need work, because they are secondary workers, and because they claim unemployment primarily to gain eligibility for benefits- toward explaining away women's unemployment, than toward investigating the economic conditions which give rise to these massive changes in women's labour force behavior (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1982)

Several studies of government policies toward unemployed women have revealed that Canadian policymakers have tended to dismiss female unemployment as insignificant and restricted unemployed women's access to unemployment insurance benefits (Gonick, 1978; Swan, 1979; Alexander, 1979; Armstrong, 1980; Townson, 1980). Armstrong and Armstrong (1982) described how women and youth who were unemployed were less likely than prime age males to receive unemployment insurance and that their benefits were likely to be lower because they were based on prior earnings. Swan (1982) examined the patterns of female unemployment in Canada between 1975 and 1979. She found that the female unemployment rate was higher than the male unemployment rate overall, in all occupational groups, in all industries

except construction, and in all provinces. She also found that one third of unemployed women were re-entrants to the labour force compared to sixteen percent of unemployed men; and that one third of unemployed women had lost jobs compared to fifty eight percent of unemployed men. Therefore layoffs play a smaller part in explaining female unemployment than male unemployment. Armstrong and Armstrong (1982) argued that female unemployment has grown within female segregated occupations because the increase in jobs has not kept pace with the rising number of women entering the labour force. While these studies do not deal directly with female unemployment during a recession, they point to a number of important factors which need to be examined in analysing the impact of a recession on female unemployment.

While some research has explored the extent and distribution of female unemployment in the Canadian labour market, we know very little about how women have experienced their unemployment and what the consequences have been for themselves and their families. Most studies of unemployment have focused on unemployed men. A recent study by Warren (1980) included both women and men and found that unemployed women reported much higher levels of stress and depression than housewives, employed women, employed men and unemployed men. She concluded that unemployment constituted a greater threat to the mental health of women than men and that

unemployed women, particularly blue collar women, had less access to support networks to help them cope with unemployment. A recent interview study with workers laid off as a result of a plant closure found that women were more likely to remain unemployed and more likely to experience greater reduction in pay if reemployed (Snyder and Novack, 1983). They also found that unemployed women were plagued by problems of financial insecurity and demoralization. In order to understand the impact of the recession on women in the labour market, it is important, therefore, to investigate not only the level of female unemployment, but also its consequences.

## THE RECESSION AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

The sexual division of labour which assigned women primary responsibility for domestic labour laid the groundwork for the definition of certain types of wage labour (e.g. cleaning, food preparation, clothing production, childcare, education and nursing) as female sex-typed jobs. The social subordination of women was perpetuated by the reproduction of gender hierarchy within the occupational structure. Women have been segregated into a separate female segment of the labour market where jobs are characterized by low pay, lack of advancement potential, and lack of job security. The segregation of women in the Canadian labour force into a narrow range of occupations is

well documented (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978; Connelly, 1978; Swan, 1982).

> While large increases in employment have changed the degree of participation of women in the Canadian work force, the nature of their participation has remained remarkably unchanged. Women have been, and continue to be, concentrated in a relatively small number of occupations and industries. Occupational and industrial segregation is one of the most dramatic facts of the position of women in the Canadian labour market (Swan, 1982, 58).

The persistence of sex segregation in the labour market shapes what takes place in the labour market during periods of economic contraction. The restriction of women to a subordinate segment of the labour market means that rising female unemployment is concentrated primarily within those same occupations and industries which have been defined as 'women's work'. Increased competition for jobs among women in the female segment of the labour market as well as increased competition from men for gender-mixed occupations has an impact on women's positions within the labour market.

A study of the U.S. labour market during the Depression found that sex segregation increased as "social forces intensified the crowding of women into feminized jobs where tradition gave them some protection from male competition" (Humphries, 1976, 110). The social climate of antagonism toward women working and the high degree of competition for jobs put most women workers on the defensive. Women became primarily concerned with holding onto the jobs they held in

female job ghettos rather than seeking improvements in their jobs or access to jobs traditionally held by men. During the Depression, women's groups put aside feminist assertions of women's right to employment and economic independence. Women were discouraged from competing with men for jobs and were thereby crowded increasingly into female job ghettos. As women's right to work came under attack, they defended themselves by arguing that they were working in segregated jobs so that they weren't taking jobs away from men.

> But this argument made a virtue of occupational segregation by sex as well as serving as an implicit attack on those women in, or anticipating entrance into, nontraditional fields of employment (Scharf, 1980, 62).

For many women in the labour force, the increased competition for jobs during the Depression, combined with the restriction of women to a narrow range of jobs, led to a deterioration of women's positions within the occupational structure (Milkman, 1976). The employment of women in temporary, low-paid, marginal jobs offered women some protection against unemployment but also resulted in "widespread downward mobility within the female labour market" (Milkman, 1976, 80).

In another study of the U.S. Depression, Scharf (1980) argued that men moved into the more desirable jobs which had previously been held by women and that women were demoted. The gender composition of formerly female professions, such as librarians, teachers, and social workers, shifted as more

men sought work in those fields. The proportion of women employed as professionals declined, but displaced women apparently sought re-employment rather than dropping out of the labour force. "Demotion, not withdrawal from economic activity, appeared to be the typical experience of women during the Depression" (Scharf, 1980, 93-94).

Kessler-Harris (1981) argues that women's job opportunities during the Depression were shaped by the sex segregation of the labour market. She argues that female segregated jobs remained essentially women's jobs, but that gender mixed occupations became increasingly male. She also argues that employers during the Depression in some cases reorganized their production processes to rely less heavily on skilled workers and that when jobs were deskilled they were often filled by cheaper female workers.

> Because of the tight stratification of the labour force into male and female sectors, men did not take over women's jobs in any large numbers during the Depression. A few became librarians and some moved into teaching and social work. But by and large these gender-defined professions remained female. Men did dominate "gender-free" jobs where the sex lines had previously been unclear or divided. Women lost ground, for example, among elevator operators and janitors as well as among college professors and musicians. They gained some jobs that had been male particularly where the job structure had changed as a result of new machinery or streamlining of operations (Kessler-Harris, 1981, 141).

There are no really adequate studies of the impact of the recession on the structure of the Canadian labour market

as it affects job opportunities for women. Recent studies of trends in women's employment have not focused specifically on the impact of recessions on job opportunities. Nevertheless these studies provide a necessary background with which to compare the patterns found during the recession.

MacDonald (1982) argues that the long term trend in the Canadian labour market is toward the expansion of jobs in the secondary labour market and the lack of growth in jobs in the primary labour market. The secondary labour market consists of jobs which are characteristically low paid, with very little job security or advancement potential (Barron and Norris, 1976). While women find employment in the lower levels of the primary labour market, the major influx of women into the labour market has been in response to the growing demand for a secondary labour force (MacDonald, 1982). Armstrong and Armstrong (1982) argue that the patterns of job creation in Canada during the 1970's show that most new employment opportunities occurred in secondary labour market jobs and that most of these new jobs were created in female job ghettos. Thus female employment rose during this period but was largely confined to low paid, insecure jobs. In addition, female unemployment rose because the level of job creation did not keep pace with the rising influx of women seeking paid employment (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1982). Duffy and Weeks (1981) and Armstrong

and Armstrong (1982) both note the growing importance of part time work as a proportion of jobs available in the labour market and the predominance of women among part time workers. The growth in part time work is largely explained by its relatively low cost to employers.

Given that large numbers of women work in low wage, insecure, temporary, or part time jobs, what will be the impact of a recession on these types of jobs? Will their numbers decline or will they become an even greater proportion of the jobs available? And as competition for jobs in the female labour market increases with the rising level of unemployment, what is the effect upon women's wages and conditions of work?

Most of the literature on women's employment in Canada deals primarily with an analysis of aggregate data on the labour force and neglects those aspects of women's work experiences which are less easily quantified. Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) began to explore the nature of women's work experiences in Canada by conducting interviews with sixty five women across the country. Their study revealed that most women share certain basic experiences on the job. Women work in jobs shared with other women, at the lower levels of workplace hierarchies, at tasks which have been deskilled and devalued. Women often experience a lack of control over decisions which affect their work and yet are held accountable by their supervisors for the quality of their

work. Armstrong and Armstrong also reported that women felt threatened by the high level of unemployment and the lack of alternative job opportunities. They concluded that although women's pay and conditions of work were often undesirable, women had little choice but to accept this type of employment.

Alexander (1983) has argued that the current economic crisis poses a serious threat to any policy changes which would improve women's positions within the labour market. A government troubled with enormous budget deficits and eager to please the business community is not about to push for costly reforms such as affirmative action, equal pay for work of equal value, or legislation to protect part time workers. In fact, government efforts to promote capital investment frequently rely on weakening workers' rights with the result that workers' attempts to improve or simply maintain their wages and working conditions face additional barriers (Gonick, 1978). Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) found many women who were afraid to voice complaints about their wages and working conditions becaue they were worried about losing their jobs. The high level of unemployment acts as a disciplining force which suppresses workers' demands for change. Wages and working conditions not only do not improve, but are likely to deteriorate as employers demand concessions from workers (Gonick, 1978). As increasing numbers of women continue to enter the labour

force during the 1980s, the prospects of their having access to jobs with improved wages and working conditions are limited.

## HARD TIMES AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

The relationship between the family and the economy and the role of each in perpetuating the subordination of women has been at the center of socialist feminist theoretical work for the past fifteen years (e.g. Mitchell, 1971; Rowbotham, 1973; Eisenstein, 1979; Sargent, 1981). A major contribution of this work was the recognition that domestic labour processes were integral to the economy as a whole and that they were shaped by broader changes in the economy.

Domestic labour which provides use values for family consumption is an integral part of modern capitalist economies (Benston, 1969). By maintaining and reproducing the labour power of current and future generations of workers, domestic labour provides capital with the workforce upon which it depends for further capital accumulation (Morton, 1970). But domestic labour does more than reproduce labour power for capital because it sustains the population which has its own needs and interests quite separate from capital's need for labour power (Seccombe, 1980). In order to understand the working lives of that population it is necessary to look at the twenty four hour

cycle of daily life which revolves around wage and domestic labour in two separate locations - the capitalist production unit and the private household (Seccombe, 1980; Luxton, 1980).

Although the development of capitalism removed commodity production from the home and gave rise to an ideological separation between 'work' and 'family', a great deal of socially necessary work continues to be performed by women within the home.

> The organization of production in capitalist society is predicated upon the existence of a certain form of family life. The wage labour system (socialized production under capitalism) is sustained by the socially necessary but private labour of housewives and mothers. Child-rearing, cleaning, laundry, the maintenance of property, the preparation of food, daily health care, reproduction, etc. constitute a perpetual cycle of labour necessary to maintain life in this society. In this sense, the family is an integral part of the economy under capitalism (Zaretsky, 1976, 24-25).

Economic crises penetrate into individual households through a reduction in purchasing capacity, through changes in household members' relation to the labour market, and through changes in the organization of domestic labour. Any study of the impact of economic crises on women's work needs to examine this usually forgotten half of production. In order to understand women's worklives it is necessary to examine both paid labour and domestic labour and how they are interconnected (Sokoloff, 1980; Eisenstein, 1979; Kessler-Harris, 1982). Relations within the family and work

within the labour market are all part of an interconnected whole, rather than two separate spheres. The ideological separation of 'work' and 'family' needs to be overcome if we are to grasp the nature of women's daily lives in which they are at all times affected by their relationships to the labour market and private households (Young, 1981; Kelly, 1979).

In Canada, while the majority of adult women are now active in the paid labour force, women continue to bear primary responsibility for housework and childcare (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978). While technological change, the growth of commodity production and consumer markets, changes in birth rates and family size have altered the nature of domestic labour in the twentieth century, women continue to spend a major portion of their working lives performing domestic labour (Vanek, 1974). Clark and Harvey (1976) compared two time budget studies conducted in Canada and found that women spent more hours than men performing domestic labour, that employed women spent less time than housewives performing domestic work, and that husbands of employed women did not perform significantly more household work than husbands of full time homemakers.

By removing production of many goods from the home, the development of industrial capitalism altered the tasks of the housewife and increased her dependence on the purchase of commodities in the consumer goods market. By shopping

for food, clothing, and household goods, women engage in necessary consumption work which transforms their household income into use values (Weinbaum and Bridges, 1979). This increased dependence on the purchase of commodities has changed the kinds of ways in which women are able to respond to economic crises.

A study of U.S. women during the Depression found that women intensified their domestic labour as a way of coping with the economic hardships facing their households (Milkman, 1976). Women produced more goods at home by sewing and preserving food. They also brought in income by working at home as laundresses, seamstresses, and hairdressers. Women took in boarders as well as additional family members who were unable to afford separate living quarters.

> Many women managed to approximate their families' prior standard of living despite lowered incomes by substituting their own labour for goods and services they had formerly purchased in the marketplace, reversing the trend toward increased consumption in the preceding decades (Milkman, 1976, 82).

Today, dependence on mass produced goods and women's paid employment may make the substitution of domestic labour for market goods and services less workable. Beechey (1978) argues that women's capacity to intensify their domestic labour and thus compensate for lost earnings continues to make women a more dispensible workforce than men. The

intensification of women's domestic labour is seen as functional to the capitalist system as a means of absorbing part of the surplus population and cushioning households against the loss of income. This functionalist explanation runs the risk of overstating the extent to which women are able to substitute domestic labour for earned income.

> To stay at home and try to stretch their husband's wage is no longer a viable alternative. To maintain what is now considered a reasonable standard of living, families must purchase a growing number of goods and services which are rapidly becoming indispensible. For their families to be in a financial position to purchase them, many wives must work outside the home (Connelly, 1978, 73).

Brown (1982) argues that U.S. households have become increasingly reliant upon the purchase of goods and services for which domestic labour cannot be substituted. A greater proportion of household income is now spent on housing, utilities, and transportation. With the cost reductions made possible through mass production, the proportion of income spent on food and clothing has declined, thus reducing the economic importance of women's ability to produce food and clothing at home. The same pattern appears to hold true in Canada as well.

> Economizing through women's work does not contribute much any more as the costs of survival have shifted from food and clothing to fuel and housing. Even if a woman has time to sew clothes and stock up the freezer to help save money, this doesn't help to counteract the huge and ever increasing oil and rent bills (McMahon, 1982, 21).

While the economic rewards of intensified domestic labour may be less than they were in the past, there are those who argue that women continue to work harder at home in an effort to stretch their household income. This may be particularly true in cases where the lack of employment opportunities or household responsibilities make paid employment unavailable. A study of domestic work in a mining community in Manitoba revealed that housewives who did not have access to paid jobs responded to financial hard times by gardening, foraging, shopping more carefully and working harder at home to stretch their household income (Luxton, 1980).

> During periods of economic crisis, for example, women intensify different aspects of their labour in an effort to stretch the budget. They may shop more frugally, do more mending, or take on a paid job (Luxton, 1980, 17).

The current economic crisis in Canada has been characterized by increased financial pressures on private households. Real wages, i.e. the purchasing power of the average earnings of paid workers, have declined since 1976 and living standards have been further eroded by cutbacks in health, education, and social services (Calvert, 1983). While these financial pressures have pushed some women into the paid labour market, domestic labour may also be intensified in order to save money.

> The domestic labour force is not only an immense reservoir, potentially engagable as wage labour; it is also a massive labour force presently engaged, whose labour can be invisibly intensified in defense of living standards of the proletariat, during periods when real wages are falling (Seccombe, 1980, 91-2).

During the current economic crisis, which is characterized by both inflation and high unemployment, many women are unable to find paid jobs and many of those who do often earn an inadequate wage. Women who are not employed outside the home may be particularly likely to intensify their domestic labour in the face of declining real income. Loss of income due to layoff, job loss, or inflation all place additional pressures on the domestic worker.

> The housewife's workday is carefully regulated by her family's income, as well as by the general level of inflation. As real income falls she must work harder in order to compensate by her own labour for the commodities and services she might otherwise have purchased (Zaretsky, 1978, 214).

During the 1950s and 1960s, governments within Canada expanded their programs for the provision of health, education and social services. As the economy expanded, government spending on social programs expanded. However, for the past decade the fiscal crisis has resulted in government cutbacks in social programs (Gonick, 1978). These cutbacks not only mean job losses for women employed as service workers; they also mean increased pressure on private households to compensate for the decline in publicly funded services. This may mean that women at home are

pushed to provide those services for free.

> In a recession, public funding for services declines, and work we are increasingly ill-equipped to perform is pushed back into the home. Daycare centers close; schools go to double sessions...Since women are usually both consumption workers and the wage labourers in the distribution of goods and services, it is especially clear that capital shifts between paying and not paying for the same work (Weinbaum and Bridges, 1979, 197).

Gardiner (1979) suggests that the forces which perpetuate or create substitutes for women's unpaid domestic labour are affected by different phases of capitalist development. In periods of economic expansion, the increased participation of women in the labour market and the growth of consumer goods production may lead to the production of substitutes for some domestic labour (e.g. daycare centers, convenience foods, personal services offered in the market). Gardiner argues that economic crises generate three tendencies which perpetuate the unpaid labour of women: 1) reduced government spending which limits access to childcare and other social services, 2) reduced income which reduces the market demand for substitutes for domestic labour, and 3) high unemployment which reduces the need of employers to offer any inducements to draw women into the labour force. Thus an economic crisis can be seen as putting an effective brake on tendencies to provide women with easy access to services which would substitute for their own domestic labour.

While declining income and cutbacks in services pose a threat to family living standards which adds pressure to the domestic workload, economic crises also generate additional stresses on families which increase the demands on women in the home. Milkman (1976) described the stresses experienced in households where the male 'breadwinner' became unemployed during the Depression. While this sometimes led to a reorganization of the domestic division of labour, particularly if the wife was able to find work, such role-reversal situations were fraught with financial and psychological problems. Zaretsky (1978) described the impact of the economic crisis on families in the U.S., noting that rising unemployment was associated with increased stress related illness, increased suicide, increased child abuse, and increased family conflict. As the emotional caretakers within the family, these added stresses within the home fall dispropotionately on women's shoulders. In a study which compared the stress and depression symptoms of unemployed women and men, Warren (1980) attributed the lower levels of stress among men in part to the fact that they could rely on women for emotional support. Unemployed women were not only more likely to be depressed than unemployed men, they were less likely to receive help from a spouse in coping with their depression.

Clearly, private households are affected in numerous ways by periods of economic crisis. Financial and

psychological pressures have an impact on the nature of domestic work, its intensity, and its assignment among household members. As the employment status of household members changes, their availability for domestic labour also changes, although domestic work continues, for the most part, to be defined as women's work (Hood, 1983). Very little is known about how women perceive these changes in the organization of domestic work and whether they experience the economic crisis as a force which shapes their work in the home.

## THE ECONOMIC CRISIS, WOMEN'S WORK AND EVERYDAY LIFE

In rethinking the impact of recessions on women's work I have tried to combine some of the analytic power of Marxism with feminist insights into women's experience. I have tried to draw upon what is useful in the Marxist analysis of economic crises in order to identify the key processes operating within recessions which alter conditions within the labour market and private households. And I have tried to identify the ways in which those processes shaped women's everyday work experiences.

By revealing that the process of capital accumulation produced conditions which eventually threatened that process, Marx was able to show that recessions are inherent to capitalist economies. Capitalism cannot sustain high levels of economic expansion and high employment, because

economic growth erodes the rate of profit, either through rising costs of production or rising competition for markets. This leads to a curtailment of capitalist investment in production and an economic recession. By driving some competitors out of business and disciplining workers with the threat of unemployment, recessions enable the surviving capitalists to recover lost markets and gain greater control over their workforce. Recessions are necessary, from a capitalist point of view, in order to restore conditions which would allow for a period of renewed capital accumulation.

One of the most important processes occuring within recessions is the expansion of the reserve army , i. e. the growth in unemployment, which increases competition among workers. Increased competition among workers gives employers greater leverage in setting the level of wages and terms of employment. From the point of view of capital, the expansion of the reserve army of the unemployed serves a positive restorative function by holding down labour costs. This analysis of the role of the reserve army in disciplining the workforce remains essential to understanding the processes through which employers gain greater control over wages and working conditions during a recession.

The expansion of the reserve army of the unemployed and its role in restoring conditions for greater capital

accumulation was an analysis developed by Marx to explain the relationship between rising unemployment and the struggle between capital and labour. The concept was not developed to account for gender differences among workers.

However, in an effort to integrate class and gender analyses, some Marxist feminists have applied the concept of the reserve army to women. Using the concept of the reserve army to refer to people not employed in wage labour, Marxist feminists argued that the sexual division of labour historically excluded many women from the paid labour force, and assigned them to that portion of the reserve army which was outside the labour market. Women's responsibility for domestic labour and their economic dependence within the family were seen as establishing for women a special relationship to the reserve army of labour. Women's position within the family was seen as creating a more flexible and manipulable connection to paid employment, in comparison to men whom ideology defined as the real workers.

The problem arises when women's special relationship to the reserve army is seen as determining women's greater susceptibility to being pushed into the reserve army during a period of economic crisis. Whether or not the expansion of the reserve army during recessions has a differential impact on women and men is a question which must be answered historically.

In the sociological literature which deals with the impact of economic crises on women, a number of key issues have been raised. These issues are posed here in a somewhat dichotomous fashion in order to clarify the varying points of view. However, this should not be taken to mean that individual authors always stand on one side of an issue. Indeed, the contradictions within social relations make it possible for both sides of an issue to contain an element of truth.

1. Are women pushed out of the labour force and into the home by capital's need for a disposable labour force? (Benston, 1969; Beechey, 1978) Or are women pushed into the labour force out of increased economic need? (Milkman, 1976; Szymanski, 1976; Kessler-Harris, 1982; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983)

2. Does capital benefit by pushing women back into the home because it reduces the level of visible unemployment? (Beechey, 1978) Or does capital benefit from women remaining in the labour market and increasing competition among workers? (Humphries, 1976)

3. Does the acceptance of an ideology of domesticity make women accept being treated as a 'disposable' workforce? (Benston, 1969; Deckard and Sherman, 1974) Or does women's attachment to paid work make them resist being channelled into the reserve army? (Kessler-Harris, 1982; Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983)

4. Are women more susceptible than men to unemployment during a recession because female unemployment poses fewer problems to capital? (Beechey, 1978) Or are women less susceptible than men because they are segregated in those industries and occupations which have been cushioned against the greatest job losses? (Milkman, 1976; Women's Work Project, 1978; Marsden, 1977)

In addition to exploring the impact of economic crises on women's relation to the labour market, Marxist feminists have also called our attention to the impact of economic crises on work within the home. The major question has been whether the intensification of women's domestic labour serves as a buffer against the attack on workers' wages and living standards which occur during periods of high unemployment. There can be little doubt that declining real wages, cutbacks in services, and increased problems associated with unemployment place additional burdens on private households, making it more difficult for their resources to be stretched to meet the needs of individuals within the home. The question which remains, however, is the extent to which households are able to respond to these increased pressures by increasing women's domestic workload. Does the intensification of domestic labour offset the impact of the crisis on living standards, thereby enabling capital to raise unemployment and lower wages more than it otherwise could? (Milkman, 1976; Seccombe, 1980) Or has

the cushioning effect of domestic labour been reduced by changes which have made the substitution of domestic labour for reduced income less feasible? (Brown, 1982; McMahon, 1982)

One of the basic problems in all of these debates has been the danger of slipping into overgeneralizations about women workers, as if there were one process operating within recessions which affected women in general. Another problem with the debates, so far, has been the tendency to use an overly functionalist framework and to ignore other aspects of women's lived experience. Essentially, the debates concerning the impact of economic crises on women's work have revolved around the question of how capital benefits from women's economic subordination by being able to manipulate women's relation to the wage labour market and women's domestic workload.

While this literature on women and economic crises provided an important background to my own research, I began my investigation from a fundamentally different starting point. Instead of asking how capital benefitted or made use of women's economic subordination in times of economic crisis, I began my research by asking how women experienced the economic crisis in their daily work lives. I focused on the nature of women's work experiences in the labour market and in the home. I sought to identify how those experiences changed during the recession and to locate those changes in

relation to social processes which were reshaping the labour market and private households.

While it was important to me to place women's everyday experiences within the context of changes in the relations of production over which individuals had little control, it was also important to me to recognize women as conscious actors who shape their daily lives within the boundaries of available alternatives. I wanted to move away from a functionalist analysis of women's work, which viewed it primarily in terms of its benefits to capital, and to develop a more dialectical analysis which was capable of recognizing those aspects of women's consciousness and daily work experiences which posed a challenge to capital.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How were women's work experiences at home and in the labour market affected by the recession, and what key processes were responsible for shaping those experiences? My research does not deal primarily with a comparison between the experiences of men and women during recessions. Instead I chose to focus solely on women and to document how their everyday lives were shaped by the economic crisis.
2. What meanings did women attach to their paid work and how did these shape their choices and actions during the recession? Did paid employment take on new meanings as a result of the economic crisis?

3. Where were job opportunities growing and declining and how did those changes in the labour market intersect with the sex segregation of the labour force? What were the changes in the demand for labour during the recession in Saskatchewan? How were these changes patterned by sex, by occupation, full-time vs. part time? How did changes in job opportunities affect women's daily experiences in the labour market?

4. How did employer strategies to reduce labour costs, through layoffs or staff reductions, affect women's experiences of job security and job loss?

5. How did the recession affect the level of female employment and unemployment?

6. More important than simply measuring the extent of female unemployment -- what were the nature of women's experiences when they were unemployed? What were the financial and psychological consequences in their daily lives?

7. How were women's jobs affected by the economic crisis? How did increased competition for jobs shape the terms of employment? How did employers' responses to the recession affect hours, workloads, wages and working conditions?

8. How did women respond to recessionary changes in the labour market and what factors shaped their responses?

9. How did the recession affect women's domestic workload and the domestic division of labour?

# CHAPTER IV

## THE MEANING OF PAID WORK IN WOMEN'S LIVES

In this chapter I am primarily concerned with women's consciousness and the meaning which they attach to their own paid employment. I approached this subject by asking how women's everyday experiences within the family and within the labour market shaped their understanding of their own relation to paid work. I wanted to find out whether the women whom I interviewed considered paid work as a central or peripheral part of their lives and how their identities as wives and mothers influenced their identities as paid workers. I reasoned that the meaning which women attached to their paid employment would influence their responses to changes in labour market opportunities in a time of economic crisis. I was also concerned with the question of whether the economic crisis was having an impact on women's view of themselves as paid workers.

Earlier Marxist-feminist attempts to explain female economic subordination have argued that women in the paid labour force have been particularly vulnerable to exploitation because they accepted an ideology of female domesticity and economic dependence within the family. This ideology was seen as enabling capital to superexploit women

and treat them as an easily disposable labour reserve. Women's acceptance of their cultural definition as primarily wives and mothers was seen as creating women wage labourers who were 'willing' to accept low pay, temporary jobs, and part-time work. Women's consciousness of their interests as workers was seen as being limited by adherence to an ideology which was functional to the perpetuation of capital and male dominance. With this overly functionalist approach to women's consciousness, it became impossible to identify or explore those aspects of women's consciousness which were in contradiction with and represented a challenge to the ideology of domesticity.

Rather than asking how women's acceptance of the ideology of domesticity has reinforced their subordination in the labour market, I sought to find out how women's daily life experiences shaped the meaning and significance which they attached to their paid work. Rather than seeing women's attitudes toward paid work as products of an ideology which was functional to the needs of capital, I saw women's attitudes toward paid work as shaped by their daily experiences which were often in contradiction to the ideology of domesticity and female dependence on a male 'provider'.

In the interviews I asked women to talk to me about their work histories, their reasons for working, what it meant to them to be employed or unemployed and what it meant

to their families. I also asked questions about their income from employment and their household's other sources of income. From the answers to these questions, as well as comments made during other portions of the interviews, I was able to weave together a picture of the meaning of paid work in these women's lives.

Just as every piece of cloth consists of basic fibres interwoven, so women's paid work consists of the basic elements of wage labour interwoven. Women sell their labour power, their energy, time, and capacity to do work, in exchange for a wage on which they are dependent. All the women interviewed saw their wages as the main benefit derived from the sale of their labour power. Beyond that, their employment had a variety of meanings, reflecting both different household situations in relation to the labour market and different conditions of work.

All of the women I interviewed thought that paid employment was important. Some were unable to find desperately needed jobs. Many of those who were employed were unhappy with their wages or their conditions of work. But all of them took their access to paid employment seriously. How could it be otherwise when these women needed the income from paid employment to meet their needs; they needed social recognition and a sense of accomplishment; or they needed the opportunity to work outside the isolation of their own homes? The fact that

paid employment often did not satisfy women's needs for income, accomplishment, independence and social recognition does not lead to the conclusion that women do not need paid work. Rather, women need work, but they need work with better pay, more flexible hours, more interesting activities, and more humane working conditions. In recognizing women's needs for paid employment, it is important to remember that their needs for human work are not met by the current organization of wage labour.

The women I interviewed worked at paid jobs for the same reason that most people in capitalist society sell their labour power - because they are dependent upon wages to acquire the goods and services necessary to meet their needs. Those who have access to higher wages, directly through their own employment or indirectly through the employment of a partner, are able to secure a higher standard of living - better housing, better food, better transportation, better education, etc. But whether the wages are high or low, they remain the chief means through which people are able to acquire necessary goods and services.

Increasingly, women in Saskatchewan have entered the labour market in an effort to secure the income they need. In 1975, 40.3% of the female population over the age of fifteen was active in the labour market. By 1983, the female labour force participation rate had risen to 52.5%

(Statistics Canada, Historical Labour Force Statistics, 1984). A majority of those women were working or seeking paid work out of economic need (Saskatchewan Department of Labour, Women's Division, 1980). The women interviewed in this study represent this emerging pattern, in which a majority of women in the province participate in the paid labour force and bear some responsibility for providing income for themselves and their families.

While women's participation in paid work has increased substantially, it is important to make a distinction between women's actual participation in the paid labour market and their attitudes toward paid work. Some sociologists have suggested that women in the paid labour force are only peripherally concerned about their paid work because their 'real work' and sense of identity are found within the family. Benston (1969) argued that women workers did not 'take their paid work seriously.' Goldberg (1970) argued that women viewed their wages as 'secondary' because of their 'primary' identity as wives and mothers. Porter (1982) argued that working class women employed outside the home still viewed paid work as male territory and she defined them as "migrants from the domestic sphere." Deckard and Sherman (1974) have argued that acceptance of the ideology of female domesticity has made women an easily 'disposable' workforce which could be "fired without much fuss in a recession".

Mainstream studies of unemployment in Canada have tended to argue that women workers have only a 'marginal attachment' to the labour force (Alexander, 1979). Women's unemployment has been viewed as insignificant because women were seen as economic dependents who did not really need paid work (Armstrong, 1980). Women's purported lesser attachment to paid work is supposedly demonstrated by their discontinuous work patterns, part time work, and 'willingness' to accept low pay. Armstrong (1980) has argued convincingly that these features of female labour force participation are better explained in terms of the characteristics of secondary labour market jobs, rather than the lesser job commitment of women workers.

As Hood (1983) has pointed out, there is a distinction between women's actual employment and their definition of themselves as providers, although some sociological literature tends to equate paid employment with the assumption of the 'provider role.' Hood argues that paid employment is a necessary but not sufficient condition for women accepting the 'responsibility' for providing financial support for the family. Based on my interviews with unemployed women, I would have to disagree. Women who are out of work continue to feel responsible for providing for their families and it is that sense of responsibility which pushes them to search for paid work. Households' increased need for income from women's wage labour has resulted in a

growing contradiction between the definition of women as economic dependents within the family and women's increased acceptance of responsibility for providing income for their families.

In this study I refer to all the women as 'providers' because they all felt some responsibility for earning income from paid employment and contributing to the financial support of their families. I did not attempt to rank or separate women into various categories of providers other than to distinguish between those women who were sole providers and women who shared provider responsibilities with a male partner.

## SOLE PROVIDER WOMEN AND THE MEANING OF PAID WORK

Over half of the women I interviewed were either self-supporting individuals or the heads of households. Those who were employed supported themselves with their own wages. Those who were unemployed depended on unemployment insurance, if they qualified, or social assistance. I classify all of these women as sole providers, regardless of their employment status or dependence on government income transfers, because they all bore the responsibility for acquiring the income necessary to provide for their households. When they were unemployed, sole provider women were prevented from financially supporting themselves and their families, but their sense of responsibility for

providing income did not change.

Thirteen of the women whom I interviewed were self-supporting individuals. They were working or looking for paid work in order to pay their bills, buy their groceries, rent their apartments, and save up for their future security. Their self-reliance on their own earnings meant that their participation in paid work was not voluntary as they were not in a position to rely upon someone else for financial support. I asked them to talk about why they entered the paid labour force and why they were working now.

A single 27 year old clerical worker described how she began supporting herself by working in a fast food restaurant while still in high school. Her experience of being unable to rely on others for financial support began at an age when a young woman's economic dependence on parents is often taken for granted.

> "We didn't have any money. My mom would take the welfare check and take off. So I worked to support my family....It was me and my younger sister basically. You have to have clothes. You have to have food. So I worked to support ourselves - the two of us. That's why I worked." (Interview 22)

The necessity of engaging in wage labour in order to meet one's needs was self evident to women who were no longer financially dependent upon parents or male partners.

A single 28 year old legal secretary described how she had to find paid work after finishing a one year business course.

> "Did I need a job? I really did need a job....I had taken a loan to go to business college, so I needed a job to pay everything back and just to support myself." (Interview 7)

By having a job and earning their own money, young women were able to establish their independence from their parents. They took pride in being able to pay their own bills and not rely upon their parents for financial support. A young waitress had been working to support herself since finishing grade 11. Although it was difficult for her to make ends meet with her wages as a waitress, she preferred to live in her own apartment rather than remain economically dependent on her parents.

> "I don't like being broke but at least, I don't know how to say it, I'm looking after myself and doing everything for myself. Sure I count on Mom for a few things now and then and maybe if I'm really broke I'll borrow $5 ... but I like it better on my own." (Interview 28)

Women who are not dependent upon a male partner's earnings are compelled to engage in wage labour in order to

meet their own subsistence needs. A divorced 33 year old woman described how her reliance upon her own wages meant that paid work was a matter of necessity rather than choice.

> "I'll stay with that job for sure for another three years because by that time my (trailer) home will be paid for and so will my vehicles....I am the provider for my home. Therefore I have to work." (Interview 23)

A 62 year old divorced woman described how she, too, was compelled to engage in paid work in order to support herself. In addition, she expected to keep working past age 65 because she could not afford to forego her income from paid employment. Having spent many years outside the labour force while married and not having been covered by a pension program at her first jobs, she lacked the financial resources which would enable her to retire.

> "I wonder if I can afford to retire. We have the option of staying on for a few years if your work is exemplary and your boss agrees. ...It would be easy for them to get rid of me ...but I have the feeling now that if I am well and if I'm able, I will (keep working). I have no intention of being able to retire at 65 - not because I want to (keep working) but because I have to." (Interview 32)

For a number of self-supporting women, paid work was

important not only because it provided immediate necessary income, but also because it provided some economic security for the future. These women did not think of themselves as economic dependents. They spoke about their plans to continue working, about their desire to have access to their own pensions, and about their need to save money to provide for themselves in their old age. The very real threat of poverty among older women in Canada has had an impact on women in the labour force who now see their jobs as their major means of protection against future impoverishment.

A 30 year old woman who had been self-supporting since finishing her training as a dental therapist spoke about her concern for future financial security.

> "Looking at the way some of the Canadian people live here on their $500 pension, I don't know what the pension situation will be when I'm at that age - whether it will be gone before I even get there or just what. So I have started looking to the fact that I don't want to be destitute when I am an old woman." (Interview 6)

A single mother who had worked since finishing high school was the sole income provider for herself and her daughter. She had watched her mother grow old in poverty when left with little income after a divorce. Divorced herself, she did not count on a male provider's support.

> "We were really quite poor. When I got the job at the library ....it was to support myself and my daughter and, as things evolved, I was supporting my mom too, because she couldn't have kept the house if it hadn't been for me paying money toward it and the bills...I worry about my mother...I guess I just sort of feel her resentment and embarassment at being poor - poor and old and female. And I just keep thinking I can't let that happen to me. And yet I don't have that much more security. I have a job now, but I just feel that being female and not having a lot of skills..., there certainly is a fear of the future." (Interview 8)

For women who are self supporting, access to paid work is a matter of necessity. Their need to earn an adequate income makes paid work central to their lives. But paid work has meaning not only as a source of necessary income but also as a source of identity and feelings of accomplishment. In capitalist societies where 'real work' is generally equated with paid employment, women as well as men often feel that their sense of achievement depends upon their ability to perform paid work. A young single woman described how it was important to her sense of self esteem to be employed.

> "It took a couple months to find my job with _____(retail store) but once I got it, I really felt good to be able to be working. Because I really like to work. I like my time off too. But I do like to work. It gives you a real sense of accomplishment. You feel like you have some self worth." (Interview 19)

While women who were sole providers were in the labour market primarily out of economic need, this wasn't the only reason that women sought paid employment. One single mother had gone back to work prior to her divorce because she was dissatisfied with staying at home and being economically dependent on her husband.

> "It was just important to me to be working. I don't feel comfortable just hanging around home. I find that all that happens is that the house work expands and that I get crazy. ...I don't know how to schedule my life that way. So working makes my life meaningful... I have a kind of pretty traditional background ... I really somehow was raised with the notion that somebody was going to take care of me and I'm really pissed off at myself that I went along with that and that I

> didn't recognize that that was the problem. So I was really happy to be able to find something where I could really get interested in the work and really work at it." (Interview 20)

The economic need for paid employment and decent wages among self-supporting women is clear. However, the need for paid employment does not rest solely on the need for wages. The women whom I interviewed also needed paid employment in order to gain a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. They also needed paid employment in order to establish their economic independence from parents, former husbands, and the welfare system in order to have more control over their own lives.

## SINGLE MOTHERS AND THE MEANING OF PAID WORK

Ten of the women I interviewed were the heads of households with dependent children. They supported their children with their wages, unemployment insurance benefits, or social assistance checks. As sole providers, these women were compelled to seek paid employment in order to meet their children's needs. Their families' dependence on their ability to secure enough income made these women keenly aware of their need for secure employment and decent wages.

Motherhood is sometimes counterposed to paid employment

in women's lives but this is an ideological formulation which views motherhood as occurring solely within the private household, a separate sphere from the labour market. Many women whom I interviewed engaged in paid employment in order to fulfill their responsibilities as mothers. As Scott and Tilly (1975) have shown in their historical study of women's work, mothers have often engaged in income producing work as an extension of their family roles rather than as an alternative to family roles. They have gone to work, often at undesireable and exhausting jobs, in order to provide for their children's material needs. Although the ideology of motherhood locates women within the home, the actual demands of motherhood often push women into the paid labour market.

For one single woman whom I interviewed the connection between motherhood and paid employment was poignantly clear. She became pregnant while employed full time in a unionized workplace. Her apparent job security and relatively high wages enabled her to choose to keep her own child. For her motherhood was not an alternative to paid employment, paid employment was a precondition for her becoming a mother. She was laid off during her pregnancy and was out of work for most of the next two and a half years. To say that she has been reabsorbed into the family after losing her paid job ignores important aspects of her experience. She has gone from being self-supporting to being dependent on

welfare. She has spent two years at home with her child, not out of choice but because her employer reduced production and cut back the workforce.

> "I was expecting to work soon after he was born and that was one of the reasons why I had him and decided to keep him. If I wasn't working or I was at minimum wage I don't think I might have kept him. I really don't know....When I did have him I knew I was going to keep him because I figured we were going to be back at work ...And so it turned out I'm spending the first two years with him. It's nice but it's not what I wanted. I like to work and pay my bills and get ahead and give him everything that I have and whatever more. It's hard. It would be nice to get back (to work)." (Interview 29)

Her idea of what it meant to be a mother included the responsibility to provide income for her child's support. Her identity as a sole provider for her child created in her a sense of entitlement to paid work and a self-supporting wage. She had gone to work as a mine labourer, a job traditionally held by men which offered better wages than the waitressing and clerical jobs she had held previously. She faced open opposition from management and some male co-workers for taking a 'man's job', but she withstood this

opposition because she felt that she had a right to earn a living wage.

> "Some guys figure we are taking jobs away from men that have a wife and three kids and such. But, I mean, we have children too. We've got to eat. And I refuse to work for $4/hour - not when I can do the work out there." (Interview 29)

Women in the paid labour force, particularly women in non-traditional jobs, may be encouraged to forego paid employment and become economically dependent on a male 'provider'. Studies of the Great Depression clearly show that married women were fired from their jobs, and denied jobs because there was widespread opposition to wives being in the workforce. Unemployment among men was often attributed to the rising participation of women in paid work (Kessler-Harris, 1982; Scharf, 1980; Humphries, 1976). Although the participation of women in the labour market has become more accepted since the 1930's, women workers still have to contend with cultural definitions of themselves as economic dependents and their employment as nonessential.

Both of the women mineworkers whom I interviewed were self-supporting at the time of the interview, and they said that most of the other women at the mines were also single. Women who are sole providers may find it easier to resist cultural pressures which define them as economic dependents.

One mineworker who was formerly married described how married women faced the most opposition from male co-workers.

> "Most of the women working there are single parents or single. There used to be a few of us that were married and we worked with our husbands. And we were told quite often, 'Why don't you get pregnant or quit so that a man who needs it can get a job?' We just told them that we have the right to earn a decent respectable living like anyone else." (Interview 30)

A 33 year old single mother described how she had gone to work to support her children when she realized that their fathers were not going to provide for them.

> "I just figured 'Well the time has come. I am going to be a single parent. And I have to take the responsibility and look after the kids.' And so I went to work and I worked one job for quite a while - that one at the laundromat....(Then) I was working two jobs for quite some time....It was a lot of work. I worked hard. But at the same time I knew that I could do it on my own. I could support my kids myself." (Interview 37)

The single mothers whom I interviewed shared the view

that a mother's responsibilites included the job of providing income for children's financial support.

> "Women that have babies, they can't just stay home and take care of them any more, cause babies cost money. You don't just have babies and expect someone else to look after them. You've got to get out there and do your part. And children cost money....Society has got to look at the fact that women do have to work, that they are not just there for the fun of it and they should be treated just as well as men." (Interview 37)

Increasingly women with young children have entered the paid labour force in Saskatchewan in order to support their families. Yet they continue to face a dominant ideology which denies that women are important income providers with the same right to employment as men. The ideology of female domesticity and economic dependence upon a male 'provider' is in contradiction with the daily experiences of women who are responsible for engaging in wage labour in order to provide for their children.

## CO-PROVIDER WOMEN AND THE MEANING OF PAID WORK

Sixteen of the women I classify as co-providers because they shared responsibility for earning income with a husband or partner. These women worked because they needed paid

employment although the character of their need and the uses made of their income varied with the security of their partners' jobs and levels of income. The nature of co-provider relationships varied among households and changed over time, but all of the co-provider women felt that their income from employment was necessary to pay their debts and meet their families' needs.

The amount of time women and their partners spent at paid employment varied, both in terms of hours/week and years/relationship. Some women worked full time for all of their adult lives and devoted as much time as their partners to income producing activity. There were also women who spent long periods of time outside the labour force while working without pay in the home. Women also varied in the degree to which their income was seen as vital to the household, as opposed to supplementary or discretionary income. Finally, individual women experienced changes in both the time spent at paid work and the significance of their income over the course of time. All of these factors have to be taken into account when trying to understand how women experience their paid employment and how they see themselves as income providers. Women's identity as workers is affected not simply by participation in the labour market and marital status but more specifically by the significance which they attach to their ability to earn their own income.

While married women often work out of economic need,

the right to paid employment should not be reserved only for those who are able to demonstrate economic need. There is a tendency in times of high unemployment to set one group of workers against another and to assert that certain groups of workers (usually men with families to support) have the greatest entitlement to paid work. During the Depression, organizations which opposed discriminatory legislation against married women defended their right to employment on the grounds that wives also worked out of economic need (Scharf, 1980; Kessler-Harris, 1982). Wives and daughters who did not need the income were encouraged to stay outside the labour market. While men universally enjoyed the right to paid employment, regardless of economic need, women's right to paid employment was contingent upon their positions within the family. These same issues have arisen during the current economic crisis, with women's employment often being defended on the basis of their need for income. Women's other needs for productive work, social recognition, and self esteem are asserted less frequently in a labour market where jobs are in short supply. Women often feel that in order to lay claim to paid work they have to prove their need for the money.

A daycare worker described how her 'right' to paid employment outside the home changed when she went from being a single parent to living with a man whose salary was enough to support them all.

> "I want a job. I do. I want a career. I want a life too but I sort of feel like _____ makes enough money now that it trivializes me as a person in the workforce. When I was a single parent, people cared. They want single parents to have jobs...If you're living with someone or married to someone and they make a lot of money, then you're not getting any sympathy from anybody. 'You don't have to work. Do some volunteer work or stay home and look after your own kids.' And I want to be taken seriously as a person in the world. It sort of seems like my right." (Interview 3)

Women living with employed men have a measure of financial security and a range of choices not available to women who are sole providers. They are able to enjoy a standard of living that would be unattainable on the basis of their wages alone. But the fact that they benefit from having access to their husbands' income does not necessarily mean that their own employment is insignificant to them. The tendency to define the husband as the breadwinner and the wife as the 'secondary' earner is an accurate reflection of the wage gap between husbands and wives, but it is not an accurate reflection of wives' attachment to their jobs.

A school secretary who was married with two children

saw her husband's income as the main source of financial support for the family because her lower wages did not enable her to provide the same level of financial support.

> "There is no way I could live on my wage. My wage buys the groceries. It doesn't really pay the bills." (Interview 24)

The fact that she made a lesser financial contribution as the result of her lower wages did not mean that she had a lesser attachment to her paid work. She had worked in the paid labour force for over twenty years. She had a long term commitment to paid work and felt that she had a right to paid employment. She expressed a worry that her right to paid employment was in jeopardy and that married women would be pushed out of the paid labour force as high unemployment made jobs more scarce.

> "What do you think will happen to people like me who have always worked? I can sort of understand during the war when the women didn't work and they sort of came into the workforce to help out...But we've always been there. To push me back into the home when I have always worked (isn't fair). I've worked for over 20 years." (Interview 24)

Her concern about whether she would have access to paid employment outside the home was echoed by other married women whose husbands were employed and the main income

providers. Whether or not their job opportunities were in fact being restricted, these women felt that their entitlement to paid work was being called into question. The ideology of female domesticity and economic dependence defined these women's jobs as nonessential because of their indirect access to their husbands' earnings. However, this ideology has been challenged by women's consciousness of their own financial and psychological needs for paid work.

A 30 year old mother of two explained how she felt about her job. While her job was important because her income was necessary to the family, it was also important because she wanted to use her training at work outside the home, she enjoyed the financial independence which employment provided, and she couldn't imagine her life without paid work.

> "If someone told me I had to quit right now and just stay home or find another job, I really don't know where I would go. After you work long enough -- I think I've had maybe seven months off since I left training and that was for the kids. I went back when my son was two months old and my daughter was five months old. A lot of people enjoy staying at home and I do enjoy it up to a point, but I like to meet people and talk and be out and still help out in the home as

> far as money and whatnot. I like to have my own money. Like I say, I have done it for so long that I feel like it's mine, you know? It's my job and if I want to have my own pension and I have things like that, not depending on what pension your husband is going to have when he retires." (Interview 33)

Women's long term commitment to paid employment is not simply a matter of individual choice, but also a response to a larger set of circumstances which include the rising dependence on women's income, the isolation and devaluation of domestic labour, and the opportunity for women to find employment in the labour market. The increased participation of women in the labour market has produced significant challenges to the ideology of domesticity. Once women have become habitutated to paid employment and have come to depend on their jobs for income and other rewards, they are less likely to adhere to an ideology which consigns women to the home.

Labour force statistics clearly indicate that more and more mothers of young children are participating in the paid labour force. Becoming a mother does not automatically push women out of the paid work force for an extended period of time. Women I interviewed showed a variety of ways of coping with the conflicting demands of paid employment and

childcare. The fact that women often returned to work shortly after having children or that they tried to return to work but had their efforts thwarted by a lack of childcare alternatives indicates that many women no longer equate motherhood with the 'notion of the housewife.'

One 33 year old mother of two left the paid workforce reluctantly because she was unable to arrange childcare for her children. She gave up a job she liked and remained outside the labour force until her children were in school. Her withdrawal from the paid labour force was not the result of any 'secondary attachment' to paid work. She was compelled to leave the labour force because there was no one else to look after her children. She experienced the lack of childcare services as "the biggest barrier in my life" and her withdrawal from the paid workforce as "the most tragic thing" she'd ever done.

> "(When I couldn't arrange childcare for my son) I quit (my job) and to me that was the most tragic thing that I ever had done... I was quite uncomfortable at home because I felt that it didn't offer me anything. I did everything with the children and I got very little help from my spouse and I felt quite upset over this and I thought there's got to be more to life than just children and marriage....My husband was opposed to me

> working because you know he thought he was bringing home the bacon and that was it - that the woman's place was in the home. And for awhile I decided okay maybe I'll go along with it...(Now I think it) is important is to get a job. You know that is important to me....To me it's just about as important as it is to any man....Housework is so undervalued and even looking after children, even though it's a job in itself and it is full time work, is extremely undervalued. So I'd like to get into the paid workforce so I can be one of those people. Right now I don't have a face or a name and when you work you do." (Interview 25)

The dominant ideology suggests that women's need for identity is fulfilled when they are wives and mothers, but clearly there are wives and mothers who prefer not to stay at home as full time housewives. As noted earlier, the interview material shows that women's identity as mothers does not necessarily preclude them placing significant importance on their paid employment. While most married women work out of economic need, the need for paid employment cannot simply be reduced to the need for income. Paid employment offers other benefits to women which are important in understanding women's attitudes toward their

work. Paid employment is a legitimate alternative for women who do not want to stay at home as full time homemakers. Paid employment offers social contact and social recognition in contrast to the isolation and devaluation they have felt at home. Some women have struggled with themselves and with others in order to establish their right to work outside the home. These women have a stake in keeping and finding paid employment which goes beyond their need for income.

A mother of three described how she had taken very little time out of the labour force when her first child was born. She had managed to combine the roles of motherhood and paid worker by becoming employed as a daycare worker. Although she had little choice about going back to work, because she needed the money, the type of work she chose was influenced by her responsibilities as a mother. Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) also found that the types of jobs women took were conditioned by their family responsibilities.

> "I worked until the day before he was born....and then I went back to working three hours a day when he was six months old....And I worked for a year, three hours a day. And then I needed to get a full time job because we didn't have enough money. I had some savings but they were running out." (Interview 3)

Like many women, she had altered her work situation in order to accomodate the unpaid work of raising children, but she was concerned about whether this put her at a disadvantage in the paid labour market.

> "I feel a bit scared about not being able to find another job, that I'll always be working with kids for my whole life. And I'd like something that was more....some kind of career that I could work on for thirty years because I still have thirty years in the labour force." (Interview 3)

Although her work at home provided her with some income, its similarities with housewifery made it seem like less than a 'real job.' Caring for children in her own home, she longed to have different work which would provide her with greater social contact, material benefits, and sense of accomplishment.

> "I want a job. I do...It's good to get back into the paid labour force because I found that I really lose my confidence if I stay out too long. I feel like the reason I'm out is because I can't handle it...(K:So when you are running a family day care home you don't feel like you are in the paid labour force?) "No, because it's so isolated. There is no one else sort of judging your work. And

> you're not considered part of the paid labour force because you're not tied to any of the programs (e.g. Unemployment Insurance; Canada Pension)." (Interview 3)

The fact that raising children no longer fills all of women's adult lives affects their views of paid work. The expectation that paid employment will occupy many years of one's life shapes the significance which one attaches to paid work and the hopes one has for the rewards to be derived from paid work. For women who have spent many years at home raising children, paid employment offers an opportunity to remain active and productive after their mothering duties are reduced. When their homes become more isolated as children grow up and leave, paid employment offers the opportunity for social contact. This forty nine year old woman reentered the paid labour force out of choice when her daughters left home.

> "(When the children were grown) I felt really lost. It was the first time I'd really been without them. I think that's why I took the job. I felt very very lost. It was a new town. I hadn't gotten involved in any volunteer work. The only people I knew were a couple people from my husband's office." (Interview 13)

While some women remain at home for part of their lives to care for their children, more and more mothers of young children are finding ways of combining mothering and paid employment. These women have become habituated to working a double day.

A mother of two school age children told me how she managed to work outside the home when her children were small, despite opposition from her husband. He had told her that she had to keep their baby with her, thinking that this would preclude any paid employment. Instead she began working in people's homes so that she could watch her child at work.

> "My husband never wanted me to work - ever. And I always wanted to work....After I had my daughter I started this babysitting and light housekeeping and I took her with me. (Later) she started in a preschoool and I (got a job working there)...I never had a sitter for my daughter at all but my son was different. ...(K: How much time did you take off when he was born?) Not much, two weeks. And then I had my sister-in-law watch him but I only worked part time for a little while - for four months." (Interview 36)

For the next few years she continued to work outside the home, although she considered her husband's income

adequate to support the family. At the time of the interview however, she felt that she no longer had a choice about working. During the past few years her husband had changed jobs and suffered a major income reduction. At times her wages as a daycare worker were the family's sole means of support. While she expressed a desire to have a baby and leave the labour force for awhile, she felt as if she couldn't afford to do so at the time because her employment was necessary to the family's well being.

## THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S EARNINGS

Increasingly women are finding that they are responsible for earning income to support themselves and their families. While this is most obviously true for the growing number of women heading households, it is also true for co-provider women who have seen their partners' incomes decline or disappear through unemployment, small business failure, declining real wages or job changes involving downward mobility. These trends were accelerated during the recent recession with the result that many women had to assume a greater share of the responsibility of providing financially for their families. In some cases this meant that women entered the labour force or increased their hours of paid work. In other cases, women continued at their previous level of employment but their earnings took on new significance as their partners' income declined. In many

cases, women who were co-providers felt that their choices regarding paid employment were being eliminated. As their partners' employment and income became less secure, several women felt that they no longer could choose to remain at home, or to work part time. Some examples may illustrate more clearly what I mean.

A 30 year old mother of two lived with her husband. They were both employed full time. Ten years ago she started working as a nursing assistant in order to provide necessary income, because her husband was only earning the minimum wage. Over the years her partner's income improved and she decided to participate in a job-sharing scheme where she would work three or four days in a row, instead of seven. She reduced her hours in order to have more time to spend at home with her children and her husband, whose shift work schedule often conflicted with her own. She could chose to work part time because she had access to her partner's income for financial support.

> "I think if more people could do that (job-sharing) even for a little while, it certainly helps shake you back into getting a good outlook again on your job. But of course, if you are working by yourself, if you are a single woman or whatever, by yourself, you have to keep working. There's not too many people that can survive on half

time (wages). (Interview 33)

Her responsibilites within the family, coupled with her husband's ability to provide enough income, meant that she reduced her hours of paid employment. However, when her husband was laid off for almost a year during the recession, she found that her status as a part-time income provider was no longer sufficient to meet her family's needs. She tried, with eventual success, to get back into a full time position. Her job sharing partner, who also found that she couldn't earn enough from part time work, left for another full time job. Even though her husband went back to work, she wondered whether she could ever afford to return to working part time.

> "In 1983 my husband was laid off at the pulp mill and he was off for just about a year. I was working part time...I went back full time because (I was) thinking we don't know really how secure that job is. At the pulp mill they can go in and close that down any day, you know?....It's still not where you know for sure what's going to happen. Or should I ever really want to go to part time again." (Interview 33)

The insecurity of the labour market and the difficulty of finding full time work when she needed it have made this woman keenly aware of the possibility that she could be

called upon to support her family and not have enough income. If you were to look at this woman today and try to judge her 'need' for paid work solely on the basis of her husband's current income, you might overlook the significant changes which have occured in her work history, changes which have left an impact on how she sees herself as a necessary income provider.

In another case, a 26 year old mother of two was forced to reenter the paid labour force when her self-employed husband was unable to support the family. The decline in construction work during the recession as well as seasonal unemployment made it necessary for her to get a job outside the home. Although she had two children still in diapers and she wanted to stay at home, she went to work at a series of temporary jobs because she shared the responsibility for providing income for the family.

> "When I originally had the kids I never did plan on going back to work. Neither of us wanted that. But now it's gotten to the point where I don't really have a choice. I have to. I have to work because one of us has to make a wage....If he doesn't have any jobs coming up, that's when I go out really looking for a job and just about take anything just so we have some money coming in....All my friends are housewives and this

> makes it really hard. I feel really bad sometimes because I can't (be like them). I have to go to work and make sure we've got money. It is hard on you. You just wonder where is it all going to end." (Interview 11)

While most of her friends near home were still housewives whose husbands were the sole income providers, at work she came in contact with many women who shared her same situation. Wives had become the main breadwinners in their families because their husbands were unemployed. The inadequate level of their wages, however, created a contradiction between their newly assumed responsibility for supporting their families and their ability to carry out that responsibility. The level of women's wages reflects the assumption that most women are economic dependents who need not earn enough to support themselves and their families. As many women assumed greater responsibility for financially supporting their families during the recession, the ideology of female economic dependence was challenged by women's daily experiences.

> "Where I am working right now, most of the girls in the office - their husbands are at home. They aren't working. So we're all sort of in the same boat. We're all more or less supporting the family, which is kind of

> scary when you're making $1400/month gross. Houses out here, people are paying between $400 and $600/month mortgage. What do you live on, you know?....It's scary and it's surprising how many women there are that are supporting their husbands and their families. And they all have kids. Very few of them don't. They just have their kid and come back to work." (Interview 11)

A 31 year old hospital worker also felt that she and many other wives had to engage in paid employment in order to provide income for their families. But she sensed that there were contradictory ideas or conflicting beliefs regarding the necessary or voluntary nature of women's labour force activity. On the one hand, people continued to assume that paid work was optional for married women, a matter of personal choice. On the other hand, within the family there was a growing recognition that the wife's income was necessary to the family's support.

> "Most people are under the false impression or won't acknowledge that the change is coming, that a woman has to work and that we don't work for the luxuries anymore. We work to live. And by admitting that it also puts an additional responsibility on a woman... Maybe five years ago somebody would have

> said, 'Well, quit your job then.' But your husband can't tell you that anymore." (Interview 35)

The sense that her paid employment was increasingly a matter of necessity rather than choice was shared by a 49 year old former housewife who had returned to work by choice after her children left home. During the recession, she found that her paid employment took on new significance as her husband's income dropped.

> "Things were getting very tight. My husband decided to go into his own business and we knew that it would be hard going at first until he got established. So I decided I had better go to work....The economy started to tighten up. This is when I decided to go back to work full time. But by this time it was because he, now his salary had obviously dropped, and I had to work....Before I didn't have to work, now I had to work." (Interview 13)

The changes in women's status as providers is not measured simply by changes in their labour force participation or their employment status. Their status as providers has to be understood by examining both their households' need for their income and their labour market activity. Changes in women's family situations,

particularly their households' access to other income, influence the meaning which women attach to their paid employment. High unemployment and declining real income among male partners caused some women to enter the labour force or look more actively for paid work. However many women who were already employed found that their employment and income were increasingly central to their families' well-being. As women experienced a change in their provider status they faced the difficulty of supporting their families on an income which had previously been regarded as supplemental.

## SUMMARY

The women whom I interviewed did not question a woman's right to employment. Their own financial and psychological needs for paid work outside the home far outweighed any ideology which defined woman's place as in the home. For the women in this study, paid employment was important because they needed the money, but their need for money varied with their standard of living and their access to other income. Most of the women I interviewed saw themselves as long term participants in the paid labour force. Women who had hoped to stay at home raising children resented the fact that they were compelled to work in the paid labour force. ("It's hard. I'd rather be at home. All

my friends are housewives.") Others simply accepted their dependence on wage labour as a fact of life and hoped to have jobs they enjoyed without really expecting to get work that was a career of their own choosing. ("I like my job and I'll probably keep doing it. But I never, I never had the luxury of thinking about what I might really like to do, if I might want some kind of career.") Finally there were women who wanted careers - work in a particular field of their choosing which would provide them with satisfaction. ("I want the same thing a man wants - a career first and the option of a family, not a family and the option of a career.") Career-oriented women in my sample were not in high paid professions, but they had specialized training or interests which they wanted to pursue in their paid employment. Regardless of whether they would have preferred to stay at home or whether they preferred to be in the paid workforce, these women had an important stake in keeping their jobs, having decent wages, and favorable working conditions.

The women whom I interviewed had many reasons for taking their paid work seriously. First and foremost, these women were working or looking for work because they needed the income. For many, their paid employment enabled them to be financially independent from state welfare programs or family members. For some women, work in the paid labour force was a desireable alternative to the isolation and

devaluation they experienced at home. For some women work was a means of developing a sense of accomplishment and pride in their achievements but for others it was a struggle against humiliation and exhaustion. Despite their responsibilities for work in the home and despite the low wages and lack of opportunities in the labour market, the women I spoke with showed significant concern over their paid jobs.

Over the years, paid employment has played an increasingly significant role in women's lives. Shortly after World War II, three out of four Canadian women were housewives working without pay in their own homes. Since 1980, a majority of Canadian women have relied at least partially on their own wages to meet their needs and the needs of their families. While married women in their childbearing years could be expected to have the greatest burden of domestic labour and be less likely to participate in paid employment, in fact, three-fifths of women in this category participate in the paid labour force. While women may interrupt their paid employment to bear children and care for them, unpaid domestic labour does not supplant wage labour in women's lives to the extent that it did in previous generations.

Mainstream economists have attempted to explain women's increased participation in the paid labour force by citing choices and individual decisions made by women. Marxist

analysts have rightly criticized this approach for being too narrowly subjective and ignoring the structural dynamics of the economy which created both an increased demand for female labour and an increased supply of women workers (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978; Connelly, 1978). Clearly the structural approach offers a fuller explanation of the social forces which shape individual decisions. However, at times, the structural approach loses sight of the fact that women are conscious actors within the changing economy and that their ideas and beliefs about their place in the economy influence their activity and their struggles.

While the Marxist structural analysis of the changing capitalist economy is an improvement over the purely subjective mainstream approach to the study of women's paid work, the emphasis on structural determinants of behavior is sometimes carried too far. Women have been seen, in some cases, as a reserve army which simply responded to the needs of capital because the ideology of women as housewives enabled capital to manipulate the supply of female labour. The growing participation of women in the labour market has undermined that ideology but our theories of women's work have not paid sufficient attention to that fact.

The notion that women are a more disposable workforce which could be channelled into the reserve army in times of recession rests on the assumption that women have a fundamentally different relationship to the paid labour

market as a result of their position within the family. Women's identity as wives and mothers and their responsibility for domestic labour were seen as conditioning their attachment to paid work. Women were seen as a flexible reserve army which would respond to the changing needs of capital as a result of the fact that women did not take their paid work seriously.

> When there is less demand for labour (as now under neocapitalism) women become a surplus labour force - but one for which their husbands and not society are economically responsible. The 'cult of the home' makes its reappearance during times of labour surplus and is used to channel women out of the market economy. This is relatively easy since the pervading ideology ensures that no one, man or woman, takes women's participation in the labour force very seriously. Women's real work we are taught is in the home; this holds whether or not they are married, single, or the heads of households (Benston, 1969, 200).

Fifteen years ago it may have been accurate for Benston to write that women did not take their paid work seriously and that the ideology of domesticity could be used to channel women out of the labour market. But I think there are serious doubts about whether the same thing could be said today. The tremendous growth in female labour force participation, the contemporary women's movement, the rise in female-headed households and the increased reliance of families on two income earners all serve to undermine the cultural definition of women solely as homemakers. And yet the notion of women as a reserve army of labour is based on

the assumption that women are defined as homemakers with only a 'secondary' attachment to the labour market.

Employers who want to pay women less than providers' wages and government officials who wish to dismiss female unemployment as insignificant will obviously cling to the ideology that women really belong at home and their access to jobs and decent wages are of secondary importance. But this ideology is no longer the taken for granted reality of women in the labour market and it is revealed more clearly as an ideology because it conflicts with women's own understanding of the significance of their paid work. In their everyday work lives, women experience their paid jobs as necessary to meet their needs for income, identity and achievement.

The women whom I interviewed did indeed take their paid work seriously. The fact that many of them were also responsible for housework and childcare did not reduce their concern for their access to paid employment. Women whose central identities were rooted in their family relationships did not necessarily have any less stake in their paid work than men (who may also place a higher value on their family ties than their occupation). A primary attachment to the family for either women or men does not determine that paid employment for these family-oriented people is insignificant. To assume this is to accept without question the false separation between family and labour market which

underlies the mainstream ideology. In fact, concern for their families permeated women's thinking about their paid work. They wanted jobs which would provide enough income for their families without taking away completely the time and energy they had to spend with their families. Concern for their families influenced women's behavior in the labour market and the kinds of changes they wanted to see introduced in their workplaces. Placing a priority on their families did not mean that women failed to take their paid work seriously.

Women who spend several hours each day at a paid job, whose paychecks are necessary to provide for the needs of their families, who have worked or expect to work for much of their adult lives, have become habituated to combining their identities as wives and mothers with the reality of their participation in paid employment. Such women are not about to be easily channeled out of the labour market and back into the home. The fact that women are strongly tied to their families by emotional bonds and the fact that women are responsible for housework and childcare makes paid employment difficult for women who have to work a double day. But women's dependence on wage labour precludes them having the option of withdrawing from the paid labour force.

The central importance of paid employment to many women seems rooted in two main factors: the importance of their wages to the support of themselves and their families, and

the social recognition of worth and accomplishment which only paid employment confers. That paid work, or its absence, is important to men is taken for granted. However, women are seen as having a different relationship to their paid work by virtue of their place within the family. Since women are the parents primarily responsible for the care of children, and since women perform the major portion of unpaid household labour, women's participation in the paid labour market is shaped by fundamentally different set of circumstances than those of male workers. That women's and men's work lives are significantly different is not at issue here. The question is: How does women's work in the family -- as homemaker, mother, cook, and cleaner, condition women's attitudes toward their paid employment?

Mainstream economists tend to assume that since women have a 'primary attachment' to the family, their paid employment is 'secondary'. I think this sets up a false dichotomy, either/or situation, which assumes that women must choose between taking their families or their employment seriously, and that women invariably choose their families. This argument is rooted in the ideological separation of 'the family' and 'the economy', which obscures the economic functions performed within the family and the familial functions performed within the labour market. Women whose central identities are tied to their families are still able to take their paid work seriously. Precisely

because the family and the economy are connected and not separate spheres, it is possible for women to see that what happens to them in the labour market has an impact on their lives at home, and vice versa. Women's concerns as mothers and homemakers are not limited to intrafamilial dynamics but extend into the workplace. As mothers, women are concerned about their ability to provide income for their children, their access to paid jobs and the level of their wages. They are concerned about the effect of working conditions on themselves and their unborn children. They are concerned about the demands on their time and energy at work which reduce their ability to meet their families' needs at home.

Women's position within the family therefore does not automatically dictate that women dismiss their paid employment as unimportant. Rather, women's position within the family often compels women to work to meet their families' material needs while continuing to perform their unpaid work at home. Under the pressure of working a double day, women want to place limits on the demands made by their jobs but they do not dismiss their jobs as unimportant. Women's desire for work that does not leave a person mentally and physically exhausted is not a sign of women's attaching secondary importance to paid work. It is instead a progressive stance which asserts that there is more to life than wage labour and that workers are entitled to hours and conditions of work which enable them to meet the needs

of their children and maintain personal relationships.

The concept of women as a reserve army of labour which can be easily channeled out of the labour market rests on the assumption that women do not take their paid work seriously and would not struggle against their expulsion from the labour market. There is nothing in the interviews I conducted to indicate that that assumption is based in fact. Women do indeed take their paid work seriously and when the economy does not have the jobs which women need, women do not go quietly back into the home.

# CHAPTER V

## JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

The impact of the economic crisis on job opportunities for women is a question of central importance in trying to understand how current developments within the capitalist mode of production are shaping women's positions within the division of labour. Beechey (1978) has argued that women, particularly married women, are more likely than men to be denied jobs because the unemployment of women poses fewer problems to capital than the unemployment of men. Beechey argues that the ideology of female economic dependence and women's responsibility for domestic labour make married women a preferred group to be disposed of during recessions. Beechey argues that unemployed women can be supported by their husbands rather than the state and they can intensify their domestic labour to offset the loss of their earnings. This argument that women are more likely than men to be channelled into the reserve army of the unemployed fails to deal with two other important aspects of women's labour market activity -- their use as a cheap supply of labour which may afford them more opportunities for work and their concentration in female job ghettos which may protect them from recessionary layoffs (Milkman, 1976; Barrett, 1980).

The question of how a recession affects women's employment opportunities relative to men's cannot be resolved at a purely theoretical level. It requires an historical investigation into the particular changes taking place within the labour market and the extent to which gender plays a part in the distribution of employment and unemployment. In this chapter I examine where employment opportunities expanded and declined within the Saskatchewan labour market during the 1981-83 recession, and how that affected the gender distribution of employment and unemployment. In addition, I explored how these changes in labour market opportunities were experienced differently by different groups of women. Rather than treat 'women' as an overarching category with one relation to the capitalist mode of production, we need to begin to differentiate among women who are in various positions within the division of labour.

Table 6 presents a summary of the changes which occurred in the Saskatchewan labour force during the 1981-83 recession. These figures reveal that the overall level of employment increased only slightly between 1981 and 1982. However, when one examines the gender distribution of employment, one finds that the number of women employed in paid work rose from 162,000 in 1981 to 167,000 in 1982. During the same period, the level of male employment dropped from 264,000 to 259,000. The proportion of the female

TABLE 6

SASKATCHEWAN LABOUR FORCE, BY SEX: ANNUAL AVERAGES, 1981-1983

(Estimates in thousands)

| | Labour force | Employ-ment | Unemploy-ment | Partici-pation rate | Unemploy-ment rate | Employment population ratio |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | | | | | | |
| 1981 | 446 | 425 | 21 | 63.5% | 4.7% | 60.6% |
| 1982 | 455 | 426 | 28 | 63.9% | 6.2% | 59.9% |
| 1983 | 470 | 436 | 35 | 65.2% | 7.4% | 60.4% |
| **Women** | | | | | | |
| 1981 | 172 | 162 | 10 | 48.7% | 5.7% | 45.9% |
| 1982 | 179 | 167 | 12 | 50.0% | 6.4% | 46.8% |
| 1983 | 191 | 176 | 15 | 52.5% | 7.7% | 48.4% |
| **Men** | | | | | | |
| 1981 | 275 | 264 | 11 | 78.5% | 4.0% | 75.4% |
| 1982 | 276 | 259 | 17 | 77.9% | 6.0% | 73.2% |
| 1983 | 280 | 260 | 20 | 78.1% | 7.1% | 72.5% |

Source: Statistics Canada, Historical Labour Force Statistics, 71-201, 1984.

population which was employed in paid work rose from 45.9% in 1981 to 48.4% in 1983. The proportion of the male population which was employed dropped from 75.4% to 72.5% during the same period.

Table 7 shows the distribution of the employed labour force by sex and occupation during the 1981-83 recession. This table reveals that the majority of women in the paid work force were employed in clerical, sales, and service occupations and that the number of women employed in each of these categories increased during the recession. Male employment, on the other hand, was distributed more widely across occupational categories, some of which grew in terms of employment, and some of which declined.

Table 8 shows the changes in the overall level of employment by sex and occupation between 1981 and 1983. Female employment in the province increased by 5000 from 1981 to 1982, while the number of men employed dropped by approximately the same number. Between 1982 and 1983, female employment rose by another 9000, while men in the labour force recovered only 1000 jobs, leaving male employment substantially lower than it had been in 1981. In clerical, sales, and service occupations, where most female employment is concentrated, women gained 5000 additional jobs between 1981 and 1982, and 3000 additional jobs between 1982 and 1983. In contrast, the male labour force suffered its greatest losses of jobs in construction, materials

TABLE 7

SASKATCHEWAN EMPLOYED LABOUR FORCE, BY OCCUPATION AND SEX

ANNUAL AVERAGES, 1981-1983

(estimates in thousands)

| Occupation by Sex | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total, Both Sexes | 425 | 426 | 436 |
| Managerial,administrative,professional | 88 | 89 | 89 |
| Clerical | 58 | 60 | 63 |
| Sales | 43 | 46 | 42 |
| Service | 55 | 58 | 61 |
| Primary occupations | 91 | 89 | 92 |
| Processing | 33 | 33 | 34 |
| Construction | 29 | 26 | 27 |
| Transportation | 14 | 15 | 15 |
| Materials handling and other crafts | 14 | 10 | 12 |
| Total, Female | 162 | 167 | 176 |
| Managerial,administrative,professional | 41 | 42 | 45 |
| Clerical | 48 | 51 | 52 |
| Sales | 16 | 17 | 17 |
| Service | 34 | 35 | 37 |
| Primary occupations | 17 | 17 | 17 |
| Processing | 4 | * | 4 |
| Construction | * | * | * |
| Transportation | * | * | * |
| Materials handling and other crafts | * | * | * |

TABLE 7 continued

| Occupation by Sex | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total, Male | 264 | 259 | 260 |
| Managerial,administrative,professional | 47 | 46 | 44 |
| Clerical | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Sales | 27 | 29 | 25 |
| Service | 21 | 23 | 24 |
| Primary occupations | 74 | 72 | 75 |
| Processing | 29 | 31 | 30 |
| Construction | 29 | 26 | 26 |
| Transportation | 13 | 14 | 14 |
| Materials handling and other crafts | 12 | 9 | 11 |

* Estimates less than 4000, qualified data.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Annual Averages, 51-529, 1981-3.

TABLE 8

JOB CREATION BY OCCUPATION AND SEX, 1981-1983

(estimates in thousands)

| Occupation by Sex | 1981-82 | 1982-83 |
|---|---|---|
| Total, Female | +5 | +9 |
| Managerial,administrative,professional | +1 | +3 |
| Clerical | +3 | +1 |
| Sales | +1 | 0 |
| Service | +1 | +2 |
| Primary occupations | 0 | 0 |
| Other | * | * |
| Total, Male | -5 | +1 |
| Managerial,administrative,professional | -1 | -2 |
| Clerical | 0 | 0 |
| Sales | +2 | -4 |
| Service | +2 | +1 |
| Primary occupations | -2 | +3 |
| Processing | +2 | -1 |
| Construction | -3 | 0 |
| Transportation | +1 | 0 |
| Materials handling and other crafts | -3 | +2 |

Source: Based on changes in the Saskatchewan Employed Labour Force as shown in Table 7.

* cannot be calculated

handling and other crafts, where the levels of female employment were minimal. This data clearly shows that the concentration of women in sex segregated occupations influenced the distribution of employment opportunities during the recession. This refutes the argument that women are more likely than men to be disposed of by employers during a recession, since it was the male segregated occupations which were hardest hit by job losses. Women's segregation in occupations which continued to grow during the recession protected women from declining levels of employment.

While the creation of additional jobs for women during the recession appears to offer women an advantage in the labour market, there are several problems with the number and type of job opportunities which were created.

First, the number of additional jobs was insufficient to provide work for the growing female labour force. While 14,000 more women were employed in 1983 than in 1981, 19,000 more women had entered the labour market seeking work. As a result, female unemployment rose from 10,000 in 1981 to 15,000 in 1983. The official female unemployment rate rose from 5.7% in 1981 to 7.7% in 1983. (See Table 6).

Second, job opportunities continued to be concentrated within those occupations which have traditionally been defined as 'women's jobs'. Of the 14,000 jobs added to the female labour market, 4,000 were in clerical occupations,

3,000 were in service occupations, and 1,000 were in sales occupations. In other words, the majority of the new job opportunities for women were found within female job ghettos. (See Tables 7 and 8).

Third, job opportunities for women were increasingly part time work. In 1975, women part time workers were 7.7% of the total employed labour force in Saskatchewan. By 1983, women part time workers made up 12.6% of the total employed workforce. Part time work is expanding rapidly. During the recession between 1981 and 1983, male full time employment dropped from 246,000 to 240,000 while male part time employment rose from 18,000 to 20,000. Female full time employment rose from 114,000 to 121,000 and female part time employment rose from 48,000 to 55,000. Of the 14,000 jobs added to the female labour market between 1981 and 1983, 7,000 were part time jobs. In other words, half of the new job opportunities for women which were created during the recession were for part time jobs. (See Table 9).

This aggregate data on the labour force provides an overview of the changing structure of job opportunities in the labour market. However, it does not explain how women's daily experiences were shaped by changing labour market conditions.

Many women experienced increased difficulty finding paid work during the recession. Some were unable to find

TABLE 9

FULL TIME AND PART TIME EMPLOYMENT, BY SEX

SASKATCHEWAN, 1975-1984

(estimates in thousands)

| Year | Male Full Time | Male Part Time | Female Full Time | Female Part Time | Female Part Time As % of Employed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1975 | 230 | 13 | 94 | 28 | 7.7% |
| 1976 | 231 | 15 | 97 | 34 | 9.0% |
| 1977 | 236 | 16 | 102 | 36 | 9.2% |
| 1978 | 238 | 17 | 104 | 39 | 9.8% |
| 1979 | 243 | 17 | 110 | 41 | 10.0% |
| 1980 | 246 | 18 | 111 | 43 | 10.3% |
| 1981 | 246 | 18 | 114 | 48 | 11.3% |
| 1982 | 240 | 19 | 117 | 50 | 11.8% |
| 1983 | 240 | 20 | 121 | 55 | 12.6% |
| 1984 | 241 | 20 | 120 | 57 | 13.0% |

Source: Statistics Canada, Historical Labour Force Statistics, 1984, 71-201.

any employment and others were able to find only temporary, part-time, or low wage jobs. Even for women who were employed on a permanent full time basis, the lack of job opportunities was sometimes felt as the lack of opportunity to transfer or be promoted. As employers attempted to weather the recession by reducing labour costs, opportunities for hiring new workers or promoting current employees were reduced.

The limitation of job opportunities during the recession seemed to have a direct impact on the labour market experiences of many women. Women who were looking for work either because they were unemployed or they wanted to change jobs were most likely to report that they were personally affected by the lack of job opportunities in the labour market. Other women felt relatively untouched by the changing structure of the labour market. In some cases, the problems experienced by women, such as difficulty finding work, or finding only temporary, low wage jobs, were simply continuations of their pre-recession experiences in the labour market. There were also some employed women whose jobs went on pretty much as they had before and who were not looking for other jobs. Finally, some individual work histories ran counter to the general trends in the labour market, e.g. women who were unable to find work prior to the recession found secure employment during the recession.

In the interviews I discovered that the lack of job

opportunities during the recession had varying effects on different women in the labour force. By exploring the diversity of experience among women in the labour force, we can begin to identify the variety of ways in which an economic recession is experienced in daily life. While some women were held for months within the reserve army of the unemployed, other women were confined to temporary, part-time or low wage jobs in the secondary labour market. Even women employed in more permanent jobs were less able to change jobs or improve their working conditions because of a large pool of surplus labour. In this chapter I present the various ways in which women were affected by the lack of job opportunities during the recession and whether those experiences were consistent with or in contrast to their pre-recession experiences.

## "I HAVE THE FEELING THAT I AM NEVER GOING TO HAVE A REAL JOB." (Interview 26)

A number of the women whom I interviewed were affected by the lack of job opportunities by being unable to find permanent, secure employment. Many women had experience with temporary jobs and were frustrated by their lack of access to "real jobs". The labour market, both through private businesses and government make work projects, offers a variety of temporary, low wage, insecure employment opportunities. According to Barron and Norris (1976), women

have been a major source of labour for the low wage, insecure and dead-end jobs which characterize this secondary labour market. The labour market is seen as having a dual structure consisting of better paid, more stable primary sector jobs and poorly paid unstable secondary sector jobs.

> A dual labour market is one in which: 1. There is a more or less pronounced division into higher paying and lower paying sectors; 2. Mobility across the boundary of these sectors is restricted; 3. Higher paying jobs are tied into promotional or career ladders, while lower paid jobs offer few opportunities for vertical movement; 4. Higher paying jobs are relatively stable, while lower paid jobs are unstable. (Barron and Norris, 1976,49)

In looking at the impact of the economic crisis on women's work, it is important to examine the types of job opportunities which were available, and whether those jobs were located increasingly in the secondary labour market. MacDonald (1982) has argued that the long range trend in the Canadian labour market has been toward the erosion of primary sector jobs and the expansion of secondary sector jobs. While women are increasing their participation in the paid labour market, the job opportunities which await them may be largely confined to the lower paid, temporary, part-time, or dead-end jobs. Duffy and Weeks (1981) argue that the temporary, part time, poorly paid work performed by women is not marginal to the Canadian economy but is instead an increasingly significant feature of the labour market under advanced capitalism. A growing proportion of jobs in the Canadian labour force are part time jobs. Over 25% of

Canadian women workers are employed part time; and the vast majority of part time workers are women.

In my research I discovered that many women found themselves confined to temporary and part time work, or work where the wages were low and job security was non-existant. These women were not confined to secondary sector jobs because they were 'willing' to accept low pay and job insecurity. They simply did not have access to employment opportunities in the primary labour market. I also discovered that some of the more permanent secure jobs for women depend on government funding for health care, education, social services, and other state-supported services. Government fiscal restraint policies tended to restrict the creation of new permanent public sector jobs, while government funds channelled into job-creation programs created low wage, temporary jobs. While government policy makers like to refer to these temporary jobs as stepping stones to permanent employment, many of the women whom I interviewed seemed trapped in the secondary labour market with no hope of finding a 'real job' in the future.

The current economic crisis does not appear to be pushing women back into the home but it may very well be making it more difficult for women to find employment outside the secondary labour market.

Sally Holden finished university in 1981 and began looking for a full time job to support herself. The job

opportunities available at that time were limited to low wage positions in female job ghettos. It was relatively easy for her to find a job, albeit one which only paid the minimum wage and offered no security.

> "(In fall 1981) the only jobs in the paper that were available were waitressing and some secretarial jobs, but I have almost no secretarial skills so I didn't bother looking into them. I was sort of looking for telephone work because I had experience there and at manpower I saw the job for (telephone answering service). So there I went and got a job." (Interview 4)

Cheryl Semchuk had a similar experience of finding work relatively quickly during the recession, although once again it was work for low pay within a female job ghetto. In 1982 she took a job as a part-time waitress because it was the best of the job opportunities available to her. The only other jobs offered her were short term temporary positions. While she had no difficulty in finding a job, she felt that she was lucky because she knew of others who were unable to find any paid work at all.

> "My jobs all come pretty easy to me but my roommate ...she had to look for a long time before she found a job. But me, I don't know, maybe I applied someplace at the right

> time. But I always seemed to get a job right away." (Interview 5)

Other women were not as lucky in finding paid employment. Being available as a cheap supply of labour was no guarantee of easy access to a job. The individual work histories of a number of women seemed to follow roughly the same direction of change as the economy as a whole. As the underlying economic conditions worsened and unemployment rose, a number of women felt their own personal economic circumstances deteriorate. The correspondence between the worsening economy and individual women's experiences of economic hard times was clearest among the women who were unable to find paid employment.

Heather McKenzie had worked two jobs in a laundromat and a cafeteria prior to the recession. When she moved to a new city she expected to find work without too much trouble. However, by the time I interviewed her in 1984 she had been unemployed for over a year and the only work she was able to find was volunteer work.

> "You know how you usually write about a job or you phone about a job and I haven't even gotten as far as anyone phoning or writing me back to even request an interview. I haven't even gotten that far...Basically, all I could get was volunteer." (Interview 37)

Christine Bonner has worked at a variety of temporary

jobs over the years. She has worked as a teacher's aide, a waitress, a cleaner, a nursing home attendant, and a community project worker. At the time of the interview she was once again employed on a community project temporarily funded by the government as part of a job creation scheme. The lack of alternate job opportunities of a more permanent nature forced her to accept employment on unfavorable terms because it was the only employment available.

> "Now I'm working on a make work project. And there isn't any sense of fulfillment when you think that you're working in a job that is just make work. It isn't a real job. And I have the feeling that I am never going to have a real job." (Interview 26)

Prior to the recession, Cathy Connelly held a variety of temporary jobs as a waitress, store clerk, and temporary research worker. In 1980 she was hired for her first really permanent job with a government agency, but after a year and a half she left that job because of the stress and workload. For the past ten years, Cathy Connelly has looked for a job offering long term employment, but with only one exception the only job opportunities available to her were temporary.

> "I couldn't ever find a permanent job. So I would think ,'Well now, I'll just take this research project for now and maybe after 4-5 months I can come up with a permanent job.'

> By the end of that four months that job would be finished...and there still wouldn't be any permanent jobs available...I've been looking for work for ten years almost. Really, you know, I've always been looking for work because when you only have a four month job, then you're still looking for work." (Interview 1)

When Cathy Connelly first left her job in 1981, she had assumed that she would be able to find other employment without too much difficulty. She only became aware of the lack of job opportunities as she began to actively look for work.

> "When you are working and you are not going through the want ads and checking out the job market, you don't know. You hear it on the news but it doesn't mean anything until you actually start to look for work." (Interview 1)

As the recession deepened and female unemployment rose, she found it virtually impossible to find work. She was unemployed for over a year before finding another temporary job through a government make-work project. While her job opportunities prior to the recession had been limited to temporary jobs, even those temporary jobs were more difficult to come by. She compared the job market during

the recession with her earlier job search experiences in 1980.

> "There was nothing available....There used to be 15 jobs in Saturday's paper that I could apply for and then all of a sudden you'd go five months and there would be nothing....They were getting 4-5-600 applications for every job. There's no jobs out there. There's no jobs out there. I know that." (Interview 1)

Cathy Connelly's experiences in the labour market have not made her optimistic about her own job future. She questions whether she will ever have access to a real job, i.e. a permanent job with benefits, sick leave, pension program, etc. She is afraid that government funding for job creation is only creating temporary make work jobs which will send her through a revolving door between employment and unemployment. She is worried that the number of permanent job openings in the public sector will remain small as governments operate with fiscal constraints.

> "I may never have a full time job again. There's people who've been out of work for years. I may never be in a situation where I can have a pension plan or a vacation benefit. I could go on with make work jobs and unemployment insurance to welfare to

> another make work job and be like that for twenty years or longer if somebody doesn't do something about it. It doesn't look good at all. (Interview 1)

Diane Houston had spent two years attending technical school to prepare for a career in providing recreation services, but after finishing her training she was unable to find any permanent work in her field. She supported herself with waitressing and temporary recreation jobs which never lasted more than a year, and sometimes only a few months. The temporary recreation jobs were funded through government job creation programs which stipulated that the jobs were temporary, and even when funding was renewed for another year, people were let go and replaced with new job candidates fresh from the unemployment lines. This revolving door approach to job creation makes it extremely difficult for new entrants to the labour market to gain access to permanent full time work.

> "I finally did get a full time job...doing recreation programming...(But) it was only for a year because it was on a government grant...There were three of us that were hired and all three of us had to be let go. They got the grant again but they couldn't rehire us because the grant stipulates that you can only keep a person for one year...To

> me that sort of defeats the purpose of why they have these grants set up. What they are doing in a sense is just keeping the unemployment at the same level as what it always is because you are letting go one person and hiring another." (Interview 19)

After working at three different temporary recreation jobs, Diane Houston was still unable to find any permanent jobs in her occupation and there were no other temporary recreation jobs available to her. She eventually landed a job as a retail clerk during the Christmas season and managed to hang onto to that job with reduced hours after the Christmas rush subsided. To pay the bills she took a second part time job as a waitress. The job opportunities available to Diane Houston are much more limited than she had ever anticipated. Government funding for recreation services has been cutback and jobs are scarce. The scarcity of permanent full time jobs in her occupation has led her to join the swelling ranks of those who are competing for less desirable jobs -- jobs with uncertain hours, no job security, and low pay.

> "A lot of ...recreation jobs do come through the government...When they are cutting back on funding that's one of the first areas they do cut back because they don't see it as an essential service...It's really frustrating

> and I know it's because of the economy. People can't hire or they have to cut you back and that is really hard...I think everybody wants to find a good permanent position somewhere...so that they can build themselves a base and then grow from it. I am going to be 24 years old and I'm still working at little part time jobs here and there...I've been out of school for three years and I'm no further ahead than I was before I even went, like when I got out of high school...Two years from now I'll probably still be where I am right now and I don't want to be. I want to have gotten somewhere." (Interview 19)

The longer Diane Houston works at temporary and part time jobs, especially jobs which are unrelated to her training, the worse she feels her chances are of finding permanent work in her field. When she first entered the labour market, her lack of job experience worked against her as she competed for scarce jobs, but the nature of her employment record now works against her because she has been relegated to a secondary labour market by the lack of alternate job opportunities.

> "It's harder and harder to get that full time job the more that you are not working at it

> and you are doing these other things. I don't want, I really hate to write on my resume when I am applying for a recreation job that I am a waitress." (Interview 19)

Even after Diane Houston lowered her expectations and began applying for less desirable jobs, she found that the competition for jobs was high. It was hard for her to find the two part time jobs she now has, even though the pay is low, the hours are irregular, and there is no job security. Diane Houston attributes the high competition for these jobs to the fact that other people, like herself, have no real alternatives, but must accept whatever employment they can find.

> "It takes a lot to get a job. Even part time jobs are hard to come by. There are a lot of people out there who would give their eye teeth to work and they just are having a really hard time...There are so many people out there trying to get those same jobs. So many people are finally getting frustrated and saying, 'O.K. I'll take anything.' Because they need to survive. You are all competing for the same jobs...and if you are getting an interview these days for a job, I think you are doing quite well just getting that far." (Interview 19)

Women who were employed and were not actively looking for work were sometimes still concerned about the lack of job opportunities in their workplace. Their contact with other workers who were unable to find secure employment made them aware of the limited job opportunities in their workplace.

Mary Engel, a hospital worker with several years seniority, reported that it had been much easier for her to find employment when she had finished her training than it was for women currently entering the labour market as certified nursing assistants. Recently the available job openings in her occupation have been for casual or temporary employment.

> "(Several years ago) I applied (to work in the hospital) one week and got in the next week. You know, it was quite easy...(Today) I know girls that are coming out of training that have no job and no outlook for a job. There are girls who have been out of training for a year already and are still working casual in the hospital because they can't find permanent positions....I think about it more than I used to - just wondering where are all the jobs going and why are they going?" (Interview 33)

Lynnette Hanson worked at a variety of temporary

clerical jobs during the past few years. In some cases she did not know from one week to the next whether she would have a job. One of her employers, not wanting to hire her for any longer than necessary, would only let her know on Friday whether she was wanted at work the following week. If other jobs had been available, Lynnette Hanson would have quit that job sooner than she did because of the complete lack of any job security. As it was she stuck with that job for five months because she had no other alternatives.

> "Every Friday they would say, 'Could you come back Monday morning?'...It was really hard on you. You had to know if you were going to need a babysitter...and you have to make some arrangements but they would never say anything more than a week at a time." (Interview 11)

Lynnette Hanson had to accept temporary low-paid clerical jobs because there were no other jobs available to her. The lack of alternative job opportunities confined her to employment in jobs which were insecure, low paid, and unstable. Even if she had found a more permanent clerical job, however, her job opportunities would have been limited by the barriers to advancement which characterize the division of labour in office work. Even the more permanent, better paid jobs held by women often have little promotion potential.

## "I FEEL LIKE I'M NEVER GOING TO BE ABLE TO DO ANYTHING MORE THAN I'M DOING NOW." (Interview 8)

Even in the best of times, job opportunities for women are limited by the way in which work is organized into jobs with very little advancement potential. Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) found that many women in their study had little opportunity for promotion or advancement due to the lack of vertical job ladders and on-the-job training. The organization of women's work into dead-end jobs was also evident in my research. I also found that women reported that the advancement opportunities which did exist were often monopolized by men or people from outside the workplace who had university degrees. I also discovered that promotions or job reclassifications become even scarcer during the recession as people became more worried about hanging onto their jobs and employers tried to avoid any increase in labour costs. As working women become more defensive about just holding onto the jobs they have, they are less able to exert pressure on employers to expand job opportunities for women or to demand that the job opportunities which are expanding offer decent wages and conditions of work. The lack of job opportunities in the labour market reinforces the barriers to the improvement of women's economic positions within the labour market. Individually women can improve their position within the

labour market by moving upward in the occupational hierarchy but the types of jobs which are increasingly available in the labour market are those in the lower strata of the occupational hierarchy. The segments of the economy which are growing in terms of job creation are not those which offer women the opportunity to improve their economic status relative to men (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983). While women are becoming a larger segment of the employed workforce, they remain confined to the lower level occupations within that workforce.

The lack of opportunities for advancement in the work-place was echoed time and again by the women whom I interviewed. Marie LaSalle described how she had arrived at a dead end in her job at a bakery.

> "I've gone as far as I can with this company. I'm getting nowhere...I wasn't going to be getting any more money. I was as high up as I could go....You can't go to owner." (Interview 27)

Jane McDonald, a part time waitress was well aware of the dead-end nature of her job. Their were no prospects for advancement and only minimal prospects for increases in pay.

> "Employers only pay waitresses so much and that's it. Your wage only would go so high and then you'd be stuck there." (Interview 28)

Lynnette Hanson, a clerk stenographer with experience

in several different workplaces described the lack of advancement opportunities in clerical work.

> "All the women's jobs, there is nowhere to go. You are just in a job and that's it...There is no chance for advancement at all because there's no jobs with higher pay (that you could move into)...Everybody is just in their slot and just do only the same thing...If you've got one of the better clerical jobs, you just sort of stay there. There is nowhere to go." (Interview 11)

Marjorie Fuller worked as a legal secretary and had gone about as far as she could in that occupation in terms of salary and responsibility. She also found that the introduction of computers in her office had reduced the skills and concentration required in her job and she was feeling bored and displeased with her current work situation. She felt that the lack of other job opportunities restricted her to staying in the job that she had.

> "I think that there are people who maybe don't like their job as well as they could and they would probably consider changing if there were more jobs to look for. I would probably look a little bit but you know that there aren't (other jobs available) so you

> just don't look....I'm not quite as enthusiastic about the possibility of really enjoying life, or getting into something that will give me enough freedom to do what I want to do. In my job there is this certain level to the job - a certain salary that I can only get to." (Interview 7)

Joan Tabor has worked as a library assistant for the past twelve years. She has reached a job classification where she can advance no further in terms of salary although she might be able to transfer laterally within the library system. When computer technology was introduced into her department, a new position was created for someone to coordinate the computer system, but she was not allowed to apply for that position despite her experience working with the new technology.

> "I was told I couldn't apply for it....I was really hurt because I did have automation experience....For six months I had been ushering in automation in our department along with other people so I knew what I was doing. I ended up having to train this new person (who was hired from outside the library)....I realized I'd been sold a bill of goods. I felt like a real idiot because when _____told me I couldn't apply for the

> job, that was the end of it. I didn't explore the reasons why. I didn't assert myself." (Interview 8)

When technological change created a new job opportunity within Joan Tabor's workplace, her employer went outside the system to hire someone for the job rather than promoting someone within the library workforce. This was not the first time Joan Tabor had seen women working in the library passed over for job openings. While in this instance a woman from outside the system with different training and job experience was hired over promoting and training someone within the system, in other instances, men within the library were given promotional opportunities more readily than women.

> "Mostly it's still female - the library workers. But it isn't a fallacy that men are promoted quicker than women. It's true because it seems that any men who are in the system are programmed or coached or pulled up through the ranks as far as they can go...I can say that fairly - that it happens all the time." (Interview 8)

Joan Tabor's case illustrates the various factors which shape job opportunities for women within their workplaces. After progressing up the various ranks in the job ladder, women fairly early in life reach a level where they can

advance no further, where they have simply reached a dead end. Jobs created through technological change may not provide opportunities for women already employed in a workplace if their employer chooses to hire from outside. Even within a largely female occupation like library work, job promotions may go disproportionately to men. And in addition to all of these factors, comes the recession - further restricting the opportunities for mobility within the workplace or the labour market.

> "I would feel better if I could move to another department but the whole thing is not many people are moving around now. People are definitely hanging on to their jobs. I think it's because of the recession. I know it is because of the recession. There is just nothing else out there, certainly not in the library field anyway. So people are hunkering down and sticking with it for now.... I feel like I just have to stay where I am in terms of security. There is no cushion out there at all....I feel that in the future I'm never going to be able to do anything more than I'm doing now....I'm at the point now where I can't go any further in terms of income or I can't even make a lateral transfer so far." (Interview 8)

Linda Clarkson, a city government clerk, has had experiences similar to those of Joan Tabor. She too applied for a job opening with her current employer but was passed over when a man from outside the workplace was hired to fill the job. Linda Clarkson, with her union's support, has challenged that hiring decision because she feels that she was entitled to the job since she had seniority and was qualified. The case is now pending on appeal. For Linda Clarkson this instance of her employer refusing to promote her to a higher position is not an isolated situation but part of a pattern of limited job opportunities within the workplace. Factors which limit job opportunities for women within her workplace include a division of labour which cuts off opportunities for promotion beyond a certain level, technological change which reduces the overall creation of new job openings, preferential treatment for men in internal promotion decisions, and the overall constriction of job opportunities stemming from fiscal restraint policies.

> "Most women who work for the city feel that there is very little opportunity for advancement. And it's just starting to break on them that their jobs really are threatened by tech change, that there's not going to be as many positions around in the future that they will fit into. And the few promotional opportunities that do exist are going to be

dominated by men." (Interview 9)

Linda Clarkson described how her employer's response to the recession had limited advancement opportunities for women. One avenue of upward mobility within the workplace is to have one's job reclassified to a higher pay scale which reflects the level of work performed. A person's job does not change but the recognition of one's responsibilities and the level of remuneration for the job change. According to Linda Clarkson, it has become virtually impossible to get jobs reclassified to a level which accurately reflects the work that is done. As employers try to reduce labour costs by redistributing work to lower paid workers, the struggle for job reclassification becomes one way in which individuals can try to win increased pay for the increased duties they are asked to assume. But the employer, whose aim is to reduce labour costs, resists any effort by workers to have their jobs reclassified.

> "There have been several people applying for reclassification of their pay, because the nature of their jobs was such that it really demanded higher wages in relation to what other people are getting paid....Reclassification is a process of negotiation between management and union over arriving at what a fair wage would be for a

given job. And that process has become a farce. Reclassification requests...are not going to be granted no matter how justified the action is, no matter how well documented. ....There were some successful reclassifications in the past so I'd have to say it was a much fairer way, the way it was handled before. I think that generally the city's economic position is such that there's to be absolutely no expansion of spending where it can possibly be avoided and this is one very expendable area. Why give a person a raise if you don't have to?" (Interview 9)

According to Linda Clarkson, her employer's unwillingness to reclassify jobs has had a particularly adverse effect on women, since women are concentrated within the lower job classifications where they may perform additional duties for which they are not fairly compensated.

K: Has the failure of the employer to grant any job reclassifications had the same impact on both men and women?

"The majority I would say would be women...The vast majority of our area of our union is women. I would say also it's because women have traditionally been given, have been expected to perform beyond the

> strict job descriptions. I think that it's sort of an unspoken thing where women are often given a supervisor's work to perform in a general way, but they're never given any credit or due remuneration for it. And so I would say it's basically women - the majority of the reclassifications." (Interview 9)

Many of the factors limiting job opportunities for women predated the recession, but employers' and workers' responses to the recession placed further limits on job opportunities. Employers' decisions to leave job openings vacant, to redistribute work to lower job classifications, to freeze opportunities for promotion all had the result of reducing the chances for upward mobility within the workplace. In addition, workers' fears of unemployment may have made them less likely to change jobs, thus reducing the number of opportunities for even lateral job mobility. For the large number of women in dead-end jobs, this further reduction in opportunities to change jobs means that they are stuck where they are until something changes.

## "I WAS TOLD THAT THEY WANTED A MAN. IT'S NOT VERY OFTEN THAT IT IS THAT BLATANT." (Interview 10)

Women who were working or looking for work in non-traditional occupations often faced discrimination which limited their opportunities of being hired or promoted. This discrimination was not a new phenomenon during the recession, but it was exacerbated by the recession since employers were freer to select workers from a large number of competitors.

Lorraine Wakowsky was employed as a corrections officer, a field of work dominated by men. As one of the first women to enter this field of work, she had faced a great deal of harassment and opposition but she perservered in her effort to retain her job. Although she performed her job well, and scored high on written exams, she was consistently denied promotions. She attributed the lack of advancement opportunity solely to the fact that she was female in a male-segregated occupation.

> "There's no promotions for women. I have tried every year since I've joined the service and I've passed all the exams but they place me at the bottom of the list because I'm female. And I was told that right straight out, 'You will never get a promotion.'" (Interview 23)

Numerous women reported that they had faced sex discrimination in hiring and promotion opportunities when they were seeking employment in non-traditional occupations. Barriers to women seeking employment in non-traditional occupations may have worsened during the recession as employers had a large pool of available unemployed male workers to choose from. If employers were already predisposed to give preference to men seeking employment, the existence of a large reserve army of unemployed male workers provided an ample supply of preferred workers to choose from. The experiences reported in the following cases raise the question of how job opportunities for women in non-traditional occupations are affected by rising male unemployment.

Vera Callas lost her job during the recession and she applied for many jobs which have traditionally been filled by men. In one case she was told directly that they wanted to hire a man and she filed a complaint with the human rights commission. In other cases, she felt preference was given to male applicants even though the employer did not openly state this. She also felt that the high level of competition for jobs gave employers the opportunity to select male applicants if they wanted to.

> "I applied as a delivery sales person and I was told that they wanted a man. It's not very often that it is that blatant...I asked

> my former boss to give me a recommendation and he did...and they told him that they wanted a man....If you go back and look at all the positions that I applied for and who got the job, in the vast majority of cases you'll find it was a man that got the job." (Interview 10)

Vera Callas felt that job opportunities were limited for her because of her gender. Most of the jobs that she applied for were male-dominated or gender mixed occupations and most of those jobs were filled with male workers. Vera Callas attributed the hiring decisions which seemed to give preference to men to employers' traditional attitudes. But she also noted that the employers were free to make selections based on those attitudes as long as there was a large supply of male workers seeking employment.

> "Even aside from their traditional attitudes of men and women's jobs, given the fact that there is a recession on, it makes it a lot more difficult. There are a lot of men applying for those jobs and when you have somebody in personnel or in the whole company who wants to hire men for that kind of work and doesn't want to hire women, he's got a ready made excuse. There's a lot of qualified men there (to choose from) and I

> trace that to the state of the economy. The other part is just traditional attitudes." (Interview 10)

Most women in the study confined their job searches to jobs which have been traditionally defined as 'women's work', but those who applied for work outside female job ghettos often felt that certain jobs were closed to them because of their gender. When a relative suggested that her unemployed husband apply for a certain well-paid job, Marta Armstrong asked why she herself couldn't apply for it, since she too was unemployed and felt she had the necessary qualifications. She did not apply, however, because she was convinced that they would prefer to hire a man.

> "(My brother in law) said, 'They have just been hiring men because they have families to look after.' I said, 'Wait a minute. I have a family to look after.' I think there is that mentality. That's not the first time I've heard that. I've heard it on a number of occasions, where they are even giving preference to married men because they have families to support." (Interview 25)

Women who suspect that their job opportunities are limited because of employers' preference for male workers often have a difficult time substantiating that they have been discriminated against. Unless a careless employer

openly admits that a hiring decision was made on the basis of gender, in violation of human rights legislation, women are left with a vague general impression that jobs were closed to them because they were women.

Diane Houston, the recreation technician, was able to get temporary jobs providing recreation services to children and the elderly, but she felt that many recreation jobs were closed to her because they involved coordinating ice hockey, which has traditionally been a male segregated sport. Suzanne Burritt, a woman with experience in several non-traditional jobs, also felt that employers had denied her jobs because of their preference for male workers in certain types of work. She described a few of her experiences in applying for work. Once when she called to apply for a job as a cement truck driver, she was told to come right over and fill out an application.

> "I buzzed over there right away. I get there and say,'Have you got an application?' And he says, 'Oh I just wanted to see if you'd come over. There is no work...I just wanted to see what this woman looked like.' (Interview 31)

Other times Suzanne Burritt applied for jobs and was met with stereotyped preconceptions about women's inability to perform certain types of work. Even when a job does not require strength, the presumption of feminine weakness may

be used to disqualify women. She described several instances in which she was told that she probably couldn't perform a job because it was too difficult when the actual skill and stength required to perform the tasks were well within her abilities.

> "They made a big deal about me applying. They said, 'Are you sure you can do this work?...Can you lift up this motor?' And it was only this big (indicating it's small size with her hands)." (Interview 31)

During the 1970's, Suzanne Burritt was able to accumulate about four years of experience in non-traditional jobs such as truck driving and construction. By early in 1980, she felt that the opportunities for women in the trades had become more scarce. Although the provincial economy as a whole did not start to decline until 1981, Suzanne Burritt felt that her opportunities to find work in non-traditional jobs were already low.

> "A lot of people I knew weren't working. It was really hard to get work, especially in the trades here...It took me about two months to find a job and I guess the recession was starting about that time, but for me I think the recession actually started earlier." (Interview 31)

Sheila Parks, who was hired as a mine labourer in 1981,

described how her employer preferred to hire men to work in the mine.

> "It's been a man's trade. When I applied out there I was told that they don't hire women. It's not really the guys (her co-workers). It's higher up than that. They can't seem to adjust (to women working in the mine)." (Interview 29)

Even in the best of times, job opportunities for women in non-traditional jobs have been scarce. The persistent concentration of women workers into female segregated occupations has been well documented (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978). While earlier economic expansion may have provided some opportunity for women to enter non-traditional fields of work, the shrinkage of jobs in those occupations during the recession has increased the competition for those jobs. What that has meant in terms of the level of female employment in non-traditional jobs is hard to determine because the numbers collected by the monthly labour force survey are too small to be reliable and the occupational categories are not broken down according to measures of sex segregation.

In instances where employers prefer to hire or promote men, it appears that job opportunities for women will only open up when the supply of male workers is short of the demand. Legal sanctions against sex discrimination in

employment are enforced on an individual case basis and lack the real capacity to challenge the persistence of preferential hiring or promotion of male workers in certain occupations. Given the lack of effective controls over sex discrimination in the labour market, it would appear that women seeking to enter non-traditional occupations or advance up the job ladder would face additional barriers to employment during a recession as the competition from male workers increases.

"IF I COULD FIND ANOTHER JOB WITH MORE HOURS AND BETTER PAY, I'M SURE I WOULD TAKE IT, BUT THERE JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANYTHING LIKE THAT." (Interview 28)

Many of women whom I interviewed felt that they had very little real choice in selecting a job which suited or interested them. Women who were employed frequently expressed the opinion that they had no real alternatives and that they would stick with their current jobs because they knew it would be difficult to find any other employment. For women who were only mildly dissatisfied with their jobs, this lack of alternatives posed no real overt hardship. But for many women, the lack of alternative job opportunities forced them to remain in jobs which left them frustrated, underpaid, overworked, and unhappy.

Studies of the Canadian female labour force have shown that the range of job opportunities for women is much

narrower than the range of job opportunities for men and that the overwhelming majority of women in the labour force are employed in clerical, service, and retail sales jobs where the wages are low and the opportunities for advancement are limited (Armstrong and Armstrong,1978; Wilson,1982). In their interview study of women workers across Canada, Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) found that most women took the jobs that they had because those were the jobs which were available. Women did not choose their jobs, but took what they could get because they needed paid employment. The results of my study are similar to those of Armstrong and Armstrong (1983).

Most of the women whom I interviewed talked about having difficulty finding a paid job at various times in their work histories. The scarcity of job opportunities and the difficulty of finding work were problems which women reported throughout the ten year period covered in the interviews. Time and again, when describing their reasons for taking various jobs over the years, women stated that there weren't many jobs to choose from. Women often took the jobs they could get because they were worried about getting any job at all. While this lack of alternatives worsened during the recession as competition for jobs increased, it was certainly not a new experience for women in the labour market.

Carol Ramsey, a daycare worker who had been previously

employed as a technician and a library clerk, echoed the feelings of most women in the study when she described her reasons for taking her previous job.

> "(I took the technician's job in 1974 because) they offered it to me and there weren't very many jobs available at the time...(I took a job as a clerk in 1979 because) there were no jobs and they were the first people to call me and offer me a job." (Interview 3)

The lack of job opportunities in the labour market shapes the choices which employed people perceive for themselves. A number of women described how the lack of alternatives forced them to accept or remain in jobs where they were basically unhappy. Kate Martin, a hospital worker for several years, described how she and her co-workers did not really have any alternatives to their current jobs. The lack of other job opportunities meant that she and her co-workers had to stay in jobs despite the frustrations of being overworked and unable to provide the kind of service they had been trained for.

> "People can't afford to quit. That's the sad part. If they could afford to quit and knew that they could get another job, then you'd see the turnover. I'm sure you would. But people cannot afford to quit because there

> are no other jobs out there to be had. They are hanging on and suffering through what they are doing daily. I don't think I can think of one person that wouldn't tell you that, because they cannot afford to quit." (Interview 35)

With the unemployment rate high, people had a tendency to report that they were glad to have a job. Any job, even a job with poor hours, wages or working conditions, was preferable to the grim prospects of being unemployed. Most women did not have the freedom to look for the kind of work they wanted. Their 'choice' of jobs was largely determined for them by the limited job opportunities available in the labour market. Kate Martin described how the women she worked with were forced to accept job conditions which were unsatisfactory because they had no real choices.

> "You be thankful you've got a job. You hang onto it as long as you can. You put up with things that you have to put up with because there is no other way to go. I have a very good work record. I use very little sick time. But I don't see myself, if I was to quit my job tomorrow, in getting another job, because they are just not there. And that is sad...I see the whole economic situation as being the direct cause, because people have

> to work. They have to do whatever they can possibly do. They can't afford to go out and look for a job that they would like or maybe be good at. They go out and look for A JOB and take A JOB." (Interview 35)

Miriam Roland, a 62 year old clerical worker, also expressed concern about the lack of job opportunities in the labour market. While she was employed and not worried about losing her current job immediately, she was aware that there would be very few jobs available to her if she tried to find other work. While part of her concern about the lack of job opportunities stems from the unfavorable labour market conditions, her own lack of job opportunities is also influenced by her age and employers' discrimination against older workers.

> "I have felt a growing fear that it would be very hard to get another job....I grew up in a time when there was a lot of poverty and jobs weren't easy to get and there was no money and I know the feeling and the recession brings back that feeling...I feel that I am lucky to have a job right now and I would be afraid to look for another job, especially at my age. I think it would be very difficult to go and find another job....My job is rewarding in a way but I

> guess I've stuck at it because I didn't think there was anything else for me." (Interview 32)

Jane McDonald was working as a part-time waitress when I interviewed her. She has had a variety of low-wage jobs in retail stores, fast food outlets, and restaurants. She has also been unemployed at various times and had difficulty finding work. She has taken jobs with late hours and low pay because they were the only jobs available to her. Her waitressing job is a dead-end position and the part-time hours do not really provide her with enough income, but she feels that she has to stay in that job because she has no other choices.

> "When you haven't gone to school or university it's so hard. You've got to take a waitressing job. And the wages aren't that good, but you have to take it. You can't be fussy....Seeing there are so many people that are unemployed that probably have schooling and experience, maybe at the kind of job that I would like to have, the only way for me to get a better job would be to go back to school or if the unemployment rate dropped and everybody went back to work....Right now I've just got to keep the job and that's it - no matter what it's like...If I could find

> another job with more hours and better pay, I'm sure I would take it, but there just doesn't seem to be anything like that. So I've got to stick to this job for now." (Interview 28)

Debbie Freeman was unemployed for a time during the recession but within two weeks of beginning to look for a job, she was hired for a permanent full time position as a government file clerk. Debbie Freeman counted herself as lucky to have found a job when so many people were unemployed, but at the same time she was dissatisfied with both the nature of the work and the level of pay.

> "Within two weeks I had gone on two interviews with the government and at the time they weren't hiring anybody...They offered me the job and I took it. The wages were the pits...I know I was really lucky. There are so many people now ...who have been looking for a long time...and keep coming up with nothing. I thank my lucky stars." (Interview 22)

While Debbie Freeman was glad to have found permanent employment relatively quickly, she still felt stuck in her job because she had no real alternatives. Particularly after she learned the job, she was frustrated by its routine and tedious nature. She kept her eyes open for other job

openings within the government and she put in applications at other workplaces, but no real choices became available.

> "I was a file clerk. I put mail on file. I put loose correspondence on file and put the files on the shelf. I opened the mail. It was the same routine every day - very boring. Once you've been there a couple of months, there is nothing to learn. It's a nowhere job...I was bored and I was looking for other work but nothing ever came up...I was stuck." (Interview 22)

The shortage of job opportunities and the high level of competition from unemployed workers compelled many women to remain in jobs which had unsatisfactory hours or terms of employment. After working in various temporary and part time positions, a government clerk named Ann Bennett finally worked herself into a position that was classified as permanent full time work. That job however, required her to work a split shift. Because of the drain on her time and energy, she was hoping to transfer to another job within the city, but the number of openings were severely limited.

> "If I have to stay where I am I will continue to look (for another job)....I leave here at 8:30 in the morning...and I'm home at 10 o'clock at night. And it's just straight in the front door to bed. That's no life. But

> I won't just up and quit...Before I quit, it would have to be something drastic because jobs are hard to find." (Interview 34)

In recent years the competition for jobs had increased while the number of job openings had decreased. Ann Bennett was worried that the qualifications required for positions had risen dramatically, and placed her own job future in jeopardy.

> "The only job postings we get are city jobs and I do look at those real closely. Watching the qualifications is scary. I feel I am going to have to go to school all over again....I wouldn't say I am desperate but I'd like to leave where I am now...I think everybody wants a 9-5 job with weekends off but there's jobs out there that just don't work that way. You take the better of the worst...They are not hiring. If somebody has been in a job for 10 years, they phase it out...and you'll never see that job again. If they can possibly do without that person it just won't be filled. They'll give you an extra half hour's work and somebody else an extra half hour's work - trying to shuffle. And they can't call it reclassification. They just say 'We're shuffling.' There's a

> lot of terms in there you have to watch out for. But the job postings have gone down tremendously. The qualifications have gone up. There is a drastic drastic change in opportunities....It used to be that every mail run there would be four or five postings and now you are lucky if there are two a week." (Interview 34)

The decline in job opportunities within a workplace stemmed from two tendencies operating within the recession - employers' tendency to reduce labour costs by limiting or reducing the size of the workforce and workers' tendency to hang onto their jobs because of the high level of unemployment. Ilse Fromm, a library worker, described how the opportunity to change jobs within the university where she worked had declined in recent years. The shrinking job opportunities within the workplace greatly increased the competition for those job openings which did become available. The reduction in mobility within the workplace has meant that women are more likely to be stuck in dead end jobs with little hope of advancement or lateral transfer.

> "The whole mobility within the library has really really decreased. Before people were able to come and go through different departments. Nowadays they stay in one job, so I don't have the opportunity to switch

> jobs which I might like to do...I can tell that by just looking at the job offerings, which I have been doing quite religiously. And there is just nothing. There is a lot more competition going around for each job. They now have 30 some applications whereas before, like for my job, there were two." (Interview 15)

The lack of opportunity to change jobs and the increased competition for the few openings that became available were reflected in the fact that women watched carefully for any chance to change jobs when their co-workers moved, retired, or became pregnant. "Maternity leave replacements...are being planned as much as the babies are being planned. When somebody gets pregnant, almost everybody counts on who is going to be the replacement." (Interview 15)

## "WHEN I HEARD ABOUT A RECESSION, IT DIDN'T REALLY SEEM TO TOUCH ME. THERE WAS ALWAYS TALK OF UNEMPLOYMENT SO I NEVER REALLY PAID ANY ATTENTION." (Interview 16)

While many women seemed to be directly affected by the limited job opportunities during the recent recession, in some cases the recession itself seemed to have very little impact. In the case of Alice Campbell, a 26 year old native woman with a high school education, unemployment had been a

chronic problem rather than a problem stemming from cyclical changes in the economy. Ever since she finished high school, she has experienced difficulty in finding paid employment and in fact, she was hired for her first real long term job during the recession. Rising unemployment during the recession did not seem to change the labour market situation of those who already faced a chronic unemployment problem.

> "Ever since I was 18 and started looking for work, I had heard about unemployment among youth and when I heard about a recession, it didn't really seem to touch me. There was always talk of unemployment so I never really paid any attention." (Interview 16)

Ellen Frank and her teenage son lived on $730/month in social assistance payments. Since leaving her abusive husband 12 years ago she has lived most of the time in poverty. Although she has worked at a variety of jobs, e.g. file clerk, cleaning lady, waitress, secretary, she has never been able to secure a permanent job at even subsistence wages. For several years she has struggled to make ends meet from a combination of wages from temporary jobs, unemployment insurance, and social assistance payments. As part of the chronically unemployed part of the population, Ellen Frank's situation was not substantially altered by the recent recession. She had already been

relegated to that portion of the reserve army which is permanently denied access to any regular participation in the paid labour market. While cyclical fluctuations in the economy change the level of job opportunities for those women who are already employed or who might expect to find work under conditions of economic growth, the women who are permanently held in the reserve army are not really affected by the reduction in job opportunities. When you are already on the bottom, there is no place farther to fall. This does not mean however that such women are unaffected by the economic decline. Cutbacks in social services and income for social assistance recipients has made it more difficult for women to stretch their income to meet family needs. Nevertheless, the fact that people who were already poor and unemployed or only marginally employed had less to lose helps to explain how these people sometimes felt that the recession had hurt others more than themselves.

Emily Meyers, an unemployed single mother who lost her job during the recession, also felt that her own situation had not worsened as much others because even when she was employed, she was living on a very low income. She felt that she was more fortunate than people who had enjoyed a higher standard of living which they could no longer afford to maintain.

> "Actually the recession bothers me on the whole for what it is doing to a lot of people

> (who have lost their homes, can't pay their debts,etc.....I am used to not living on much.) I don't think it affected me as badly as it did a lot of people." (Interview 2)

This sympathy for the plight of the newly unemployed who were used to a higher standard of living startled me when I first heard it expressed by women who had never been able to count on steady income or enjoy a higher standard of living. As I listened to them explain how it was possible for them to feel more fortunate than the newly unemployed, I discovered that they felt that their experience of living on low income had equipped them with the necessary skills to survive. Heather McKenzie, a single mother supporting her five children on social assistance, described the hardships she and her family had to endure as a result of their poverty, but she still concluded that she was better able to cope with the hardships than people who were unaccustomed to living in poverty.

> "I was raised in poverty so I sort of learned to accept it as a way of life. So I have it easier than a lot of people, cause a lot of people weren't...I grew up having to budget my money so I understand it. So I wouldn't say exactly that we are the worst off." (Interview 37)

## SUMMARY

The lack of adequate job opportunities for women has been a persistent feature of the Canadian labour market. Women workers have been concentrated in a narrow range of sex-segregated occupations and have been found disproportionately within the low wage, unstable, and part-time jobs in the secondary labour market. The pattern of restricting women's access to better paid, more permanent jobs continued during the recession. In fact, the interviews indicate that many women felt that it had become increasingly difficult to find a 'real job'. The job opportunities which women reported as being available during the recession were largely confined to jobs in the secondary labour market, and even these were limited because of the high level of competition for jobs. As a result, many of the women who found work during the recession were confined to jobs which were low-paid, temporary, insecure, or part-time. While the lack of job opportunities was not new, the situation appeared to worsen during the recession.

The lack of advancement opportunities in women's jobs has also been a persistent feature of the Canadian labour market. The lack of job ladders linking women's jobs to higher positions in the division of labour, and discrimination against women in granting promotions have perpetuated the concentration of women in dead-end jobs.

The interviews confirmed that women in Saskatchewan experienced barriers to advancement in their jobs, and there was some evidence to suggest that these barriers were strengthened during the recession as employers sought to avoid any increase in labour costs.

The lack of job opportunities for women in occupations which have historically been filled by men is readily evident in both the labour force data on occupational distribution by sex and in the personal accounts of women seeking employment in non-traditional jobs. The interview material is inconclusive as to the impact of the recession on job opportunities for women in non-traditional jobs. While some women speculated that the large supply of unemployed men made it more difficult for women to get hired, others felt that the preference to hire men for certain jobs was unaffected by labour market conditions.

Overwhelmingly, the women in the study reported that they took the jobs they had or stayed in the jobs they had because they had very little choice. While some theorists have argued that women are willing to accept low wage, temporary or part time work because of their position within the family, I would argue that women accept these jobs because they are the only jobs available. Women do not choose to work in the secondary labour market because they see themselves as secondary workers. They get shunted into the secondary labour market because that is where job

opportunities are available to them. Women employed on a permanent basis, with full time hours and better than average pay feel compelled to stay in their jobs despite dissatisfaction with the working conditions because the most likely alternatives are unemployment or a worse job.

While many women reported that their opportunities for employment, promotion, or changing jobs had declined in recent years, some women felt that they were relatively unaffected by the recession. This was particularly evident among women whose access to employment was limited even during periods of economic expansion. Native women, single mothers on welfare, women with little formal education, or others who are denied access to regular employment may not experience any major change in their work lives as a result of the recession.

In the interviews I discovered that most women's work lives are shaped by the lack of job opportunities available to them. I discovered that the increased competition for scarce jobs during the recession forced women to accept employment or remain in jobs despite their dissatisfaction with the wages, hours or working conditions. I also discovered that there were a range of experiences among women which varied according to their varying positions within the labour market. For example, women employed in fairly secure, permanent jobs felt that they had less opportunity to change jobs or gain promotions. Women

employed in temporary and part time jobs felt shut off from any economic security. Women who had been chronically unemployed felt relatively unchanged by the recession. In developing strategies for improving the conditions of women's work, it is important to recognize this variation in the experience among women workers.

# CHAPTER VI

## JOB LOSS, LAYOFFS, AND STAFF REDUCTIONS

A number of studies of unemployment during economic crises have shown that industrial jobs, which are highly male-segregated, are more susceptible to recessionary layoffs than jobs in clerical and service occupations, where the majority of workers are women. Milkman (1976) found that the unemployment rate in female segregated occupations was lower than the unemployment rate in male segregated occupations during the Great Depression in the United States. The Women's Work Project (1978) found that the unemployment rate among operatives was 5-8% higher than the unemployment rate among clerical, sales, or service workers during the 1974-75 recession in the United States, and that the increase in the unemployment rate during the recession was nearly twice as great among the operative classification as among the clerical, sales, and service classifications. An OECD (1976) study of the 1974-75 recession in sixteen capitalist countries concluded that the concentration of women in service sector jobs protected the level of female employment since the demand for labour in that sector had grown while the demand for industrial labour declined. In a study of unemployment among Canadian women, Marsden (1977)

concluded that the concentration of women in clerical, sales and service occupations tended to protect women from recessionary layoffs, which were more likely to occur in mining, construction, and manufacturing.

While these studies suggest that men's jobs are hardest hit by cutbacks in production during a recession, the literature on the dual labour market locates women workers disproportionately in the secondary labour market where jobs are more likely to be unstable, seasonal, or temporary. Barron and Norris (1976) argue that employers in the secondary labour market treat women as a 'dispensible' workforce, in part because women are seen as being less entitled to secure employment and in part because women do not have the union strength to protest their loss of work. Lack of job security for women in the secondary labour market stems from the dual structure of the economy, in which large, powerful primary sector employers are able to export instability in demand for products and labour to the secondary sector (Sokoloff,1980; Barron and Norris, 1976; Phillips and Phillips, 1983). The location of women within secondary labour market jobs may make them more susceptible to job loss when the demand for labour declines. Marsden (1977) argues that women are often the first to lose their jobs during a recession because they are low skilled and easily replaceable. Peter Armstrong (1982) argues that it is not the lack of skill but the fact that women workers

have been systematically confined to labour intensive production processes which makes them more susceptible to layoffs. The dual labour market analysis seems to suggest that the primary labour force is protected from fluctuations in demand and therefore enjoys a greater job security than the secondary labour force in a time of declining demand for labour.

The stability of jobs within the primary labour market has come under attack during the economic crisis. Rather than protecting the jobs of their primary labour force, whose wage and benefit costs were far above those of secondary sector workers, employers have shifted production to new plants and new cheaper sources of labour (MacDonald,1982; Phillips and Phillips, 1983). To the extent that employers respond to the economic crisis by reorganizing production to reduce the number of jobs in the primary labour market, male workers may be more susceptible to job loss than women.

There is also evidence to suggest that gender is a factor influencing job loss experiences within a given occupation or segment of the economy. The OECD study of the 1974-75 recession found that:

> Those women who did hold industrial jobs experienced greater employment losses than men....The effect of the recession on the employment of women has therefore been to slow down the growth of their employment in those industries in which they have been traditionally underrepresented. (OECD, 1976, 30-31)

Bedell (1980) found that layoffs among industrial workers took a heavy toll among women in the auto industry since they had been among the last hired and the first fired. It therefore appears that women who have recently gained employment in occupations which have traditionally been dominated by men are more likely to lose their jobs when labour demand in those occupations declines.

The literature which attempts to explain the interconnection between gender and job loss during periods of economic decline relies heavily upon the analysis of labour force statistics. There is very little which tells us anything about how women workers have experienced the loss of work in their daily lives and whether they perceive any connection between their own experiences and the cyclical changes in the economy.

Saskatchewan employment figures show that women increased their share of jobs during the recession. As Table 10 shows, the proportion of jobs held by women increased between 1981 and 1983. In 1981, women were 38.1% of the people employed in the province. In 1983, 40.4% of those employed were women. Women increased their share of the jobs in managerial, administrative and professional occupations, and sales occupations. Women's share of jobs in clerical, service, primary, and processing occupations dropped slightly. In construction, materials handling and other crafts, where men experienced substantial job losses,

TABLE 10

WOMEN AS A PERCENT OF THE EMPLOYED, BY OCCUPATION, 1981-1983

| Occupation | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Managerial, administrative, professional | 46.6% | 47.2% | 50.6% |
| Clerical | 82.8% | 85.0% | 82.5% |
| Sales | 37.2% | 37.0% | 40.5% |
| Service | 61.8% | 60.3% | 60.7% |
| Primary occupations | 18.7% | 19.1% | 18.5% |
| Processing | 12.1% | * | 11.8% |
| Construction | * | * | * |
| Transportation | * | * | * |
| Materials handling and other crafts | * | * | * |
| Total Employed | 38.1% | 39.2% | 40.4% |

Source: Based on changes in the Saskatchewan Employed Labour Force, as shown in Table 7.

* cannot be calculated.

TABLE 11

WOMEN AS A PERCENT OF THE EMPLOYED AND UNEMPLOYED

SASKATCHEWAN, 1975-84

| Year | Women As Percent of Employed | Women As Percent of Unemployed |
|---|---|---|
| 1975 | 33.4% | 54.5% |
| 1976 | 34.9% | 53.3% |
| 1977 | 35.4% | 44.4% |
| 1978 | 35.9% | 45.0% |
| 1979 | 36.7% | 50.0% |
| 1980 | 36.9% | 47.4% |
| 1981 | 38.1% | 47.6% |
| 1982 | 39.2% | 42.9% |
| 1983 | 40.4% | 42.9% |
| 1984 | 40.3% | 42.1% |

Source: Calculations based on annual averages for employment and unemployment reported in Statistics Canada, Historical Labour Force Statistics, 1984, 71-201.

it is impossible to tell what happened to the women since their numbers in those jobs are too small to be reliably measured in the labour force survey.

Table 11 shows that while women's share of employment increased during the recession, their share of unemployment declined. In 1981, women were 47.6% of those officially counted as unemployed. By 1983, women were 42.9% of the unemployed. This indicates that job losses during the recession fell disproportionately on the male workforce.

While the aggregate data on the labour force give us an understanding of the overall structure of job opportunities in the labour market, where jobs were created and where jobs were lost, they do not tell us very much about how women in the labour force experienced the changing structure of the job market in their daily lives. To gain an understanding of how women's daily lives were affected by the changing structure of the labour market, I asked them to describe the kinds of job opportunities which were available to them, and any changes in their employment such as hirings, firings, layoffs, or promotions. In this chapter, I describe the various ways in which employers' decisions to fire, layoff, or reduce the number of workers affected the women in this study.

A number of the women whom I interviewed lost jobs during the recession. Businesses faced with declining markets and governments faced with growing budget deficits

often attempted to reduce labour costs by reducing the size of their workforce. In some cases, such as potash mines, where the workforce was predominantly men, most of the workers laid off were men. However, since layoffs in that industry follow rules of seniority, the small number of women who had recently gained employment in the mines were among those laid off because they lacked seniority. In a retail store where the workforce was predominantly female and there was no established rule of seniority governing layoffs, women who had been employed for many years were laid off while workers with less seniority were kept on. In a clothing factory, where the workforce was again predominantly female, the recession resulted in a plant closure and the elimination of all the women's jobs. In some cases, women lost their jobs because they had no protection against the arbitrary actions of their employer. And in other cases, women enjoyed some measure of protection against job loss because they were unionized, they could not be easily replaced, or they were employed in jobs which were not subject to staff cuts.

The relationship between job loss and gender is much more varied and complex than implied by the popular notion that women workers are the 'last hired and first fired'. In some occupations women are practically the only ones hired or fired. In some circumstances women may be the first ones fired because of blatant sex discrimination on the part of

employers who act on the belief that men deserve jobs more than women. In some circumstances women may be the first ones fired because they lack seniority, as in occupations which have historically excluded women. In other situations, men may be the first ones fired because more money can be saved by eliminating their positions and the workload can simply be shifted to female subordinates. In many workplaces, staff reductions occur through attrition as positions are eliminated when people retire or change jobs, rather than through overt layoffs. In trying to understand the relationship between the changing structure of the labour market and the experiences of women workers, it is important that we develop concepts which can encompass the range of experiences which characterize the female workforce. It is important to avoid reductionism which treats the experiences of a portion of the female labour force as the experience of women workers per se. While the concept of women as the last hired and the first fired is applicable in some circumstances, it is basically irrelevant to women working in female segregated occupations or in workplaces not affected by layoffs.

The interviews which I conducted with women about their work experiences during the recession revealed a broad range of experiences. There were women whose jobs were secure, whose workplaces were unaffected by layoffs, and who felt relatively untouched by the recession in terms of their own

employment status. While these women were not threatened with job loss during the recession, they were frequently aware of changes in their working conditions or their opportunities to change jobs or gain promotions. There were other women who were directly affected by layoffs either through the loss of their own jobs or through changes in their workload resulting from staff reductions. In gender mixed occupations, women might be the first laid off because of lack of seniority or outright discrimination. In female segregated occupations, women were laid off because they were the bulk of the labour force. This variation in experiences and women's responses to the recession can only be understood when the various factors influencing the distribution of job loss are taken into account.

We need to develop a theoretical understanding of the relationship between gender and economic recession which takes into account these various factors which produce the range of experiences found among women workers. The first step in developing a more complex theoretical understanding is to identify the range of experiences and what appear to be the most significant factors shaping those experiences.

## GETTING LAID OFF IN FEMALE JOB GHETTOS

One type of experience can be summarized as job loss in a female segregated occupation as a result of recession

cutbacks. This type of experience is exemplified in the case of Emily Meyers who worked as a clerk in a major retail store between 1975 and 1982. When the store's business declined during the recession, her employer's first reaction was to reduce workers' hours. This was eventually followed by massive layoffs of the predominantly female workforce.

> "They cut down everybody's time...They brought in everybody they were paying but there was only enough work for each person one day a week...A lot of people (were) going in, putting in very little time, on a very small wage...Then it got so they just reduced staff and gave the reduced staff more time...I think they laid off over 500 people...A majority were women but both men and women got laid off." (Interview 2)

When the number of workers was reduced, the employer increasingly shifted workers from one department to another. Flexibility and the capacity to handle a variety of jobs became the major factor in determining who kept their jobs and who was laid off. Since the workers were not unionized and had no seniority rights established by contract, the employer was free to lay off any workers.

> "When the recession got quite bad, that was when they were looking for people who were able to do more... It didn't matter how long

> you'd been there...There was one woman who'd been there 26 years who got laid off...They wanted people that they could pretty well put into any corner....The more flexible a person was - whether you could go from mail filling to helping in the office - you had a better chance of staying." (Interview 2)

Linda Moore's experience was in many ways similar to that of Emily Meyers. She too had been employed in a major retail store and had witnessed layoffs as a result of declining business during the recession. The layoffs in her workplace seemed to fall most heavily on part-time workers, even those who had put in many years working at the same store. The layoffs also afforded the managers of the store the opportunity to get rid of people whom they defined as 'trouble makers'. People were laid off, predominantly women, not because they lacked seniority, but because they were part-time workers or they made demands on their employer.

> "Even at Christmastime that year, the customers weren't coming in and it was a really bad year...People were getting laid off. Part time staff were getting laid off and full time staff were being pulled from the back to do part time staff's work...There was a lot of change in management and a lot of staff cutbacks...In one week they laid off

> about 75 people. Some of those people, some of those old ladies had been there for years and years....All of a sudden those people started dropping off...Once the new management came in it became a thing of let's get rid of all the people who cause trouble, all the people who stand up for their rights and stuff like that." (Interview 12)

Part-time workers, the majority of whom are women, may be defined as more expendable than full time workers and may therefore be more vulnerable to layoffs. The lack of seniority protection in this situation makes women workers who are trying to improve their working conditions more vulnerable to layoff since management has the right to lay off whichever workers they choose. While seniority rights may mean that women in traditionally male occupations who lack seniority are vulnerable to layoffs, the lack of seniority rights in non-unionized workplaces acts to suppress workers' demands for better conditions since individuals who raise demands have no job protection. When seniority does not govern the allocation of job losses, management is free to get rid of whichever workers it deems least desirable.

Sally Holden worked as a switchboard operator for a private telephone answering service during the recession. The company's entire workforce was women and the management

had an explicit policy of telling men who applied for work that the positions had already been filled. The fact that women enjoyed a certain advantage over men in getting hired at this company did not provide them with any job security. Even before the recession, women frequently lost their jobs. These women were particularly vulnerable to job loss at any time because their employer could fire and replace them at will. The available pool of unemployed women willing to accept employment at low pay and the relatively short training period required to prepare workers for the job meant that the women working there had very little job security.

> "The turnover was really high there...The method of firing and how often people got fired was really bad....People were always being let go for personality conflicts...It would have nothing to do with the type of work you were doing. Maybe you told them once that you should have had a coffee break. Some people would be fired for making one mistake and another person could make a hundred mistakes of greater severity and never get fired. There was a high turnover and many many people were let go, in my opinion, unfairly." (Interview 4)

While Sally Holden was working at the answering service, a number of workers got involved in a unionization drive in an effort to improve their job security and working conditions. The employer responded to this by firing some of the women who were suspected of being active in the union drive. Although these women were eventually reinstated by a decision of the Labour Relations Board, the actions of the employer were indicative of his pattern of firing workers who voiced complaints. In these circumstances, women did not lose their jobs because of recession cutbacks or because they were women. They lost their jobs because they tried to improve the wages and conditions of work within their female job ghetto. Their employer had no interest in pushing women out of work. He benefitted directly from the presence of large numbers of women in the labour market because it provided a cheap supply of workers from which he could select a compliant workforce. Women's compliance with low wages and poor working conditions should not be seen as the result of feminine character traits such as passivity. It should be seen as the result of the imbalance of power between employers who are free to hire and fire at will and women in the labour market who face stiff competition for jobs.

Marie LaSalle, who had worked as a baker in a doughnut shop during the recession, described how layoffs and staff cuts occured in her workplace. First of all, the women who

worked in the jobs requiring little training were subject to firing at any time, because they were easily replaced with other unskilled workers. (In using the term 'unskilled' I am referring to the level of skill as it is socially defined in the labour market. As Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) have pointed out, skills such as food preparation, sewing and childcare, which are learned by women in the home are not valued as skills in the labour market.) Marie LaSalle described how women who had to take off time because of illness were fired from their jobs.

> "The girls that were finishers were minimum wage workers...If they missed a couple days they were asked to leave. In fact, they said, 'Fire her. Somebody else is waiting for the job.'...They didn't worry about the other person...They were more concerned about keeping their business afloat. But because there were so many people looking for work, they didn't worry about somebody getting fired." (Interview 27)

Marie LaSalle felt fairly secure in her job because she had baking skills, worked hard and could not easily be replaced with cheaper labour. In fact, when her employer had to hire an additional baker to handle an increased volume of business, they hired a male baker at double the wage she was receiving. Subsequently when the volume of

business declined and they laid off a baker, the male baker lost his job first. While this may have been because he had the least seniority, it is quite likely that he was laid off because he was more expensive to the employer.

> "They were paying him $14/hour and I was getting $7/hour. And they gave him the best hours and all that...But then things slowed down a bit and he was the first one to be let go, obviously because they couldn't afford to pay him. (Interview 27)

In Marie LaSalle's case, she was able to keep her job when her male co-worker was fired because her employers discovered that she was doing the job competently and costing them only half as much in wages. In this case, the relative cheapness of women's labour acted as a protection against layoff. To the extent that a recession encourages a redistribution of work away from higher paid workers toward lower paid workers, the problem faced by many women will not be loss of jobs, but the perpetuation of their status as cheap labour.

For Marie LaSalle, the job security stemming from her skills and relatively low rate of pay was shortlived. As her employer sought to cut costs by cheapening the product, business declined and hours were cut back. Not able to support herself and her two children on part time wages, Marie LaSalle eventually quit her job.

> "They went bankrupt two months after I quit. I could see it coming...They lost a lot of business because they cut their quality way down....Once they started losing business...they wanted to change my wage and have me work three days a week for 24 hours a week. And I said I just can't afford to do that...So they laid me off and I was better off on unemployment (insurance)." (Interview 27)

Another woman employed in a female job ghetto described how her employer fired women in order to reduce labour costs during the recession. Cheryl Semchuk worked as a waitress-hostess in a hotel restaurant which cut back on staff when business declined.

> "The hotel was losing money so they had to start laying off...When I first started there, there were at least fifty girls working there, maybe more. Now there are about forty and a lot of them are part time.... We used to have eight girls for the whole sections plus hostess and sometimes two hostesses. Now we sometimes start with six girls and one hostess, so there is definitely a cutback." (Interview 5)

Cheryl Semchuk's employer was directly affected by the recession. When business dropped and threatened profits, the employer cut costs by laying off workers. The power of the employer to fire at will generated a great deal of tension in the workplace as women realized how the threat of job loss was being used to intimidate them.

> "For about six months there was a lot of tension between employer and employees because they were laying off people that shouldn't be laid off....They laid off a girl, not because she wasn't doing her share of work, but just to scare the staff...They just did it to scare us, to say, 'We're in charge and start doing this or else you are going to be just like her.' They fired ...three girls in five months just to give off the impression that they were in charge and that they could do it. So there was a lot of tension for a long time." (Interview 5)

Women who work in jobs which require little on the job training are vulnerable to job loss at any time. As long as there is a supply of cheap female labour which has learned the necessary job skills at home, employers can readily find replacements for workers they choose to fire. Anna Santos described how in each of her cleaning jobs she had been

vulnerable to the arbitrary decision of her employer to fire her. She had lost two jobs with cleaning companies because she took time off for illness.

> "After I worked one year for _____cleaning company, I had a problem with my health and I stayed in the hospital and had an operation. When I stayed in the hospital, my supervisor had me fired....(Later) I worked for another cleaning company and again I had a health problem. I went to the hospital again...for two days...and my doctor (told me) to stay home for three more days....My manager said it was o.k., but afterwards when I came back to my job, I was fired." (Interview 21)

Anna Santos did not lose her jobs with the cleaning companies because of the recession, but because she had absolutely no job protection as a relatively 'unskilled' worker in an unorganized workplace. When she eventually found a job processing vegetables in a small factory, she hoped that it would be permanent. However, as demand for the product declined, production was cut back and she was laid off. Anna Santos' loss of two jobs because she was sick illustrates the vulnerability and lack of job security often experienced by women who work in jobs where they can be easily replaced. Women in relatively 'unskilled' occupations may be subject to hirings and replacement at the

whim of their employer. This vulnerability to being fired was echoed in the descriptions of work given by the baker Marie LaSalle and the telephone operator Sally Holden. In these segments of the female labour force, frequent firings and job losses are not limited to periods of recession when employers are reducing staff. They are ongoing features of a labour market relationship between employers with the power to hire and fire at will and low skilled, unorganized workers who have no protection or job security.

## GETTING LAID OFF IN NON-TRADITIONAL JOBS

A few of the women whom I interviewed had been employed during the recession in non-traditional jobs which were still overwhelmingly male segregated. The work histories of these women reveal that a number of factors have influenced their job loss experiences. Overt opposition to women working in non-traditional jobs has forced some women to lose their jobs either through firings or being pressured to quit. Job loss as a direct result of sex discrimination was reported throughout the ten year period covered in women's individual work histories and was not confined to the recession. These women did not notice any significant change in opposition to their working during the recession. However, recession layoffs did adversely affect women in non-traditional jobs.

Two women mineworkers were clearly laid off during the recession as a result of cutbacks in production. Their lack of seniority determined that they would be among those who lost their jobs. Since their gender was a factor which influenced their lack of seniority, it was indirectly a factor in determining their susceptibility to layoff.

Sheila Parks, a 22 year old single mother, began work as a mine labourer in 1981. In 1982, markets for potash declined, the mine cutback production and she was laid off. Those with the least seniority, including the only women working in the mine, received four days notice before losing their jobs. When some of the workers were called back, those with the least seniority remained on layoff.

> "We got four days notice and we were laid off... I don't know how long they shut down for. It wasn't very long and then they called people back but they cut it back to three shifts...We got called back for seven weeks...and then we went back onto layoff." Interview 29)

Sheila Park's situation is a classic case of a person who was the last hired being the first fired. 'Last hired, first fired' is essentially a statement of the basic principle of seniority in which workers who have the least worktime on the job are the first to be laid off. Not all workplaces are governed by principles of seniority. I spoke

with other women who were laid off because they took sick time, because they complained about the workload, because they weren't as flexible as other workers, because they became involved in union organizing, or simply because they were women. Having low seniority is not the only or even perhaps the most significant factor determining which women lose their jobs. However, it is a significant factor in reducing female representation in occupations which have historically excluded women. Women who have only recently gained access to certain fields of work are now losing those jobs as the workforce in those fields contracts as a result of the recession. It is not seniority per se which pushes women out of these jobs but the overall reduction in jobs resulting from the recession which increases the level of unemployment for those with low seniority or little experience. The concept of women as the last hired and the first fired is primarily applicable to those women working in jobs where the employer has historically given preference to hiring men, where job opportunities are now shrinking, and where seniority governs who shall have access to the reduced number of jobs. In other sectors of the labour market, where job opportunities are stable or increasing, where women are the bulk of the workforce, or where seniority rights are non-existant, the concept of women as the last hired, first fired does not apply.

Another mineworker, Donna Taylor, had worked in a potash mine for eight years, and had accumulated some seniority, but the workers with the most seniority were still men and most women mineworkers had relatively low seniority. When the mine cut back production during the recession, the workers with the lowest seniority were the first to be laid off and the last to be called back.

> "During the layoffs the majority of women working there were low seniority so they were the last to be called back. There were a few of us with high seniority - eight or nine years, that were called back....but the ones with the most seniority are still men." (Interview 30)

In non-traditional jobs such as mining, there was a correlation between gender and seniority which made the women workers more susceptible to layoffs than the men. Historically, mining has been men's work and women seeking employment in mines have faced opposition from employers and some male co-workers.

I asked Donna Taylor whether that opposition to women working in the mines grew worse during the recession. While the layoffs may have afforded an occasion for people to express their opposition to women working in the mines, Donna Taylor did not think that there was any change in people's attitudes.

> "(During the layoffs) the guys who are real jerks probably give you more of a hassle because you are 'taking away someone else's job.' When it was recall, the odd turkey would say, 'Why don't you let so and so have that (job)? You've got a husband to support you.'....'Women are taking away a man's job.' You hear that all the time. But the people who have that attitude - the layoff doesn't make any difference, because they are always biased." (Interview 30)

Suzanne Burritt agreed that women had always faced opposition in non-traditional jobs, but that the recession brought the opposition more into the open.

> "In non-traditional areas they are just opposed to (women working). They find it really hard to work beside women because they think it makes their job look degrading - like 'if a woman can do the job, why am I doing it?' During a recession, I don't know, I think they, in general, are prejudiced and it makes it more clear." (Interview 31)

Opposition to women working in non-traditional jobs by both employers and male workers has discouraged a number of women from staying in those jobs. When the demand for labour in those occupations declines and competition for

jobs becomes more intense, women may have to struggle harder to keep from losing the small foothold they have gained in the better-paying non-traditional occupations. Suzanne Burritt described how she lost two jobs as a mechanic in recent years. In the first workplace, she was isolated and ignored by her male co-workers so that she eventually left the job and did not return. In the second workplace, although she got along well with her male co-workers who helped her to learn the job, she believed that her employer fired her because he did not want women working there. In this instance the employer claimed that she was fired because of the recession, but she felt that this was used as an excuse to cover the real reason she was fired.

> "(The company I worked for) used it as an excuse...They were doing really well. Yet they were saying, 'Oh the recession.' And it is absolutely crap, because they are making lots of money. He is trying to use the recession as a reason probably to get rid of me and to get a highly skilled white male." (Interview 31)

The recession seems to be the real reason for some loss of jobs as it was in the case of the women mineworkers. However Suzanne Burritt's experience suggests that employers may attribute firings to the recession when, in fact, there are other underlying causes. The fact that a recession is

seen as justification for getting rid of workers is evidence of the extent to which capitalist production relations are taken for granted. Employers assume that they have an unquestioned right to fire people and reduce production if their profitability is threatened. Otherwise, the recession would not be proffered as an 'excuse'. Businesses bemoan their difficulties in the market and governments bemoan their tight budgets and workers are expected to bear the burden of the recession on their own shoulders. While there is no denying the real financial constraints imposed on businesses and government by an economic recession, some women felt that their employers overstated their difficulties in order to get rid of workers who were 'undesirable' because of their gender or their reluctance to accept concessions. While the recession was a real force in shaping women's experiences in the labour market, employers' talk of recession and tight budgets was also perceived as something of a con job in which the employers' difficulties were exagerated in order to wrest more concessions from workers. As far as Suzanne Burritt was concerned, the recession was not the real reason behind her loss of a job.

## STAFF REDUCTIONS WITHOUT LAYOFFS

Many of the women whom I interviewed were employed in workplaces where there were no major layoffs. In many

cases, however, the number of workers was reduced through the elimination of job positions when someone retired or left work. Several women described how their employers had imposed freezes on hiring people or filling job vacancies. Some also described how employers refused to hire replacements for people on vacation or sick leave with the result that fewer staff had to carry the workload or it simply piled up until the people on leave returned. While laying off workers is the most obvious way in which employers cut back production and reduce labour costs, other cost-cutting responses to the recession seemed to affect more women in the study than outright layoffs. Women in a variety of occupations and workplaces complained of staff reductions through attrition since the workload was then redistributed among a smaller number of workers, making their jobs more difficult.

Lorraine Wakowsky, a corrections officer, described the staff reductions in her workplace.

> "We've been cut back by about a third and the workload has been increasing. With budget cuts and the restraints being put on, they are just not hiring...There were no layoffs. It's just that when people leave, they don't rehire...It's made our jobs a lot worse...Right now there is a shortage of staff all over the place." (Interview 23)

Sarah Mason, a dental therapist in a publicly funded dental program for children, also described cutbacks in staff when the government decided to not hire replacements for people who left.

> "There were some positions frozen for a period of time and the government decided we've got to save some money and can't hire any more staff. So if someone went away on maternity leave or resigned (their positions were left vacant.)" (Interview 6)

Mary Engel, a hospital worker, described how her workplace was not really affected by layoffs, although understaffing had seemed to worsen in recent years as her employer failed to fill certain vacant positions. She also described how her employer no longer increased staff to cover the needs of patients requiring special care. Not only were jobs left vacant and the workload distributed among the remaining workers, but temporary increases in the need for nursing care were no longer met with a corresponding increase in nursing staff.

> "(When) some patients are very sick and need a private nurse, they should have more (staff)... A few years ago, if someone were acutely ill or needed a lot of things done for them, they would get another nurse...to take the load off the staff." (Interview 33)

One of the simplest ways in which employers try to reduce labour costs is by cutting workers' hours. A number of women told me of their employers' efforts to reduce their wage bill by reducing workers' hours. While some women workers who are employed on a permanent full time basis are not threatened by cutbacks in their hours of work, other women have no protection against this erosion of their jobs and their income. In some workplaces such as retail stores, the entire workforce may be subject to potential reduction in hours and pay. In other workplaces, such as hospitals, schools, government offices, and universities, the workforce is fragmented into permanent, full-time, year round workers with contract protections against a reduction in hours, and casual, part-time, and temporary workers who are more vulnerable to cutbacks in hours and wages.

For example, a hospital worker whose own hours were guaranteed in her contract described how part-time and casual workers were having their hours cut back. Similarly, a high school secretary, who was relatively secure in her full time permanent job told me that other clerical workers employed by the school system on a ten month basis were vulnerable to cutbacks in their hours.

> "They have replaced a full time secretary with a half time secretary. In a lot of schools they have one girl who comes in half days or two and a half days a week and that's

> it...(The clerical workers in) all the elementary schools are 10 month employees so at the end of June they are laid off until the end of August. So it's easier for them to do it (cut back their hours). When they come back in August they say, 'We've decided we don't want a full time secretary at our school.'" (Interview 24)

Marcia King worked two part time jobs as a technician at a publicly funded university. When government fiscal restraint policies led to cutbacks in the university budget, half of Marcia King's job was eliminated, along with other jobs in her department. As her department scrambled to find funds to maintain some of the positions, assumptions about female economic dependence and male breadwinners influenced the decision about which positions would be saved. Marcia King's position was seen as more expendable than that of her male co-worker and she was seen as needing the job less because she was a woman. The cut in her hours was therefore influenced by the underlying fiscal restraint policy, the assessment of her work as more expendable than that of others, and the assumption of her lesser need for paid employment because of her gender. What strikes one in Marcia King's case is the contradiction between the assumption of female economic dependence and her actual situation as a sole-providing single parent, while her male

co-worker, whose job was salvaged, was in a co-provider situation where his partner provided the greater part of the household income.

> "My supervisor's attitude was, 'Well, we're lucky we saved half your job. It would be nice if you could work full time, but we're lucky we saved half of it'...I think its really silly. We're not lucky that we saved it. We bloody well should have saved it and more... (A department administrator told me) they didn't have enough money for both (my job and a male co-worker's job) and they thought he needed the job more because he had a family. Which is really bullshit because he has a wife who has a teaching job and makes more money than he does or I do...and at the time I was separating from my partner." (Interview 20)

In Marcia King's case, her hours were cut as a result of her employer's need to reduce labour costs, but her employer's decision about whose hours to cut and whose to save was influenced by assumptions about men's greater need for or entitlement to paid employment. Thus while the recession had a direct impact on Marcia King's job, the nature of that impact was shaped by her employer's patriarchal assumptions about female economic dependence.

Employers' conception of women as a 'dispensible' labour force is not an accurate reflection of women's real characteristics. It is an ideological construct which denies the growing importance of women's roles as income providers and which allows employers to reduce women's hours and incomes without appearing to cause any serious harm.

While patriarchal asumptions about women's lesser need for income may have influenced some employers' decisions about which staff to reduce, other patriarchal assumptions about women's readiness to be accommodating allowed employers to cut workers' hours without reducing workloads.

Carol Forman felt that the school system was cutting work time in half without a corresponding reduction in workload. She felt that women whose hours were reduced intensified their labour in order to complete their jobs even to the extent that they worked beyond the hours for which they were paid. From the employer's point of view, cutting hours of work can reap a double benefit - a reduced wage bill and an intensification of labour during worktime. From the worker's point of view, cutting hours means a serious reduction in income and an overload of work which adds stress and frustration to the job.

> "When someone who has worked in the school full time goes to half-time....they won't work half time. They'll get the job done no matter if they come in early or they stay

> late or they work through lunch hour or whatever. The job will get done...(but) they'll just be paid their half time. And women do that all the time. It's frustrating. It's really frustrating." (Interview 24)

Linda Clarkson, a clerk employed by a local city government, described how her employer reduced staff and redistributed work to a female clerical worker.

> "There haven't been any layoffs but there have been some positions that have stayed vacant for quite awhile through the employees leaving. This past year has seen three employees leave (at my workplace) and none of those positions were filled until just recently...(One position is still open) and one of the clerk-stenos who works there has been performing the functions of that position as well as her own." (K: Do you think they've been hesitant to fill positions because it saves them money or they haven't been able to find people?) "It's definitely money. They've admitted as much, that this was one cost cutting factor....The reasons for not filling the positions have definitely been financial." (Interview 9)

Linda Clarkson also talked about how municipal workers had seen computer technology introduced in recent years without any direct loss of jobs, but she was worried about possible staff reductions in the future being made possible by the technological change.

> "To this point it hasn't displaced any jobs but I can't see that continuing. I can definitely see in the future that we're going to lose jobs through attrition. I don't believe that we're going to have any layoffs but I believe that we are going to lose jobs through attrition, that they are simply not going to fill positions in the future. That still has to be confirmed, but I think all indications are that that is what is going to happen." (Interview 9)

One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the transformation of women's work through the introduction of microcomputer technology. Increased competition among businesses and increased pressure on government budgets, combined with the extraordinary reduction in the cost of computers has resulted in the widespread application of computers in workplaces. A few of the women whom I interviewed had already seen microcomputers introduced into their workplaces. Although none of these women had lost their jobs because of technological change,

they were worried that the machines would eventually replace people and that jobs would be lost or new jobs would not be created. These women perceived technological change as the greatest threat to their future job security - much more than they were worried about being laid off because of the recession.

Joan Tabor worked as a library assistant in a public library which had introduced computers in the workplace since 1980. Restraints on government spending have not resulted in any direct layoffs but the staff has been reduced through attrition. Joan Tabor feels that the new technology has enabled the library to reduce the number of workers without reducing services.

> "Nobody has been laid off, which is good.... But when people retired in our department, they just didn't fill the positions. They froze them. They said they had lent them to other departments and they were filled by temporary people...(Those positions) have since run out of their temporary status so two positions are lost by attrition.... Tech change has caused attrition so far in our ranks. We've lost a few people just because they retired and I'm sure it will keep happening. Whether we have any control over that or not, I don't know....It's a lot

> cheaper if you have more machines doing the work rather than people and over time we'll have a lot less people." (Interview 8)

From Joan Tabor's perspective, computers were introduced because they would enable the library to provide services more cheaply than hiring more workers. While the employer's attempts to reduce labour costs did not take the direct form of laying off workers, the introduction of labour-displacing technology has indirectly enabled the employer to reduce the number of workers.

> "Computers don't go on strike. Computers don't get sick. Computers don't have babies or ask for wage increases every year. I think the whole thing with tech change is tied in with economics because they can keep replacing people with bigger and better machines that do more. That's sort of the space we are in now. There haven't been any layoffs because of economics. It's not like working in a potash mine or something where if there is no demand, then you get laid off. It's a little different than that." (Interview 8)

Joan Tabor's observation that "it's not like working in a potash mine" points to the significant difference between her experiences and those commonly associated with

recessions, i.e. declining market demand resulting in cut-backs in production and massive layoffs. Joan Tabor, like many women in Saskatchewan, is employed in the state sector of the economy where the demand for services and labour is less subject to fluctuation than within the private sector. While the fiscal crisis of the state places pressure on government employers to reduce labour costs, the government risks widespread public opposition if public services are greatly reduced. There are therefore political constraints on the extent to which governments can cut back services and public sector employment. The existence of public sector unions also curtails the power of the government to lay off workers and means that government employers seek other ways of reducing labour costs.

It is significant to note that most of the unionized public sector workers whom I interviewed were not directly affected by layoffs, but by other employer actions to reduce labour costs. Job loss through attrition, technological change, and the redistribution of work to lower paid workers were the types of problems more likely to be described by women employed directly by the state.

For women employed on temporary projects funded by the state, it was a different matter entirely. These women were employed at low wages and for a limited period of time. They did not enjoy any union protection. For them, job loss was an inevitable feature resulting from the temporary

nature of their employment. This raises the question of the extent to which the state workforce itself is fragmented into primary and secondary segments. And it raises the question of whether the work organized by the state is being shifted from permanent unionized workers to low-paid, temporary, unorganized workers. In response to the economic crisis, is the state sector limiting the size of its regular workforce by introducing labour-displacing technology and exporting work to temporary, government-funded, make-work projects?

Kate Martin, a certified nursing assistant, described how her employer attempted to reduce labour costs by implementing a variety of staffing policies which affected working conditions and job opportunties for women working in the hospital. She described how her employer was reluctant to hire replacements for people who were absent because of sick leave, vacation time, or accumulated time off. When replacements were hired, they were sometimes people with less training and lower pay classifications.

> "They have started now with a CNA, who is a trained person, replacing them with an aide, who is not (trained) and is not legally covered to do a lot of our duties. Therefore somebody else has to pick them up....Our jobs aren't in danger, but I can see maybe us being reclassified as aides, or them putting

> aides in and thereby paying less. That's what I can see. But they are going to have to have that complement of people to do it. But I went to school and I will not be reclassified as an aide or do an aide's job." (Interview 35)

Kate Martin worried that her employer would try to reduce labour costs by deskilling her job and hiring less skilled and lower paid workers. The hospital where she worked tried meeting some of its staffing needs with minimum wage workers hired through temporary job creation programs and through the recruitment of more volunteers.

> "They've been coming out with deliberate lies to get people in on minimum wage. (The hospital was) saying that Manpower has approached them to train these people (on government make work projects) when actually it is the other way around. They end up getting personnel and they are paying them the minimum wage when the hospital is a union closed shop....Another way they get around it is volunteers...They bring people in off welfare, put them in the hospital to do work that I do - not to as great extent as I can see coming, but they have started it. Therefore they are not having to provide the staff

> that I think (the patients) are entitled to. They are even advertising in the paper. They run ads with job descriptions in the paper but it is voluntary." (Interview 35)

Kate Martin works in a hospital which has to operate with serious constraints on its budget as a result of government fiscal restraint policies. This funding situation encourages the hospital to meet its staffing needs through cheap and sometimes even free labour. The increased use of temporary workers from job creation programs and volunteers has led to a reduction in regular permanent staff positions. While no one has been laid off and replaced with cheaper workers, regular staff position vacancies have not been filled and regular part time staff have had their hours reduced.

> "I've got no problem with (volunteers visiting on the wards) as long as they are not doing the work that I am supposed to be doing. And they are. And it's gradually working to be more and more and more. That's one way that they are also able to reduce staff. What is happening is positions haven't been filled. Within _____ (department) the volunteer program has taken away one complete position in the last couple months and our part time people are suffering

> because they are not being called in and their hours are being reduced." (Interview 35)

Kate Martin was not the only working woman who expressed concern over her employer's use of free volunteer labour. Particularly in the public sector where governmental and non-governmental agencies are attempting to staff their facilities without increasing their expenditures on labour, volunteers have been recruited to provide services rather than employing regular paid staff. While volunteers have always played a significant role in the provision of community services, the recession increases the tendency toward volunteer labour by placing further constraints on government funds which limits the money available for hiring paid workers, and by increasing the pool of unemployed people available for volunteer work.

Carol Forman, a clerical worker in a public school system, described how the schools relied heavily on volunteers to provide certain programs and how this free labour could be used to perform the work which would otherwise be assigned to paid workers.

> "They have volunteers, a lot of volunteers and the school board encourages it. They start working in the library and they send home the newsletters...The parents drive the kids here and there and they help Johnny read. They start helping in the library and

> then they just ask them to do more and more. And first thing you know they are just like one of our workers and they damn well should be paid." (Interview 24)

Christine Bonner worked at a community services project which was funded on a temporary basis by the government. The program was set up as a diminishing project which would rely less and less on government funding over time. Since other funding sources are not really available, this means that the project considered recruiting volunteers as the money for paid staff dried up.

> "It's a diminishing project so since February we have lost two staff. We started with six staff and now we are down to four...The amount of work is growing but we've lost two people....A lot more people are talking about using volunteer labour because there are so many people out of work. '(The people who are unemployed) need some sense of fulfillment that - Let's use (them as) volunteers.' I keep hearing that." (Interview 26)

Linda Moore worked as a volunteer in a community services project after she was laid off from her full time job at a retail store. She volunteered for several months but was then hired to work as a paid staff member as part of

a government job creation program. However, when the temporary government funding ran out, the project simply folded and the services which it had provided to the community were no longer available. While it is clear that the government stopped paying for the labour to provide these services, the work was not added to the unpaid labour performed by women at home or women volunteers in the community. The work simply ceased being done. The lack of services obviously adds a burden to the community which can only partially be alleviated by the unpaid labour of women at home and in the community.

While reliance on volunteers means that services which would otherwise be unavailable in the short run are being provided, the use of volunteers relieves employers of the necessity of hiring an adequate number of paid staff. Reliance on volunteers means that employers can shift the responsibility for providing certain services to unpaid volunteers without ensuring that those volunteers are in sufficient number or adequately trained to perform the necessary work. When employers abdicate their responsibility for employing adequate staff to perform the work, they attempt to shift responsibility for the work to the home or the community at large, but this attempted shift in responsibility does not mean that the home or community is able to actually perform the work now dumped in its lap. It is important to distinguish between the work for which

the home and community are now held responsible and the work which unpaid homemakers and community volunteers are able to perform. While women at home and in the community may be burdened with additional responsibilities to provide certain services, this does not mean that unpaid women are able to actually perform that work.

Weinbaum and Bridges argued that government funding for services decreased during recessions with the result that work was shifted from paid service sector workers to unpaid women in the home.

> In a recession, public funding for services declines, and work we are increasingly ill-equipped to perform is pushed back into the home...Since women are usually both the consumption workers and the wage labourers in the distribution of goods and services, it is especially clear that capital shifts between paying and not paying for the same work. (Weinbaum and Bridges, 1976, 197)

The actual daily work experiences of women working in schools, hospitals and community agencies reveal that the impact of limited government funding is more complex than a simple shift of work from public to private sphere, from paid to unpaid labour. Underfunding in hospitals and schools does not mean that the work of caring for the sick and teaching the children is shifted back to women at home. It means that hospital workers and teachers are subject to increased workloads which affect the quality of services they are able to provide. Households which can afford the expense can purchase private services to compensate for

those lacking in public institutions. Households where women are already engaged full time in domestic labour may be able to directly provide services to children, the sick and the elderly by increasing the domestic labour workload of the full-time homemaker. Not all households have either the time or the money to provide these services however, which means that the private household is unable to compensate for declining quality of services in the public sphere. When public funding for services does not keep pace with the need for those services, the agencies or institutions providing those services seek cheaper ways of providing their services. This includes increasing work-loads, redistributing work to less skilled lower paid workers, recruiting volunteers to provide services, reducing the number of paid staff positions, or failing to pay replacements for staff who are on leave. The result is that the work performed by paid, trained staff changes and that necessary services are simply not provided. When Weinbaum and Bridges state that "work we are increasingly ill-equipped to perform is pushed back into the home" what they should really be saying is that the public sector is no longer performing that work. Whether that work is being performed within the home is another question. There is certainly a fair bit of evidence to suggest that work that should be performed is simply not done - children and the sick are left virtually unattended unless their families can

afford either the time or the money to meet their needs.

The fiscal restraint policies which limit the ability of public sector workers to provide services does not mean that those services are automatically picked up by anyone. Women in private households may work harder to provide some of those services for their families and women working as volunteers may work to provide those services on a broader basis in the community, but it is crucial to realize the fact that these forms of unpaid labour cannot provide the same level of services which would be provided if government funding for trained paid staff were available. By failing to hire an adequate number of paid staff, government agencies and institutions attempt to shift the responsibility for certain jobs to unpaid volunteers, but this does not mean that sufficient volunteers are available to able to perform the necessary work.

The presumption that women in particular have the time to work as volunteers providing necessary services is rooted in an ideological presumption that women are not dependent on paid employment of their own. Especially in a time of high unemployment, women with employed husbands are encouraged to forego paid employment and volunteer their labour to help the 'less fortunate'. While the provision of services to those who need them is an important goal, the shift to volunteer labour represents an attempt by the government to shift responsibility for those services from

itself to individual women who are not paid for their work. This is the most extreme form of the exportation of jobs from regular, unionized, secure public sector employment.

## SUMMARY

The interviews revealed some important patterns in women's experiences related to job loss and staff reduction. Within female job ghettos, many women are without any job security or protection against their employers' decisions to fire them. During the recession, some women lost their jobs as a result of their employers' decisions to reduce the number of staff. Other women lost their jobs because their employers found it easy to replace them from the large pool of unemployed women available in the labour market. While women's lack of job security is an ongoing problem, the recession made the threat of job loss even greater.

For women employed in traditionally male-segregated jobs, the recession often meant the loss of work. As recent entrants into these fields of work, women lacked enough seniority to protect them against recessionary layoffs. In some cases, women may have lost jobs and been unable to find others because of the stiff competition from unemployed men. While opposition to women working in traditionally male jobs has a long history, the increased competition for work and the decline in the number of jobs in construction, processing, materials handling and other crafts may have

brought that opposition more to the surface.

In the public sector, many women workers enjoyed a certain degree of protection against layoffs, particularly if they were permanent full time unionized staff. The public sector however also includes the part-time, temporary, and volunteer workers who are hired through government funded agencies and make work projects. Women employed on temporary projects enjoyed no long term job security. Nearly all of the women working in the public sector discussed the problems created by employers' decisions to control spending by limiting the size of the staff. Underfunding and understaffing arising from the fiscal crisis of the state affected women working in the public sector although the effects were less visible than massive layoffs.

While the conclusions drawn from these interviews cannot automatically be the basis for generalizations about the entire population of women workers in the province, the patterns which emerge suggest the need for further investigation into the impact of the economic crisis on the loss of jobs or the redistribution of jobs within the female labour market.



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# CHAPTER VII

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT

Between 1981 and 1983, the number of women in Saskatchewan, who were officially counted as unemployed, rose from 10,000 to 15,000. In just two years the number of unemployed women in Saskatchewan increased by 50 %. The official unemployment rate for women in the Saskatchewan labour force rose from 5.7% in 1981 to 7.7% in 1983. In 1975, just eight years earlier, the female unemployment rate had been 4.4%. In every year between 1975 and 1984 the unemployment rate for women was higher than the unemployment rate for men in the province. Yet during the recession, the gap between male and female unemployment rates narrowed. In 1980, the female unemployment rate was 5.6%, compared to a male unemployment rate of 3.6%. In the depths of the recession in 1982, the female unemployment rate was 6.4%, compared to a male unemployment rate of 6.0%. The recession created much higher levels of unemployment for both women and men, but male unemployment increased more than female unemployment. Unemployment has been rising since 1979, and the 'recovery' which began in 1983, has done nothing to reverse that trend. Table 12 shows the trends in male and female unemployment in Saskatchewan between 1975 and 1984.

TABLE 12

SASKATCHEWAN UNEMPLOYMENT, BY SEX, 1975-1984

(estimates in thousands)

| Year | Total Unemployment | Male Unemployment | Male Unemployment Rate | Female Unemployment | Female Unemployment Rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1975 | 11 | 5 | 2.1% | 6 | 4.4% |
| 1976 | 15 | 8 | 3.1% | 8 | 5.4% |
| 1977 | 18 | 10 | 3.8% | 8 | 5.6% |
| 1978 | 20 | 11 | 4.2% | 9 | 6.1% |
| 1979 | 18 | 9 | 3.4% | 9 | 5.4% |
| 1980 | 19 | 10 | 3.6% | 9 | 5.6% |
| 1981 | 21 | 11 | 4.0% | 10 | 5.7% |
| 1982 | 28 | 17 | 6.0% | 12 | 6.4% |
| 1983 | 35 | 20 | 7.1% | 15 | 7.7% |
| 1984 | 38 | 22 | 7.7% | 16 | 8.5% |

Source: Statistics Canada, Historical Labour Force Statistics, 1984, 71-201.

The official figures themselves obscure the real level of unemployment. Women who would like to work but are unable to find alternative child care, women discouraged by the lack of job opportunities who have given up looking for work, women who have returned to school full time because they were unable to find paid employment are all hidden in the estimates of unemployment which are based on the government's monthly Labour Force Survey. Women who are underemployed in part time or temporary jobs would add even further to a true measure of female unemployment. The extent of this hidden unemployment is no small matter. Stirling and Kouri (1979) found that by altering the definition of unemployment to include those who wanted employment but had not looked for work, the unemployment rate was raised to 7.2% in contrast to the official rate of 1.9% in July 1973. They also found that by including people who said they would like employment if there were changes in the job market, their household or their personal situation, the unemployment rate rose to a staggering 20.0%. The overwhelming majority of these potential workers were women. There is no escaping the fact that the level of unemployment among women is high and has worsened dramatically.

While this fact itself is inescapable, government policy makers and certain portions of the population tend to dismiss female unemployment as relatively insignificant. Gonick (1978) described the distinction made by policy

makers between 'soft' unemployment among female 'secondary earners' and 'hardcore' unemployment among male 'providers'. Given the wage gap between women and men, most married women in the labour force are classified as 'secondary earners', which the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission defines as 'one in a family where there is another earner who contributes a greater proportion of family income' (Swan, 1979). Studies of government policies related to female unemployment have shown that the Canadian government has attempted to restrict women's access to unemployment insurance benefits and jobs programs while rationalizing these policies with the contention that female unemployment is less significant than unemployment among prime age males (Armstrong, 1980; Swan, 1979; Townson,1980; Alexander, 1979; Gonick, 1978).

> The government is dealing with the dramatically rising unemployment rates by defining female unemployment out of existence, by blaming women for the increase in unemployment and unemployment insurance costs, by cutting back in those areas where women are employed and by withdrawing funds from programmes designed to help jobless women. (Armstrong, 1980, 2)

Peter Armstrong (1982) described the response of people to women in a factory losing their jobs as a result of technological change as "If it's only women it doesn't matter so much." Indeed it seems that such a response to female unemployment is quite common. Assumptions about women's economic dependence on male 'providers' and their

lesser entitlement to paid employment persist despite the irrefutable evidence of women's economic need for paid work. These assumptions color people's perceptions of what female unemployment signifies. These assumptions are also expedient for policy makers who are thereby relieved of any obligation to seriously confront female unemployment as a major problem.

Unemployment among women is certainly not insignificant to the women who return week after week to the 'un'employment office to search the jobboards in an attempt to find work. It is not insignificant to the women who are struggling to feed and clothe their families with the money they receive from social assistance because they are unable to find paid jobs. It is not insignificant to the women who are trying to reenter the labour force and find that competition for jobs among 'experienced' workers leaves them with little hope of being hired.

It is only logical that women who need paid employment to provide income for themselves and their families would take their unemployment or the threat of unemployment seriously. Unemployment reduces their ability to provide and leads in some cases to impoverishment. Women who need paid employment for a sense of identity and social recognition, who want to participate productively outside their homes, who do not want to be economically dependent on husbands, parents, or the welfare state suffer the harsh

consequences of unemployment. There are those who would have us believe that the feminine gender provides a buffer against the harsh consequences of unemployment and that women who lose their jobs simply return to their "natural' environment within the home. While the loss of income and self esteem suffered by unemployed men has been documented, very little is known about the experiences of women who are unable to find paid work.

Many of the women whom I interviewed in 1984 had been unemployed for months during the recent recession. Their unemployment was not necessarily the result of recession layoffs, although there were several cases of this. There were also women whose work histories were riddled with a series of temporary jobs interspersed with recurrent periods of unemployment. Some of these women lost their jobs because small businesses folded or their employer could fire and hire at will. Some women went through a revolving door, going back and forth between temporary make work projects and unemployment. Some women were trying to reenter the paid labour force after leaving a job to have a baby, raise children, or move to a new community. While the recession itself may not have caused their job losses, these women were adversely affected by the recession because it made their search for paid employment all the more difficult.

In this chapter I present a summary of the social costs of unemployment as experienced by the women whom I

interviewed. First and foremost among their experiences was the difficulty arising from the loss of wages. While this was particularly acute in the cases where women were self-supporting individuals or single parents, it was also significant to a number of married women with both employed and unemployed husbands. Secondly, the loss of self esteem which accompanied women's unemployment led to a number of psychological problems. Thirdly, women's unemployment caused hardships within their families, increased family conflict and strained personal relationships. In the following pages I let the women speak for themselves about the consequences of unemployment in their own lives - what it meant to them and what price they had to pay. Not every woman who was unemployed suffered the same injuries but this in no way diminishes the pain of those who are injured by the economy's failure to provide jobs for all those who need them.

## FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES
## "YOU DEFINITELY HURT WHEN YOU'RE BROKE."
## (Interview 29)

The unemployed women whom I interviewed included women who had been laid off or fired, who had left one job in hopes of finding a better one, or who had entered the labour force after finishing school or raising children at home. Previously employed women had to cope with the loss of their

wages, but other unemployed women also suffered the financial consequences of being unable to find paid work.

For women who were able to collect unemployment insurance (UI) benefits, the loss of their paid jobs meant that their income was reduced to 60% of their former insurable earnings. Women who were entering or re-entering the labour market had less access to UI benefits because they were required by federal government policy to work longer than people with labour market experience in order to establish their eligibility. Women who work less than fifteen hours a week and women who work at home providing childcare, typing or other informal work also do not qualify for unemployment insurance. There is also some evidence to indicate that married women and young people are scrutinized more thoroughly by government workers to find a basis for refusing to grant UI benefits (Alexander, 1979; Armstrong, 1980). As a result women are less likely than men to receive UI benefits when they are unemployed, and the level of their benefits is less since it is tied to the level of their former earnings (Swan, 1979). The wage gap between employed men and women is reproduced in the distribution of UI benefits. A study by the Economic Council of Canada (1976) found that over half of the men receiving UI got benefits above the minimum wage while only one tenth of the women on UI got benefits above the minimum wage.

Women who have been laid off by employers can normally receive unemployment insurance benefits after a brief waiting period, but if women quit a job they may have to wait several weeks before receiving any benefits. Even those who receive UI benefits only do so for a limited period of time, up to one year, and then that source of income is gone.

Women are indeed dependent upon wage labour to secure the money which they need to procure the means of subsistence. Without access to paid jobs, women become economically dependent on the government or other family members. If other family members have sufficient income to support unemployed women, then these women do not necessarily experience impoverishment with the loss of paid work. However, for the majority of unemployed women who are self-supporting or whose families do not have access to high income, the lack of paid work entails serious financial hardships (Armstrong, 1980). A Canadian study by the National Council of Welfare found that the number of poor families in Canada would increase by fifty one percent if working wives lost their income (National Council of Welfare, 1979). By examining the number of women who are self supporting or whose husbands' income is below a family wage, it has been estimated that at least two thirds of the women in the Saskatchewan labour force are working or looking for work out of economic need (Saskatchewan Labour,

Women's Division, 1980). Given the fact that the majority of women in the Saskatchewan labour force work out of economic need, it should come as no surprise that many of the unemployed women whom I interviewed did not have the financial resources to meet their needs.

Vera Callas, a self-supporting 29 year old woman who lost her job in 1982 and was unemployed for almost a year, responded immediately about the importance of the loss of income when I asked her how the loss of her job affected her.

> "One of the things about unemployment, well, the big thing that affects everything else is the reduced income. You don't have the money to go out and do things and it's amazing how much money simple little things cost." (Interview 10)

Heather McKenzie, a 33 year old mother of five who had been unable to find work for two years, compared living on welfare to supporting her children on her previous wages.

> "It's quite a difference when you are used to having just about everything you need (when you are employed) and you get to the point where you can't afford nothing you need." (Interview 37)

Sheila Parks, a 22 year old single mother, had been employed as a mine labourer and took home $1450/month. When

the mines cut back production and she was laid off, she was able to collect unemployment insurance for awhile. However, as the layoff stretched over many months, her unemployment insurance ran out and she was forced to live on social assistance benefits which were approximately half of her former earnings.

> "I make $770 (on social assistance) and my rent here is $350 and my bills are between $50 and $70 and I've got a car payment of $100....You get your check at the beginning of the month and you buy your groceries and maybe something little for the house like a garbage can. And come the end of the month, that eleven dollars, you notice that you should have kept it....Since I've been on assistance I've never made it to the end of the month and still had money." (Interview 29)

Suzanne Burritt, a 35 year old self supporting single woman, had been employed as an auto mechanic but left that job because she was isolated by her male co-workers for seven months. She collected unemployment insurance for a few months and then was forced to go on social assistance because she was unable to find another job.

> "I was on unemployment (insurance) until December (1981) and then I was on welfare for

> two months. And that was really a drag. I was living in this house at the time that cost $275/month plus heat, plus food and I basically didn't have any money. That was the first time I really knew what it was like not to have nothing." (Interview 31)

Angela Debray, a 31 year old Native woman who lived with her children and unemployed husband, was able to collect unemployment insurance after leaving her job as a social worker because of the stressful working conditions. When her unemployment insurance ran out, she struggled to support her family on social assistance. She eventually found a job with a non-profit agency but was fired because of a controversy over the agency's unwillingness to provide services to Native communities. At the time of the interview neither she or her husband were earning any income and they both refused to go back on social assistance.

> "I was getting $808/month (UI benefits). We weren't rich and we struggled but, you know, it was enough. We could survive. It was comfortable. It was all right. It wasn't the best but we made it.... (When the UI ran out and we were on welfare) $525/month was what we were getting." (Interview 38)

I asked the women whom I interviewed to describe their experiences in applying for unemployment insurance. I

wanted to find out if they experienced any particular problems as a result of their gender. While no one reported any overt instances of sex discrimination, there are certain policies in the administration of unemployment insurance which disproportionately affect women. The most significant policy is the formula for calculating the benefits on the basis of a percentage (60%) of prior insurable earnings. Since women are found disproportionately in low paid jobs, their UI benefits are also lower than men's. In 1980, for example, the average weekly benefits for regular UI beneficiaries in Saskatchewan were $122.92 for men and $94.58 for women. Another policy which affects women disproportionately is the requirement that new entrants or reentrants to the labour force have to work for a longer period of time before they qualify for UI benefits. Finally, because of the temporary or part time nature of their jobs, some workers do not qualify for UI benefits at all and workers who have their hours cut, but are not laid off do not receive any compensation for their underemployment. Since women are found disproportionately in part time and temporary work, and since they are more likely to leave the labour force for family reasons, these restrictions on UI eligibility make it more difficult for women to qualify.

Many of the women whom I interviewed collected unemployment insurance without any problems but some were unable to collect or were cut off from collecting their full

benefits. Women from low wage jobs received very low UI benefits. For many women the level of their UI benefits was not enough income to live on.

Cathy Connelly, a 28 year old single mother, was unemployed over a year before finding a temporary job which lasted five months. When that job ended she went back on unemployment insurance, glad to be able to spend time at home with her baby. However, living on unemployment insurance she had depleted her savings and faced the prospect of becoming dependent on social assistance if she was unable to find work before her UI benefits expired.

> "Now my savings are gone and so is my unemployment insurance and I don't know how people make it. Cause unemployment would be enough for me if there was just me but I've got a baby and I didn't realize how much a baby cost....$720/month (which I get from UIC) is a lot more than I am going to get on welfare and I can't live on that. I'm not really extravagant. I don't really have any clothes for myself. And I bought most of my furniture at the Salvation Army and second hand stores. I'm not a consumer at heart and I still can't manage." (Interview 1)

When Linda Moore was laid off from her low wage job in a retail store during the recession, she had to support

herself and her son on very low UI benefits.

> "Then I had to live on UIC and at the time I was only getting $127/week. And that was my only source of income except for $100/month my ex-husband would give me, that's if he paid." (Interview 12)

When Diane Houston's temporary job as a recreation worker ended because the funding for the program ran out, she had to support herself on unemployment insurance benefits that were far below the minimum wage.

> "I made $102/week on UIC." (K:Were you able to live on that?) "Barely. Just surviving though. Not going anywhere." (Interview 19)

Donna Taylor, a laid off mineworker whose wages were better than those of many women in female job ghettoes, still was unable to collect the full level of unemployment insurance benefits because her earnings were not high enough. In her workplace, only those men who were skilled craftsmen or miner operators were able to qualify for the maximum UI benefits when they were laid off.

> "A miner operator and a journeyman (jobs held by men at her workplace) get the full UIC benefits but I don't. I make that wage but I don't qualify for the highest UIC benefit....They always say 'Well look a person can make so much a week on UIC.' But

> you've got to be making a lot of money to get up to that ceiling. And people don't realize that. They figure that everybody that is on unemployment benefits is getting the top rate. No, they are getting pretty close to half - a lot of people." (Interview 30)

Marta Armstrong re-entered the paid labour force after staying at home while her children were small because she was unable to arrange alternative childcare. She was able to find employment on a temporary government funded project, but her job did not last long enough for her to qualify for UI benefits. When additional funding for the project became available and she wanted to return to work there, she was told that she could not be hired because she had not been unemployed long enough to qualify for employment in a jobs creation program. Because of various government policies she was unable to retain her job, unable to collect unemployment insurance, and unable to be rehired by an employer who wanted her back.

> "I worked a total of 18 weeks and after that I tried to apply for unemployment insurance and I couldn't qualify. They said 18 weeks was insufficient because I was re-entering the labour force. I was really upset but there was an opportunity that I could go back to the office to work because one or two

> women had taken a holiday....But I couldn't get on to work without waiting a 9 week period. (In order to be rehired) I had to be unemployed for 9 weeks. That was the stipulation from Manpower....So I sat out for 9 weeks without unemployment insurance." (Interview 25)

Sheila Parks, the 22 year old mine worker who was laid off during the recession, described how she became ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits because she was pregnant. State financed maternity benefits and unemployment insurance for job losers are both administered through the same government agency. Sheila Parks had expected to collect unemployment insurance because of the layoff and then qualify for maternity benefits after her baby was born, but they used up her maternity benefits during the pregnancy and then declared her ineligible for unemployment insurance because her pregnancy made her unavailable for work.

> "I got laid off in June and I collected unemployment until the first week in November. They cut me off. I was eight months pregnant and I wasn't eligible for work. Therefore I wasn't eligible for the benefits and they had paid me my maternity benefits starting in June, which they weren't

> supposed to do ....So I'm eight months pregnant. What am I going to do for money? I went to Social Services. I paid into UIC for years and years and years and all they did was the same thing the mine did. They told me to come back when he was six weeks old. So I went back when he was six weeks old and they told me I'd have to look for a job and they'd be checking up on me....I told them that they had made the mistake by giving my maternity benefits too early and they cut me off for three months and I figured they owed me that money. But they said, 'No, no, no. That's not the way it works." (Interview 29)

Women's reproductive roles have become socially structured liabilities. Women who spend time outside the paid labour force in order to perform the housework and childcare which are socially defined as their responsibilities are put at a disadvantage in the labour market and in government programs related to the labour market. Women's pregnancies have become grounds for denial of access to unemployment insurance, except in the form of maternity benefits. And as the following woman pointed out, women's responsibilities for childcare could also be used as grounds for denying them unemployment insurance benefits. It is important to remember that these liabilities are not biologically

determined, but the result of the socially constructed institution of motherhood (Rich, 1976).

> "Childcare has traditionally been the woman's responsibility. And if a woman is going for a job interview and say she's been referred by UIC to go for a job interview and if she misses that job interview because her kid is sick, that is grounds for cutting her off unemployment insurance. If a guy had the same situation happen to him, it would also be grounds for cutting him off, but how many times does that happen to a man? Daycare (subsidies from the government are) not available to women after they've been unemployed for two months or so. What are they supposed to do with their kids while they are looking for work?.... So they are being penalized because they have kids, because they have the responsibility for looking after them." (Interview 10)

I spoke with women whose income from unemployment benefits or social assistance was so low that they were barely able to meet their subsistence needs. These were women who sometimes did not have enough food to eat, or enough money to pay their utility bills. In most cases women watched how they spent their money very carefully but

there was simply not enough money to meet their needs. Economic need compelled these women to seek jobs in the paid labour market but the lack of jobs consigned them to a life of financial hardship.

Heather McKenzie described what it was like to try to raise her children on welfare. She was constantly having to juggle one set of expenses against another, trying to decide what they could do without or where they could find the money to pay an unexpected bill.

> "You can't really live off social assistance. You are existing. You are not living. There is a difference between living and existing. Living means you're comfortable. Existing means you are just there...If the electricity bill is a little high, where does it come from - the grocery money. If your gas is a little high, the same thing. They (Social Services) allow you a certain amount but after that it's finished....There's a lot of people that are in trustee because the welfare says they can't handle their money. The way I look at it is if they had enough they'd be able to handle it. What can you buy for that amount? I think it's $115 per child and that's got to cover their groceries and their clothes....That's okay if you don't

> need any clothes for three or four months so you can put it in the groceries, but the month that they need clothes, you have to pull it out of the groceries. It's always being pulled one direction or the other. And who is suffering? It's not us; it's the kids." (Interview 37)

She went on to describe how she herself would go without food in order to insure that her children had enough to eat. And because the private household is the basic unit in which economic resources are distributed, hunger within the family is often a private matter. Heather McKenzie did not tell people outside her family that there was not enough food to eat until her obvious weakness led them to ask her what was wrong.

> "I really didn't have enough food. I made sure the kids ate and I just had coffee.... Some months that just had to happen. We had big bills and the kids eat and I have a drink of water or a cup of coffee or a glass of milk, whatever happens to be in the house, because a lot of times it's two or three weeks until check day comes." (Interview 37)

Suzanne Burritt described being able to live pretty cheaply and save part of her income when she was employed. However, when she found herself unemployed for several

months she depleted her savings and exhausted her UI benefits. When she was forced to go on welfare, she barely had enough to meet her basic needs for food and shelter.

> "I am used to living on not a lot. I don't really spend piles of money on things and I'm pretty good at saving so when I do work, the extra money I make, I save pretty well. I can live pretty cheap. Except that particular time (when I was unemployed and on welfare) I wasn't eating very good....Usually I had one meal a day for sure....I ate pretty poorly. But I can't remember, I think I had about $30/month for food." (Interview 31)

Angela Debray described the impossibility of stretching a welfare check to cover expenses for a month when the cost of utilities rose astronomically with no corresponding increase in benefits. She also described how hunger in the family was a private affair, even though she held the government and not her family responsible for the situation.

> "You get a check. The next day it is gone. And if you don't make your groceries last until the end of the month then you are out begging for food. But not us. We stay here and we don't go anywhere. We stay right here and we don't ask anybody for a cent. We don't ask anybody for a dime, not even for a

> loaf of bread. And we go without. Sometimes we don't eat for two days, three days. That's because your power bills are so high. The government puts this 6 and 5 restraint on the people but then your power bills come in with a 40% increase....That is not 6 and 5 restraint to me, not when they are squeezing every cent they can out of poor people." (Interview 38)

After the Conservative government came to power in Saskatchewan in 1982, there were significant changes made in the social assistance programs. Among the first wave of changes were cutbacks in certain types of benefits. Special needs grants and household and clothing allowances were cut back in an effort to limit government expenditures for the growing number of welfare recipients. Heather McKenzie described how, as a result of these cutbacks, it became necessary to borrow against future welfare payments or go without necessities.

> "The special needs are out now. They don't give any more special needs (grants)." (K:So if you have a special need and you get money from Social Services, then over the next few months they reduce your check?) "Yes. The new welfare reforms have made them take out furniture allowances, clothing allowances,

> all this kind of stuff. You just don't get it. You have to work it in your budget with your grocery money to buy your kids what they need." (Interview 37)

Cathy Connelly described how the cutbacks were particularly aimed at people who had exhausted their unemployment insurance benefits.

> "When they (Social Services) assessed it last year, they were giving you enough that you couldn't do anything but barely survive. And now they've cut out about $100 and they are still expecting you to live on it. The theory is that if you got unemployment (insurance) then you've got lots of clothes and lots of stuff for your house so you don't need that money. But they know that people don't use that money for clothes and household goods anyway, that they have to use that for food too because they don't give you enough money for food." (Interview 1)

Trying to live on social assistance often meant that women were unable to pay their bills. Sometimes women were able to borrow money from family or get an advance from Social Services but the accumulation of debts which had to be paid back at some point only extended the period of financial hardship. In addition to accumulating debts, women

who tried to live off welfare payments also found that they had to pay more. They had to pay security deposits because as welfare recipients they were considered high risks. They had to pay high heating bills because they were only able to find substandard housing. They had to pay the full cost of childcare services because they were cut off from government subsidies after two months of unemployment.

Angela Debray explained how an unexpected increase in expenses could result in welfare recipients having to pay more than middle income earners for the same services.

> "One month our power bill came up to $150 and on $525 (social assistance) you can't afford to dish out $150 all in one shot. So I filed that and eventually it added up and I am still paying for that. We haven't paid it off yet. After that SaskPower called us a 'risk' and they said 'Because you're a risk, you are going to have to pay an additional $100.' They do that to all welfare recipients." (Interview 38)

When I began interviewing women about their experiences during the recession, I did not intentionally seek out welfare recipients. But I found that a number of working women had been forced to go on social assistance because they were unable to find paid employment. There are no hard and fast boundaries separating women who work at paid jobs

from women who are unemployed and women who are on social assistance. Employed women's experiences are significantly shaped by their direct access to wage labour. Low wages and lack of job security, however, tend to blur the boundaries between employed women and women in the reserve army of the unemployed. All of the welfare recipients whom I interviewed had been working to support themselves before going on social assistance. Some of them worked for such low wages, they were eligible for social assistance even though they were working. Others were able to support themselves with their wages until they lost their jobs. Then while living on their UI benefits, they waited to be called back from layoff or looked for other work. When their UI ran out, their only recourse was to apply for social assistance.

These women varied in terms of their educational background. Some had not finished high school, but others had university degrees. They varied in terms of their occupational background. Some had been employed in low wage female job ghettos and others had worked in non-traditional occupations. They came from varied family backgrounds. Some were the former wives of professional men, some were single, some were married to husbands who were unemployed. There were two sets of circumstances which they shared in common. They were unable to find employment which paid them enough to live on. And they were not in a position to depend upon a male provider for economic support.

In some cases, women were on welfare for a short time before finding a job and becoming self-supporting again. In other cases, their dependence on the state stretched over months and years as their chances of finding employment seemed to diminish. The point I am trying to make here is that, contrary to the commonly held stereotypes of women on welfare, they are not a separate category from working women. Some working women are on welfare while they are employed. Many women on welfare have been employed and are looking for work but subsist on welfare because the jobs are not available. When people are employed they tend to see themselves as fundamentally different from people on welfare. As people lose their jobs and realize that their unemployment may stretch over a long period of time, they come painfully to the conclusion that they themselves could cross over the line and become a welfare recipient. As the recession deepened, the number of people exhausting their unemployment insurance benefits and going onto welfare rose substantially.

After losing her job during the recession, Vera Callas did not imagine that she would be out of work for very long. Twenty nine years old, a college graduate who had supported herself since leaving high school, she never expected to become a welfare recipient. After more than a year of being unable to find a permanent full time job, she faced the very real possibility of becoming dependent upon state social

assistance programs. But by this time she had come to feel enough anger and resentment toward a social system which denied her the opportunity to support herself that she felt that she had a right to receive welfare with dignity instead of shame.

> "It's gotten to the point where in two months, if I don't have a job, I am going to be on welfare. A couple months ago, a year ago,that would have just killed me. I'm getting to the point where I am saying, 'Okay I want to work. I'm really looking for work and all the rest of that but I am not being hired. It's not my fault. If society doesn't want to give me a job, society can bloody well support me. I'm willing to work. Give me a job and I will." (Interview 10)

The lack of paid employment consigned women to a position of economic dependence upon other income earners within the family or upon the state. Economic dependency reduces women's ability to control their own lives, even if the level of financial support is enough to provide a comfortable standard of living. Economic dependency on the state, however, provides no such guarantee of a comfortable standard of living.

While the wages women earn are often so low that they remain economically dependent even when fully employed, the

growing level of female unemployment signifies a serious setback to women's efforts to gain some measure of financial independence. The loss of income suffered by women who are unable to find paid work reduces not only their standard of living, but their freedom to control their own lives. These financial consequences of female unemployment are reason enough for us to seek fundamental changes in the labour market opportunities for women. But there are other consequences of unemployment as well.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

"I DON'T CARE WHAT CATEGORY YOU'RE IN, MAN OR WOMAN, IF YOU'RE UNEMPLOYED YOU'RE LIVING A NIGHTMARE." (Interview 37)

Although unemployment is first and foremost the experience of being unable to find paid work in the labour market, it is also an experience which reaches beyond the economic institutions of the labour market. Unemployment is not an experience which is confined to a separate sphere of solely economic relationships.

Unemployment becomes an identity or nonidentity, a stigma, which one carries either openly or furtively into the rest of one's social interactions. And it is not simply an identity which the unemployed person brings with her but is, more accurately, an identity which is created for her in a variety of social interactions. While the rejection of job applications by employers creates the unemployed woman,

she is recreated again and again outside labour market in encounters with friends, former co-workers, store clerks, welfare workers, bank tellers, bill collectors, and school officials.

In some cases these encounters lead to a sense of invisibility as if an unemployed woman is someone who doesn't exist. While the loss of paid work by men is socially acknowledged as a significant loss of their status as 'providers', the social response to female unemployment is more ambiguous. On the one hand, women are subject to the same stigmatization and blame which falls upon all those who are out of work. 'What's wrong with her that she can't get a job?' On the other hand, her lack of employment is trivialized because of her presumed economic dependence upon a man. 'It's not so bad because she has her husband to support her and now she can stay home with the kids.' In many cases these encounters stigmatize and devalue the person who is out of work, implying that they are to blame for their situation and assuming that they are unreliable, untrustworthy and unwilling to work.

Often as a result of these social interactions both inside and outside the labour market, unemployed women are changed inside themselves. Their confidence in their own abilities, their self-esteem, their sense of being able to act in the world are all undermined by their condition of unemployment which originates but is not confined to the

labour market. Unemployment isn't something which just takes place in a personnel office or the unemployment line, it is something which takes place inside people when their hope for the future is replaced with a sense of futility and discouragement.

Among the women whom I interviewed, nearly all who had been unemployed for more than a few weeks had suffered from psychological problems caused by their unemployment. Sometimes during the initial period of unemployment women breathe a sigh of relief and enjoy a brief respite from the demands on their time and energy which paid work has made. At first, women who have been employed may assume that they'll be able to find another job fairly easily. However, as their day to day experiences of looking for work bring repeated rejections, women begin to lose hope and feel powerless. They have to struggle against depression and the loss of self esteem. For women without any savings to carry them through even a brief period of unemployment and for women who are fired from jobs that they wanted to keep, there is no initial vacation. The nightmare of unemployment begins at once.

Marta Armstrong, a 33 year old married woman with two children, had reluctantly given up paid employment when her children were small because she was unable to arrange adequate childcare. When she tried to reenter the labour force, the only jobs she was able to find were temporary.

She described for me how she felt each time she had been out of work.

> "I start to lose self esteem after about a week or two. A week you think its kind of a holiday but you are only fooling yourself. Like I feel like I have nothing to offer. What do I do with myself? And I guess you start getting really down. What's the matter with you? You start questioning your whole being. Can't you do anything? It's terrible. To me I think its one of the worst things that's ever happened to me in my life. When I've been working there have been problems and you're in a bit of a ratrace but I've always preferred that as opposed to having some time. I guess I don't have any energy. I don't want to do anything when I am unemployed. And basically there is a lot that I could do but I don't want to do it. And that to me is depression....I would sometimes get almost suicidal I think. Not really intending to do it but thinking 'Oh what the hell, what is life worth living for anyway?'....It's been hard. I think you lose faith in a lot of things - not only your government but also in people around you

> after awhile. Because sometimes if you are unemployed, people are insensitive to you, especially when you are a woman. They think 'What do you need to do that for (find a paid job)? " (Interview 25)

Vera Callas, a 29 year old single woman who had been self-supporting since finishing high school, was laid off from her job in March 1982. She spent most of the following year looking unsuccessfully for paid work. She described how her preconceptions about the unemployed made it difficult for her to face being unemployed herself.

> "I couldn't believe it was going to take me all that long to get work again. If anybody would have told me that by the end of the summer of that year I would still be unemployed, I'd have said they were nuts. ...I was too good a worker to be laid off that long. After all, the only people who were unemployed were bums who didn't want to work, right?...I knew on one level that wasn't true, but I still fell into the trap of believing it on occasion. And I certainly never expected it to apply to me. And I found that it did. And I really found it difficult to deal with - with the fact that I wasn't going to get work." (Interview 10)

Cathy Connelly, a 28 year old single mother, was unemployed for over a year before landing a temporary job which lasted only five months. She described the depression and loss of hope for the future which unemployment brings in its wake.

> "I can really understand how people who are isolated in their unemployment can really, well, almost get to the point of being suicidal....The hardest thing right now is the stress that it causes. It gives me a physical headache to think that I may never have a full time job again. There's people who've been out of work for years. I may never be in a situation where I can have a pension plan or a vacation benefit. I could go on with make work jobs and unemployment insurance, to welfare, to another make work job and be like that for twenty years or longer if somebody doesn't do something about it. It doesn't look good at all." (Interview 1)

Twenty four year old Barbara Lian and her husband had both had difficulty finding paid employment at various times since finishing school. Her experiences had shown her that unemployment undermines feelings of confidence and self esteem.

> "We put a lot of worth in a job, a lot of our sense of worth, pride, all that into a job. And not having a job you seem to lose that aspect of what you are worth as a human being. And we still do that. I think it is wrong but that is in our value system. And not having a job really affects your state of well being....It did make me question my confidence and my abilities. Thinking maybe I'm not as good as I am." (Interview 14)

Marcia King, a 37 year old technician who became underemployed when half of her job was eliminated, described how the loss of work brings about feelings of self-doubt and self-blame.

> "I find it very stressful trying to assess where my responsibility begins and ends for the situation I am in. That is very hard. I'm sure that is the case for all unemployed people or underemployed people, because there are so many personal factors to blame yourself for. And that has been the traditional way of scapegoating I think. The individual takes responsibility and just feels like a worthless person because they can't get a better job." (Interview 20)

When people are employed, their daily life is structured by routines of getting ready, going to work, and coming home. When they are at work the materials necessary for them to carry on their jobs are provided by their employers. When they go to work, they come in contact with other people. When people are unemployed, they have more 'free time'. When they use that time to hunt unsuccessfully for work they experience rejection and failure. When they are not looking for work it is difficult for them to make plans or structure their daily activity. Unemployment encourages passivity - not because individuals lack ambition - but because their daily experiences reinforce the futility of their efforts. People who spend their time waiting to hear about the decisions made by others start to feel powerless and aimless. Lack of income compounds the problem because even when people figure out what to do with their time, they may not be able to afford the materials necessary to carry out their plans.

Marta Armstrong described the lost feeling of not knowing what to do when she was at home and out of work. The lack of structure in each day and the uncertainty of the future left her with a sense of aimlessness.

> "Floundering I guess is a good word. Not really knowing from one day to the next....I would say every day has been like that. There hasn't been one day in which you don't

> think 'What is going to happen? What should I do?' And that is awful." (Interview 25)

Suzanne Burritt, a self-supporting 35 year old woman, lost her job in the summer of 1981. She was unemployed until February 1982, when she found a temporary job. She spent the next twelve months going back and forth between looking for work and a variety of short term jobs before finally being hired as a production worker in a factory. She described how the daily experience of being out of work led to a loss of purpose and direction in life. A sense of hopelesssness and not knowing what to do encouraged a kind of frustrated passivity.

> "The day after day thing, I think that is the hardest to take. When you're on the job and you're working with rednecks that's hard but at least you've got a job. When you're off the job, when you're looking for work, unless you're on a project or something, you have to have that rejection constantly....You wake up in the morning and you think 'Well, what am I going to do?' You're always sort of desperately looking for this job that's not there and you sort of never really plan anything for yourself. You know you could be doing other things....I've worked for a year and a few months and I can just think of a

> million things I want to do....But talk to me a year and a half ago and I just couldn't imagine what I wanted to do, because I didn't have any money and everything just seemed sort of hopeless." (Interview 31)

Angela Debray, a 31 year old Native woman whose husband was also unemployed, described the utter hopelessness she felt when she lost her job with a non-profit community organization because of a dispute over their reluctance to provide services to Native communities.

> "They fired me and that is something I am very bitter about because I liked it. ...Right now I am pretty discouraged and right now I just don't feel like looking for a job. I just want to lay down and die. That's how I feel about it and I don't know when I am going to get even the will. I don't know when I am going to feel like working again. It seems like everything is coming down on us right now. I don't know if I want to do anything again." (Interview 38)

The experience of looking for work and not finding it is an ongoing process in which the social interactions between job applicants and potential employers repeatedly reinforce feelings of failure and low self esteem. The psychological problems of unemployed women are best

understood not as static characteristics of these individuals but as the products of ongoing social processes which demean and undermine individuals' feelings of self worth.

The common practice among employers of not even acknowledging receipt of job applications from persons they don't intend to interview leads to a feeling of social invisibility. Women who repeatedly apply for jobs and receive no reply begin to wonder if anyone knows or cares that they exist. Women who apply for jobs only to face repeated rejection begin to lose confidence in their own abilities and to blame themselves for their lack of paid employment. Women who want and need to be employed but cannot find work begin to feel that society has no place for them and they question the meaning of their own existence. Depression, isolation, feelings of worthlessness and loss of hope are all caused or exacerbated by unemployment. Women who are unemployed are in no way immune to these feelings and they suffer the consequences of unemployment regardless of their gender.

Heather McKenzie, a single mother who had supported her children by working at two jobs and taking in boarders, moved to a new community and was unable to find work. When I interviewed her she had been unemployed for two years and was on welfare. She described how she became depressed and discouraged over her prospects of finding work.

> "It's sort of depressing you know. You go every day and you get a newspaper and you look and you look and you write a few letters. And you wait and you never hear. Or you phone and you keep phoning back and sooner or later you get somebody telling you not to phone back....Every day you'd keep hoping. But after about a year, you lose all hope. If there is something out there, I'm not even going to bother trying any more, because you get to the point where I have tried so many times and where has it got me? They say that you should just keep trying but after awhile you just kind of give up. You lose all hope." (Interview 37)

Diane Houston, a single self-supporting 23 year old, had been unemployed at various times since finishing school because she had only been able to find temporary employment. She described her sense of frustration at being unable to find a job after spending two years in a training program.

> "It was really depressing - really frustrating. There were times when I wasn't working and I'd be on unemployment and I'd just shut myself in this apartment and I'd be doing a really totally depressing number on myself. I'd feel like I wasted two years of

> my life going to school because nobody is giving me the chance to show that yes I can do this kind of work. I know what I can do and I know this job really well. People keep saying 'You have to have experience.' But people won't hire you to give you the experience and how are you supposed to get experience if no one is hiring you? And that is really frustrating. There were a lot of long distance calls to my mother. It seems like sometimes no matter the harder you were trying to get ahead the further back in the hole I was falling. You know I tried to get out and improve myself. There's times when I feel like all I'm doing is running up against a brick wall and the harder I try to get by it, the harder I am running into it. It gets really frustrating at times." (Interview 19)

The process of applying for work and meeting with rejection puts unemployed women onto an emotional roller coaster. In order to apply for work women struggle to build up their hope and self confidence. When they get as far as an interview, they have to psych themselves up in order to make a favorable impression. After raising their hopes they have farther to fall when the rejection letter or phone call arrives. If this happens often enough the struggle to

maintain an appearance of confidence and hopefulness becomes more difficult to endure.

Vera Callas described how the search for a job involved painful emotional risks. Rejection of a job application was felt more deeply as a rejection of oneself.

> "You never get to the point where you can accept rejection with a smile. I don't care who it is. People may say that you can. People may see the smile but they don't see what goes on inside. There's always that absolute devastation that you feel when you open the letter and it says 'Sorry the position has been filled.'" (Interview 10)

Cathy Connelly gave a vivid description of how her job search experiences had put her on an emotional roller coaster.

> "It was just an awful experience the whole way around. It was terrible. Sometimes I don't know how I survived it. There were a lot of times when I thought I wasn't going to. And I wished I'd just crack up and I wouldn't have to handle it any more. One of the things that I found really hard was when you got an interview. Then you'd have to work yourself into a high point so that you appeared really good for this interview. You

> would go in and you'd lay out your whole life in front of them. And then you'd get a rejection notice and have to come all the way back down again to where you were before and start looking for a job again. It was this constant up and down, up and down. So you really felt like you wished you didn't get an interview after awhile." (Interview 1)

Ellen Frank, a middle aged divorced woman who lived with her son on social assistance, had been unemployed for much of the past seven years. Although she had a university education and some paid work experience, it had been very difficult for her to find employment. As prolonged unemployment eroded her sense of self esteem, it became increasingly difficult for her to face the risks involved in applying for work. At the same time, her loss of self-confidence became a liability which lessened her chances of being hired.

> "I've been applying for jobs all along. Sometimes it would get so hard when they start to say 'Tell me something about yourself'. I would see it that here is another thing or I would just burst out crying and couldn't continue. So I kept thinking that that's the time to quit, to stop trying. And then when I would feel more

> confident, then I would start at it again.... I applied for a job and they hired a 19 year old girl who was very very cheerful. They said that they hired her because of her personality. I think I would have become more cheerful too if I had a job. And I think if she kept looking for work as long as I have, that she would have also been a little less cheerful too." (Interview 17)

Marta Armstrong described how she blamed herself and focused on her own personal shortcomings whenever she applied unsuccessfully for work. She has been made to feel particularly inadequate in the job market because she has spent some years outside the labour force caring for her children and doing volunteer work. This unpaid labour of women is frequently ignored and devalued when job applicants are being evaluated. The woman who has experience in unpaid labour is defined as lacking work experience which counts in the labour market.

> "(After an interview) I thought 'I really blew it. I need this job. I want this job. But I really blew it.' And I put myself down terribly....I always feel inadequate because I don't have much work history really and I always feel maybe I've got a lot of volunteer work and whatnot but maybe they don't see

> that as work. And they didn't really mention anything about volunteer work at all, like if they would consider it or not....When I walk in I always feel that I don't have anything to sell, which has been really bad because I think that you always have to have a lot of years of work behind you before you get a job today. And I don't have that. I may have it in other areas but not paid work." (Interview 25)

The psychological costs of facing repeated rejection from potential employers were coupled with a growing sense that the longer one was unemployed, the less chance one had of being hired. The social interaction between job applicants and employers, whether face to face in interviews or indirectly through other forms of communication or non-communication, created the frustration and hopelessness which unemployed women felt. It is important to see the frustration and depression experienced by unemployed women not as the characteristics of individual personalities but as the products of ongoing social processes which repeatedly recreate these emotional responses. Women become depressed, discouraged and hopeless not because of individual flaws in their character but because their interactions with others reinforce their feelings of powerlessness. The tendency to assume that there is something wrong with people who are

unemployed places the blame for unemployment on the individuals who are out of work. While the unemployed are held responsible for their 'inability' to get a job, the actual power to provide them with employment rests not with themselves but with employers. And employers, it seems, are not interested in hiring people who have been out of work for a long time.

Cathy Connelly described how job interviews with potential employers were shaped by the employers' attitudes toward people who were not employed. The presumption that there was something wrong with individuals who couldn't find work and the devaluation of volunteer work made in increasingly difficult for unemployed women to improve their chances of being hired.

> "As it got longer and longer that I was unemployed they thought I'd just been sitting around....This guy sits back smoking a cigar, telling you that you're basically lazy, and you know he's not going to hire you. And that adds to the frustration. And it got worse,of course, as you were unemployed longer. So you try and tell them about how you are keeping yourself busy. But they don't care about volunteer work anyway. That's just women's work that they do anyway and it's not important. After awhile you

> don't tell them about that either....I had one interview shortly after I was unemployed that was pretty good. I can't think of another one that wasn't devastating....They assume that there is either something wrong with you or that you really didn't want to work anyway." (Interview 1)

Similarly, Ellen Frank expressed her belief that employers preferred to hire people who already had jobs.

> "Very often from many people I have heard that they will give jobs to those who already have it because they are seen as winners. If you have a job, hold onto it. If you want to transfer, take a leave of absense and look. They won't hire a person who is unemployed." (Interview 17)

Diane Houston, who had only been able to find temporary work as a recreation technician, explained how her work history of several short term jobs placed her at a disadvantage in applying for more permanent work. Her history of frequent job losses, while rooted in the temporary nature of the jobs available to her, was seen by potential employers as a personal characteristic, something for which she as an individual was responsible. The liability which resulted from taking several temporary jobs may be more prevalent among women.

"I've been asked 'Why aren't you working and what have you been doing?' And I just say 'I've been trying to get a job is what I've been trying to do.' And just trying to explain to them that. But they do get a little hesitant and wonder. Or if they see that you worked at a job and they really want to know why you aren't there any more. Some people don't understand about these government grants. I try to explain to them that it's not that I got fired. It's just that the funding ran out." (Interview 19)

Vera Callas also described the liability of being unemployed when looking for work. She responded to this situation by identifying herself as a student.

"That is the one place where I don't say I'm unemployed anymore - at an interview. I used to say 'Well, I am unemployed.' And they couldn't handle that. The longer you're unemployed, the more they wonder what's wrong with you. Now I say that I went back to school in grad studies and that works - sort of. Now I am finding rejections because I am overqualified. I applied for a job as a (retail) clerk and I was turned down because I was overqualified." (Interview 10)

In addition to facing repeated rejection from potential employers, unemployed women also experience the erosion of their self esteem in their daily social encounters with other people. In encounters at banks where they are denied overdraft privileges, in encounters at stores where they are denied check cashing privileges, in a variety of social situations where they are asked 'what do you do?', unemployed people are given the message that they are not desirable or trusted members of the community. In their daily life experiences, unemployed women are stigmatized, devalued, and blamed for their 'inability' to support themselves. In response to these experiences, unemployed women often retreat into isolation or put up a false facade to protect themselves.

Heather McKenzie, a single mother who had been unemployed for over two years, described how the social stigma of unemployment was felt my men and women alike.

> "I don't care what category you're in, man or woman, if you are unemployed, you're living a nightmare....Wherever you go you get called down, told you're good for nothing....There are some places where, if I am really depressed, I won't go into, because I think they are whispering about me. That's how self conscious you become." (Interview 37)

Since identity is so often equated with occupation, people who are unemployed find it difficult to introduce themselves when meeting other people. The simple and taken for granted conversational exchange which locates a person in the world of work is experienced by the unemployed as an embarassing situation in which they must reveal that they are nobody who does nothing. Rubin (1983) has suggested that women are somewhat protected from this loss of identity which accompanies unemployment because they also derive a sense of identity from their place within the family. However, my interviews suggest that a substantial portion of women derive an important sense of identity from their paid employment and that the loss of work means a loss of identity for them as well.

Cathy Connelly described how this loss of identity made it difficult for her to go out and meet people. As a result, she spent much of her time isolated at home.

> "I was kind of devastated (when I couldn't find a job). But I was thinking that it was going to end pretty soon. It's really stupid that we depend so much on a job that you don't feel like - you hate to go out and see people. Because everybody asks you 'What do you do?'" (Interview 1)

Vera Callas described how she too avoided social contact because of the stigma of being unemployed and not

having much money. She described how in small ways she hid the truth from people in order to protect herself from their negative judgments. But she also described how she rebelled against having to pretend in order to save her sense of self esteem.

> "During that six month period I didn't want to go out and meet people. One of the first questions that people ask you when you first meet someone is 'What do you do?' And I'd say 'I'm unemployed.' I would try to say, rather than admit to unemployment, I would say 'Well, I'm a student.' There was less stigma in being a student. Well there is no stigma in being a student. And I wouldn't admit to being unemployed. Now I do. Even though I am more or less a full time student I consider myself unemployed and that's what I tell people if they ask me 'What do you do?'" (Interview 10)

She went on to describe how it was not just in meeting strangers, but also in socializing with friends that she had felt compelled to cover up her real situation. Her anger at having to do that finally turned outwards so that she became critical of the social conventions which had caused her embarassment.

> "When everybody would go out to a restaurant I'd take my little brown bag along and I'd pull it out and I'd eat. And they'd look at me like I was cracked. And one woman said 'People don't do things like that.' And I told her right out 'Unemployed people do.' But I still felt a little embarassed inside to do things like that....Initially when I'd go out for lunch with people I wouldn't take my brown bag, I'd tell people I was on a diet. You know, I'd lie and say that was the reason I wasn't eating. Crap. The reason I wasn't eating or bringing food along was cause I couldn't afford to buy my lunch." (Interview 10)

Linda Moore, a 33 year old single mother, was unemployed for several months after losing her job in a retail store. She began volunteering and then working for pay on a community services project. Funding for the project was temporary, however, and she was once again out of work when I interviewed her. She described how the need to cope and survive on welfare caused her to cover up the truth in certain situations but that she paid for this with a loss of self-esteem. She did not lie because she lacked integrity, but because she lied, her sense of integrity suffered. And the damage to her sense of pride was only

reinforced by the prevailing social definition of the unemployed as worthless and untrustworthy.

> "Being unemployed and being on welfare makes you cheat and it makes you lie. It takes away your pride. It takes away things that you feel inside yourself. That person is so important. The person I am is very important - the person my child is. I have such high values and high sense of being within myself and I portray that to my son. 'Right is right. You don't cheat.' But yet I do it myself for survival because it is so important to survive. I don't want to walk down the street and somebody point a finger at me and say 'That person is on UIC' or 'That person is on social assistance....It is scary to go out there and say to somebody, 'Hey I am unemployed.' Because right away they say, 'Oh you are unemployed. Then you are this type of person.'....Nobody takes that into account. They (the unemployed) have feelings. And that is the sorrowful part of the whole economic thing, y'know?" (Interview 12)

When women are unemployed, they often come in contact with workers administering government programs such as

unemployment insurance or social assistance. In their dealings with these government workers, the unemployed are often made to feel dehumanized. They are often reduced from their full identity as persons with interests, abilities, and human connections to a narrow identity which rests solely on their capacity to perform a particular type of wage labour. Women who had interacted with the 'un'employment office complained not only of the lack of job referrals but of the treatment by workers who failed to recognize them as people with interests and aspirations which went beyond their previous job experience. In their interviews with Canadian working women, Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) found that women who had sought help from Canada Employment Centres, the state run employment services, were frequently critical of the treatment they had received and the lack of assistance in finding work. Alexander (1979) cited evidence to suggest that women's entitlement to unemployment insurance benefits was more likely to be questioned by workers at these public employment centers and that unemployed women were required to do more job searches than men in order to qualify for benefits.

Cathy Connelly described how she had felt degraded in interactions with government workers but she also showed an insightful understanding that the problem stemmed from the underlying assumptions of the government policies rather than the personal characteristics of the government workers.

> "Everybody you run into who's in an official capacity when you are unemployed does everything in their power to put you down.... I don't really blame the welfare workers. I realize they don't make the rules. But if they continue to be bitchy or arrogant, I can't handle it....When I went there I felt better if I didn't let them get away with it. I didn't care if she didn't give me any welfare, but I just couldn't sit there and take it. But a lot of people are afraid." (Interview 1)

She went on to describe how the government workers judged her capabilities by the fact that she was unemployed and not well dressed. Since she couldn't do anything about changing her employment status, she tried changing her style of clothing in an effort to get more assistance and respect.

> "You go up and you take this job off the board and it says on the card what you have to be able to do. And you bring it up and if you're not dressed in a suit then they assume that you can't do anything that's on this card....Some of them treat you like you're a complete imbecile because you're unemployed, like you just haven't got enough understanding to know that you have to have

> these qualifications. That used to really get to me so eventually I would put on better clothes and I went there and then I didn't get that any more." (Interview 1)

Linda Moore described the dehumanization of being defined only in terms of her former jobs and her level of education. She felt that her aspirations, her informal education, and her own personal growth were never taken into account by workers who labelled her as someone only fit for menial, low-skilled jobs.

> "Going through the whole system of getting UIC is very humiliating....The first thing they look at is your education. It's not who you are or what you've learned or what your capabilities are. Its what your education states you are. I had a grade seven education until last year and every time you wrote down grade seven they'd say 'Oh well, I guess you're gonna have to go wash dishes or be a waitress or something like that.' And you'd get categorized continuously. But then they don't take account of what a person grows into being....They don't look at what you could be. They look at what you are, and when you walk in there you are a number." (Interview 12)

Anna Santos, a Latin American immigrant whose fluency in English was limited when she first arrived in Canada, found work with a cleaning company at the minimum wage. When she lost that job and sought help from the public employment service, she was channeled once again into low wage, undesirable work.

> "I need money. For this reason I work in the cleaning company. But I don't like it. And all cleaning companies work in the night. When my husband is back from work, I need to go out for my job. I never stayed here for supper with my family or looked on the children....When I went to my counselor at Manpower I tried to explain that I need more English because I don't want to work in cleaning....For me the cleaning job is for people who don't have education, don't have ambition....Manpower gave me the name of a cleaning company. I explained to the lady there 'I don't want to work again in a cleaning company.' But anyway I took it." (Interview 21)

Vera Callas did not experience any harassment or devaluation in her encounters with the public employment service workers. Perhaps this was because she had a university education or perhaps the high level of unemploy-

ment reduced the tendency to see unemployment as a personal failure rather than a consequence of inadequate job opportunities. Perhaps she had a sympathetic worker. In any event, she counted herself as lucky - the exception that proves the rule.

> "I have been extremely fortunate in the time that I was on unemployment insurance. I never had any hassles. I was called in for one interview and my worker was extremely reasonable, took a look at the employment situation and didn't put me through a bunch of garbage like a number of people that come to see us at the (unemployment) committee tell us about. Some of those stories are real horror stories. I was lucky. I never had that problem." (Interview 10)

The social interaction between unemployed women and potential employers consisted primarily of the women applying for jobs by phone, by letter, or in person. In many cases these job applications appeared to vanish into an unresponsive void where the employers chose to ignore the surplus of applications they received. When applications were acknowledged but rejected there was seldom any explanation for the decision other than that another applicant had been more qualified. This procedure seems to place the entire onus for securing paid employment on the

individual involved. It is seen as the individual's responsibility to secure additional training or job experience.

In a period of labour surplus, employers are under no pressure to provide on the job training or employment opportunities to workers without 'experience'. With such high unemployment and so many people competing for the jobs which are available, employers are in a powerful position to pick and choose. The blame for lack of experience or training is placed on the shoulders of the unemployed but the power to alter the situation is not placed in their hands. This powerlessness is not simply a feeling which is characteristic of people who cannot find work. Their powerlessness is rooted in their social relationship to those who do have the power to determine the employment future of others, i. e. those who have the power to hire and fire.

Among the unemployed women whom I interviewed, there was an easily recognizable pattern of psychological consequences of this powerlessness. Repeatedly women spoke of suffering from depression, of not knowing what to do, of questioning their own existence. Time and again women spoke of their struggle to fight off feelings of worthlessness and salvage a sense of pride and self esteem. Women spoke of social withdrawal from contact with others because social contact meant painful experiences of being devalued and humiliated. The psychological injuries to women who are

unemployed and unable to find paid work are made less visible by this withdrawal from social contact. This makes it easier for policy makers to ignore the hidden injuries of female unemployment. It makes it easier for those who argue that women who are unemployed are happy to be at home. When unemployed women suffer in silence, they do not realize the strength with which they could shatter the silence by raising their voices together.

## FAMILIES OF UNEMPLOYED WOMEN

"DETERIORATION IS THE WORD I WAS THINKING OF. IT'S A GOOD WORD FOR FAMILIES. THAT'S WHAT'S HAPPENING. WE ARE NOT THE SAME AND I DON'T KNOW IF WE EVER WILL BE." (Interview 25)

As I pointed out earlier, unemployment is not a phenomenon which is located solely within the labour market. It is a labour market experience which changes people inside and changes the rest of their social relationships. Some of women's most important and emotionally powerful social relationships are those within families - relationships with partners, children, and parents. These relationships are not immune from the consequences of female unemployment.

Despite a dominant ideology to the contrary, the family is not a separate sphere isolated from the competition and harsh realities of the labour market (Zaretsky, 1976). While the study of work and the study of the family have traditionally been two separate areas of specialization

within sociology, the growth of socialist feminist theory in recent years has sought to overcome this artificial dualism between home and economy (Young,1981; Kelly, 1979; Sokoloff, 1980).

Although people turn to their families for emotional support and come home to lick their wounds in private, what takes place inside families is affected by the situation of individual household members within the labour market. Hood's study of wives entering the labour force, for example, shows that an important renegotiation of family relationships occurs when a family becomes a two-job family (Hood, 1983). A study of families during economic crises reveals how relationships within families are shaped, in part, by the households' external relationships to the labour market and the consumer goods market (Zaretsky, 1978). Within families it is significant who sells their labour power and receives a wage and how much that wage is able to purchase. Relationships inside families change when someone begins to earn money, or someone loses a job. When women are unemployed and feeling the financial and emotional consequences of unemployment, their families feel the strain. While some families can muster the financial resources and emotional support necessary to withstand the strain, other families seem to fall apart.

In my interviews with women who had been unemployed during the recession, I asked them to describe the kinds of

problems which they felt were caused by their unemployment. I also asked them whether they felt that their families had been affected at all by the declining economy. I discovered that several women experienced problems at home as a result of their unemployment. In addition, women reported problems at home stemming from their spouses' unemployment. For working women whose families have come to depend totally or in part upon their income, unemployment means that they are financially and emotionally less able to meet the needs of other family members. While the responsibility for providing income for the family became defined as a man's responsibility as capitalism developed, in actuality, that responsibility was frequently shared by working class wives and mothers.

> We argue that working class households have always required more than the male wage and that women have always contributed to the maintenance of the family household either by intensifying their domestic labour in the home, by earning money through an informal economy, or by participating in the labour force and earning a wage themselves. The combination of ways in which they contribute depends on specific economic conditions. (Connelly and MacDonald, 1983, 46)

Inflation and declining real income have made it increasingly difficult for men to support their families by themselves. The number of female headed families in Canada has increased rapidly in recent years. The growth in the labour force participation of married women and women with young children is irrefutable evidence of the extent to

which responsibility for providing income has become women's responsibility as well as men's. When unemployed women are unable to meet that responsibility, they are frustrated and saddened by their inability to provide their children with the kind of life they had hoped for.

The unemployed mothers whom I interviewed worried about the impact of their unemployment on their children. Sole provider mothers and co-provider mothers whose partners were unemployed lacked the financial resources to do things for and with their children. I spoke with women who were unemployed and who could not afford to pay for things for their children - not extravagant things - a decent mattress for a child's bed, bus fare to go downtown, a nice Christmas tree, music lessons, fees for sports activities, a new pair of shoes. I spoke with women who worried about the strain placed on their children by living in households with a parent who was unemployed.

Marta Armstrong, a married mother of two children, had reentered the labour market in recent years and was unable to find any long-term employment. During the recession her husband's job was eliminated by government cutbacks and for a time they both were unemployed. Since her husband had been the main income provider for some time, his loss of work caused serious financial hardships, but she also felt responsible for their shared inability to provide for the family.

> "For me we don't have a future. Like we used to think about being able to put our kids through university or whatever and now I am even questioning that, because my son is ten and I am thinking 'What have we done in ten years?' And we've only got about six or seven left. How can I put my kid through - two kids? I don't have any future and I am really scared to think about what might be out there. And I can't provide for my children like I was hoping to do. I thought that (with) some of my skills, or even my husband's, or some of my training, now I should be able to provide for them and I can't." (Interview 25)

She went on to describe how the stress and anxiety caused by their unemployment created more conflict within the family, and how their preoccupation with not being able to find work meant that they didn't have time to give their children the attention they needed.

> "I think it takes its toll because stress is really high and then you start yelling at each other more than maybe you should because of the whole situation. All you do is talk around the table about work all the time and your kids get neglected.... Deterioration is

> the word I was thinking of. It's a good word for families. That is what is happening. We are not the same and I don't know if we ever will be." (Interview 25)

Marta Armstrong spoke with some bitterness and sadness about the conflicts between her and her husband over her working outside the home. A few years ago she felt pressured by him to stay at home with their children and so she gave up a job she enjoyed. During the recession, when he lost his job and then found work at a lower wage, he was anxious for her to find a job and share the responsibility of providing income. She described her frustration and anger with being told to not work when she had a job and being told to get a job when she couldn't find one. Although she and her husband were still living together, the conflicts arising from their difficulties in the labour market had placed a serious strain on their relationship.

> "My husband was opposed to me working because you know he thought he was bringing home the bacon and that was it. The woman's place was in the home. For awhile I decided o.k., maybe I'll go along with it....but I never really conformed to that. And I thought gee, there is something wrong with me....My husband, now, he wants me to produce (get a paid job). Like 'Look. You've been taking

> classes, now do something.' Because of the times I think. At one time I thought, 'What the hell are you doing to me? You made me quit my job because you weren't willing to support me in the daycare hunt, because you thought you could bring the money home...It was a good job and I should have stuck with it. And now you are telling me to get out and how can I?'...It's been very hard because I know I have the skills and I could do a good job, but I am competing against so many people. I hear that all the time. After awhile you start thinking that you're all wrong, that you're never right. Somehow you are missing the boat." (Interview 25)

Although Marta Armstrong was frustrated by her difficulty in finding paid work, it was her husband's loss of a job and income which produced the greatest strain in their family. Even when she found a temporary job, their problems continued because she didn't earn enough to support the family and he remained depressed over his loss of work. Their financial insecurity and anxiety over the future left its mark on their children as well.

> "He would be so depressed and everything all the time. I just couldn't handle it because it just seemed like he wouldn't do anything

> with the kids. he wouldn't do anything with anybody....(My kids) were starting to feel it. It was really bad. And I think my daughter (age 8) was quite depressed through the whole period....I've done reading that when the spouses are unemployed, the families break up. And I can sure see why, because you don't support one another. We didn't here anyway." (Interview 25)

Heather McKenzie, an unemployed single mother, also described how her unemployment and reduced income had had an impact on her relationship with her children. She was also worried that her daughter was suffering from depression because she was unable to provide them with the things that other families took for granted.

> "A lot of times we want to go someplace and we don't have enough money for extra bus tickets...It's awful depressing when something is needed and you can't go get it. I used to be able to take the kids out at the end of the month and get them a meal or something. And I can't do it (now that I'm unemployed). If the kids needed something, I got it when they needed it. Usually about two days after I found out, they had it. Things like this. Whereas now I just have to

> wait. And I have to say 'Well you just have to wait til the check comes.' Even if they've got shoes that are too small, they've just got to wait....My youngest little girl - she is having a lot of problems lately in the medical line and I think a lot of it is maybe due to just depression. She is just starting to realize. They get very depressed when they see their friends able to do things." (Interview 37)

Sheila Parks, an unemployed single mother, described how her anger and frustration with being poor and out of work affected her interactions with her child and made it more difficult to be the kind of parent she wanted to be.

> "You definitely hurt when you're broke. You learn to live with it though. I do. You sit back and moan and groan and complain and you don't get ahead. I don't like to do that because he (16 month old son) knows if I am having a bad day. Kids know a lot more than you give them credit for. Sometimes ...it builds up and that's time just to take him over to Mom's and skip out of town.....You know I don't like to get to the point where he'll do something and I'll just turn around and yell at him. Right there I know that's

> not what I want to do. And he doesn't understand and it makes me feel bad. So we both sit down and have a cry and then we feel better and then we go for ice cream. You do hurt. But you make do with what you've got." (Interview 29)

When unemployed women suffer from depression or a loss of self esteem their relationships with those closest to them are affected. Vera Callas described how tension and conflict arose between her and her father when she was out of work.

> "When I first started to realize that I wasn't going to get work again for a hell of a long time ....I just withdrew into myself. I didn't go out. I just sat in the house and watched soap operas. Now that's a depressing situation right there....All I did was really eat, sleep, and watch tv. I read through every book in the house. I was practically impossible to live with. My father and I fought constantly. Everything he said I interpreted as criticism of me when, hell, he was just trying to make conversation. And that went on for a good six months." (Interview 10)

In Saskatchewan, the government provides very little direct funding to day care centers which are therefore almost completely dependent on revenues from parent user fees. The provincial government provides subsidies to low income parents to cover a portion of their daycare fees. Without these subsidies childcare services would be beyond the financial reach of many parents using daycare. Even as it is, the level of subsidies has not kept pace with the inflation in daycare fees so that daycare has become less accessible than it was in the past.

Under the former NDP government, unemployed parents were eligible to receive childcare subsidies for six months while they looked for work. In 1982, the newly elected Tory government cut back childcare subsidies for the unemployed from six months to two months. Since most daycare centers require a one month notice before a child is withdrawn from the center, in effect, this gave unemployed parents one month in which to find work. This cutback in daycare subsidies came at a time when the level of unemployment in the province was high and rising. It was a cutback which had particularly adverse effects on unemployed women with small children because it is the women, by and large, who are responsible for arranging alternative childcare. Since subsidized daycare services have never been universally accessible, there have always been large numbers of women who had to forego looking for paid work or who had to juggle

their job search activities in between looking after children. The lack of adequate daycare services, which has been well documented in Saskatchewan, has not prevented the entry of large numbers of young mothers into the labour market (Saskatchewan Social Services, 1980). These further cutbacks in daycare services will not automatically cause unemployed women to stay at home outside of the labour market, although it makes their participation in the labour market more difficult and causes disruptions in children's lives.

Linda Moore, an unemployed single mother, described how she had to pay the full fees for daycare when her subsidy was discontinued. In many cases, however, the costs of daycare services are beyond the financial reach of women who are out of work.

> "I got laid off in November. For December and January unemployment lets you have two months on your daycare (subsidy) and then after that they don't subsidize you any more. So I've been paying the full fee since February....He's only in kindergarten but it means a lot to him to be there with kids. I didn't feel that I had the right to take him out of that natural environment where he goes to daycare, goes to school, comes back to daycare, has all his activities with his

> friends and everything. So I pay the full fee....But he's scared. He knows what is going on. He says 'Get a job quick. Hurry. Hurry. Cause if you don't, I can't stay in daycare.' But we scraped up the money this month and next month we'll have to wait and see." (Interview 12)

Cathy Connelly, a single unemployed mother, was worried about her lack of access to daycare services as she was about to begin hunting for a full time job. She had spent six months at home, quite happily, after the birth of her son, but as her eligibility for unemployment insurance was about to expire she was faced with the necessity of finding both employment and childcare in order to avoid going on welfare.

> "It used to be six months. They'd give you child care subsidy for six months. Then they changed it about a year ago. While you're looking for a job now, they only give it to you for two months. Now there's 30% less jobs out there and they give you 60% less time in which to find it. You get the childcare subsidy for two months, but if you don't get a job during those two months, then you don't get a subsidy." (Interview 1)

The unemployed women whom I interviewed were concerned

about the impact of their unemployment on their families. Their loss of income made them less able to provide for their families' material needs. Their own frustration and depression affected their relationships with partners, children and parents. In some cases family members were able to offer financial and emotional support to women who were out of work, but for other women their closest relationships became fraught with tension and conflict. As unemployment created more financial and emotional problems within families, the government's response to the economic crisis only further exacerbated the problems. Cutbacks in social services made it more difficult for unemployed people to live on welfare. Cutbacks in daycare made it more difficult for unemployed parents to find alternative care for their children while they searched for work. Cutbacks in other social programs made it more difficult for families to find the help they needed to cope with depression, alcohol abuse, or other unemployment related problems.

Carol Forman, a clerical worker in a city high school, observed a rising level of depression and alcohol abuse among the students where she worked. She attributed part of the problem to the rising level of unemployment among the students' parents. At the same time, she felt that the government was doing nothing to provide the necessary social programs to help people deal with these problems.

"It seems to me, in times of economic crisis,

> that is when you really need the social programs and all the assistance and all the drug and alcohol programs. We can see it happening at school....We can see what is happening to the kids from alcoholic parents. They are being abused. And a lot of kids are alcoholics or suicide attempts. It (the recession) really had an impact on the kids at school and a lot of them - the parents are at home and they are frustrated because they don't have jobs. I can see the problems come out in the students and they need all kinds of help and if the programs aren't there and the money isn't there and there's no help for them, I just don't know what is going to happen." (Interview 24)

'I just don't know what is going to happen.' These words sum up the frustration and uncertainty which was characteristic of the unemployed women whom I interviewed. Although our dominant ideology denies that women play an important role as income providers for the family and therefore dismisses female unemployment as less significant than male unemployment, my research indicates that the loss of income among unemployed women had serious consequences for themselves and their families. I also found that women who were out of work suffered from a loss of self-esteem as well

as a loss of income. Women's unemployment affected their material and emotional well-being. And it affected their social relationships with others. Unemployed women often suffered the injuries of their unemployment in the isolation of their own homes, avoiding contact with others who would only reinforce their low sense of self worth. But the home was not a separate haven which sheltered women from the labour market, for the problems generated by their unemployment added further strain and conflict to their relationships within their families.

## CHAPTER VIII

## WOMEN'S RESPONSES TO UNEMPLOYMENT

In the previous chapter, I discussed the impact of unemployment on women's lives - the loss of income and self-esteem, the difficulties and problems arising from being unable to find paid employment. But women are not simply victims who suffer the consequences of unemployment. Women who lost their jobs or looked unsuccessfully for paid work did not simply succumb to the financial and psychological injuries inflicted upon them. Women developed strategies to cope with their unemployment. They struggled against the effects of unemployment on their state of mind and their standard of living. And they struggled to create choices for themselves despite the lack of job opportunities. They did not often go quietly back into the home and accept their lack of paid work without struggle. They searched, often diligently and fighting against depression and discouragement, for paid employment that would offer them a better standard of living and a feeling of accomplishment.

While it is important to understand the ways in which women's experiences in the labour market are shaped by social circumstances beyond their control, it is also important to see that women need to exercise some control

over their lives, to make some choices, to believe that their actions can make a difference. The unemployed women I spoke with were caught in a dilemma. In order to cope with hard times and maintain some hope for the future, they had to believe that they could somehow make a difference - that their efforts to find work, improve their job skills, or gain experience through volunteer work would eventually pay off. Women had to believe that there were jobs in the labour market in order to perservere in their searches for paid employment. But if they believed that jobs were available and that their efforts to find work would produce employment, then they were susceptible to blaming themselves for their lack of employment. The fact that it is individuals who look for paid work reinforces the perception of unemployment as an individual problem. But the awareness that so many others are also unemployed helps to counteract this tendency and create an awareness that the problem goes beyond the responsibility of the individual. Nevertheless women struggle within themselves to arrive at a perception of their unemployment which combines a sense of their victimization by forces beyond their control with their need to take action to overcome their unemployment and be more than victims.

Some theoretical works dealing with women's relationship to the labour market have claimed that women respond to periods of economic contraction by withdrawing from the

labour force (Benston, 1969; Goldberg, 1970; Beechey, 1978). In 1969, Benston argued that it was easy to push women out of the labour force when demand for labour dropped because "the pervading ideology ensures that no one, man or woman, takes women's participation in the labour force very seriously" (Benston, 1969, 200). Goldberg (1970) and Beechey (1978) have argued that because women derived their primary identity from the family, their attachment to the labour force was more marginal and they were therefore more likely than men to disappear back into the home when faced with unemployment. On the one hand, these arguments reveal an important truth - that the real extent of female unemployment is much greater than official measures of unemployment because women at home are defined as being 'outside the labour force'. However, this theoretical conception of women as a reserve army of labour which can be easily put out of work and pushed back into the home has a number of weaknesses.

First of all, it fails to explain why women's paid labour force participation has increased rather than decreased during various periods of economic contraction. During the Great Depression, women, particularly married women, increased their participation in the U.S. labour force (Milkman, 1976; Kessler-Harris, 1981). A study of the 1974-75 recession in sixteen capitalist countries revealed that female labour force participation continued to grow but

at a slower rate than during periods of economic expansion (OECD, 1976). The literature on female labour force participation in relation to economic recessions is contradictory and inconclusive. Recessions create both more discouraged workers who give up looking for work and more new workers who enter the labour force from outside. Swan (1982) cites a study by Curiak and Sims for the Canada Department of Finance which concludes that cyclical changes in the labour market may be insignificant as factors determining women's participation in the labour market.

As Table 13 shows, the male labour force participation rate in Saskatchewan has remained fairly constant over the past decade, while the female labour force participation rate has persistently increased. During the recent recession, the percentage of the female population participating in the paid labour force rose from 48.7% in 1981 to 52.5% in 1983.

As Table 14 shows, the female labour force participation rate increased every year between 1975 and 1983. In 1983, the female labour force participation rate was 2.5% higher than the previous year. This represented the largest annual increase in female labour force participation since 1975-76. Clearly, the recent recession has not expelled women from the paid labour force in Saskatchewan.

TABLE 13

SASKATCHEWAN LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION, BY SEX

ANNUAL AVERAGES, 1975-1984

(estimates in thousands)

| Year | Male Labour Force | Female Labour Force | Male Participation rate | Female Participation rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1975 | 249 | 127 | 78.0% | 40.3% |
| 1976 | 254 | 139 | 77.9% | 43.0% |
| 1977 | 262 | 146 | 78.9% | 44.1% |
| 1978 | 266 | 152 | 78.9% | 45.2% |
| 1979 | 269 | 160 | 78.7% | 46.6% |
| 1980 | 273 | 163 | 79.1% | 47.0% |
| 1981 | 275 | 172 | 78.5% | 48.7% |
| 1982 | 276 | 179 | 77.9% | 50.0% |
| 1983 | 280 | 191 | 78.1% | 52.5% |
| 1984 | 283 | 193 | 78.0% | 52.4% |

Source: Statistics Canada, Historical Labour Force Statistics, 1984, 71-201.

TABLE 14

ANNUAL INCREASE IN FEMALE LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE

SASKATCHEWAN, 1975-1984

| Year | Increase in participation rate |
|---|---|
| 1975-76 | +2.7% |
| 1976-77 | +1.1% |
| 1977-78 | +1.1% |
| 1978-79 | +1.4% |
| 1979-80 | +0.4% |
| 1980-81 | +1.7% |
| 1981-82 | +1.3% |
| 1982-83 | +2.5% |
| 1983-84 | -0.1% |

Source: Based on changes in the labour force participation rate as reported in Table 13.

Secondly, the conception of women as a reserve army which can be pushed out of work and into the family fails to explain why many women who become unemployed continue to search for paid work rather than disappear into the home. Over a decade ago, Sylvia Ostry (1968) argued that official female unemployment in Canada was low because many unemployed women dropped out of the labour force and did not actively look for work. Revisions to the official Labour Force Survey in 1975 had the effect of raising the female unemployment rate by uncovering many women previously defined as outside the labour force who were in fact actively looking for work (Marsden, 1977). The growing importance of women's employment as a source of family income has increased the likelihood of women remaining in the labour force (MacDonald, 1982). One of the most recent studies of women in the Canadian labour market concluded that:

> (Some married women) disappear back into their domestic work when they no longer have paid jobs...(But those) who are officially unemployed show evidence of strong commitment to continuing the search for paid work.
> ....
> Now women are staying in the labour market when they find themselves without a job at least in part because economic need makes it more difficult to disappear back into the home. (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983, 20,32)

Finally, the assumption that unemployed women are reabsorbed by the family glosses over and obscures the frustration, depression, anxiety and anger which unemployed

women experience. The family doesn't absorb unemployed women any more than the street corner absorbs unemployed youth. For many women, the family is not a haven where they can retreat from their loss of paid work, because their loss of income and self esteem create problems for themselves and their families. Unpaid domestic labour within the home does not take the place of paid employment because unpaid domestic labour does not offer the same rewards and cannot meet the same needs.

Most of the unemployed women whom I interviewed were not quietly "reabsorbed" by the family. Unemployed women continued to need paid work - for the income, the sense of accomplishment, the social recognition. Often unemployed women spent large portions of the day at home looking after children or doing housework. When there are few jobs to apply for, the daily lives of the unemployed are often spent looking over the newspaper ads and waiting by the phone to hear from potential employers, activities which are easily performed at home. Unemployed women may turn to other family members- spouses, parents, siblings - for financial and emotional support during their period of unemployment. The fact that women who are out of work spend time at home and rely on other family members for financial support may seem to indicate that women are reabsorbed into the family. However, unemployed men also spend time at home and become financially dependent on other family members, but we do not

dismiss their unemployment by assuming that they are reabsorbed by the family.

It is clear that an ideology which defines women in terms of the family enables policy makers and the public to dismiss female unemployment as relatively insignificant. But it is important to realize that the disappearance of unemployed women from public consciousness is an ideological phenomenon, and not an accurate representation of the experience of women who are out of work. The theoretical conception of women as a reserve army which can be pushed out of work and into the home seems to equate the dominant ideology with women's actual responses to unemployment. It seems to assume that women actually disappear into the home because this disappearance is functional to capital as a way of reducing the apparent level of unemployment. By failing to explore what takes place behind the ideology, this theoretical approach fails to illuminate the hidden experiences of unemployed women whose disappearance is only an ideological phenomenon in the public consciousness. We need to incorporate women's actual experiences and their ongoing needs for paid employment into our theories of women's work and economic crises. We need to look beyond the changes in the labour market which affect women, and ask how women actively respond to those changes.

This chapter is about how women responded to unemployment - how they coped with it and how they struggled

to overcome it. Sometimes the struggle was very personal and individual like the times when women asserted their own self-worth in the face of circumstances which denied it. Sometimes the struggle was collective. Unemployed women established networks of support among family and friends in order to cope with their loss of income. They joined with other unemployed people to overcome their isolation, create services for the unemployed and lobby the government for programs to reduce unemployment. The major struggle waged by unemployed women was the struggle to find paid work.

## SEARCHING FOR A JOB

All of the unemployed women I interviewed had looked for paid work without success. They had gone through the want ads in the newspaper. They had directly contacted employers. They had gone through the Canada Employment centers. They had in some cases tried everything they could think of to find a job and had met with rejection after rejection.

The search for paid employment can only be understood as a struggle when the labour market is flooded with thousands of unemployed workers looking for jobs. The most frequent response to this struggle is the individual attempt to beat out the competition, and to find some way of improving one's own individual chances of getting hired. To

this end women accepted voluntary or temporary jobs in order to gain 'experience'. They took special courses designed to improve their 'marketability'. They wrote and rewrote their resumes in order to catch the attention of employers who had hundreds of applications to choose from.

In short, women who were unemployed did not "disappear back into the home", if what one means by that is that they gave up any desire to find paid employment and were content to become full time homemakers. The unemployed women whom I interviewed looked extensively for paid employment. If after awhile they became discouraged and gave up looking for work, this was not the result of any adherence on their part to an ideology of domesticity but the result of employers' failure to provide enough jobs.

Women's unemployment and withdrawal from active job searches are much better explained by reference to the employers' power to control production and make decisions about hiring and firing rather than vague references to an ideology of domesticity and women's disappearance into the family. Employers may rationalize their failure to provide jobs for women by asserting that women really belong at home and don't need paid jobs, but their rationalizations are challenged by women who continue to assert their need for paid work.

Even for women like Lynnette Hanson, who shared the ideology and would have preferred to stay at home, the need

to provide income for their families pushed them to continue their search for paid employment. A 26 year old married mother of two, she could not afford to stay at home with her small children when her self-employed husband was unable to support the family.

> "When I originally had the kids I never did plan on going back to work. Neither of us wanted that. But now it's gotten to the point where I don't really have a choice. I have to. I have to work because one of us has to make a wage....If he doesn't have any jobs coming up, that's when I go out really looking for a job and just about take anything, just so we have some money coming in." (Interview 11)

Often women began their job searches with certain goals and expectations of finding work in a particular field, with daytime hours, or with decent wages for example. After numerous attempts to find work which they wanted, women often had to settle for jobs they did not like - jobs working late at night, jobs that only paid the minimum wage, jobs that were only part time or temporary. When Lynnette Hanson began looking for work during the recession, she hoped to find a job which would use her skills and pay enough to live on.

"This counselor (from the employment center) phoned me on two jobs with the federal government. They were clerk 1's. I've got 8 years experience, plus I've done payroll; I've run a company. I don't want a clerk 1 position for $800/month. So I told her that.... I'm paying $360/month for a babysitter and if I get $800 /month gross, by the time I pay I may as well stay at home. I would not make any money by the time I paid for my gas to get there and my clothes and my lunch. I may as well stay at home". (Interview 11)

As it became apparent that she was unable to find the kind of employment she wanted, she applied for a low level clerical position but was told that she was overqualified.

"It really seemed hopeless. There's just no jobs to be had. Everyplace. I went to all kinds of places putting in applications. They just hand you an application and you fill it out. They don't say 'I'll call you.' They don't say there's going to be any jobs. ....(At one place I applied and) all they wanted was someone junior. She told me I was too qualified for the job. She said, 'You won't enjoy it' and the pay was not very

> good. But I was really disappointed too because I really needed one at the time and it almost seemed like I don't care what I have to do." (Interview 11)

Emily Meyers, a 39 year old divorced mother with two daughters at home, described how she searched for a job after being laid off by the retail store where she had worked for seven years. In one case she applied for a job preparing food for a chain of convenience stores. They were swamped with applications for 2 openings which paid the minimum wage. I asked her if she was willing to work for the minimum wage.

> "Yes, I was. And I hadn't worked at minimum wage since 1966...I applied for anything which I felt suited for. I filled out applications but there were another several hundred people out there looking for the same job." (Interview 2)

Women described various strategies which they developed in order to look for paid work. Vera Callas, an unemployed self supporting single woman, described how she applied for a wide range of jobs.

> "I applied at other government jobs, in social services, what else? I applied in libraries. I applied in anything where I thought my education or experience would even

> remotely give me an in to the job....I applied as town clerk in various small towns.... I wasn't limiting myself to union work by any means. I was looking for work, period." (Interview 10)

Elena Navarro, an immigrant woman who tried unsuccessfully to find work after arriving in the province, described how she went about looking for jobs besides those that were listed in the newspaper want ads.

> "I used to go with my sister. Sometimes we'd just think about some places. We took the yellow pages and phoned here and there to see if they'd receive applications or if they want to see a person or not. If they would accept applications then we went to write them down. But we find so many places - they didn't even want you to go to fill out applications. And... in some places they even put paper on the door saying 'We don't take applications.'

Unemployed women showed a remarkable persistence in the face of discouraging odds. Suzanne Burritt, a single, self-supporting unemployed mechanic, described how she tried various ways of finding paid work with very little success.

> "(I looked for work) steadily. I mean I really looked....Mainly mechanics, truck

> driving, a little bit construction but there wasn't a heck of a lot happening there....Any job that I feel I could have done....I'd go sometimes every day and then I'd get bummed out and not do it for two weeks and then I'd go down to Canada Manpower and there was usually one job on the board and then I would look in the paper or just go out to places and put my application in. It was pretty dismal because there was nothing. And everyone said 'No, we're not hiring.'" (Interview 31)

Heather McKenzie, an unemployed single mother, who was unable to find employment for over two years, described how she tried to find jobs through the newspaper and the state run employment agency.

> "I've gone to Canada Manpower from time to time. And I usually pick up the daily paper and I look at it and it will say phone such and such number and I'll phone such and such number. 'Well, the manager isn't in. He'll get back to you.' So after about six times I get fed up. I've done alot where they say write to such and such box number and I've yet to hear - things I've had experience in doing and I've yet to hear." (Interview 37)

The job search strategies used by unemployed women were often quite similar. Women looked for jobs through the newspaper want ads, through government-run employment services, and through direct applications at employers. Jane McDonald, a single unemployed waitress, described her various methods of searching for a job.

> "I went to the unemployment office a few times and looked on the board there. Actually I went there about once a week and every day I would look at the paper and then I applied at different places - different restaurants and things like that. I was looking for anything I could get....I applied at shoe stores and book stores and drug stores and I just didn't hear from anyone about any of the jobs." (Interview 28)

Regardless of whether their efforts paid off, women persistently tried to do whatever they could think of to improve their fate in the job market. Marta Armstrong tried to improve her chances of finding employment by spending weeks revising her resume.

> "I worked really hard on my resume during those nine weeks and I improved it quite a lot because it seemed to be really important. Employers seemed to look at resumes quite a lot." (Interview 25)

As women found that their initial attempts to find jobs were unsuccessful, they tried to think of new approaches to conducting their job searches. Faced with initial failure, they did not simply give up. They kept trying to find work by any means they could think of. Cathy Connelly had expected to find work fairly quickly when she became unemployed, but despite months without finding a job, she kept trying.

> "I think I did everything humanly possible and more besides. I used every resource that I could identify to try to find a job." (Interview 1)

The assumption that unemployed women can disappear back into the home and that the family can reabsorb women who are unable to find paid work rests on the premise that the household still has access to the earnings of a major 'breadwinner'. For women who do not live with co-providers or for women whose partners are also unemployed, the family does not have access to enough income to relieve the family's dependence on women's wage labour. In such cases women cannot afford to disappear into the home; they are compelled to search for work to provide for themselves and their families.

Marta Armstrong, a married mother of two, had tried to reenter the labour force when her children reached school age. Finding only temporary work available, she combined

working on a temporary basis with going to school. However, when her husband lost his job, she intensified her efforts to find more secure employment.

> "I've applied for positions where I've been told there are 200 applicants. That is absolutely nothing today....It's frightening. ...It's not like I'm not trying because I am. I have had to. Having an unemployed husband and everything, you know, you look for work. If nothing else motivates you, that does." (Interview 25)

Christine Bonner also described how her husband's unemployment caused her to intensify her search for paid employment.

> "I was looking for work but I didn't think there was much hope of finding any....When (my partner) was unemployed, during the month of July and until he got a job in August, I was looking very very hard for work. We were both going down to the employment office every day....It was always the same. There was just nothing there." (Interview 26)

As women who were unemployed looked without success for the types of jobs they wanted, they gradually adjusted their expectations downward. Women who began their job searches with a focus on a particular type of work were often forced

to accept jobs they did not like because they were the only jobs available. Some women, on the other hand, refused to be forced to work at undesireable jobs and managed to live on unemployment insurance, welfare or their partners' income.

Jane McDonald described how she eventually agreed to take a low wage job working nights because she was unable to find anything else, and she had no other secure sources of income.

> "(My partner) got laid off. There wasn't enough work. He was a carpenter's helper. I thought, 'Well my unemployment isn't going to last very much longer. I'd better just get out and find something.' So I took that job. I had seen it in the paper when I was there in January and it had been there off and on. I can see why. (Working) until four in the morning. Nobody would want it." (Interview 28)

Diane Houston, a single self-supporting woman trained as a recreation technician, initially limited her job search to jobs related to her training. After looking for five months, she found a recreation job that only lasted for the summer. After that she began looking for any kind of job she could find in order to support herself.

> "I had that job for June, July and August last summer and again I was off - back on

> unemployment. I was looking for work and I finally got on with (retail store) in November. By this time I was starting to get frustrated and I was applying anywhere because there just wasn't any type of recreation jobs to apply for. So I started looking for other jobs." (Interview 19)

Barbara Lian described how she lowered her expectations and accepted a clerical job when there were no better job opportunities available. In her case, it was interesting to note that her husband did not lower his expectations in his job search after completing his education, but held out longer in order to get a job to match his training.

> "With my B.A. degree I felt that I shouldn't have to put up with office work. That I should be qualified for other things. But between what I wanted and what I had there was a difference. You know, what I could get. So it was a matter of settling for what I could get....It was about a month and a half that I was unemployed before I found that job so I thought I might as well accept it because I'm not going to get anything else." (Interview 14)

Many women reported going to the state run Canada Employment Centers for help in finding paid work, but most

of them were disappointed in the lack of job referrals or in the types of jobs which were available. Women would go to the employment centers to talk with job counselors and check the openings posted on job boards but time after time there was practically nothing to apply for and the number of applicants for the existing job openings made competition for jobs very high. Going to the employment office became an exercise in futility. The Canadian women interviewed by Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) reported similar frustrations with the public programs aimed at serving the unemployed.

Lynnette Hanson's case was worse than most. She had gone to a Canada Employment Center thinking they would help her find work. She submitted a resume and took a typing test but, unbeknownst to her, these records were somehow lost.

> "Canada Employment was just sitting on my file. I didn't have a resume in. I didn't have anything and I didn't realize it. They had nothing on me and I'm sitting here like an idiot waiting for the phone to ring cause they should have a job for me. You know, you're sort of naive. You sort of sit back and then you start getting really cynical about the whole business. What are they there for? They don't do you anything. They don't help you find a job. The job I found

> on the job board - why didn't my counselor refer me to that? I told her I would work temporary or part time or casual or anything. I said, 'Anything. I'll work anything.' And not one call." (Interview 11)

She was particularly annoyed because she discovered that she could get temporary assignments working in government offices through a private temporary employment agency. She felt that the federally run public employment centers should be able to place temporary workers in other branches of the federal government. And she felt exploited when she learned that the government was paying $15/hour for her services to the private employment agency while she was earning less than half that amount.

> "I said (to the Canada Manpower counselor), 'What kind of job opportunity is there?' and he said, 'None. There is not one job open in your line. But we'll keep this (typing test) on file and we'll let you know. You can check the job board downstairs whenever you want.' Meanwhile I couldn't find anything so I went to (private temporary employment agency) and started there...."All that time Manpower had never called me. After I took that .... job, I realized that was federal government. I went back (to the Canada Employment Center)

> and I said to the counsellor, 'What's going on?.... I said I wanted to get on even temporary with the federal or provincial government or anything and you guys say that there are no temporary jobs. How come you guys (the federal government) are paying.... $15/hour for me to work and I'm getting $6.50? (Private employment agency) is just sitting there laughing. What are you guys here for?' ....They should be doing that. That's what they're there for as far as I'm concerned. Why do I have to go and let (private employment agency) make $6-7/hour on my working, every hour I work? It just really, really bothers a person. How you gonna get anywhere? And they still haven't called me for a job." (Interview 11)

Several women voiced their dissatisfaction with the lack of help they received from the public employment services. They described the scarcity of job referrals, the temporary nature of the jobs listed, and the channelling of people into undesireable, low wage jobs. Elena Navarro, an immigrant woman with two children to support, described how she was classified as a garment worker because of her previous job experience and how she received no help in finding other types of work.

> "You go here, you go there and you get nothing. You don't receive any help from anybody because the Canada Employment Center - it doesn't. They don't do anything for you. ... They put the people in different categories. You do this and you are categorized like that. So I was categorized as a garment factory worker and that's it. They should have something maybe that they should phone me sometimes but they never did. And the social workers, they don't help you anyway. They push you to try to find a job but that's what I am doing. And that's it, you know? So you have to do everything by yourself and you are not the only one. You find that there are many, many, more and more and more people (looking for work)." (Interview 39)

People who turned to the Canada Employment Centers for assistance in finding jobs often found that the jobs which were available were temporary jobs created through government job creation programs. These programs were usually targetted for certain segments of the populations, e.g. students, welfare recipients, people collecting UIC. While these offered some opportunities for employment, the positions were usually temporary and the wages were low.

When the government funds which created the jobs were used up, the jobs often disappeared. Because there were no other jobs available, women accepted these jobs despite their drawbacks. Cathy Connelly, who was unemployed for several months, described how she persisted in seeking paid employment by attempting to convince government employment counselors to refer her to jobs creation programs.

> "I continued to look for work. Then they came up with this NEED (job creation) program and I always had to beg to be sent....My unemployment insurance ran out and you have to be on welfare for ten weeks in order to qualify for the NEED program....I had to go every day for about six weeks after I was eligible to beg to be sent out for a NEED program job that only pays the minimum wage anyway. I'd go to the unemployment office... to try to get sent out for an interview for one of those jobs. And it was getting really frustrating because here I was begging for this minimum wage job." (Interview 1)

While the search for paid employment was a difficult struggle for many of the women I interviewed, the immigrant women who spoke English with a discernible accent faced additional barriers to employment. Despite their training and job skills acquired in their own countries, they were

treated as incompetent or inexperienced workers. They had to struggle against discrimination from employers and fight for the chance to be hired. Anna Santos, a Latin American immigrant, described her problems in searching for paid employment. Her lack of 'Canadian' experience was used as a basis for denying her employment.

> "The problem here is when you make some application for a job, the people say, 'What experience do you have?' But for all the companies it is not important your experience in other countries, like my country for example....One time I went to a sewing factory where they make clothes for men. I went to put in an application and these people needed some person to make jackets. I know how to make jackets. I explained that I know everything about the jacket. He said, 'Your English is very bad.' I said, 'Yes, my English is very bad but I know sewing.' He said, 'But I need some person who has experience.' I said, 'I have experience in sewing because I make everything for my children and I worked in my country too for sewing.' He said, 'But I needed experience here in Canada.' I said to him, 'You take me for one week only. I'll show you I know

> everything about the jacket.' And he said, 'I don't have time for that.' And I said, 'O.K. Give me the opportunity to show you for one day only.' And he said, 'I don't have the time.' After that I felt very depressed because I thought that here I don't have any opportunities. The people say it is more difficult for a man to take a job but I think for the women it is terrible, for me for example." (Interview 21)

Elena Navarro, also an immigrant from Latin America, described how it was difficult for her to apply for work because people reacted to her differently because she spoke with an accent.

> "They look at you and it's like you are insignificant. Or they give you an application because you are asking for it, but they make you feel inferior....The way they treat you is like an animal....The way they look at you, they make you feel nervous. You know what you want to say but their attitude that they have - they want you to get out of there. Some people are like that. ...I get used to it now but at the beginning it hurts you." (Interview 39)

Despite the barriers which women encountered in applying for paid employment, most of the unemployed women whom I interviewed persisted in searching for a job until they eventually found one. In a few cases, they became so discouraged by the lack of job opportunities that they gave up actively looking for work although they did not give up the desire for paid work. In some cases women who were unable to find an employer willing to hire them developed other strategies for coping with their situation. Some tried to create their own jobs in order to increase their income. Others returned to school in order to develop more marketable skills.

## CREATING WORK FOR THEMSELVES

Most of the unemployed women I interviewed responded to their unemployment by searching diligently in the labour market for paid work, but a few women attempted to create work for themselves when they found no other jobs available. There is within Canada an informal economy which exists alongside the recognized labour force and which has included the work of a large number of women who work for cash cleaning houses, babysitting, typing papers, or sewing clothes (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983). In a recent study of women's work in Nova Scotia, Connelly and MacDonald (1983) found that women who were denied access to paid employment often worked to improve their families' standard

of living by intensifying their domestic labour or seeking work in the informal economy.

In my interviews I found that women who were unemployed or underemployed sometimes tried to earn income by providing goods or services directly to consumers rather than as wage earners. One woman started a greenhouse and a market garden in order to produce some cash income when she was unable to find work after being laid off from the store where she had worked for seven years. One woman who was trying to re-enter the labour force worked with a community group which applied for a temporary government grant that enabled some of the group members to draw a salary. A woman who was underemployed as a half time technician tried to create work for herself by providing her services on a contract basis. The effort and creativity which these women exhibited in their search for paid work reveals both the importance of paid work and women's ongoing attachment to the labour market. The notion that women disappear into the home when they are unable to find paid jobs obscures the ongoing struggle which women engage in to remain in the labour force and find work that provides them with income.

Marta Armstrong had found temporary employment by belonging to a community group which applied for government job creation funds. At the time of the interview she described her efforts to help form a social workers' cooperative which would apply for funding from the

government to provide services to the community and create jobs for its members. Since the probability of being hired directly by the government was slim, she and her fellow students were attempting to create their own jobs and secure temporary funding to carry out their work.

> "Right now the only possibility for me is to be able to apply for funding and just be employed that way for the next few years (on temporary government funded grant projects). A few of the unemployed social work students have formed a cooperative of our own and we are looking at applying for funding....We are all feeling that that's the only way that we are going to find work....That seems to be the trend. People seem to be getting together and doing this because you can't get employment anywhere else. So we are getting together to form a cooperative and do it that way." (Interview 25)

Emily Meyers, an unemployed mother on welfare, described how she responded when she lost her job in a retail store and was unable to find other employment. She started a greenhouse operation at home in order to grow young plants for sale and in the spring and summer she raised a market garden in order to get some income.

> "I've always gardened but last year was the first time I tried a market garden. It was a very good year for everything. We had tons of cucumbers that normally sell pretty good but I gave away an awful lot....I didn't sit and twiddle my thumbs (when I was out of work.) I did something I liked and it was constructive." (Interview 2)

Anna Santos, an immigrant woman whose employed husband did not earn enough at his full time job to support the family at a comfortable standard of living, described how she started cleaning private homes when she was unable to find regular employment.

> "I looked for jobs for a long time. Then I worked in private homes cleaning for the summertime only. A nun helped me find work cleaning a house once a week and then that person helped me find another person and after awhile I had five houses to clean each week." (Interview 21)

Marcia King, an underemployed university technician who supported her two children, described how she had to scramble to create paid jobs for herself to supplement her part time wages. Her supervisor expected her to take on additional work without pay and she had to arrange her own contracts in order to earn additional income. She felt that

she was expected to work harder without additional pay because her supervisor did not take her need for income seriously.

> "I had to be aggressive. I had to create a contract for myself, for example. Somebody would ask for the kind of service (which I provide) and my boss would pass it on to me and ask me to do it as part of my job....(I said,) 'We really should offer them a paid contract. I will do it for money.' And he just laughed. He didn't take it seriously. So I went ahead and did that anyway. I called them and said I'd be willing to do it for a paid contract and I got a contract and made myself some extra money...My supervisor was embarassed because he thinks we should do everything for free. He is old fashioned and very polite and accomodating. He'll say 'Of course, if you ask me I'll do it and I'll pass it on to my ha ha wife-technician here.'" (Interview 20)

Marcia King had depended upon her full time job to meet her expenses for food, shelter, and clothing. When her job and income were cut in half she did not qualify for any unemployment insurance or social assistance benefits. She struggled to find other work to supplement her part time

job. She tried other part time jobs, as a technician, as a telephone solicitor, in order to earn more income. She not only applied for jobs which were advertised but she actively tried to create jobs for herself by approaching people and offering her services as a technician. Her case indicates clearly that women who lose their jobs or have their hours cut do not quietly disappear in to their domestic roles.

> "So far it's not too bad because we are still coasting on what we used to have. But our clothes are going to wear out soon and I worry a lot about all that. I feel certain that I have to change something. I have to fix something somewhere. I am scrambling for ideas. I'm convinced that I have to do something. Once in awhile I fall into despair and say 'Oh, what will I do? I just can't. I've done everything and I can't do anything more.' But I don't let that last very long. I will do something.....I am scrambling. That's what I feel like. From one thing to another- trying to fill gaps from one month to the next, hoping that I don't run out of money too fast, hoping that I don't get any big expenses." (Interview 20)

## GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

Several women who were unemployed took the opportunity to reexamine their future prospects in the labour market and went back to school as a strategy for improving their chances of finding work or of getting a better job. Some women returned to school rather than look for a paid job because they wanted to upgrade their skills in order to qualify for a different type of employment. Others returned to school out of desperation because they were simply unable to find a job. Some women were able to qualify for UI benefits during their period of training but others supported themselves with part time employment or were financially dependent upon others. Eight of the women whom I interviewed had gone to school or taken courses during the recession for reasons related to the labour market. Women who responded to their unemployment by going back to school exhibited an ongoing commitment to participation in the labour market. They viewed their schooling as a temporary measure which would make their future participation in the labour market more successful.

The women I interviewed came from a variety of educational backgrounds and so their return to school for further education took a variety of forms. The strategy of returning to school was not confined to any particular group of women. A woman with a grade nine education who was unable to find permanent work after losing her job due to

recession staff cuts enrolled in a Life Skills program in order to improve her chances of finding work. A woman with a bachelor's degree entered graduate school and supported herself on a teaching assistantship because she was unable to find regular permanent employment. A clerical worker whose husband was unemployed took a course in word processing in order to compete more successfully in the job market. An immigrant woman enrolled in English classes in order to qualify for something other than cleaning office buildings at night. A woman who was laid off from her job in a bakery enrolled in a program for native students. A young mother who had temporarily left the labour force to raise her children discovered that her earlier training program was no longer sufficient to compete in the labour market and so she returned to school in order to reenter the labour force.

Returning to school may or may not help these women to find work in the future. Returning to school, like rewriting resumes or practicing for job interviews, is a way in which individuals try to improve their chances of being hired. It is an individual strategy which women follow in order to try to affect the direction of their lives. It is important for women to pursue these individual strategies because otherwise they are left feeling completely powerless. On the other hand, these individual strategies can only work for a certain portion of the unemployed because

there are simply not enough jobs for everyone to be successful in their attempts to find employment. And women recognize this. While they study and go to school in order to find jobs in the future, they often realize that more education is no guarantee of a job.

When Barbara Lian finished university she was disappointed to discover that the only jobs she could find were temporary or low paid. She reentered school to improve her chances in the labour market but was already sceptical of whether further education would prove to be an advantage.

> "I always thought that it would be easy to find a job, but in the last few years I am not as optimistic. And although I am going to school, getting my social work degree, hoping to get a better job in the future, I am still very leery as to whether or not it's all going to pay off....I do hope that I can find a job, but again I am not too optimistic." (Interview 14)

Marta Armstrong had been employed and volunteered in the field of social work prior to leaving the paid labour force to care for her children. When she tried to reenter the labour force during the recession, she had difficulty finding long term employment, so she returned to school. I asked her if she went back to school because there weren't any jobs available.

> "That was the primary reason. I kept hearing that the one year course (I had taken) no longer existed....A certificate in social work is a lot better than what I was holding. In order to compete effectively I felt, since I am lacking an extensive work history, maybe education would be beneficial in the job force. I would say that is the reason I did return to school - so I could compete more effectively in the workforce." (Interview 25)

Elena Navarro, an immigrant woman with two children to support, explained how she struggled with the government employment service in order to get sponsorship so that she could go to school. A high school graduate in her own country, she had to complete a program for grade 12 equivalency in Canada and she had to take courses in English as a second language in order to become fluent. After completing these programs, she found that it remained impossible to find employment and so she entered a a two year occupational training program in the hopes that she would then qualify for something better than minimum wage unskilled jobs.

> "(As an immigrant woman) the language is a barrier. Even if you know the language, it's hard. You have to work in a restaurant or a

> hotel or factories. There is nothing else available. And that's why I started to push Manpower to get the training....That's why I was always trying to look for the training. Because I realized I couldn't get out of there all the time trying to find this kind of job." (Interview 39)

As discussed in the previous chapter, unemployment caused numerous problems in women's lives. Being out of work and unable to find a job caused many women to suffer from depression and a loss of hope in the future. Having no regular job to go to created a void in women's lives which was sometimes difficult to fill. Women didn't know what to do with their time and they were already doing whatever they could think of to find paid work. One way in which women could structure their daily lives and regain some sense of control over their job future was by going back to school. Becoming a student gave women access to social recognition and helped to ward off depression and feelings of low self-esteem. Regardless of whether their schooling would actually pay off in the future, it did help women to cope with their unemployment. Instead of waiting powerlessly to hear from potential employers, women attempted to take some control over their lives by furthering their education.

Marta Armstrong described how being a student enabled her to forget about her inability to find paid work.

> "It seems like every time I tried to find any sort of work and got really discouraged, I would bury myself in classes a little harder to sort of avoid what was happening." (Interview 25)

Elena Navarro described how becoming a student gave her a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, even though it created substantial demands on her time.

> "I got very tired and very depressed sometimes. I feel better now because I am studying. Even if I feel more tired because I have the intellectual work and also the physical work I have to do. But, in some ways, I feel good, because I like to study. I like to read and do things, but I feel very tired because I have so many things to do. (Interview 39)

Vera Callas described how being a student gave a person an acceptable identity and a measure of respect which contrasted sharply with how other people reacted to someone who was 'unemployed.'

> "Rather than admit to unemployment I would say, 'Well I am a student.' There was less stigma in being a student. Well, there is no stigma in being a student. And I wouldn't admit to being unemployed. (Interview 10)

Women who were students still maintained an ongoing relationship with the labour market. Some students worked at paid jobs while they were going to school. Others continued to search for jobs while they were going to school. And all of them anticipated seeking paid employment when their school program was finished. There is no clear cut dividing line between students and the unemployed. All of the women whom I spoke with were unemployed prior to their entry into school programs. Many of them continued to think of themselves as unemployed and unable to find work throughout their period of training. Vera Callas is an example of someone whose experience of unemployment was not resolved or ended by her entry into an educational program.

> "I've continued to consider myself unemployed even when I was taking more or less full classes on my M.A. beginning in 1983 because the only reason I did that was because I wasn't finding work and my unemployment insurance was going to run out at the end of February...Then I had a chance to at least get some money coming in and continue my education, so I did it. But as a matter of fact in a couple days it will be two years of unemployment despite this teaching assistantship part time work in those two years." (Interview 10)

While some women combined working at paid jobs with going to school, other women found that their training programs alone demanded a lot of their time. Particularly for women with children it was impossible to go to school, study, raise a family and still have time to work at a paid job. These women deferred earning an income in order to complete their studies successfully.

Marie LaSalle, a 30 year old Metis woman, had previously been forced to leave school because the demands on her time had been too great. At the time of the interview, she was devoting her time to study because she knew how limited opportunities in the labour market were without further training. She had previously been employed in a bakery and supported her two children on wages of $1200/month. Somewhat hesitantly she entered a program in Native studies and then decided to go on to university.

> "I felt it necessary to look for work. I needed to because I couldn't afford to live on what I was getting (UI benefits). Or I didn't think I could. But I felt that I couldn't look for work because of the time that was demanded of me with my children and my school. I've been spending an awful lot of time - sometimes 12 hours a day- with school work and you know you just don't have the time." (Interview 27)

Elena Navarro also described the difficulty of trying to attend school while raising children as a single parent and maintaining a household by herself. She described how she attended classes all day while her children were in school and daycare, how she had to rush to get them before the daycare closed and how she often fell asleep studying in the evening after she had fed them dinner and put them to bed.

> "I feel very tired because I have so many things to do. It's very hard with the training and also with the children. I don't know, that's the main thing, the main problem I have. Sometimes I don't have time and my house is - forget it. Sometimes I don't have time on the weekend to put everything in order and clean." (Interview 39)

Her experience reveals the difficult struggle faced by women who try to combine raising their families with completing their education. For women who returned to school in response to their unemployment, it was sometimes a struggle to succeed, given the other demands on their time.

## CREATING SUPPORT NETWORKS

Women often coped with unemployment by turning to others to help them through hard times. This meant turning to family and friends for financial, material, and emotional

support. Women who did not have access to these networks of support were left in emotional and economic isolation. While it is important to recognize the resourcefulness and cooperation used by many women to reduce the impact of unemployment on their lives, it is equally important to recognize that there are others who remain cut off from community and family support systems.

In the interviews, a number of women described how they turned to family members for help when they were out of work. In addition, women turned to friends and neighbors for help with childcare, shopping, meal-sharing, and borrowing money. While some women were able to establish reciprocal relationships where they shared time and resources with each other, other women were totally isolated from such networks of reciprocity.

Vera Callas described the importance of having family and friends who were supportive of her when she was unemployed for months on end.

> "I've been extremely fortunate in that my family - my close family- really believe that I'm trying hard to find work. I don't have to face family pressures that (suggest) ,'Oh, you're just not trying hard enough'...Most of my friends are supportive. And they won't be too obvious, but when we go out they unobtrusively pick up the bill and pay it or

> if there is a dance or something that you need a ticket for, either the prices for the unemployed are lower or they just happen to have an extra ticket and they need somebody to go." (Interview 10)

Family and friends provided emotional support in the case of several women I spoke with. Family and friends also offered material support in the form of food, clothing, shelter, money, and time. Sometimes the provision of material support was not a consequence of economic hard times but an ongoing relationship of sharing resources among kin and friends. However, when economic hard times hit a particular household through the unemployment of major income providers, the material support provided by others took on a new significance. Adult children sometimes became more dependent on their parents, reflecting not so much a network of reciprocity but an exchange of resources across generations.

Like many people in Saskatchewan, Lynnette Hanson had relatives who lived on a farm. She and her husband often went to help out on his parents' farm during the busy season and they shared in the harvest. When her self employed husband was not bringing in any income and she had difficulty finding paid work, their share in the harvest enabled them to eat well without spending much money. She described how important this was during the recession.

> "I usually go out for a couple weeks in the summer (to my inlaws farm) and dig potatoes, pick strawberries and raspberries, whatever. We can them and freeze them. We get all the meat - like whatever they butcher, we get a third....We get all our frozen peas and carrots and all this kind of stuff. So we're not paying for any of this food. Really all we need is our milk and we bring our eggs home (from the farm)...There is a lot of food we don't buy. We just get it from the farm for free and I don't think we do a whole lot of work out there. We'll go out and help them build a fence or whatever....I don't know how we would have made it (in 1982) if we hadn't had all the stuff from the farm - all the meat and chickens and eggs and vegetables that we got from my husband's parents." (Interview 11)

Marcia King, the underemployed technician whose part time wages are inadequate to meet her needs, described how she shared resources with her other family members outside her household.

> "My family is a big help. I have a sister. We pass things around a bit. My mother likes to bring me a jar of pickles or six oranges

> or something - whatever she happens to have sitting there at home. And whenever I visit her she likes to give me something - little things like that help out. I sometimes think there is sort of an underground welfare network. The government has this welfare system and keeps cutting back on it all the time and really people are taking care of a lot more on their own. People are bitching about 'welfare bums' and the 'slobs on unemployment' and I don't think they are recognizing all that people are doing to keep themselves together and not get on welfare. And the support network there is. My parents are not well off by any means and they just give me everything they can anyway. That helps a lot in terms of the stress. It's valuable to have somebody behind you." (Interview 20)

While some women are able to rely on family support to keep from going on welfare and to sustain themselves while they search for employment, other women who have turned to government welfare programs find that they still have to turn to their families for support because the income from social assistance programs in not enough. Sheila Parks, a laid off mineworker and single parent, described how she

relied on her parents for occasional meals, babysitting, food, and emotional support. Shortly before her son was born, and while she was on layoff, she moved in with her parents in order to save money and have help with the baby. She later moved into an apartment of her own but continued to rely on her parents for support to help her cope with her low income and unemployment.

> "Since I've been on assistance, I've never made it to the end of the month and still had money. You get about four days before and I'd end up flat broke and I'd end up taking pop bottles back or going to Mom and Dad's and taking their beer bottles in. Or Dad will come over and bring me a box of diapers and stuff $50 in it and I'll go back and stuff it in his pocket. I think the same $50 has been going around for a year. If I need it I know it's there." (Interview 29)

The fact that Sheila Parks was able to turn to her parents for help during the recession did not eliminate her need to find paid work and become more independent of her parents. Her return to her parents' home did not indicate a willingness on her part to return as a dependent daughter.

Some unemployed women also turned to friends and neighbors and established networks of reciprocity in which they exchanged goods and services which allowed them to meet

their needs on a low income budget. Particularly, single mothers often turned to each other for support in sharing childcare, meals, and other household tasks. Sheila Parks described how she and another single mother helped each other out.

> "There's a girl across here I used to work with and she's got two little ones, so she'll bring them over here and I'll babysit for an evening and if I want to go out I take mine over there. Or if she's got grocery shopping to do we'll usually try to do it at the sme time and we'll take the kids and go do our banking and go get our groceries. It saves her cabfare and it works both ways." (Interview 29)

Linda Moore, another single mother who was unemployed when I interviewed her, described how she exchanged goods and services with friends in order to conserve her small supply of cash. Her resourcefulness and ability to barter enabled her to feed her child meat all winter.

> "I'm a beg and borrow person. I'm a barterer. I know people that go hunting...'If you give me a moose, I'll give you this macrame hanging that cost me $20.' And they give me $50-60 worth of meat....I barter for parts (for my car) and I barter for people to

> come and do tune-ups...I'll cook them a meal or something....Last winter I ate moose until it was coming out - I was so sick of moose. My kid was sick of moose. But we had meat and potatoes every night. It was all moose but we had it....Half the time I am feeding the woman next door because she always takes my son to daycare. So I barter for that too. I ship him over there in the morning and she takes him. Then I pick him up at night and I'll fix supper or something because she doesn't have as much time to cook because she works later. So it's all returned....It becomes a good bargaining system for all of us, so we can all help each other." (Interview 12)

Linda Moore developed these networks of support partly in response to her separation and her need to find ways to supplement her inadequate wages. When her income was further reduced by unemployment, she did not start up new networks of support. The establishment and creation of networks of support therefore is not simply a response to unemployment. It is the result of a complex web of factors which produce low household income - unemployment, low wages, reliance on only one income earner, reliance on social assistance programs.

In addition to these informal networks of support, unemployed women, in a few cases, turned to more formal organizations for support. Some participated in programs offered by community groups to assist women in entering the labour market or finding employment. Some turned to food banks or soup kitchens to help feed their families when their own groceries ran out. Some joined with other unemployed women and men in organizations which provided services to the unemployed and which pressured the government to develop policies to combat unemployment.

Unions of the unemployed or committees of the unemployed were organized in 1982-83 in three major cities in the province. Women, as well as men, were involved in the formation and development of these organizations. Some of the unemployed women I spoke with devoted endless hours of volunteer labour to organizing referral services for food banks, answering phones at organization offices, preparing speeches and letters to the government, planning and strategizing over how to build viable organizations to meet the needs of unemployed workers and lobby for government policies which would address those needs. This political, collective response to unemployment only involved a small portion of the thousands of unemployed workers in the province, but it is a significant phenomenon because it involved unemployed people in a struggle against unemployment which went beyond their individual search for jobs.

While women struggle to find work and stretch their resources to create a future for themselves, their individual struggles take for granted the overall labour market situation and their lack of adequate income. Collective political responses, however small, are important because they represent fundamental challenges to the taken for granted reality of an economy which does not provide enough jobs or enough income to those unable to find jobs.

The women I interviewed varied in their responses to unemployment. While all of them engaged in an individual search for paid work, some of them also responded in a more collective fashion to their circumstances. The most common collective response was participation in informal networks of sharing time and resources. The most political collective response, which provided a challenge to the underlying circumstances, was participation in formal organizations of the unemployed. These organizations were mixed organizations of women and men, some of whom were novices and some of whom were experienced in collective political action. It is important to recognize that unemployed women who did participate in collective political responses to their unemployment did so in mixed organizations of the unemployed. Women in these circumstances did not act as conscious members of a female reserve army which included unemployed women, low paid women, and housewives; they acted as a reserve army of the

unemployed (male and female) and they addressed themselves to the impact of the recession on jobs for both - rather than the specific impact on women. This is not to say that such women were unaware of problems which were specific to unemployed women, but that these problems were addressed within an overall context of addressing the shared problem of unemployment. One can raise the hypothesis that unemployed women act primarily in terms of their status as workers rather than as women, although their gender at all times influences their status as workers.

Vera Callas described how she became involved in one of the three unemployment committees in the province after being out of work for several months. Initially, getting together with other unemployed people helped her to overcome the isolation and depression she suffered after losing her job in 1982. As she became more involved in the committee, she began to experience her unemployment more as a social problem and less as a personal failure. She turned her anger over being out of work into active involvement in trying to help other unemployed people.

> "Toward the end of that six month period (when I was just depressed and staying at home) I got involved with the unemployment committee and that was the beginning of starting to come out of that depression phase - if you could call it that. I don't feel

> that way anymore. I realize that my period of unemployment isn't my fault - most times. I don't think you ever get used to that feeling, but it's a hell of a lot easier to take. And the periods of being depressed are fewer and farther between...Since I've been unemployed, I've got together with a few other unemployed people....a group of unemployed people who are trying to organize and improve our situation and bring to people's attention just what the problem of unemployment is. If somebody's got a problem with UIC we'll try and help them out and do appeals for them. And we got involved with the food bank in the city and we serve as a referral agent for the food bank." (Interview 10)

Cathy Connelly, who was unemployed for over a year, expressed a similar feeling about the importance of the unemployment committee in helping her overcome her feelings of self blame and worthlessness.

> "That was the godsend of the unemployment committee....because you come in contact with so many other people who are unemployed that you know it's not your own fault. It's really reinforcing and you can feel good

> about yourself. Because there are people and you know they are fine and you've known them for months and they are not working either. So maybe there is nothing wrong with me either." (Interview 1)

Heather McKenzie also became involved in an organization of unemployed workers and found satisfaction in being able to do something productive with her time and develop her skills for writing and public speaking. After two years of unemployment she was well acquainted with the financial and emotional problems it caused. She devoted much of her time to the unemployment committee because she knew that people who had been beaten down by their unemployment and poverty needed help in standing up for their rights.

> "The union (of the unemployed) helps people fight - people who can't do it any more. You get to the point where you say, 'I've had it. I can't do it anymore.'...When I first started there all I wanted to do was answer the telephone and do a little typing. Then all of a sudden that was boring and I had to do something better." (Interview 37)

She got involved in writing articles, public speaking, and planning meetings. As she became more involved in developing plans with other unemployed workers, her anger about her own situation became directed toward the govern-

ment instead of herself. She described for me the impact of the government's cutbacks in social assistance programs, the cutbacks in daycare, and the problems associated with the public employment services. An 'unskilled' unemployed woman with a grade 10 education, she had responded to her unemployment by developing a political awareness of the shortcomings of state programs for the unemployed. With that knowledge she asserted the rights of people on welfare to dignity and jobs. And she acted upon her knowledge by helping to organize other unemployed people.

> " The ones of us who have to live off assistance shouldn't have to be punished because there's no jobs...Instead of saying that people won't work, why don't they get the jobs out there for the people. That's the way I look at it. I would have had a job two years ago if there was one that I could do." (Interview 37)

Women who became politically active in response to their unemployment provide the sharpest contrast with our ideological images of women who are 'marginally attached to the labour force', 'more easily made redundant', or able to 'disappear back into the home'. The four women whom I interviewed who had been active in unemployment committees were all self-supporting women before they lost their jobs. All of the unemployed women described in this chapter played

an important role in providing income for their households either as sole providers or co-providers. It may very well be that women in households above a certain income level, with secure economic resources to fall back upon, are able to enjoy a period of unemployment as additional leisure time. But such women, if they exist, must be a small minority. While the responses of women in this chapter may not be representative of all women in the province, I think that their struggles to find work and cope with unemployment provide an insight into the ways in which unemployed women act within the contraints placed upon them and are not simply acted upon by external social forces.

The overgeneralization that women workers per se constitute a reserve army of labour which can be channeled out of the labour market when demand for labour declines assumes that the supply of female labour power would somehow automatically adjust to the changing demand and that the surplus of women workers would disappear from the labour force. The structural forces pushing women into the labour market are not suddenly abated when the demand for female labour declines. Households continue to rely on women's paid employment because women have increasingly become sole providers or co-providers in their families. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that women do whatever they can to find paid work when they lose their jobs.

Women in this study who had been unemployed showed a

remarkable strength and persistence in their search for paid work. They also displayed an ingenuity in devising individual strategies for coping with their unemployment. Some tried to create their own income producing work. Others went back to school to improve their 'marketability'. And some coped with their limited income by pooling resources with family and friends outside the household.

A few of the unemployed women I interviewed also described their participation in collective efforts to improve the situation for unemployed members of the community. They described the support they derived from working with other unemployed people and the types of activities they became involved in. The unemployed women who engaged in any collective response to their unemployment were clearly a minority, but their response is significant because it represents the most developed challenge to the ideology that unemployment is an individual problem to be solved by the individual search for paid work.

# CHAPTER IX

## WORKING CONDITIONS DURING THE RECESSION

While each individual occupation is characterized by unique and specific labour processes involving particular tasks, skills, and materials, all labour processes organized within capitalist relations of production are shaped by the driving force of capitalism, i.e. the drive for capital accumulation. And since the accumulation of capital rests upon the production of surplus value by the working population, the drive for capital accumulation transforms the production process in an effort to increase the relative surplus value, i.e. to decrease that portion of the working day which replaces the value of the worker's labour power and to increase that portion of the working day which produces value for the benefit of capital (Marx, 1967).

Despite differences in particular occupations, the shared characteristic of labour processes under capitalism is the organization of production under the control of capital for the expansion of capital. The fact that labour processes are organized under the control of capital in order to maximize the further accumulation of capital creates similarities in the conditions of work regardless of differences in occupation or workplace (Braverman, 1974).

The drive for capital accumulation leads the capitalist to seek control of the production process in order to increase the productivity and intensity of labour, thereby increasing the production of surplus value. As a result, advanced capitalist societies are characterized by a labour force which has been divested of control over production processes and which has been deskilled, and thereby cheapened in the labour market (Braverman, 1974).

These tendencies toward the reduction of workers' skills and workers' control over labour processes have shaped the nature and conditions of work in the occupations which have drawn large numbers of women into the labour force since World War II. In their interviews with women workers, Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) found ample evidence to support the argument that women work at jobs where they have very little control over their work, where the necessary level of skills has been reduced and thereby cheapened, and where they are subject to close supervision and management attempts to increase their workloads.

While the drive for capital accumulation shapes labour processes continuously, a period of recession provides capital with an opportunity to further extend its control over labour processes. By generating a high level of unemployment and thus replenishing the 'reserve army of the unemployed', capital is able to lower the price of labour power and weaken workers' control over labour processes.

This tendency of a recession to 'discipline the workers' and increase employers' control over the labour process is one of the ways in which a recession brings about a restoration of profitability and the potential for a new period of economic growth (Marx, 1967; Sweezy, 1942; Gordon, 1975; Dowd, 1977; Crotty and Rapping, 1978).

Responding to declining markets and rates of profit in a recession, businesses increase their attempts to reduce the costs of production. Attempts to cut costs can involve reductions in the number of workers, speed-up, wage cuts, the introduction of new technology or the reorganization of work. All of these cost-cutting efforts have an impact on the daily working conditions which people experience on the job.

Changes in working conditions stemming from cost-cutting efforts by employers are not found only within the private sector. Governments and organizations dependent on government funds are also subject to cost-cutting strategies in the face of a stagnant economy. Government revenues are constrained by the limited growth in the economy. This creates pressure on the government to control spending in order to avoid uncontrollable government budget deficits. Both public and private sector employers are therefore under pressure to find ways to reduce their expenditures, which frequently involves attempts to reduce labour costs.

While a stagnant economy generates added pressure on employers to cut costs and exact concessions from workers, it also generates added competition among workers which makes it more difficult for them to resist employers' demands for concessions. The high level of unemployment creates an abundant reserve army of labour which competes with those workers who are already employed and exerts a downward pressure on their wages (Sweezy, 1942). This reserve army of the unemployed also reduces workers' bargaining power vis a vis their employers and results in the extension of employers' control over the labour process (Gordon, 1975). Working conditions may deteriorate as workers are forced to accept increased workloads in order to keep their jobs.

Marx's concept of the reserve army of the unemployed clarifies the relationship between growing unemployment and the strengthening of employers' control over the workplace. With competition for jobs extremely high, employers hold the upper hand in negotiations with workers over the terms of their employment.

We have already seen that the relationship between women workers and the reserve army cannot be understood by a simple equation of the two. Women are not a reserve in the sense that they can be easily channeled out of the labour market. They are not a reserve in the sense that they are the last hired and the first fired. There are subgroups of

women workers who fall into these categories but their experiences cannot be accurately equated with the experiences of women workers per se. The relationship between women workers and the reserve army has to be understood in its complexity and multiplicity. That includes the relationships among the various segments of the reserve army of unemployed women and the various segments of the employed female labour force. To simply equate women workers with the reserve army glosses over the differences in the experiences of women who are employed and women who are unemployed and it makes it impossible to investigate the impact of the growing female reserve army of unemployed on the employed female labour force.

It is these questions which I sought to investigate in my interviews with employed women. I wanted to find out how their experiences differed from the experiences of the women who were unable to find paid work. And I wanted to find out how the high level of unemployment affected their own work situations. I asked them to describe their working conditions and to discuss whether they had experienced any changes in working conditions during the recession. I asked them whether and in what ways they thought the state of the economy had affected their own daily working conditions.

I found that between the underlying state of the economy and the individual experience of one's working conditions there were many mediating layers of influence.

Women could accurately describe their immediate working conditions and the closest mediating layers of influence which shaped those working conditions, but they varied in the extent to which they saw those mediating influences as stemming from the underlying state of the economy.

In this chapter I describe the working conditions of women in clerical, sales, service, and blue collar jobs during the 1981-83 economic recession. I began with the idea that their working conditions would deteriorate during the recession as employers tried to cut costs and workers were forced to make concessions in the face of overwhelming competition from the unemployed. I found that the changes between the recession and the pre-recession period were not essentially changes in kind but changes in degree. The impetus to cut costs, reduce staff, and increase workloads was not confined to the period of the recession, although in some cases it seemed to intensify as a result of the worsening economic crisis. The problems which employed women encountered during the recession were therefore not new problems, although in some cases the recession made conditions worse.

## THE DEVALUATION OF WOMEN'S WORK

The devaluation of women's work is most clearly revealed in the persistent wage gap between male and female workers in the Canadian labour force. The average income

from employment among women workers is less than two thirds of the average income among men. Even when the comparison is limited to fulltime workers with the same level of education, women earn significantly less than men (Wilson,1983). Even within the same occupational categories women workers earn less than men, but at the same time, much of the income inequality stems from the fact that men and women do different work (Phillips and Phillips, 1983).

Among the women whom I interviewed, the majority had an income of less than $1500/month, and several were employed at or near the minimum wage. During the recession, the Conservative provincial government cancelled a scheduled increase in the minimum wage, which has been frozen at $4.25/hour since January 1982. While some of the low income women were living on welfare or unemployment insurance, others were employed at low wage jobs. Women workers who earned over $1500/month were frequently in the lower paid positions within their workplaces.

Many traditionally female occupations are concentrated at the bottom of workplace hierarchies, so that women workers are routinely found in subordinate positions at work. Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) found this to be true of the working women in their interview study. They also found that women's skills were devalued and taken for granted. It was assumed that women knew how to type, prepare food, care for children and the sick, and interact

with the public. Such skills, being generally available and having been learned in the home or school, had little value in the labour market. Armstrong and Armstrong (1983) also found that women workers take pride in their work and assert the worth of their labour, defying its devaluation in the marketplace (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1983).

In my research, a number of women who worked in traditionally female occupations felt that their work was undervalued. The devaluation of their work was not only a matter of low wages paid for their labour power, but was also experienced as a lack of respect for their contribution to the workplace. The lack of respect accorded to workers in subordinate positions affects a large proportion of women in the workforce. Several of the women whom I interviewed complained about the fact that they received neither the pay nor the recognition to which they felt entitled. Their assertion of their own self-worth and the value of their work is a tribute to their struggle for dignity and recognition in a labour market which denies them both.

Kate Martin, a unionized hospital worker, earned over $11/hour, well above the minimum wage, but still not enough to support a family by herself. While she would have liked to earn more for her work, it was not the lack of money but the lack of respect which she felt most sharply.

> "They have very little respect for the work you do and I guess I think my work deserves a

> certain amount of respect....I don't necessarily want money all the time ( for the extra effort I put in), but a thank you wouldn't hurt once in awhile." (Interview 35)

Miriam Roland, a clerk stenographer whose duties are much broader than her job description suggests, described how the clerical workers were indispensible to the functioning of her workplace. She described with delight how the professional staff had been unable to carry on their work when the office staff had all been given holidays at the same time one year. As she described the skills and qualities required in her job, she expressed dissatisfaction with both the level of her pay and the lack of respect for her work.

> "Stenos are low man on the totem pole in the job market. A lot of people don't think they are important....There are a lot of people that look down on us. They think that because we don't have a university education, we're not as good as they are...To be a steno you have to ... have a lot of common sense and you have to be intelligent. Maybe it doesn't take as long to get to be a steno, but we are invaluable. They can't run an office without us." (Interview 32)

In several cases, women said that their employers failed to recognize the importance of the labour performed by women at the bottom of the workplace hierarchies. Cheryl Semchuk, a hostess/waitress in a hotel restaurant, described how most of the workers who cleaned rooms or prepared and served meals were women, while the top administrators of the hotel were men. She described how her employer gave no recognition to the contribution of her work, while she recognized that her job performance was essential to the success of the business.

> "(The employer's attitude is) 'Thank us for giving you a job.' They don't think about the fact that they wouldn't be doing nearly as well if we weren't doing such a good job. People wouldn't be coming back if we were doing a really poor job and we've had people come back every year...because they like our service....We've gotten lot of compliments ....and yet the employer is saying how poor we are, that we are not pulling our weight. It makes you want to stand up and do something." (Interview 5)

The lack of respect and the low level of pay which marks the devaluation of women's labour was evident in the experiences of the daycare workers whom I interviewed. Although they all worked full time, often with no breaks

from their responsibilities, one of them earned approximately $1000/month, another earned less than $700/month, and one who directed a daycare center earned $1300/month. Michelle Rossi, a full time daycare worker who at times during the recession had to support her family on her wages alone, spoke about the importance of her job and how it was undervalued.

> "I feel that daycare workers are underpaid. We have a lot of responsibility looking after someone else's children. I mean they are people and they are more important than things...Parents leave their kids at a daycare so they can know that they are looked after well...It's an important job, a very important job. (Interview 36)

The low market value of women's labour power was often reflected in the lack of respect which they were shown in the workplace. Sally Holden, a switchboard operator for a private answering service, described how the operators, all of whom were women, earned the minimum wage or slightly over.

> "He'd call us his girls - the boss, the general manager. It was a real kind of demeaning attitude in a way...He'd usually pat us on the head...We were definitely 'his girls'. And the sales manager was worse.

> He'd yell and scream and figure he'd scare us into working faster. There certainly wasn't a feeling of respect...They even had a whip they would crack behind the chairs just for fun. They thought it was just for fun. When one of the clients would come in,...he had this cattle whip that he would crack and say, 'This is how I keep my girls working for you.' ...Once at a meeting, (the sales manager) said 'Goddamn monkeys could work better' than we could. The treatment wasn't really great." (Interview 4)

The lack of respect for women in the workplace was seldom as blatant as that described by Sally Holden, but she was not the only woman who described being called names, being yelled at, or being treated as if she was stupid. Jane MacDonald, a waitress, described a former employer who berated and yelled at the waitresses in front of the customers and her current employer who treats the waitresses as stupid.

> "The way he looks at you and talks - as if we are dummies and he is the only one that knows anything." (Interview 28)

Mary Engel, a hospital worker, described how the women who were at the lowest rank within the nursing team were treated as inferior by both men and women above them.

> "You just don't feel like you are allowed to use your brain enough. And I think a lot of us are just as smart as these new people...There is almost a class sytem in the hospitals. We are supposed to be working as a team but...A lot of the girls (certified nursing assistants) felt like they were really getting stomped on and bossed around and pushed around...I felt that way too for awhile...You were the CNA that did all the dirty work and that was it...I know that I'm a good worker...(if) they want to step on me - fine, but at least I know I'm doing (my job)." (Interview 33)

Time and again women described how they were denied recognition for the work they performed. They described working hard and conscientiously to do their jobs well, utilizing skills which they had acquired through the home, training, or job experience. All too frequently their skills were taken for granted, and the contribution of their labour was ignored. The invisibility of women's work, except when it is not performed, was illustrated for me in a story told by one of the women about a co-worker.

> "She was having a bit of a rough time up there. She came into work with a little sign that she had found. It says, 'When I do

> wrong, no one forgets. When I do right, no one notices.' It is just the exact feeling of what was happening up there....A little thank you would go a long way....(but) all you get is criticism. In fact, you expect it. You are very shocked if you get anything else." (Interview 35)

The devaluation of women's work which was evident in numerous conversations with women during the course of this research was not substantially affected by the recession. However, during the recession, as some women were forced into the situation of being the sole providers for their families, the devaluation of their labour took on a new significance. The contradiction between what women are paid and what they feel their labour should be worth becomes more pronounced when women assume the major responsibility for the financial support of their families.

Christine Bonner, a university graduate who had combined working at temporary and part time jobs with raising her son, while her spouse brought in most of the family income, realized with bitterness that she could not earn enough to support her family when her husband lost his job. After several months of unemployment, she finally found work at a community services project which requires skill and responsibility, but which pays slightly more than the minimum wage.

> "The pay is another major problem...The take home pay is $357 every two weeks so that is around $700/month, which could not support a family. I think that part bothers me a lot. I think I am doing a job that is needed and I am doing a job at a professional level and I feel like I am carrying it out as much a professional as I can....We should all be paid a decent wage and we should be able to support a family on it. When people are unemployed in the family and you are working full time and you are working as hard as you can and somebody else is making a wage that can support a family and you can't, it just seems so unfair - which it is." (Interview 26)

The devaluation of women's work, the lack of recognition and financial rewards, and the lack of respect for the work they performed was felt by many of the women whom I interviewed. While a few women felt that they were fairly paid, most women felt that their work was underpaid and undervalued. They often felt that the useful contribution made by their labour was ignored unless something for which they were responsible was undone. In the face of this devaluation of their labour, many showed a remarkable sense of their own self-worth and the importance of the work which

they performed. Many also performed their jobs conscientiously, taking pride in a job well done, even when it yielded them so little in terms of money or recognition. Increased competition during the recession made it more difficult for women to win recognition or higher pay, as employers froze wages, limited promotional opportunities, and continued to devalue women's contribution.

## UNDERSTAFFING AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF WOMEN'S LABOUR IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Government fiscal restraint policies directly affected the working conditions of women in public sector jobs. Understaffing was a nearly universal complaint among the public sector working women whom I interviewed. For some, the problem of understaffing appeared to be a chronic condition which was not noticeably affected by the recent recession. In other cases, women felt that the problem of understaffing had worsened during the recession as their employers looked for additional ways to reduce labour costs. In either case, it was clear that understaffing did not arise as a new problem during the recession. The longer term economic crisis and the limits placed upon government revenues by that economic crisis had resulted in fiscal restraint policies prior to the 1981 recession.

The following women were all employed directly in the public sector. I asked them to describe their work environment, their workload, and whether there had been any significant changes in their working conditions in the past few years.

Kate Martin has worked as a full time certified nursing assistant in the same hospital since 1976. Over the past few years she has observed a number of changes in her working conditions which stem, at least in part, from limited government funding for health care. Budget constraints have influenced the decisions made by the hospital management and those decisions have directly affected Kate Martin's conditions of work.

At the most immediate level, some of the changes in Kate Martin's working conditions could be attributed to changes in the type of patients found on her ward. Older patients requiring extended care have been placed in hospitals rather than nursing homes as a result of the lack of adequate funding for extended care facilities. The growing number of patients requiring extended care has increased the nursing workload. A management decision to increase the nursing workload without increasing the number of workers has caused working conditions within the hospital to deteriorate. That management decision and the lack of nursing home facilities are both embedded in an overall government policy of fiscal restraint. This government

policy appeared in some cases to intensify during the recent recession but was generally evident for some time prior to the recession.

> "We have a lot of old people on the surgical ward who are waiting for nursing home placements that aren't available to them...It's been gradually getting worse...And they don't staff for it, because in a nursing home it requires more staff because there is heavier work and on a long term basis. But they are just staffing according to acute care and, you know, you do burn out....I'd say the workload has doubled in the last three to five years....They have always been understaffed...and the numbers haven't really gone down but the type of patient has gone up. The care required has increased." (Interview 35)

The increased workload was further exacerbated by cost-cutting staffing policies. When regular staff were on sick leave or took accumulated time off, they were often not replaced. This meant that their duties had to be shouldered by the remaining staff. The tendency of the hospital's management to place a priority on reducing labour costs meant an intensified workload for the women employed there. As a result of understaffing, Kate Martin had to hurry

through her day, unable to provide anything more than the basic physical care to her patients.

> "Now it's basically reached the level where I go to work in the morning and I make some attempt to plan my day but in order for me to plan my day I just have to look at the basics. I don't have time to sit down and talk to (patients) about family problems ...That is part of my job, you know? Emotional care, as well as spiritual and physical care. But I don't have the time. I feel that I have to get the physical things done first. We have to follow our routines or you won't get done. So you do it as quickly and, in that period of time, as thoroughly as you can, but because you are doing it quickly, of course, your thoroughness suffers." (Interview 35)

Kate Martin became a certified nursing assistant because she wanted to provide nursing care to the sick. She lived away from her children for a year in order to get training to enter this field of work. She was frustrated by the working conditions in the hospital and felt that she was prevented from doing her job well.

> "I used to take pride in my work and I'm finding it harder and harder to do....We have

> people that come in with terminal cancer that we can't spend time with that we should... Part of my job is to help them, to work through it and to listen. And I don't have time and I feel really bad about it. Really bad....We have a case right now where a patient is very close to death and her family is not dealing with it and we don't have the time to sit by her and just be there for her. That's my job. That's what I want to do. And it's not, it's not happening." (Interview 35)

Kate Martin was under a lot of pressure to intensify her labour at work. She dealt constantly with sick people who needed more care than she had the time to give. She responded to this pressure by working herself to the point of exhaustion because she was committed to doing a good job. Yet she recognized, with a sense of irony, that the hospital's management was able to intensify her labour because of her commitment to providing good care to her patients. Caring work, the work of looking after others, providing services, attending to their needs, which is so often the work of women in Canadian society, involves people emotionally in the quality of their work and makes them susceptible to exploitation. Nonetheless women like Kate Martin take pride in their commitment to doing their jobs

well and they resent the exploitation of that commitment by managers who seem more concerned with budget cuts than quality of care.

> "When I go to work, I don't leave until my work is done. You see that more in women than you do in a man. It's 4:15 and it's time to leave and they go, where I don't think a woman does that. I don't know whether you call it a sense of responsibility but probably for lack of a better word, yeah. I think management does bank on that, because I am not going to leave the ward in the middle of doing something so that somebody else has got to pick it up. But, by the same token, I am also slitting my own throat because how can I tell them we are understaffed when I am getting my work done. But I can't see myself changing that either because that's the only thing that I can actually take pride in. And they bank on that. I don't actually put in extra time that you could see on any hour sheets or anything but...I'm doing my work faster, accomplishing more in that eight hours than I would normally." (Interview 35)

Kate Martin's case illustrates a number of significant patterns in women's work experiences during a time of

economic crisis. Her working conditions were largely shaped by her employer's decisions to control labour costs by limiting the number of paid staff and relying on the workers themselves to shoulder the additional workload. This intensification of women's labour within the public sector was rooted in the efforts of the state to alleviate its fiscal crisis through controlled spending. Her employer was free to impose this added workload on the staff because the workers had few alternatives. They could not afford to stay at home and there were few other job opportunities in the labour market.

In another interview, a dental therapist in a publicly funded dental program described how her workload was also affected by government budget constraints. Sarah Mason, like Kate Martin, worked directly with people who depended upon her health care services. They were both, in a sense, on the front lines of the health care system where they were able to directly observe the impact of management policies on the quality of services provided. And like Kate Martin, Sarah Mason had seen her working conditions deteriorate in the past few years as her caseload increased and she was pressured to work faster.

> "(Our workload) has increased. Up until this summer people in (the provincial government) had figured that 800 was a reasonable number of children - a reasonable

> caseload. Then they....decided now is the time for Saskatchewan dental therapists to have a caseload of 1000 children....Last year we were struggling to get the dental work completed by the end of the school year....I cannot honestly say that we are adequately staffed. A lot of pressure is being put on us to get our work done. They are wanting quality and they are also wanting quantity, and something somewhere has to go." (Interview 6)

Along with the increased caseload and pressure to work faster, dental therapists in Saskatchewan have been subjected to monitoring which purportedly measures their output. For the past three years, dental therapists have submitted detailed records of their work which have been fed into a computer which has calculated and measured their 'productivity'. Specific values are assigned to particular dental procedures and the work performed by each dental therapist in the province is thereby quantified and compared to regional and provincial averages. This centralization of knowledge about the labour process by the administration has increased their control over the work performed by dental therapists and enabled them to intensify their labour. The impetus to reduce labour costs in the public sector has led to the application of principles of scientific management

(Braverman, 1974). This kind of monitoring fails to measure some of the important work done by dental therapists, such as tracking down children who change schools and miss dental treatment. It therefore discourages people from performing those services which are not quantifiable and it puts pressure on people to emphasize quantity of treatments rather than quality.

> "They say they're not applying pressure but subtly it's there. They don't stand over you with a big whip saying 'Get moving', but every month we get sheets coming out...with the amount of work we've done for a month... You get this figure and you look at it and compare what you've done with the regional average and the provincial average. And if your figures are down, I feel that some people are going to say, 'Oh I'm not doing as much as other people' and that becomes a pressure. They may be working their butts off but it's not showing up (in the figures). (Interview 6)

The government's commitment to fiscal restraint affected the working conditions of dental therapists and made it more difficult for them to do a good job in providing services to the children in their care.

Like the hospital worker Kate Martin, Sarah Mason had taken special training in order to enter her field of work and she took pride in her ability to do her job well. Like Kate Martin, she had a sense of responsibility to the people in her care which caused her to work hard to maintain the quality of care even as her working conditions made that more difficult.

> "I feel I am under pressure and I don't like that. And I've really had to home in to myself that I am going to produce quality dental work. I am not going to let myself become so rushed that I'm going to be irritable and short-tempered with the children because that is no good for the children whatsoever....(K: Is your situation shared by other dental therapists?) Yes. Definitely, in this region...There is concern because of the workload and because we don't want to shortchange the children. That is the number one feeling (among dental therapists today)." (Interview 6)

Many women in the labour force work at jobs where they directly provide services to people, and are thereby able to observe the effect of policy changes on recipients of services. Sarah Mason knew, as a result of her daily work experiences, that certain policies caused unnecessary

hardships and that the quality of care could be improved by reducing workloads and expanding the scope of the program. Although she understood better than anyone else how her work could be improved, she was not in a position to control the policies which would affect her working conditions and the quality of care she was able to provide. There is a fundamental contradiction between her knowledge of her working conditions and her lack of control over her working conditions. She faced that contradiction every time she treated a child who should have received earlier treatment but who did not, as a result of cutbacks in the dental program.

> "We are looking at children, especially in the first term, adjusting to school life and some of them having major dental problems. ...You see these children with these badly decayed teeth and you know that had the government said 'Yes, we'll include preschoolers', we could have saved those teeth much more easily for the children...It is hard on those little kids. Most of them carry through just fine. For some of them it's a nightmare and yet it needn't have been." (Interview 6)

Public sector workers frequently reported that understaffing resulted in unreasonable workloads.

Understaffing was not necessarily the result of any layoffs, but often the result of a failure to increase staff. Mary Engel, a 30 year old certified nursing assistant, reported that there had been no major layoffs of hospital workers, but the number of workers had not kept pace with the rising workload. Like Kate Martin and Sarah Mason, Mary Engel found that the size of her workload did not enable her to provide the quality of health care that she had been trained to deliver. Several times she gave examples of simply not having enough time to do the work that needed to be done - not enough time to answer patients' questions about surgery, not enough time to give individual attention to patients, not enough time to teach people things that would make their recovery more rapid.

> "When I first started working, it seems we just always had more people to go around... It's just not the way it should be. In training you have your one-to-one with patients and no one would ever tell you that you wouldn't have time to do anything....When you don't have time for the little things you could do, because there aren't enough people to go around, that's what wipes the fresh look off your face." (Interview 33)

Staffing policies in state-run institutions sometimes resulted in a serious shortage of workers which made work

not only more difficult, but more dangerous. Lorraine Wakowsky, who worked as a guard in a government corrections facility, described how her job was affected by government budget cutbacks.

> "(Management's) attitude is that on a crew you can run short rather than hiring overtime because the budget doesn't allow it. Right now they are running so short...Over the weekend three of our names appeared on the board as working when we were actually off - two on annual leave and one on compensation...That means they ran shorter than blazes at work and it was very busy." (Interview 23)

Understaffing in the public sector was sometimes the result of difficulty in keeping staff in temporary positions. Ann Bennett, a cashier/office clerk, described how understaffing affected her working conditions, when there was a turnover of temporary staff.

> "For the last two years we've had trouble with the seasonal girl. She'll last maybe three months and find something better, so we are always short staffed...When we were short staffed, we didn't work any longer hours but you came home and you had a headache out to here. (She gestures with her hands around her

> head.).... The hours didn't change but the workload did. And you get no time to eat. You're lucky if you can make a cup of tea." (Interview 34)

The shortage of staff and the unreasonable workload were not the only evidence of tight government budgets in Ann Bennett's workplace. The building where she worked was old and unpleasant. There was no room where she and her co-workers could go relax during breaks. The furniture was old and worn out. The locks on the doors were inadequate and people had broken in before she took the initiative to get new locks installed so that the women working nights would be more secure.

> "It's so cold in there. We've got a little miniature heater and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. We don't really have a room we can call our own for lunches or anything...We've just been told that we can't have tea or coffee at our front desk where the public can see us. We have to sit around a corner by this old safe, kind of hiding, but you still have to get up and peek around the corner to see if anybody is out there..They are all minor things, but minor things that could be changed to make it a heck of a lot easier." (Interview 34)

Women working in the public sector found it more difficult to gain any improvements in their working conditions during the recession. Tight government budgets produced additional workloads and created financial barriers to workplace improvements. Ilse Fromm, a library assistant in a publicly funded university, described how the university's budget did not include monies for hiring the necessary staff, or making improvements in the conditions of work.

> (K: Did your employer do anything in the last three years in response to tight budgets which affected your everyday work?) "Well, part of that was this freezing of positions which does have an impact because you have more workload. It's not so much what they did do but what they didn't do. In terms of general improvements of your workplace - there is never enough money for that. When you ask for better working conditions, then there is no money in the budget.... We get a lot of increased duties to perform. And they didn't hire anyone else, so we are building up quite a substantial backlog." (Interview 15)

Ilse Fromm's employer attempted to monitor people's work in order to increase productivity. Sarah Mason, the

dental therapist whose work was broken down into specific procedures each with its own particular number of "relative value units", hated having her work monitored in that way. Ilse Fromm, whose department was subjected to numerous time studies, thought that management's monitoring of work was a waste of time and an insult to the workers.

> "Over the last year...they have conducted a lot of time studies...They came pretty close to breaking down your work into the minutest little details and noting down every quarter of a minute that you did this and that. We're being studied to death...Management always says, 'We are not trying to make you work faster. We're trying to make you work smarter.' It's a real insult." (Interview 15)

Debbie Freeman, a government clerical worker, described how a reorganization of the labour process in her office had increased the workload of the women in her section. Since management had control over how the various tasks were to be assigned and performed they were able to redistribute the work to different workers. While the reasons for this reorganization of the labour process were not immediately apparent to the women whose workload was being increased, it is possible that this represents an attempt by management to redistribute work to lower paid workers in order to reduce labour costs.

> "They keep piling more responsibilities on us. I don't know who they are taking them away from. I think everybody was overloaded at one time and my boss just decided to shift things...which is a lot of extra work on my section. And I find it very difficult to do - to clear up the office when I go home at night. There is always stuff lying around. There was no time to do it." (Interview 22)

The workload has also been affected by the decision to hire temporary workers, whether through temporary agencies or job creation programs. Problems of staff turnover have reduced efficiency and placed a greater workload on the shoulders of the remaining staff. In Debbie Freeman's workplace there are workers who are permanent staff, workers who are hired for a specific term contract, and temporary workers hired through a private agency. When her employer decided to fill a job opening with temporary agency workers rather than regular permanent staff, the resulting staff turnover created a lot of extra work for her. The decision of employers to hire temporary workers not only affects people looking for work who are only able to find temporary jobs, it also affects the working conditions in the places where they are hired.

> "I am getting these agency employees. I'm training and I'm trying to keep up, plus I've

> got this extra workload. It is quite tough. Occasionally...when the typing pool got overloaded, they'd hire an agency person for a week...I have no idea why they are doing this clerical position like that. I spent a lot of time in training one woman...On Monday she was just to the point where she could be left alone for two days and function. That was four weeks after she started. She found a permanent full time job and she's gone. Here we go again. I had another temporary worker...and she didn't work out...She was a keypunch operator that was used to making $12/hour and there she was doing a job she didn't like for $5/hour...Now on Tuesday morning they are going to have someone different again. That makes it a lot more difficult for me....It is a job for two people who know what they are doing. It's not for one who knows what she is doing and one who you are trying to train." (Interview 22)

The following case is a clear illustration of how working conditions were adversely affected by underfunding even in situations where the funding was not reduced. If the need for services is not matched by a corresponding

level of funding and staff, then the result is an unreasonable workload which limits the quality or availability of services. There do not have to be cutbacks or budget reductions for this situation to occur because the funding was not adequate in the first place. Miriam Roland, a clerk-steno in a program funded by the government, has seen the program grow and the funding become more secure, although they still have to rely on temporary grants and workers hired through job creation programs to meet their staffing needs. Even though their funding has increased over the years, it is still less than they require and they maintain a lengthy waiting list for people needing their services.

> "We haven't seen any cutbacks which has been marvelous. In fact, our ...program is negotiating right now for an increase because they are short of help. They've got so many people on the waiting list...We've got a full caseload...and we're booking appointments into next year already (seven months away)...The level of funding isn't high enough. We have grown so much and the need is there. We can do with more help, more staff..." (Interview 32)

The inadequate level of funding has had a number of consequences in Miriam Roland's workplace. One of the most obvious problems has been the crowded, inadequate facilities

available to the program. The female office workers were situated in the worst part of the facility where the temperature in the summer often reached 100 degrees.

> "We've never had any frills. We're cramped in very cramped quarters. There are noisy, very poor working conditions in our department. We've had to beg, borrow, and steal space...Our waiting room is the hall...Our conditions haven't been the best. It's hot. We (finally) got an air conditioner for our office because there was an equipment room below us and the floor is so hot all the time...In the summer it would get to be 100 in there." (Interview 32)

The underfunding not only affected the physical facilities available to the program, but also the money available for staff. Two staffing policies seemed to have an adverse effect on the working conditions of the clerical workers at the project. As the program grew, money for staff was allocated to various positions but very little was allocated for additional office workers. The increased officework was simply added to the workload of the current office staff. Secondly, the reliance on temporary job creation programs to meet certain staffing needs meant a frequent turnover in temporary workers.

> "The clerical staff came last. They hired a physio or a speech therapist. They were more important. We could just work harder. We got a half time secretary when we needed a full time. We could do with a filing clerk and we don't have one. We are always last...Stenos are low man on the totem pole....(The workload) has grown. Sometimes we have quite a pile of typing and we're quite far behind. The girls get all upset and I have to tell them, 'Look, you can only do what you can do. They can't expect you to do more than you can do. You're working at top speed now.'" (Interview 32)

The reliance on temporary government grants to supplement the program has meant that a number of workers have come and gone on various make-work projects. The recession and lack of alternative job opportunities may lead to less turnover among the regular staff, but the reliance on temporary grant workers means a lot of time is spent in training and orienting new people.

> "We've had a lot of turnover in the office which has meant a lot of work for me - training and hiring. I always sigh when I hear somebody else is going to leave because I can't face training another one. Our work

> is quite detailed and it takes a long time for people to catch on - a good six months before they know what they are doing." (Interview 32)

The testimony of women who have to train a recurring stream of temporary workers and who have to shoulder additional work themselves during the training process reveals that the ease with which employers replace workers is dependent upon the intensification of the labour of the more experienced workforce. It is not simply a question of one 'unskilled' worker being replaced by another. In clerical work, for example, while many offices have subjected their labour processes to deskilling, in others women are expected to carry out a wide variety of tasks and keep track of myriad details without any recognition of the skills required. When a worker is replaced with someone unfamiliar with the office, they cannot immediately perform the job with the same speed and skill.

Christine Bonner was also employed in a community program funded by the government. However, that program had been established as a diminishing project, i.e. the government provided funds to initiate the program but not to support it on an ongoing basis. As a result of the diminishing funds, workers were hired on a temporary basis with two positions ending after the first year. The temporary nature of the jobs encouraged women to seek other

employment, so that there was even greater turnover in staff. For Christine Bonner, the reduction in the number of workers and the frequent changes in staff had made it much more difficult for her to do her job.

> "It should get ongoing funding, but it won't. We've seen that there is really a great need. There is more need than we can fill....(but now) we are trying to make up for the two staff that are gone. The amount of work is growing but we've lost two people....I think we are all working a lot harder and still there are a lot of things that just aren't getting done that were getting done before... It's become more individual effort and doing it as quickly as possible rather than doing a really good job." (Interview 26)

Diminishing funding from the government for community programs resulted in an intensification of labour as people struggled to maintain services with fewer staff and resources. Once again we see women working directly to provide services to people, intensifying their labour in an effort to maintain services, and being frustrated by their inability to perform their jobs well.

In some occupations it is harder than others to turn one's back on unfinished work and walk out the door. In situations where one's supervisor devotes endless hours to

the job, there is a pressure on others to conform to a workaholic model of behavior. It becomes difficult for people to voice grievances about unreasonable workloads under such circumstances. Marcia King worked at a publicly funded university. Her department has not been adequately staffed for some time, but when her hours were reduced as a result of budget cutbacks, it became even more difficult for her to cope with her workload. The pressure on Marcia King to work harder or faster was compounded by the dynamics of her interaction with her supervisor.

> "(My supervisor) jokes about it. He'll say, 'Well, I know you don't have enough to do, so here's another thing for you to work on when you have some spare time. Ha Ha.' But the thing is, he is working three times as much. He is a workaholic...He works ridiculous hours - all his weekends and everything....It is a difficult position to be in because we work as equals in a lot of ways and yet when it's time to go, I just quit and go...There is constantly the temptation that I should come in and put in a couple extra hours...If I didn't have the home life I have, I'm sure I would." (Interview 20)

Marcia King knew that the problem of understaffing was directly tied to her employer's efforts to reduce labour

costs as a way of operating within budget constraints established by the government. Yet she also knew that these so-called savings actually decreased efficiency in her department. It became much more difficult to work productively when the workload exceeded the capacity of the staff to complete it.

> "The work is less efficient. A lot of work would be much better done if you could work at it for 5-6 hours at a stretch and get it done. The way it is I keep getting interrupted with something different that just came up and has to be done. So you drop what you are doing and do something else for awhile. When you come back, you've forgotten a lot of the headway you made and you have to start over again. There is a lot of that. It's really frustrating because you know that it's not really all that economic to be paying me half time. It doesn't really save them that much money when you talk about work efficiency, but they don't think in those terms." (Interview 20)

Marcia King, like many other women working in the public sector, is knowledgeable about the ways in which her work could be organized to increase efficiency and quality of services. But important decisions about the organization

of work, like the number of staff, the hours of work, and the assignment of tasks, are decisions which are made by management rather than the workers themselves. Management decisions to reduce labour costs as a way of operating within budget constraints often result in a deterioration of services, inefficiency, and stress. There is no doubt in my mind that women working in the public sector would organize their work differently and improve the quality of their work if they had the power to do so.

Women directly providing services to people and women whose supervisors were workaholics and women whose individual productivity was monitored were all subject to pressures to intensify their labour. These pressures often caused women to respond to increased workloads by working harder to get their jobs done. Ada McNaughton, a 49 year old government clerk, responded to the high workload in her office by working hard to try to get things done. Although her work did not involve dealing directly with the public, she felt that her job was important in the delivery of health care services to patients. Ada McNaughton, like many of the women I interviewed, seemed to be very conscious of the human connections of her work. She was aware that other people were affected by how well she did her job. And her sense of responsibility to those people made her a conscientious worker.

> "Over the past 2-3 years at least, the work has increased tremendously, but we certainly haven't increased the staff...The work is there and it's got to be done...We grumble amongst ourselves, but we do it anyway, because it's got to be done...Nobody says this in so many words, but you wouldn't get the work if (people) weren't sick. So these people are sick. They don't do it on purpose. And you do it. The volume of work is there and it has to be done." (Interview 13)

To Ada McNaughton no other course of action is conceivable when faced with a high volume of work. Her dedication to her job seems to stem directly from her awareness of the connection between her work and the well-being of others.

Time and again women described the relationship between their work and the well-being of other people. Hospital workers, dental therapists, and daycare workers were among the most obvious examples of working women who were concerned about the quality of services they were able to provide. This same concern for others was also expressed in occupations where the impact of one's work on others was less obvious. An operator for an answering service spoke about being able to provide friendly service to people as an important part of her job. A government clerk spoke about

how her office work was important to patients around the province. A library assistant spoke about how she and her co-workers felt that they were providing an important community service to the public. A waitress described her pride in being able to please her customers and provide good service.

I don't know whether this characteristic is more prevalent among women workers than men, but I would predict that it is. It seems likely that female socialization toward service and concern for others would affect women's attitudes toward work and that women's disproportionate presence among service occupations would perpetuate that orientation toward work. Women's orientation toward providing service to others and women's ability to see the human connections of their work may make women more vulnerable than men to certain forms of exploitation. In their efforts to reduce labour costs, employers may find it possible to increase workloads among women workers by relying on women's sense of responsibility for the services they provide. I do not mean to argue that women are necessarily more exploitable than men but that the forms of exploitation may differ by gender of the workforce. Women may be pushed to work harder by appeals to their guilt and sense of service to others. Men, on the other hand, may be pushed to work harder as proof of their strength and masculinity.

I particularly wish to avoid any implication that women are more docile or subservient than men in the workforce. I am not arguing that women workers are more exploitable than men because of women's commitment to service. I am arguing that employers may exploit women's commitment to service to get women to work harder, but that this characteristic among women workers cannot be isolated as a negative trait which makes women more vulnerable. It is only negative within the relationship of exploitation which takes advantage of that trait and turns it against women's own self-interests. If women had the power to organize work themselves, their commitment to providing good service would be a positive characteristic which did not automatically lead to their exploitation.

Men have gender-related characteristics which also make them vulnerable to certain forms of exploitation. The masculine tendency toward shows of strength and bravado may make men less likely to complain about heavy workloads or unsafe working conditions. There is some evidence to suggest that women are less vulnerable to forms of exploitation which rely on workers living up to a macho image encouraged by managers. (Gray, 1984)

The problem of understaffing was a widely shared problem among the public sector workers whom I interviewed. They frequently complained of unreasonable workloads, stress and exhaustion which stemmed from their employers' staffing

policies. While in some cases, the problem of understaffing seemed to worsen during the recession, in other cases, the problem of understaffing was a chronic condition reflecting a longer standing policy of fiscal restraint. I discovered that the impact of the recession on women working in the public sector varied from workplace to workplace. Policies of fiscal restraint which led to problems of overwork and understaffing were not applied uniformly throughout the public sector so that some women working for the government experienced deteriorating working conditions in recent years while others experienced no significant change. These variations in individual experience are important because they may be significant in affecting how different public sector workers respond to government policies.

Women working in public sector jobs, either directly as government employees or indirectly as workers in government funded programs, have seen their working conditions affected by policies of fiscal restraint. While these fiscal restraint policies have been reinforced by the recent recession, underfunding and budget cuts have plagued public sector workers for some time. Many of the public sector workers whom I interviewed talked about the worsening of their working conditions during the recent recession. But at the same time it is important to remember that this experience is not universally shared by all public sector workers. While some departments or workplaces saw

reductions in staff, increased workloads, and restrictions on overtime or hiring substitutes, other departments had their staff increase or at least remain stable. While some public sector workers noticed problems of understaffing and inadequate funding grow worse during the recession, others saw no change in their basic working conditions.

It is important to understand the gap which exists between the general direction of government policies and individual workers' daily experiences on the job. To the extent that cutbacks result in widely shared experiences of deteriorating working conditions, there is a potential for broad alliances of public sector workers to oppose government restraint programs. To the extent that there is significant variation in the experiences of public sector workers, there may be less likelihood that broad alliances would arise.

Government managers are not unaware of the potential opposition which might arise to some of their fiscal restraint policies. By introducing their policies in a piecemeal fashion, they may be able to diffuse that opposition. Massive cutbacks in the form of firing large numbers of civil servants could generate major opposition, whereas staff reductions through attrition are less dramatic and do not affect all departments. While unions of public sector workers serve as watchdogs on the policy changes introduced by management, the response of workers to those

policy changes may depend significantly on the extent to which those policies are directly felt in the workplace.

## WORKING CONDITIONS IN PRIVATE SECTOR JOBS

Many women working in private sector jobs experienced changes in their working conditions as a result of the recession. Women working in stores, restaurants, and hotels whose customers declined during the recession, felt the impact of changing economic conditions directly on the job. Employers who experienced a decline in the volume of business during the recession took steps to reduce their workforce and increase productivity in an effort to reduce labour costs. In some cases, this cost women their jobs, but even if women were not laid off, they found that their conditions of work were altered.

Retail stores, which are major employers of women, were affected by the reduction in consumer spending during the recession. As their business declined, retail stores altered their staffing arrangements in order to reduce labour costs. This had an impact on the working conditions of women in retail trade occupations.

Emily Meyers worked for seven years as a clerk in a major retail store, before being laid off during the recession. She lost her job as part of a major staff reduction as the store cut back the number of workers as their volume of business declined. She described how the

working conditions in the store deteriorated just prior to the staff reductions.

> "Half the time our schedules weren't made up...If you had to go in to work tomorrow or the day after you'd have to wait for a phone call. Have you ever considered a job where 'I work today but when do I work next?' ... It's pretty disgusting and disillusioning.... (Sometimes) you get a phone call and they say that things are slow and they won't need you to come in...then I don't work that day and I don't have that money." (Interview 2)

As the recession cut into the store's volume of business, the hours of workers were reduced and became more and more uncertain. Women were shifted from one department to another in an effort to operate the store with fewer staff. Flexibility in adapting to different departments in the store became the main selection criteria for those women who were kept on when large numbers of workers were laid off. This total lack of job security created additional pressure on workers to work harder in order to keep their jobs.

Between 1979 and 1982, Linda Moore worked full time as a shipping-receiving clerk in a major department store. As sales dropped during the recession, several workers were laid off and the remaining staff were shifted around to

cover various positions throughout the store. This resulted in a number of changes in Linda Moore's job - different hours of work, different dress requirements, added responsibilities, and increased pressure to work faster.

> "All of a sudden I wasn't working 8 to 4 any more. I was working 9 to 5 because that was the busiest hours you had to be on the floor....Before the store opened I could get a heck of a lot done ...but then it was asked that you do it in store hours. And then your dress code changed too...When you work out in the back in shipping and receiving you wear blue jeans and t-shirts...(When) you have to work on the floor, all of a sudden you have to wear dress pants or skirts...I had to wear those dress clothes and still go out in the back and do the dirty jobs, like emptying the garbage cans." (Interview 12)

When Linda Moore's employer reduced the number of workers in the store, she was expected to work in various departments as the need arose. While these new duties were added to her job, she continued to be held responsible for completing all her previous duties. Her workload increased; she was pressured to work faster; and she was blamed when she was unable to complete everything assigned to her.

> "I didn't mind helping on the floor, or

> cashing, or working in the restaurant, or whatever, but then that started becoming my full time job. I was the coverup for everybody else and meanwhile my job wasn't getting done. I was getting reprimanded for my job not getting done. Meanwhile they were making me do somebody else's job....All of a sudden everything was really nitpicked at - especially the work I was leaving behind to do other people's work....They expected me to wrap 200 parcels a day, do all 200 claims per day plus everything else. It's just not a feasible thing to do. But I did and that's the thing that bothered me. I did it and once you do it, they expect it." (Interview 12)

When Linda Moore responded to the increased workload by speeding up her work and working harder, her employer expected this intensification of her labour to continue. Linda Moore coped with the increased workload until further work was added during inventory season. She refused to do the inventory without additional help. While her employer assigned people to help her with the inventory, when the inventory was completed, Linda Moore was laid off from her job. Her working conditions deteriorated during the recession but she coped with them as best she could.

Shortly after she complained about the unreasonable workload, she found herself out of a job which she had held for three years.

> "You were allotted those things. You just had to do them. When you are working in a retail store, you just have to put up with a hell of a lot....There is nobody for you, and there is always somebody watching you." (Interview 12)

The lack of control over working conditions and the lack of job security which Linda Moore experienced in retail stores were also characteristics of jobs in restaurants. In both types of workplaces, a predominantly female workforce was pressured to take on extra work in order to avoid being laid off. Cheryl Semchuk worked as a waitress and hostess in the restaurant of a large hotel during the recent recession. As business in the hotel dropped off, the workload in the restaurant decreased and several women were fired. For the women who remained, the staff reductions meant an increase in their workload with no increase in pay. The increased workload made it difficult for women to do their jobs well.

> "Your sections were a little bit larger. You went from maybe five tables to seven tables. You'd have to cover for another section or half section because there were one or two

> less girls there. Hostessing was strictly hostessing at one time, where now the hostess does that and looks after Section A...You get a lot of people getting angry and not liking the service in Section A. I don't like people being angry at me because I wasn't there (when they wanted to order). I don't like people getting offended and not liking the place. We are there to please them...I was doing my fair share of the work. I just couldn't be in four different places at once. ...I tried to explain this to the employer - that they (the customers) get the right service and are happy...but they didn't see it my way." (Interview 5)

Cheryl Semchuk took pride in being able to do her job well, and became dissatisfied with her job during the recession, as management efforts to cut costs made it more difficult for her to perform her job. As someone who dealt directly with the public, she had to face angry customers who were dissatisfied with the quality of service. While she took the brunt of customer criticism, she had no control over staffing decisions which would have improved the quality of service.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF INCREASED WORKLOADS

Understaffing, increased workloads and the intensification of women's labour in their paid employment created numerous problems for women at work -- exhaustion, stress, and frustration at being unable to do their jobs well. A number of women expressed a growing dissatisfaction with their conditions of work during the recession. The hospital worker, Kate Martin, described how her deteriorating working conditions affected her.

> "I don't have time (to do my job) and I feel really bad about it. Really bad....When you come home and you don't feel good and you don't feel that you've done your job as well as you should be doing, it reflects at home and it reflects at work.... Right now I am at the point of seriously thinking of changing it and I can't afford to do it....I want out. I spend my day frustrated. I spend my day angry." (Interview 35)

Kate Martin's perception that her working conditions have worsened in the past few years is based on her observations of her co-workers as well as her own individual workload. She told me about another nursing assistant suffering from depression because of the high level of stress at work and about a housekeeper at the hospital who was reprimanded by management for doing a thorough job and

not working 'fast enough'. She described how most of her co-workers were frustrated with the workload and their inability to provide thorough care to the patients. She described how people's dissatisfaction with their jobs showed up in numerous ways - insubordination at work, increased sick time, and a growing orientation toward time away from the job.

> "People are being charged with insubordination because their frustration is showing. Their jobs aren't up to par because they are just too tired to do them...People are going toward twelve hour shifts because...you can get a longer period of time off, supposedly. All they look at is the time off, which is a reflection in itself that people are thinking about the time they are away and ignoring the time that they are there...Sick time is going up and ...that's got to tell you something, when people have to take those days, even if they are honest enough to say it is a mental health day. And that's what it is a lot of times. You just turn off the phone, close the door, and scream at the walls or whatever. That is no exaggeration. A lot of people feel that they have to do that." (Interview 35)

Christine Bonner, the community project worker whose job had become increasingly difficult when declining government funding led to staff reductions and turnover, explained how she put up with deteriorating working conditions because she had no alternative.

> "Every once in awhile I say, 'Why am I doing this?' And then I remember - because it is the only job around. I wouldn't have taken a job on the terms of this job if I would have had a choice...If I could find another job, I would take it right away without any question, because I don't feel very content with what is going on. And I don't feel like I am doing a good job." (Interview 26)

The frustration of being unable to do the job well, the personal loss experienced when one could no longer take pride in one's work, was repeated by many women who were pushed to intensify their labour beyond the limits of their capacity - limits, I should hasten to add, which were imposed on them by others who maintained control over the organization of their labour processes. Health care workers, daycare workers, clerical workers, community services workers were all able to describe ways in which their work could be improved and their jobs made easier. But because they did not control their own labour, they were unable to make the changes which would have made their work

more satisfying. Trying to work well without having control over the level of staffing, the availability of resources, or the assignment of work resulted frequently in stress and frustration.

When working conditions such as underfunding and unreasonable workloads make it impossible for women to do their jobs well, the guilt and stress generated at work spill over into women's personal lives. When work leaves a person mentally or emotionally exhausted it is harder to meet the needs of children or spouses who wait at home. Several women who worked at demanding jobs reported that they were were too tired or depressed after work to provide the care and energy their families required. Mary Engel, a hospital worker, described the difficulty she had in keeping the stress from her job from affecting her home.

> "A lot of it is just the guilt. In another situation where you are working with something that doesn't cry in pain, you can put your little boxes away for the night and come back the next day and they are still there. They are not going to change. But (we are) working with people, and people in pain...You want to do more but you just can't. And if you get too involved, you suffer at home for it." (Interview 33)

Ann Bennett, a clerical worker employed by the city government, did not have to worry about sick people not receiving adequate care if she did not work harder in response to increased workloads. However, her job had its own sources of stress and mental exhaustion. Telephones ringing when there aren't enough people to answer the calls prod women into working faster. Being in positions where they deal directly with the public, women are vulnerable to being blamed when the services they provide are unsatisfactory, even though they do not control the conditions of work which would make improvement in services possible. Ann Bennet described some of the pressures under which she worked.

> "With bells ringing on all four lines, you went to bed hearing the telephone ringing. People screaming at you because this wasn't ready or that wasn't ready. Well, you are doing the best you can....When you come home...you are mentally worn out. It's a hard job." (Interview 34)

Irene Tate had been employed as a government office worker for the past 18 years and had worked her way up to a supervisory position. She dealt directly with the public and frequently handled complaints when people were dissatisfied with the services provided. Women workers are often in a position where they receive the blame for

inadequate services although they lack the power to alter working conditions which would improve the quality of service.

> "Some days can be quite busy. We have sometimes as many as 1500 calls a day which we can only take a very small portion of. We have a gadget that records the number of calls we lose and I have been complaining to my boss that we are not giving very good service to the public....Any of those 1200 calls (per week) that are lost I usually get as complaints for poor service....The mental strain is difficult on a person because it seems that all you are doing ...all you are getting is problems. People are always blaming you. By the end of the day you are mentally exhausted from trying to control your temper." (Interview 18)

Debbie Freeman, a government clerical worker, was faced with a constant flow of paperwork so that the job was never done. There were always more files to be processed or more letters to be sent. When there was some mixup in the flow of information, the blame always seemed to fall on the clerical staff. Women working there were caught in a situation where they were limited in what they were able to accomplish by the overload of work, and yet they were blamed

when the work was not perfect.

> "You go home at night and it's the same files. They go out to somebody and they come back and they have to be recharged. It doesn't matter how fast or how good you think you are doing, there is going to be a pile of files there when you walk out every night. It's a thankless job...And people are always complaining that it is always our fault. If they didn't get a letter, then it's our fault." (Interview 22)

The frustration of not being able to finish one's work produces more stress in some jobs than in others. While Ilse Fromm and Debbie Freeman faced a mounting backlog of paperwork that was never finished, Ann Bennett and Irene Tate faced an angry public that blamed them when services weren't provided. Perhaps hardest of all, health care workers like Kate Martin, Sarah Mason, and Mary Engel faced the frustration of being unable to provide the kind of care which their patients needed and deserved.

## TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND THE REORGANIZATION OF WORK

The introduction of computer technology in women's workplaces is one of the major factors transforming women's job opportunities and conditions of work. For women who had experienced the introduction of computers in their own work-

places, technological change was perceived as the most significant factor affecting their conditions of work. For these women, it was not the recession which threatened their job security, but the possibility of being displaced by a machine. Women experienced changes in the nature of their jobs as a direct result of technological change rather than as a result of the recession. Any underlying connection between the economic crisis and the introduction of new technology was basically unexplored.

Joan Tabor, a 30 year old library assistant, described how her employer had reorganized work and introduced new technology in the past few years in an effort to save money. One result of the reorganization of work has been the assignment of more duties to various staff members without any alteration in their job classification or rate of pay.

> "I know a number of people who this has happened to. On the one hand, you're glad to get more responsibility and to be doing work which is more challenging, but at the same time, you're really kind of caught because we don't have job descriptions in our contract per se. So it's sort of like open season...I know that people are doing more work. They have more work to do or else the work is of a greater difficulty but they're not being paid for it." (Interview 8)

In Joan Tabor's workplace, her employer tried to reduce labour costs by assigning work to people in lower job classifications. I asked her how long this cost-cutting strategy had been in effect and whether it seemed to result from the current recession.

> "All during the 70's it seemed like we were always getting new staff, because there was more money in the system and the library was getting more money...I'd say it's safe to say that this has happened in the last four years or so....(Now) they are trying to streamline a lot of things...(and) reorganize the work flow so that the people underneath are given perhaps more things to do....so that they have people at a lower rate of pay do more." (Interview 8)

While Joan Tabor was aware of changes in her workplace which stemmed from cost-cutting policies introduced by management, she did not notice any major differences during the recession. For her, the major change in recent years which completely altered her working conditions was the introduction of new technology. The introduction of computers to her department resulted in the deskilling of her job as well as numerous other clerical workers in the library.

> "(Management) really sold us on this idea that our work would be much more interesting (with the computers)....I feel deskilled and I know the women who ...instead of doing a variety of typing jobs...are now just stuck on a terminal putting information in...I don't have any supervision duties at all anymore and I just sit at my desk all day. I don't have any interaction with the rest of the department which is a real contrast to what it used to be. We used to have a much looser system and sort of give and take...(Now) it is very structured and rigid...Before I realized it, my responsibilities were really reduced with automation coming in." (Interview 8)

Joan Tabor was not the only woman I interviewed whose job was drastically altered by technological change. Carol Forman worked as a school secretary when computers were introduced into her workplace, unilaterally by her employer. She resented the way in which her work was changed without any consultation with her and her co-workers, but she worked hard to help install the new system, often working overtime and on weekends in order to be ready by the beginning of the school year. She eventually transferred to another job because she was unhappy with the changes in her work and the

potential health risks involved in working with video display terminals. I asked her to describe how the new technology had changed her work.

> "It's pressure. 'When we need it, we need it.' And you have to stay on the computer all day to get this done..It's pressure. It's got to be put in. It's got to be fast. And it's got to be error free...Before it was a person (that we were keeping records on) and now it's just a number...You make changes by adding and deleting numbers and that is all you do. As you do it, you tick it off. You could do the same thing over 14 times and you wouldn't know it if you didn't have that red check....We lost control. We completely lost control of our jobs." (Interview 24)

Marjorie Fuller, a legal secretary, also described how the introduction of computer technology had led to a deterioration of her working conditions. She described how the introduction of computers had changed the nature of her work by simplifying the job and reducing the necessary level of concentration.

> "Right now my job has changed quite a bit. About two years ago I didn't find my job routine at all....It was really busy and really good - diversified and interesting.

> Now we have computers and...basically we all do the same job and it's become very routine to me. It's too simplified and I'm finding it boring....I don't think it is as challenging because it's all programmed. It's really quite easy. You sit back and you just watch the screen...I'm finding that my mind just isn't working the way it has been, just because you don't have to concentrate as well. So your mind is someplace else....We sit there and we work and we can do our jobs, but we don't really have to work at doing it. It's too bad. It's good to put some effort into (your work)...It doesn't require more skill to operate a computer. Once you've learned how to use it, it's just, it's so simple. You just push it and it does it." (Interview 7)

Marjorie Fuller was not the only person to talk about wanting work where she could use her brain and the skills she was trained for. A number of women welcomed work that involved more challenges or opportunities to think for themselves. While technological change was one factor in deskilling some jobs, it was not the only factor. Reorganization of the work process to rely on a greater portion of lower skilled staff could also result in a

general deskilling of the workplace. While people at the bottom of the skill hierarchy may have duties added to their jobs without any additional pay, the more skilled jobs at the higher levels of pay may be reduced. The movement toward a reorganization of work which relies more heavily on less skilled workers threatens to reduce the responsibilities of some women in the labour force and potentially reduce their opportunities for work. But it is this very tendency toward the reduction of skills and cheapening of the workforce which is inherent in the development of labour processes within capitalist relations of production (Braverman, 1974).

## SUMMARY

During the recession, women working in clerical, sales, service, and blue collar jobs faced increased barriers to the improvement of their wages and working conditions. As employers tried to hold down labour costs and extend their control over the workplace, many women found that their wages and working conditions deteriorated or remained stable. Government decisions to freeze the minimum wage and limit public sector wage increases had an adverse effect on women's wages; and government decisions to limit spending led to widespread problems of understaffing in the public sector. Many women faced pressures on the job which caused them to respond to this situation by intensifying their

labour and working harder to get their jobs done. Increased workloads and the intensification of women's labour created added stress and frustration.

Women varied in the extent to which they experienced the recession as a significant factor shaping their conditions of work. Most public sector workers felt the effects of fiscal restraint policies, although these were in evidence prior to the recession. Some workers felt that their jobs were fundamentally altered by technological change, rather than by changes in the business cycle. Women employed in businesses which laid off workers as a result of the recession were most directly affected by changes in their work assignments and the level of their workloads.

All this leads to the conclusion that in examining the impact of a recession on women workers, it is necessary to treat women workers as a category encompassing a wide range of people with varying experiences. Nevertheless, one can still conclude that most women workers were adversely affected by the recession as a result of employer efforts to control labour costs. The changing balance of power between employers and workers as a result of the recession could only result in further barriers to women gaining greater control over their conditions of work. This changing balance of power is the subject the next chapter.

# CHAPTER X

## STRUGGLES FOR CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE

Given the conditions under which many women work it should not be surprising that working women have attempted to change their work environments, improve their working conditions and increase the level of their wages. Sometimes the struggle to improve the workplace involves nothing more elaborate than a single woman saying that she wants to be treated with more respect. Sometimes the struggle involves organized collective action as women attempt to gain certain rights in the workplace by forming a union. Both individual and collective efforts to improve working conditions for women are shaped by the overall balance of power within the labour market.

According to Marxist analysis, the growth of the reserve army of the unemployed strengthens the power held by employers as competition among workers for jobs increases. High unemployment, in other words, acts a control on the demands of workers for improvements in the workplace. Workers who continue to make demands on their employers when there is a large supply of labour readily available among the ranks of the unemployed face the possibility of losing their jobs and being replaced by others. While this threat

of job loss always exists, it becomes more serious when jobs are scarce and cannot be readily replaced. Thus the high level of unemployment creates a climate in which employers feel free to demand concessions from workers without any fear of an interruption in their supply of labour. At the same time, workers are pressed to accept whatever terms of employment are offered because of the high competition for jobs (Sweezy, 1942).

High unemployment strengthens the bargaining position of those who purchase labour power, while weakening the position of those who exist from the sale of their labour power. Workers who can be easily replaced with recruits from the reserve army of the unemployed are not in a strong position to make demands upon their employers. The strengthening of employers' control over the workplace reduces the chances of women improving their wages and conditions of work. High unemployment therefore reinforces the barriers to changes which would be necessary to improve the economic positions of women. The employers' increased control over the labour process acts to suppress workers' demands for changes. However, that increased control on the part of employers may also generate resistance and increased struggle on the part of workers against any further deterioration in their conditions of work. The struggle between employers and workers over control of the work process is strongly affected by the overall condition of the

labour market and the level of unemployment (Gordon, 1975). On the one hand, the threat of job loss leads to the suppression of workers' demands. But, on the other hand, the employers' demands for concessions from workers more clearly expose the antagonism of interests which separates them.

In this research project, I explored the impact of high unemployment and fiscal restraint policies on the relationship between women workers and their employers. I asked women to describe the relationship between workers and employers in their workplaces and whether that relationship had changed in the past few years. Some women did not experience any real change in labour-management relations in their workplaces. However, other women described a growing tendency on the part of the employer to demand concessions from the workers or a growing refusal on the part of the employer to listen to workers' concerns. In situations where the employer seemed to toughen its stance toward the workers, the response of women workers varied. Some women seemed to accept the employers' arguments that concessions from workers were necessary, some doubted the employers' arguments but felt resigned to acceptance of the employers' terms, and others resisted employers' efforts to gain more control over the workforce.

In this chapter I attempt to outline the range of experiences among the women I interviewed in order to

identify the various attempts women made to maintain or improve their conditions of work and how those experiences were shaped by the recession.

## HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE SUPPRESSION OF DISCONTENT

Several women reported that the high level of unemployment affected their attitudes toward their jobs. They often reported that employed workers felt lucky to have jobs or, that they should refrain from voicing complaints or making demands upon their employers. Some women accepted this definition of the situation and saw co-workers who made demands on the employer as being 'ungrateful' or 'too choosy'. Other women refused to accept this definition of the situation and continued to argue for better wages and conditions of work. Women in the employed workforce were pulled in two directions. Comparing themselves with the high number of unemployed, they saw themselves as lucky to be working. At the same time, they often felt that they deserved better pay, better hours, better working conditions, and greater job security. There were several women dissatisfied with their wages or working conditions who felt that the open expression of their discontent was too risky and offered little hope of improvement. Their estimation of what they needed and what they were entitled to was tempered by their assessment of what they might lose and what they might hope to gain.

For example, Ilse Fromm, a university library worker, reported that people in her workplace were worried about taking any risks and were less willing than they had been in the past to file grievances against the employer. On the one hand, the open expression of discontent seemed to decline. On the other hand, the level of concern over working conditions seemed to increase in response to the employer's decision to introduce new technology. This case illustrates the complex relationship between changing economic conditions and the struggle over control of the workplace. The lack of alternative job opportunities, tight government budgets, and employers' resistance to improving wages or working conditions promote a sense of resignation on the part of workers that they have no choice but to accept work on the employers' terms. However, the employers' efforts to increase productivity may generate new sources of discontent, e.g. resentment over speed-up; opposition to firings or layoffs; and concerns over job security, health, and safety arising from the introduction of new technology. Thus the sources of conflict between employers and workers may grow during a recession while some of the more overt expressions of that conflict are suppressed because workers are in a position of weakness vis a vis the employer. Ilse Fromm described the growing concern over job security and working conditions among the women working in the library and the hesitation which they

felt over taking any formal action against the employer, e.g. filing grievances.

> "People are talking about working conditions quite a bit but it's only to the complaining, grumbling stage...In terms of really taking steps to file grievances, that has decreased markedly. On the other hand, in terms of getting together and complaining about occupational health and safety, that might have even increased with the introduction of new technology...People are very scared. I mean they are not going out on a limb. They are obviously scared." (Interview 15)

Linda Clarkson, a clerk employed by a local city government, felt that her employer was trying to get people to work harder but that workers were resisting changes in their jobs. As part of a government employees union, Linda Clarkson and her co-workers were not really worried about losing their jobs, but they did become more hesitant about filing grievances or voicing complaints with their employer.

> "People's attitudes have changed. I think that just generally speaking people are feeling more insecure about their work...If there is some dissatisfaction in any given area people are more inclined these days to

> say, 'Oh well, I guess I'd better just be thankful I have a job and not complain too much.' That's sort of the underlying unspoken feeling." (Interview 9)

Carol Forman, a high school secretary, described the impact of high unemployment on people's attitudes toward their jobs. She felt that the other women she worked with were less willing to voice complaints or grievances because they felt fortunate in comparison with the unemployed.

> "Things that they would ordinarily make an issue out of, they don't (now). They let it go because I think most of us know family or friends or someone who is unemployed. And I think employers have a heyday in an economic crisis because they can say, 'We're cutting your wages. Or you're going to have to work three hours extra today or whatever.' And everybody is just so happy to have a job that they don't raise hell. They don't question it the way they should and the way I think they would ordinarily." (Interview 24)

Women's willingness to accept their employer's offers in contract negotiations was influenced by their feeling that they were just glad to have their jobs. And women's attitudes toward the need for wage increases were somewhat influenced by their households' access to other income. In

assessing their own situation and deciding whether or not to make demands on the employer, the women were influenced by the high level of unemployment in the labour market and their own access to economic resources outside of their jobs. Conditions both within the family and within the labour market therefore played a role in determining women's responses to any conflict with the employer over wages and working conditions.

Ada McNaughton, a government clerk, felt that her co-workers, whose husbands were well paid, considered themselves relatively well-off and did not support a union demand for higher wages. Their access to economic resources within the family, coupled with their knowledge of the hardships faced by the unemployed, resulted in a willingness on their part to accept the terms of employment offered by their employer.

> "A lot of people were saying, 'Just be grateful you've got a job.' People said, 'Let's be honest about it. We're not hurting desperately. We have a job and we are reasonably well paid.' Nobody has enough. But the majority was that we have a job and we did a lot better than a lot of people in the country and we are reasonably well paid. We don't want to go on strike....People were just grateful they had a job." (Interview 13)

The high level of unemployment created an atmosphere in which many people felt as if they were doing well as long as they were relatively secure in their jobs. Demands for higher wages failed to gain the support of the majority of Ada McNaughton's co-workers because, according to her, people were grateful for what they already had. While the women who were the only income earners in their families had a hard time living off their wages and were more inclined to demand an increase, the majority of women came from two-income families where they were better able to withstand a decline in their real wages. The differences among women workers in terms of their provider status within the family and their access to economic resources from outside their job need to be taken into account in examining how women workers responded to the suggestion that they be grateful for what they already had. Ada McNaughton described how the wage settlement agreed to by the workers had a different impact on women from one and two income households.

> "There were a lot of other people who were hurting more than we were. Most of (the women at work) weren't hurting by having to do without food or clothing or shelter. They couldn't have overseas holidays or eat out as much. It was the luxuries they were having to lose... It was hard on (single mothers) but they're not the majority." (Interview 13)

Self-supporting and co-providing women workers who share the same types of paid work still differ in terms of their positions within the relations of production. Women's positions within households with varying ties to the labour market may influence their responses to workplace struggles. Debbie Freeman, a single woman working in a government office, felt that the self-supporting women were more concerned about the level of their wages and the conditions at work.

> "There are quite a few (women) whose husbands make good money...and their jobs are sort of for the fat - so they can go away on a holiday to Hawaii every year...There are a few of us around who support ourselves. The ones that support themselves I find are the more militant. I bring home only one paycheck and I live on that paycheck so it makes a difference to me. I don't have a husband who brings home a paycheck and if worse came to worse I could stay home all day...The women who are supporting themselves are the ones you see filing grievances." (Interview 22)

While Debbie Freeman felt that single self supporting women were most likely to demand improvements in wages and working conditions on the job, other single self supporting

women whom I interviewed did not conform to that pattern. A 62 year old clerical worker who relied completely on her own wages refused to ask for a raise or a job reclassification even though she considered herself underpaid because "I'm not one to toot my own horn." (Interview 32) A single self supporting woman who worked as a retail clerk and part time waitress felt that she was lucky to be employed even at low wage, part time jobs, and she felt that the married women she worked with made unreasonable demands upon their employer. In her case it seems that women who had another income to fall back on were more willing to make demands in the workplace because they could take more risks. Among the women I interviewed there were both self-supporting and co-providing women who felt grateful to have a job on their employers terms, just as there were both single self-supporting and co-providing women who were willing to struggle with their employers for better wages and working conditions. Indeed, these contradictory feelings of being both grateful for the job and at the same time dissatisfied with the terms of employment were often found in the same women. The impact of the recession and high unemployment was, I think, to encourage the former type of attitudes and suppress the expression of discontent.

While Debbie Freeman was working as a file clerk in a government office, the federal government passed legislation negating the existing contracts with government workers and

imposing wage guidelines of six and five percent increases - well below the rate of increase in the cost of living. Debbie Freeman protested against this unilateral action on the part of her employer but she was not joined by her co-workers. She felt that part of the reason that her co-workers were not actively opposed to the wage guidelines was because they were not the main income providers in their households. She also thought that her co-workers' acceptance of the situation was influenced by their sense of powerlessness and inability to bring about any change.

> "In our contract we had said that we were going to get 9% or 10% or whatever and then right away we are getting 6% and 5%. People just think that the government is so powerful- what's the use?...And there are always people who take the attitude that 6 and 5 is okay...Sad to say, a lot of the women are second income earners ...and I didn't really hear very much complaining...Things just went sort of dormant. They never talked about the union. They never talked about 6 and 5...I heard all the time, 'Oh you are just lucky to have a job.' A lot of people had that attitude; a lot of people still have that attitude." (Interview 22)

Debbie Freeman's case also illustrates how the demands for concessions from workers during the recession constituted a real setback for women's struggles for higher wages and economic equality. Actions by the federal and provincial governments and private employers to hold down the level of wage increases had a particularly adverse effect on women. The imposition of wage restraint guidelines did not create a climate in which the wage gap between higher and lower paid workers could be narrowed. In fact, the use of straight percentage increases, such as the six and five percent wage increases imposed by the federal government, has the effect of actually widening the wage gap. Like most women in the public sector, Debbie Freeman was employed in one of the lower paid job classifications. A five percent increase in her salary did not amount to very much money and it put her in a relatively worse position vis a vis the higher paid workers in the public service.

> "It's fine if so and so gets 5% because he makes $45,000 a year and that's an increase of $2250, but I'm getting 5% and that's only $700 or it wasn't even that...I was the one doing most of the screaming, but then I was at the low end of the pay scale." (Interview 22)

While Debbie Freeman, among others, put up a protest against the deterioration of her wages and working conditions, many women responded to their situation by

becoming resigned or suppressing their discontent out of fear. And while workers reduced their demands for improvements in wages and working conditions their employers often moved aggressively to gain more control over the workplace.

## HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT AND INCREASED MANAGEMENT CONTROL OF THE WORKPLACE

Employers' unwillingness to listen to workers' concerns and to negotiate over the terms of employment seemed to increase during the recession. As workers were intimidated by the threat of unemployment, employers were emboldened by their easy access to pools of cheap available labour. Under pressure of declining business or limited government revenues, employers became more resistant to workers' efforts to improve their wages and working conditions. For women whose wages are low and whose working conditions are poor, this employer resistance to improvements in the workplace constitutes a major barrier to women's struggle for economic equality. While labour-management relations remained unchanged in some workplaces, many of the women whom I interviewed reported that their employers became more demanding and less willing to negotiate during the recession.

Several women whom I interviewed described a worsening of management-worker relations in their workplaces in recent

years. Other women experienced no change or an actual improvement stemming from changes in personnel. In places like daycare centers, community projects, and small offices, women workers sometimes reported a positive and cooperative relationship between the workers and the management. However, even in these cases, there was a reluctance to improve workers' wages or working conditions because of limited funding or limited income. I can only speculate as to which type of experience was more prevalent among women workers, but I think that the growing reserve army of the unemployed gave employers the opportunity to take an increasingly hard line in negotiations with workers. In the interviews women often spoke about employers' dismissing workers' complaints by implying that they were just lucky to have a job. The high level of competition for jobs enabled some employers to demand concessions from workers in the form of increased workload, wage constraints, or reduced hours.

This more openly antagonistic relationship between management and workers was described by a number of women in the interviews. Carol Forman, for example, described how one of her co-workers became unhappy with her job after the introduction of computers changed the nature of her work. When she tried to approach her employer with her concerns over the changes in her job, she was met with a 'take it or leave it' attitude.

> "She went to (one of the administrators) and she said, 'Look, if this is going to be my job for the next 10 years, I don't want it. Is this all I am ever going to do? ' And she asked him a bunch of questions, trying to pin him down. He said, 'If you don't like it or you're having a problem, go to your union or find another job.' He wasn't the least bit sympathetic." (Interview 24)

The recent deterioration of labour-management relations in the public sector was described by Lorraine Wakowsky, a corrections officer. The collective agreement which had been negotiated between management and workers was unilaterally suspended when the government imposed wage restraint guidelines on public sector workers during the recession. The management's efforts to cut costs by reducing staff had led to a deterioration of working conditions but management seemed unwilling to listen to the workers' complaints.

> "Our management when we first started was excellent. They worked with us and they treated us as equals. Since we've got this new management (about three years ago), they are almighty god and we are just little slaves." (Interview 23)

Other public sector workers also reported that their employers had become increasingly unresponsive to workers' concerns. Kate Martin, the hospital worker who described how her working conditions had deteriorated in recent years, also described the unwillingness of management to listen to the workers' concerns.

> "Management four or five years ago was very cooperative and we worked very well together. They would come to us and say, 'What do you think? Is this a good idea?' Now they don't. They are quite antagonistic towards the workers - almost like they are backing them into a corner." (Interview 35)

Linda Clarkson, a city government clerk who had been employed at the same place since 1977, described how the city government administration, under the constraints of tight budgets, had become more resistant to yielding any control over decisions to negotiations with workers.

> "I think there has been a marked change in attitude in general - willingness to negotiate in a fair way, any equitable way, any kind of conflicts...whether it's about job classifications or contract negotiations or just general disagreements over different things." (Linda Clarkson, Interview 9)

Workers in private sector jobs, where employers were affected by the recession, also reported that management's attitude toward workers had worsened. Linda Moore had been employed at a major retail store since 1979. When the recession caused a decline in business during the usually busy Christmas season of 1981, the store responded by initiating a tougher management approach over control of the workplace. The more antagonistic management style was seen by Linda Moore as the result of a change in management personnel. But it seems possible that the change in personnel itself was a calculated effort to crack down on the workers. The change in management personnel occurred at approximately the same time as the layoff of many long time workers which increased workloads and altered people's job duties.

> "There was a whole turnover in management (in January 1982). The manager that did come in...didn't care about people. He stepped on them...With this new management, nobody got any strokes. You didn't get anybody saying, 'Hey you are doing a good job.' There was more, 'You are just not performing well enough.'" (Interview 12)

Anna Santos, who worked at night cleaning office buildings, described how her employer responded to any complaints by threatening to fire the workers. Her employer

felt confident that he would have no difficulty in finding people to replace any workers who voiced complaints, and that it was even possible to find people willing to work for less than the minimum wage because jobs were so hard to find. The high level of unemployment and the lack of job opportunities created an environment in which Anna Santos' employers felt free to treat their workers however they pleased, and any attempts to improve conditions were met with blatant opposition.

> "When I said something was wrong with my job, the manager opened his desk and took out many applications and said, 'You see that? I have many persons waiting for the job. You don't like the job? You don't like the salary? The door is open....I have many persons who want your job.' Another time the people (in the cleaning company) said, 'I pay you the minimum (wage), but I can get (someone for) the same job and the same hours for no minimum. I can pay $4.00 to another person because many people from another country are waiting for a job.' I said, 'It's not true. You can't pay below the minimum...' He said, 'Do you want to try? You are here five months but I can fire you quick.' And after that I was quiet." (Interview 21)

A shift in managment's attitude toward workers was described by a number of different women in a variety of occupations and worksites. Although not universal, this tendency by employers to take a harder line, demand more work, and refuse to respond to complaints by workers is reflective of the increased power held by employers in a time of high unemployment. The existence of a large reserve army of unemployed workers who are anxiously looking for paid employment intensifies competition among workers and gives employers greater freedom in selecting workers who will make concessions. Attempts by women to improve their conditions of work were often met with blatant refusal by employers. This strengthening of employers' control over the labour process and the terms of employment had an adverse effect on women throughout the labour market.

Despite the obstacles standing in their way, many working women have struggled to improve their conditions of work.

## KEEPING UP THE STRUGGLE FOR A VOICE IN THE WORKPLACE

The impact of the recession upon women workers' attempts to improve their working conditions is most clearly illustrated in the case of Sally Holden, a switchboard operator for a private answering service, who along with her co-workers attempted to organize into a union and negotiate a first contract with the employer. The high level of

unemployment created a climate in which people were supposed to feel lucky to have a job, even if they earned only the minimum wage and had virtually no rights in the workplace. In spite of this pressure, the women workers at Sally Holden's workplace began to make demands on their employer for job security, better working conditions, and better wages. While the workers were not cowed into submission by the threat of losing their jobs, the high level of unemployment did affect their ability to influence their employer who was able to lock out the women in the union and hire other women to readily replace them. The ready availability of unemployed women willing to accept employment on the employers' terms meant that the employer was under no pressure to concede any of the workers' demands. If one group of workers started to ask for certain basic rights in the workplace, one had only to seek another group of workers who would settle for less, not because they needed less, but because the experience of unemployment had already brought them to a position of accepting any job they could find.

In some ways Sally Holden's case is rather unique because there were not many organizing drives among women working in small private workplaces during the early 1980's. Nevertheless, Sally Holden's case is important to examine because it reveals the forces which were operating during this time to suppress attempts to improve the economic lot of working women. The overt nature of the struggle in Sally

Holden's workplace brings into focus the ways in which high unemployment strengthens the employer's control over the workplace and makes it more difficult for working women to improve their conditions of work.

Sally Holden outlined a long list of grievances which workers, all of whom were women, had at her workplace. People were fired without cause. There was no job security. People were expected to work overtime and on holidays without any extra pay. There were no coffee or lunch breaks and the workers were treated in a patronizing and sometimes abusive manner.

Sally Holden described how individual attempts to improve the situation met with repeated failure. People who asked that they be paid what they were entitled to under labour standards legislation risked losing their jobs. After seeing several people lose their jobs for trying to stand up for their rights, the workers decided to take some collective action.

> "We were underpaid on statutory holidays and overtime and if someone made a suggestion that we get paid properly for our statutory holidays...you might get paid for that day but the next week you'd get fired for wearing the wrong shirt of something. It was pretty bad...Basically for job security was the reason (we decided to organize)...There were

> just so many things going on that were unfair. We thought that we would try and organize and see if that would help, if we could be a collective voice rather than one little voice going in to talk to the boss." (Interview 4)

The union organizing drive began in the summer of 1982 at a time when unemployment was quite high and jobs were hard to find. The women who worked with Sally Holden needed their jobs and were afraid of losing their jobs if they started to make demands on their employer. People knew that they might be out of work for a long time if they were fired but this added risk did not in the end prevent them from joining the union. The threat of unemployment scared people but it did not scare them into submission. It's important to recognize that there was not a simple automatic relationship between the expansion of the reserve army of the unemployed and the increased control of the workplace by the employer. The threat of unemployment by itself was not enough to settle the contest between Sally Holden's employer and the women workers.

> "Some people were really afraid of losing their jobs...and some people...felt so strongly that something had to be done that they would even run the risk of losing their job...If unemployment wasn't such a problem,

> they wouldn't have minded signing a (union) card...If there hadn't been a problem finding jobs, they all would have signed up, I'm sure. There was nobody that was just anti-union...They didn't want to lose their jobs, but they signed anyway. Even the ones that were afraid of losing their jobs signed the cards because they thought conditions were so poor that it was worth the risk." (Interview 4)

High unemployment affected the women working with Sally Holden and the prospect of losing their jobs frightened them but it did not prevent them from trying to win a greater say in how their work was organized. High unemployment also had an effect on their employer. Because of the large supply of available unemployed workers, the employer was easily able to replace the unionized workers after locking them out.

> "They did hire people right away. They put an ad in the paper and it didn't seem difficult for them to find people who were willing to cross the picket line and go to work even after they talked to us...A lot of people would talk to us and say,'I understand what you are doing and think it needs to be done but I need a job. I have a kid at home and I'm going to go to work.' They found

> other people quite easily, unfortunately. And unfortunately they treat them as poorly or worse than they were treating the employees before the lockout...The company doesn't feel the need to get us back to work because there's lots of people that will work for such poor wages and conditions because of the economic situation that they are in and everybody else is in." (Interview 4)

The high level of unemployment has an impact on people's attitudes toward what they can reasonably expect from work. Time and again women working for low pay and in adverse working conditions were told to be grateful that they had a job. There seemed to be a growing sense that just to be employed was a privilege denied many and that those who were employed, under whatever circumstances, had no right to complain. Demands for improvements in the workplace were thus suppressed in an environment of opinion which increasingly defined employment alone as a state of good fortune. While Sally Holden and her co-workers gained some public support for their workplace struggle, they also encountered people who considered them lucky to have a job on any terms.

> "Many people come by on the street and say things like, 'You should be happy to have a job...In these hard times, you should be

> happy to have any kind of job.'..A lot of the opinion is in these hard times you take what you can get and don't cause any waves." (Interview 4)

Because Sally Holden and her co-workers engaged in an open struggle with their employer over their right to form a union and negotiate the terms of their employment, the impact of high unemployment upon that struggle was clearly visible. The impact of high unemployment on struggles in other workplaces was just as real, although perhaps less obvious because of the absence of overt formal labour disputes.

In Sally Holden's workplace, the recession affected workplace struggles to the extent that the large reserve army enabled the employer to easily replace locked out workers. In some cases, the recession affected workplace struggles by generating increased antagonism between employers and workers. Cheryl Semchuk, a hostess/waitress for a hotel restaurant, described how her co-workers became angry with their employer during the recession because of arbitrary firings and unfair treatment by the management. When management responded to the recession by firing part of the staff and making more demands on the workers, Cheryl Semchuk and her co-workers felt a growing conflict with management over how the work was organized. However, despite the growing conflict between the workers and the

management over how the work should be organized, Cheryl Semchuk and her co-workers felt as if they had little alternative but to accept their employer's decisions. Their resignation and acceptance of their employer's changes in the workplace were rooted in their assessment of the lack of other opportunities for employment in the labour market.

> "I remember a lot of girls thinking about quitting. I don't mean giving them 2 weeks notice. I mean walking off the job because they were so angry at the way they were running the place...If jobs were more plentiful, they wouldn't have given a second thought to just walking out, but there wasn't that many jobs around. And even the jobs that were around, there weren't many that pay $6.25/hr. You have to think about that too. Two dollars less an hour is a lot of money." (Interview 5)

Cheryl Semchuk may have accepted her employer's decisions because she had no other job alternatives, but she did not accept them without a growing sense of anger and injustice. During the interview she spoke with me about the need for waitresses to organize into a union in order to protect themselves against unfair treatment by their employers.

> "They had no right to treat us that way. And if we were unionized we'd be protected...That's the only way I can think it will get better because they are not willing to do anything to make it better for us. Their attitudes are 'You've got a job, you should be lucky. Thank us for giving you a job.' They don't think about the fact that they wouldn't be doing nearly as well if we weren't doing such a good job. People wouldn't be coming back if we were doing a really poor job and we've had people come back every year...because they like our service. If it weren't for us they wouldn't be coming back." (Interview 5)

Cheryl Semchuk talked about the need for a union and the risk involved in trying to organize one. She was afraid that getting involved in a unionization drive might cost her her job, but she also said that she was willing to run the risk because she had her partner's income to fall back on. In her case, her access to her partner's income increased her willingness to take chances in trying to gain more control over her working conditions. She was not the only woman to mention the risks involved in unionization and how the high level of unemployment made the prospect of losing one's job even more threatening. For example, Vera Callas,

who was involved in a unionization drive in 1981-82, felt that the lack of job openings in the labour market made people very unwilling to risk their jobs by actively supporting a union.

> "People were scared to get involved with the unions. It's tough to find another job and if you're going to get canned because of union activity you may not find another job. And okay, so the law says that the company can't fire you but that doesn't stop them from going ahead and doing it anyway. You've got to prove that you were fired because of union activity and that scares a lot of people off." (Interview 10)

The fear that support of a unionization drive would place their jobs in jeopardy affected but did not necessarily deter women seeking more control over their jobs. Particularly with possible budget cuts and layoffs occuring during the recession, union supporters were afraid for their jobs. Joan Tabor, a library worker, had worried that her employer would be able to use the recession and budget restraints as an excuse for firing workers who were active in the union. The recession was thus seen as giving the employer more freedom to fire workers who voiced complaints while claiming that the firings were merely necessary staff reductions. Even when employers did not

actually fire workers who were active in unionization drives, as in Joan Tabor's case, the recession created a climate of insecurity.

> "We thought that if there were going to be any cutbacks...it was going to happen to us (i.e. the union supporters). If they could use the recession and economics as a reason to have to cut us back...it could be done. This is before we were certified and so it was kind of a gamble. When I look back, I was worried for my job and I'd never been insecure in my job before...I was paranoid for six months and I know a lot of other people were." (Interview 8)

Joan Tabor and her co-workers were successful in forming a union and negotiating a contract with their employer. One of the major areas of conflict with the employer was over the introduction of technological change which has changed the nature of several women's jobs and could affect many more in the future. Joan Tabor felt that she and her co-workers were in a defensive position of trying to keep their jobs from being eliminated and their working conditions from deteriorating. Progressive struggles to improve the wages and working conditions of women working in the library have been superceded by efforts to prevent the present conditions from being further eroded.

> "I think we're fighting just to keep the status quo as it is now...Having had first hand experience (with technological change) and seeing what happened in our department, we really feel we owe it to the other people to make a point of making sure it's done better next time...The very nature of our work was changed. And...they wouldn't promote people within the ranks...Automation didn't have to be that way...It could have been done so differently...If they would listen to us, we could do it so much more humanely and fairly I think." (Interview 8)

"If they would listen to us" we would organize our work differently. These words were echoed in the voices of many women who were denied control over how their work was organized. The women I interviewed did not lack a vision of how their workplaces could be changed and improved. They lacked the power to see their visions implemented. Without being able to control their conditions of work, it is not surprising that many women become resigned to their conditions of work and turn to life outside the job for some measure of satisfaction. But there is a catch 22 in this response to unrewarding work, because the dissatisfaction experienced on the job spills over into the rest of women's lives and makes their life at home more difficult as well.

Thus in order to have better lives, women find that they have to struggle for better jobs. Despite the lack of alternatives and despite the habituation of workers to their conditions of work, people continue to assert their need for work where they can direct their own activity and develop their abilities (Braverman, 1974).

After describing a number of problems with the working conditions in the hospital where she was employed, Kate Martin talked about her co-workers responses to problems at work.

> "You can't put your finger on who is responsible for the intimidation. A lot of the women I work with - their husbands have spent the last year, year and a half, unemployed - so they need their jobs. And they have got it ingrained in their minds that if they don't make waves and whatever, they can hang onto their jobs. And we see a lot of people apathetic toward other people's problems. But we are also coming out of it because people have finally had it. Some people are resigned and probably will be for the rest of their life. Some people are just working their way through...to stand on their own two feet instead of lay back and watch somebody walk over them." (Interview 35)

I asked her if she had any idea why people were starting to show some new willingness to place demands on their employer. The level of unemployment had not dropped. People's jobs were no more secure. There had been no increase in government funding which would have enabled the hospital to increase the size of the staff. She replied that people were becoming desperate. They had to improve their jobs or suffer painful consequences - depression, stress, physical exhaustion, and family problems.

> "It's a matter of survival, I think. I know myself I went through a bad time...My work situation, the economic situation, has affected my psychological situation and has directly affected my home. I have spent the last two years very very depressed....and I directly blame it on what's happening out there. If I can enjoy my work, I'm not the type of person who can stay at home. I have to work for my own sanity. But if I enjoy my work and feel good about my work, then I'd feel good about my life....The only thing that brought my head around is I finally said, 'You're no damn good to yourself. You are no damn good to anybody else. So you'd better stand up (at work).' And you do it. That's what I think you are seeing. People

> ...are either going to stand on their own two feet or they are going to totally break." (Interview 35)

Christine Bonner also felt that many people had reached the point where they were willing to struggle for change in the way their work was organized. After describing the frustrations of working on a temporary government funded project, she spoke about people's growing dissatisfaction with the way that services to the community were inadequately funded and staffed. While on the one hand she felt that people had become more passive during the recession, there was another contradictory tendency toward increased desire for change.

> "I see more and more people organizing. To me that is a positive effect of the recession. People are starting to consider alternatives to the way things are planned and done and the kinds of makework jobs that are available as opposed to the kinds of community services that are needed and aren't being funded properly." (Interview 26)

And so the struggle for change continues, impeded by the recession and pushed forward by the recession at the same time. The need for rewarding work, which is denied to many women in the labour market, is a need which continues to be felt and make itself known. As long as women

experience a contradiction between the kind of work they need and the kind of work which is available, women will engage in efforts to reorganize their work and regain some measure of control over their lives.

The recession had an impact on how women responded to the need for change in their workplaces. The high level of unemployment and lack of job alternatives produced a tendency for women to suppress their discontent over wages and working conditions. Many women were disciplined by the threat of job loss, particularly because of the lack of other job opportunities. Women's responses were shaped by their positions within households and the labour market.

The recession also affected how employers treated their workforce. While employer responses to the recession varied, several women reported that employers became more demanding and less responsive to workers' concerns. Women were thus put in an essentially defensive position of trying to protect their working conditions from deteriorating, rather than struggling to make gains in the workplace. The large active reserve army of unemployed women provided a pool of cheap labour for employers to draw upon to replace workers who made demands for improvements.

Despite the fact that the balance of power shifted in employers' favor during the recession, a number of women continued to seek improvements on the job.

# CHAPTER XI

## CHANGES IN WOMEN'S DOMESTIC WORK

Economic recessions create changes in the labour market, in private households, and in the relations between them. In order to understand women's work experiences in an economic crisis, it is necessary to look beyond the labour market and investigate changes which occur in domestic work. One of the major contributions of feminism in recent years has been the recognition of women's unpaid domestic labour as a central feature of the organization of work in modern capitalist economies. As a result, socialist feminist theorists have attempted to broaden our conception of relations of production to include both wage and domestic labour as they are structured within the labour market and private households (Sokoloff, 1980).

Previous studies of women's domestic labour during economic crises have suggested that women have intensified their labour in the home in order to 'take up the slack' created by high unemployment and lost earnings (Milkman, 1976; Zaretsky, 1978). However, Brown (1982) has shown that households have increased their spending on housing, utilities and transportation -- services for which domestic labour provides no adequate replacement. As a

result, women's ability to substitute domestic labour for reduced income has become more limited. Weinbaum and Bridges (1979) argue that women's domestic workload is also increased during economic crises as a result of cutbacks in social services. And Zaretsky (1978) suggests that added financial and emotional strains within families create additional work for women in the home.

In this chapter I examine the domestic work experiences of the women I interviewed in order to identify how their work was affected by the recession. I examine the ways in which various households were affected by the recession and whether there were any changes in the nature of domestic work, its intensity, or its assignment among household members. I wanted to find out whether women responded to the recession by intensifying their domestic labour. I also wanted to explore whether the domestic division of labour changed as household members changed their relations to the labour market.

## THE INTENSIFICATION OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

"Wage work and household work are two sides of the same coin. Scratch one side deeply enough, and the other will be blemished" (Kessler-Harris, 1981, 17). The interrelatedness of paid work and domestic work is evident when one looks at the impact of household income on the nature of domestic work. Household members' access to paid employment, and the

level of their earnings play an important part in determining the financial resources which the domestic worker has to draw upon.

Some women who were employed and married to employed husbands had enough income and financial security that they did not feel the need to alter their work at home. They responded that they had not changed their shopping or budgeting habits, their way of cooking or their other household chores. Linda Clarkson and her husband were both full time workers whose combined household income was around $45,000/year. As a result, she was under no financial pressure to stretch their income to meet their basic needs.

> "We haven't really felt the effects of the recession except for the year where the mortgage interest rates were quite high...We generally do what we like financially... (Besides) I've always been a conservative spending person since before recession days... We haven't kept up with inflation (but) we manage quite well on what we do have." (Interview 9)

Financial pressures caused some women to intensify their efforts to stretch their family income. In households protected from these financial pressures by secure income there was less evidence of any changes in budgeting, economizing and substituting labour for finished products.

Likewise, in low income families, the efforts at economizing were part of an ongoing strategy for coping with limited resources. This left little room for an intensification of domestic labour in low income households.

In households where the recession meant a decline in real income, women often tried to shop more carefully, budget their expenses more closely, and find various ways of economizing. Several women whom I interviewed tried to stretch reduced income to meet their basic needs. In some cases, the reduced income was the result of job loss by themselves or other household members. In some cases, their household income declined as a result of job changes or reduced hours of work. In many cases, it was simply the result of wages not rising as quickly as the cost of living. Women whose households experienced a decline in real income described how they tried to work harder to save money.

When women lost their jobs, their loss of income frequently caused financial strains within their households. Often women who were unemployed tried to compensate for their lost earnings by working harder at home. Anna Santos, a married mother of three, was unemployed and she received only $300/month in unemployment insurance benefits. Her husband's wages of $800/month were not enough to absorb the loss of her former earnings. Since becoming unemployed, she had found it increasingly difficult to stretch the family's income to meet their needs.

> "(When I was working) I think it was enough (income). It was fine to live. But now I have a big problem because the money is not enough. Now I just buy what I need...I buy clothes second hand and I don't buy something that is not important for the house. I buy some things at _____store because there it is more cheap - coffee, beans, and noodles are cheaper there. Fruit and other things are cheaper at ____store and I buy them there. I am looking for any place to buy things more cheaply. (K: Does that mean more work for you at home? Do you have to try harder to make the money stretch?) Yes." (Interview 21)

Another woman who was unemployed and came from a low income household used a similar strategy to try to stretch the family income. Heather McKenzie, a single unemployed mother, described how she spent a lot of time and effort shopping for bargains in order to stretch her welfare check to cover her basic expenses. Prior to the recession she had been employed at two low wage jobs, but she had found it easier to meet her families needs while working full time because she had more income.

> "When I go shopping, it takes me at least three days because I go get what's on special at one store and what's on special at another

> store...I don't just go one place and do all my shopping, so by the end of the three days, I'm just so tired it isn't funny. Maybe it's not as good if it's on sale but you can't afford to just pick stuff up and not look at the price." (Interview 37)

Heather McKenzie, also described how she spent more time preparing cheaper foods when she was unemployed because she had more time to spend cooking and preserving food.

> "I don't buy canned stuff. I go buy soup bones and it takes me over a day to do it - fix well balanced meals for my kids....When you are working you go for more fast foods because you don't really have the time...but even when I was working I still made a lot of home made soups and stuff....Last summer we bought ninety dozen corn on the cob and me and my son got it ready to freeze...I get vegetables in the summer and I freeze them ...(When I was working) I didn't have time." (Interview 37)

Elena Navarro, a single unemployed mother of two, described how she had tried to save money by washing laundry by hand and shopping carefully. Since she was unemployed she did not have the money to purchase what she needed, but

she did have time, which she used to stretch her low income. The money she received from unemployment insurance or social assistance never kept up with the rising costs of supporting a family, so she tried to economize in numerous ways.

> "Mainly at the end of the month we are very very short of money...Sometimes, you know, we had to wash clothes by hand. We were doing that for a long time when I was unemployed... I used to wash everything, even the sheets, all the things, the blankets, everything by hand in the bathtub...because I didn't have a job and I wasn't working so I had the time. But it gave me a backache, you know, for months...We are always trying to look for cheap things. But sometimes you pay more because I used to buy cheap things and they don't last....I used to go to these second hand stores for clothes...and you wash them two or three times and they get holes." (Interview 39)

It was not simply unemployed women who spoke of having to work harder to stretch their income. Women who were working full time also found that their buying power was reduced as their wages fell behind the rising cost of living. Lorraine Wakowsky, for example, had tried to economize in numerous ways in order to cope with reduced

real income. At $28,000/year, she was one of the best paid women whom I interviewed, but since she supported herself and lived alone, she still found it necessary to stretch her wages to cover basic costs for housing, food and utilities.

> "There is a lot now that I don't buy that I always used to buy, even at my wages. I used to eat a lot of meat, but now with the price...I've become more of a vegetarian. Even buying vegetables is a fortune...My parents are farmers so they help me out. If it wasn't for that it would be really hard with a single income...Utility bills and everything have just gone sky high and wages haven't." (Interview 23)

Sole provider women were very conscious of the limited purchasing power of their own wages. And even when they did not experience a loss in real wages, the recession increased their concern for their future financial security. Women put more effort into saving money as a protection against future financial instability. Marjorie Fuller, a self-supporting full time secretary, described how she had tried to stretch her income since the cost of living was rising more than her wages and she was trying to save money toward buying a home.

> "I probably take my lunch more often and go out for lunch less...I probably watch for

> sales a little bit more in the last couple years...I'm sewing a little bit, starting to knit...I'm buying economy packages and packing up things rather than buying for every time...I'm trying to save money and I'm finding that I don't have as much to spend." (Interview 7)

Another sole provider woman expressed similar concern over stretching her income and saving for her future economic security. Sarah Mason, a dental therapist, described budgeting more carefully because she had become more concerned about her own job security and ability to support herself in the future.

> "I've been looking after my pennies far more closely than I had been. I've noticed that my dollar doesn't buy anything like it used to....A twenty dollar bill would buy my groceries for a week...but not any more." (Interview 6)

Employed women whose partners experienced a loss of income were also faced with increased demands to stretch the reduced household income. Michelle Rossi, a full time daycare worker, described how she had to budget much more carefully when her husband's income dropped and she became the sole provider for their family of four.

> "We lived on my salary for a year and it was very hard - very hard. We were on a budget. I bought groceries every two weeks and I spent $100 - no more. That was it. And my husband likes big meals...It was hard shopping and having good meals all the time. I'd have to tell the kids, 'You are only allowed one orange or one apple, because if you eat everything in one week we won't have anything for the second week.' They would always ask me 'Can we buy this? Can we buy that?' And I'd say, 'No we can't.' (Before) my husband made good money and I never had to budget for groceries...so that year it was really really hard. But it taught me...the value of money." (Interview 36)

Women whose partners were unemployed often did not earn enough income from their own jobs to adequately support their households. As a result of their low wages, employed women often found themselves having to budget their expenses very carefully. Jane McDonald, a part time waitress, described how she and her partner had had to struggle to make ends meet during the recession. At the time of the interview, her partner was on unemployment insurance and she was earning $600/month as a waitress. She described how carefully she shopped in order to stretch their income.

> "When I go for groceries, I have so much money to spend. I always make my list up ... and I usually buy two cartons of milk but if I get to where I've spent just about all my money and I need something else, I'll put one carton of milk back and think 'Well I can buy that with my tips tomorrow or whenever I need it...Before I usually said how much I had to spend for groceries but if I went over it didn't really matter that much, whereas now this is how much I spend. And I really notice a difference...When we were both working full time or I was working part time and he was working full time, we still had extra money, so I wasn't really budgeting that much for groceries." (Interview 28)

Some women said that they tried to stretch their income by gardening and preserving food. For some women these tasks had always been a part of their domestic workload and did not represent any new response to the recession. But even when the work didn't change, its significance changed because the household depended more on the garden for food.

Christine Bonner and her husband were both unemployed for part of the summer of 1982. She described how she became more concerned about their supply of food when they no longer had secure income.

> "We'd always had a garden but we realized how important it was to have a good garden that year. I think that summer we were really much more careful about our garden and were really hoping that we would have lots of vegetables coming out of it because we weren't sure what we were going to eat come fall. We were probably more diligent about berry picking that summer - at least I was." (Interview 26)

Ilse Fromm, in contrast, had not been a gardener prior to the recession. She took up gardening and food preserving as a conscious effort to save money in order to counter the rising cost of living.

> "I just started gardening two years ago because I wanted to save money. I wouldn't have taken up gardening being an otherwise busy person...but I did start that and I started freezing stuff in the summer." (Interview 15)

Women not only increased their efforts to economize and stretch household income, they also worked harder to help their families cope with the financial and emotional pressures stemming from the recession. In some households, domestic labour may have changed as the recession generated increased demands on women to provide emotional support to

family members in times of stress.

When women are unemployed or when they live with someone else who is unemployed, the changes in people's ability to provide income often breeds conflict within the family. People have the sense that their lives are turning out in a way that they hadn't bargained for. The stress and frustration experienced by people out of work is not left behind when they come home. And women, as the emotional caretakers within the family, struggle to reduce the psychological stress and depression experienced by their children and unemployed spouses, as well as struggling to overcome their own depression.

Marta Armstrong described how it was difficult for her to cope with her husband's depression when he lost his job and was unable to find other work.

> "He would be so depressed...I had to constantly encourage him but I never got any of that back. And I started to get really resentful...'Feeding a baby' (was) how I felt, like I was being used all the time, like I was a mother and I had to look after three children rather than two. It was a drain on me every day....He was relying on me for everything and he wasn't willing to give anything back." (Interview 25)

## FACTORS LIMITING THE INTENSIFICATION OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

While the recession generated financial and emotional pressures on many households which added to the domestic workload, women were not always able to respond by intensifying their labour in the home. There were limits on women's time, energy, and capacity to substitute their own labour for lost income.

It would have been impossible for women, who worked at demanding paid jobs, to intensify their domestic labour. Demands on their time and energy at their paid jobs meant that women were unable to expend additional time and energy in work at home. Women working a double day described reaching the limits of mental and physical exhaustion. When they were subject to speedup or increased workloads on the job, something had to give. Frequently, women coped with increased demands at work by cutting back on the time and energy expended on housework. While women adjusted to decreased housework by reducing their standards of performance, decreased time with children and partners was experienced as a significant loss.

Diane Houston had to work at two low-wage part time jobs in order to support herself. She had been unable to find any permanent or full time work which would pay her enough to live on. She was working 45-50 hours a week as a waitress and retail clerk. She did not have the time or energy to spend on domestic labour.

> "I am working two part time jobs and that's a lot of hours. Sometimes I just don't get around to doing a lot of things that need to be done - washing floors and doing dishes. When I come home I am tired and I don't want to be standing there washing dishes or scrubbing floors." (Interview 19)

Women employed at demanding jobs did not have the time or energy to spend on intensifying their domestic labour. Kate Martin found that her workload as a full time hospital worker had increased substantially in recent years. After working a twelve hour shift she often came home too exhausted to deal with other people's needs or household tasks.

> "I don't have time to be gardening...I used to bake a lot. I don't do it anymore...I come home and I am miserable and it takes me a few hours to get my head together so that I am even civil around people...I don't have time for a lot of things that would maybe make it easier....We'll eat pizza or go out to eat some days because I am too tired to cook...It does cost a lot of money but it's the only thing that I can seem to manage." (Interview 35)

When mothers were employed full time at demanding jobs, they had to divide their remaining time and energy between recovering from paid work, spending time with their children and doing housework. Given the priority that their children had in their lives, it was often housework that was cut back. Kate Martin described how she was sometimes criticized for not being a perfect housekeeper, but for her the role of mothering took precedence over a clean house.

> "When I come home, my time is spent with my children. It doesn't matter what the house looks like. I get a lot of criticism for it, but my kids aren't going to be home that much longer. I've lost a lot of years with them. I feel guilty about the time I spend away from them because I have to work, and I have to. So maybe I overcompensate sometimes." (Interview 35)

While work in the paid labour force means that women are able to provide income for their families, it also means that they have less time and energy to spend with their families and that their family time is scheduled around the time demands of their paid job. The tension between providing income for the family and subordinating other family needs to the demands of the job puts working women in a double bind and creates a contradictory set of feelings about paid work. Women want to work at paid jobs but they

resent the sacrifices which they have to make in order to fit the rest of their lives around paid employment.

Carol Ramsey, a daycare worker, described what it was like to come home after working full time at a daycare center. After spending all day attending to children's needs at her job, she came home to look after her own small children, fix meals, and clean house.

> "I really noticed this summer when I was working full time at the daycare that you really have to work hard when you work full time because you work at your job and then when you come home you're sort of tired if you put out at work but you come home and everybody wants to see you. The kids want to see you and they're very demanding and all the mess from the house is still there and you have to make supper and get the kids to bed so it's very exhausting." (Interview 3)

Employed women frequently continued to carry the domestic workload on their own shoulders. As a result women often put in long days of work trying to meet the demands of both jobs. Women put up with this double day because they felt that their income contributed more to the household than their unpaid domestic labour. Ann Bennett had reentered the labour force in recent years in order to contribute to her family's support. She would have

preferred to stay at home but she felt that her income was important to her family's standard of living. She worked at a job with a split shift so that she was gone from her home from morning until nearly ten oclock at night and she felt worried that she had so little time with her children.

> "But I'm wondering what changes we are going to see in the kids. You try and make up for it on your day off even if you are dog tired. You try and include them in as much as you possibly can because you feel that you have neglected them. I don't want to have to go out to work. I'd sooner stay home...But I can't. So you make the best of it. But I think a lot of us are wearing ourselves out." (Interview 34)

Mary Engel, a full time hospital worker, described how her long work schedule left her very little time with her family. Not only did her family work get crowded into a limited amount of time, her absence generated additional family tensions which made it harder for her to maintain harmonious relationships within the family.

> "We had a rotation where we would work ... fifteen out of sixteen days. And you don't feel too much like coping with a family and a husband and everything else after that....The long days of work I couldn't cope with after

> awhile. There was friction here from me being gone all the time....You never saw the kids or if you did you were too tired for them anyway." (Interview 33)

Employed women often experienced a shortage of time so that they were limited in the amount of time they could devote to domestic labour. But there were other limits on domestic labour which also counteracted the tendency toward the intensification of domestic labour. The very nature of housework and childcare dictates that certain basic daily maintenance work be maintained regardless of the state of the economy. While some women could describe ways in which they were working harder at home as a result of economic hard times, quite often women simply felt that certain work had to be done at home regardless of the economic situation. Cheryl Semchuk described working harder than in the past, but the change was not a response to the recession.

> "(K: Did the recession have any impact on your work at home?) I don't really think so - not really. I've done what I've always done. I might be working harder but not because of the economy. It is just because of who I am living with. He believes that a woman should do the housework. He doesn't do dishes or anything...I am continuously picking up after him. it's a lot different

> compared with my (former) roommate. She was fairly tidy." (Interview 5)

The amount of effort low income women already put into stretching their income prior to the recession, frequently offered little room for further intensification of their efforts. In low income families, the need to budget carefully and stretch the income to cover basic needs is an ongoing requirement of survival. It is not a recession phenomenon as it is in some households which go from a higher standard of living to being unable to pay their debts. Alice Campbell described how her family had always stretched their low income to meet their needs. Families which were already cutting corners and economizing did not really have the option of further intensifying their domestic labour.

> "My family has always been low economic status and we have always shopped - grocery shopping at the cheapest possible prices and learned how to stretch it....(We) looked in second hand stores for clothes if its possible to save money rather than buy new clothes. I don't think any recession had anything to do with it - just trying to get by from month to month." (Interview 16)

While some women tried to stretch their income by more careful shopping, several women said that they had

always shopped for bargains and simply continued to do so during the recession. Vera Callas, for example, did not spend any more time looking for bargains when she was unemployed.

> "I don't think I spend more time looking for bargains. I don't think there was ever a time that I didn't shop for bargains. With the exception of the job with _____, none of the (jobs) I ever had paid well enough to allow me to just go out and buy whatever I wanted without considering the price." (Interview 10)

Joan Tabor, an employed single mother, described how her domestic labour was basically unaffected by the recession. The basic tasks of cleaning, laundry, shopping and meal preparation still had to be done and she and her daughter continued to share them. Since they had always budgeted carefully, they did not have any means of further economizing.

> "We've always lived on a fairly strict budget just out of necessity. I haven't really noticed any cutback, to tell you the truth, because we never really spent a lot of money on things anyway..." (Interview 8)

The lack of money also placed limits on the amount of domestic work women were able to perform. Some women

described being unable to perform certain household work because they lacked the financial resources. Women described not preserving food, not making home repairs, not sewing, etc. because they didn't have the money to purchase the necessary materials. Women who were short on time because they were employed outside the home and women who were short on money because of unemployment or low wages were often restricted in the amount of domestic work which they could perform. Marcia King, a single mother whose job was reduced to half time, described how she couldn't afford to sew clothing for her children.

> "I used to do a great deal more sewing than I do now. I can't afford to buy any fabrics that are fashionable. For my daughter, it's got to be exactly the right thing or it's not worth it. And I find, mostly the time factor. ...I certainly mend things and make things last as long as I can. But with trying to work as much as I can, sewing on top of it is almost out of the question. I do it when I can and we look in second hand stores for clothes all the time." (Interview 20)

When I asked them if their purchasing power had declined during the recession, a number of women talked about the high cost of housing and rising utility rates. While some women described various ways of trying to

conserve energy or reduce utility bills, by and large, there was no way of substituting their own labour for the cash needed to pay those bills. Thus there was no real opportunity for women to intensify their domestic labour as a replacement for these commodities when their income declined. Although women felt that their income was not keeping up with these rising costs, they did not really change their domestic labour in response to this added financial pressure.

Women's ability to economize and stretch the household income was limited by the fact that intensified domestic labour could not substitute for the most costly household expenses. Women could alter their shopping and food preparation, but they could not really substitute their own labour for housing or utility payments.

> Economizing through women's work does not contribute much any more as the costs of survival have shifted from food and clothing to fuel and housing. Even if a woman has time to sew clothes and stock up the freezer to help save money, this doesn't help to counteract the huge and ever increasing oil and rent bills. (McMahon, 1982, 21)

There were time limits and financial limits and the inability to substitute domestic labour for household expenses which all placed restrictions on women 'taking up the slack' by intensifying their labour. Another response to the recession, besides increasing their own workload, was for women to negotiate a reassignment of domestic work duties.

## CHANGING THE DIVISION OF DOMESTIC LABOUR

Studies of household labour have shown that women still perform the majority of domestic work regardless of their employment status (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978). Nevertheless, employment does influence the amount of time women spend on housework and the extent to which other household members share in housework (Clark and Harvey, 1976). Hood (1983) describes how couples renegotiate their domestic division of labour when the wife becomes employed outside the home.

During the recession, a number of women whom I interviewed either changed their employment status or lived with someone whose employment status changed. I tried to find out whether these changes in the household's relationship to the labour market resulted in any changes in how domestic work was divided among family members.

Mary Engel, a married hospital worker with two children, described how her husband had always shared in performing housework and childcare. They had arrived at this arrangement with little conflict partly because she had shared in the work of providing an income for the family and partly because her shiftwork meant that he was often home to take care of meals and children when she was at work.

> "I go to work. We both have jobs. We both do equal work in the house...You know, I

> think it actually just had to happen. I worked shift work and he didn't. He had to look after the kids when I went to work. He had to learn how to feed them and change their diapers and learn how to wash (the laundry)...I wasn't the kind of person that whipped up three or four meals ahead of time ...or made sure there were clean clothes for the kids...If I didn't have time, he had to do it, but he was never concerned why I left it." (Interview 33)

During the recession, Mary Engel's husband was laid off for a year because the mill where he worked cutback production. I asked her whether their division of work at home stayed the same when she was working and he was unemployed. She described how her husband took on additional responsibility for work at home, including gardening, meal preparation, housework and childcare.

> "(K: You said that he had always helped take care of the house, and laundry and meals. Did that stay the same when he was unemployed?) No. He was off, so he did it.... I know women that I work with and he teases me about men that he works with (who) when they are off and their wives go to work, they take the kids to a babysitter and don't look

> after their own kids...I haven't had that problem...My husband was unemployed...(so) he shelled all the peas...(and) helped me plant the garden....He helped before but this way I could make him do it." (Interview 33)

Ada McNaughton, a middle aged married government clerk, also described how the division of work at home changed as she and her husband altered their roles as income providers. Earlier in their marriage, when their children were still at home, Ada McNaughton had been a full time homemaker while her husband was the sole income provider. When her children grew up, she reentered the paid labour force out of choice and thought of her income as supplementary to her husband's. However, during the recession, her paid work took on new meaning as her husband's income declined. She no longer worked out of choice but because she shared the responsibility to provide income for the family. In her case, it was not entry into the labour force but the assumption of responsibility to provide income which led to a redistribution of work at home.

> "When the children were young, I was in the home all the day and that was my half of the work. He never had to get up in the night for babies. He never changed a diaper. But he brought the money home to keep the house running. So we shared jobs that way. Now

> there's just the two of us and I have to work and we share household jobs as well...The economy started to tighten up...His salary dropped and I had to work. Before I didn't have to, now I had to work. So because of that now we share jobs (at home)." (Interview 13)

She went on to describe how her husband had taken on numerous household tasks but how they still believed on one level that such work was not appropriate for a man. She described how they preferred not to disclose the fact that he shared in housework with their family and friends.

> "He vacuums the rugs... Occasionally he'll cook a meal...He can do laundry if I tell him what to put it on...Normally, just being the two of us, he'll wash the dishes after supper. If we have company, if our daughter and her husband come to visit, I would never dream of asking him to do the dishes or cook a meal, because he still - he was brought up when boys didn't do that. But he still does it at home when there's just the two of us." (Interview 13)

When men reduce their contribution to the financial support of their households, in some cases, there is a redivision of domestic work to adjust the sharing of

domestic and income-providing roles. In some cases, women who became major income providers were able to negotiate a reduction in their domestic workload in exchange for their assumption of greater income providing responsibilities. Reallocations of domestic work did not always occur smoothly, however. Some men resisted taking over additional housework and childcare.

Marta Armstrong, a married mother of two, described how there was more conflict in her home over the redivision of household work. Her husband, who had formerly been the sole provider for the family, lost his job as a result of government cutbacks. For a time they were both unemployed and looking for work, and then Marta found a temporary job with a community services project and became the main provider for the family. I asked her to describe how these changes had affected the division of work at home.

> "(When he was unemployed) what he did was look after meals...but in everything else he did not. Like he thought maybe the laundry should only be done once a week and the kids should wear their clothes four or five days in a row...So we fought quite a bit...I felt 'You are at home now and you have the time. I am away all day. You should be doing this stuff because you have the time'...And I just couldn't handle it because it seemed like he

> wouldn't do anything with the kids...He'd just shut himself away. (Interview 25)

Marta Armstrong's husband agreed on one level to take over more responsibility for housework and childcare. But he did not agree to perform the household jobs to the same degree which she felt was necessary. Their varying standards of how much work had to be done caused conflict between them and resulted in her continuing to perform most of the household work even though she was working and he was unemployed. While he felt that she was making unnecessary work for herself, she felt that he wasn't holding up his end of the bargain.

> "He wouldn't vacuum nearly as often as I felt was required, but then I started feeling guilty. He would say, 'That's just your opinion. Doesn't mine count? I'm the boss here now. Why can't I decide?' I said, 'Sure but I think you have to compromise because your standards aren't up to mine. I'll lower mine, but you put yours up.' We never did (compromise), so I would just sulk and I would do the vacuuming and everything after I came home or after we ate the night meal. And laundry I always did in the evening...In all the months that he was unemployed he didn't do (housework) more than

> I did...He did some, but he didn't take it over like he said he was prepared to do. And I was very resentful because I would come home from work and think 'Oh my, I've got all this too." (Interview 25)

Michelle Rossi also continued to perform most of the domestic labour in her family, while working at a full time job. Even when she became the sole income provider during the recession, she continued to do most of the housework. While this had caused some conflict in the past, she had adjusted to the situation by accepting her husband's unwillingness to do what he still considered 'women's work.' She got some help from her husband with cooking, because that was work which he enjoyed, and she got some help from her daughter, but it was clearly defined as 'help'.

> "I don't have a husband who helps with housework. I sometimes had a hard time coping with that because I know a lot of Canadian men - a lot of husbands do help. Lots don't, but lots do. But my husband comes from a different kind of background and I have to take that into consideration...I have a really good husband and he likes to cook. He will help me with the cooking but it's only when he feels like it. As for laundry and housework, I do everything. My

> daughter helps me though, now that she is older. She helps me with the dishes, but otherwise I do everything myself. I try to keep up every day and do laundry every other day. I usually spend all day Saturday cleaning...I just like to keep busy." (Interview 36)

The problems experienced by Christine Bonner did not stem from her spouse's reluctance to take over certain household work. Prior to the recession they had both shared in the housework and childcare even though he had also assumed the major responsibility for providing income. When he lost his job as a result of recession cutbacks, the only other job he could find was in another community. He moved there during the week and left Christine behind to manage the house on her own. In the meantime, she too found full time work in order to provide needed income for the family. As a result of these changes in their employment, the division of labour at home also changed.

> "We had always shared the household work, so him being away from home during the week was quite a change. It meant that I was doing everything and it also meant that there was a lot that didn't get done. When he came home on the weekends he was trying to sort of catch up because he knew that I was under a

> lot of pressure during the week....I was trying to keep everything running at home and my job was really demanding...especially when I was working with kids....I'd come home and I'd be pretty drained and my son would be at home and I would find it really difficult to listen to more kids. He kind of stopped communicating very well and he didn't have his father as a backup to go to when I was just too worn out to talk." (Interview 26)

Lynnette Hanson, a married mother of two, also began working full time outside her home during the recession when her husband's income dropped. Before reentering the paid labour force, she had worked at home caring for their young children and keeping the books and answering the phone for her husband's construction jobs. She described how their division of labour at home fluctuated with changes in their employment status.

> "When he was working and I was working, I found it really hard because I had to take the children to the babysitter and I had to pick them up and I had to worry about getting the groceries and worry about the housework. This is just a snap (now that he's off work for a few weeks) because he does everything. He washes the clothes and he cleans up and he

> vacuums and he makes supper. Before (I had to) bring the kids home, get them undressed because they couldn't dress then, make the supper, get them to the table, and he wouldn't get home until ten o'clock at night. I'd get everything cleaned up and then he would be back and I'd make him supper again." (Interview 11)

Women sometimes share the domestic workload with their children and this too can be affected by changes in individual's relationship to the labour market.

Irene Tate described how her grown son moved back into her home in order to save money when he lost his job and his unemployment insurance ran out. He was unemployed and she was working full time at her paid job. I asked her to describe their division of labour at home.

> "I may have cooked a little more but he had to do his own laundry....I feel that he has been on his own and for him to come back and me start doing that again - I didn't feel like I wanted to. Everything is there. He could do it himself...He could even make meals so I really didn't notice any change except in my grocery bill." (Interview 18)

Marie LaSalle, an unemployed single mother, described how she shared housework and childcare with another woman in

order to save money. When she decided to go back to school after being unemployed for a few months, her daughter began to assume more of the domestic workload.

> "This last year (while I've been in school) my daughter has really done a lot more. She...makes the supper most of the time. We don't clean house too often. My son doesn't do very much....She has been doing full course meals, sometimes because she likes to and sometimes because I'm just too tired." (Interview 27)

Heather McKenzie's situation at home is in contrast with that of Marie LaSalle. Although both women are unemployed and both women are single mothers with children old enough to perform household work, Marie LaSalle's commitment of time to going to school has relieved her of some of the responsibility for work at home. Heather McKenzie has committed a major portion of her time to volunteer work but her children still hold her responsible for housework because she is not employed.

> "I know what my kids do. When I am working they pitch in and help. When I am not working, they make more messes for me to clean up. They think, 'She's got nothing to do anyway. Why should we have to do that?' Whether I have something to do or not has no

> effect. I'm not working, so why should they have to do dishes? why should they have to cleanup their room? They still get conned into doing it but, you know, that is their form of thinking. 'When my Mom was working we had to work. Now we are taking a holiday because she has a holiday.' But I don't think it's a holiday." (Interview 37)

The interviews provide a number of insights into the relationship between paid employment and household work but they also reveal the variation among households in how that work is assigned and who is held responsible. A principle of fairness and a recognition that employed women have less time to spend at household work often meant that other household members assumed responsibility for domestic work. However, women's performance of paid work was no guarantee that they would be relieved of responsibility for housework, even when their partners were unemployed. While some households seemed to divide household work on the basis of who had the time to do it, other households clearly maintained domestic work as the woman's responsibility. Changes in household members' positions as income providers often were related to the declining economy and these changes had an impact on the division of labour within the home.

Women's access to paid employment, their level of income, hours of work, and conditions of work all influence their ability to perform the work of mothering and homemaking. The artificial separation of 'family' and 'work' has not only obscured the work performed within the family; it has also obscured the extent to which paid work and domestic work are interconnected. By listening to the experiences of women who are both homemakers and paid workers it is possible to begin to see how women's concerns for their families are connected to their concerns within the labour market.

The recession had a varied impact on women's domestic labour. Women whose households experienced a decline in income found themselves under pressure to stretch the income to meet the families needs. Women tried to stretch income by shopping more carefully, gardening, cooking cheaper foods, and substituting their time and effort for lost income. Low income women often had very little opportunity to further intensify their domestic labour, because they were already economizing in a number of ways. Employed women had very little extra time or energy to devote to increased domestic labour. Financial and emotional pressures increased women's domestic workload, but it was not always possible for women to alleviate those pressures by intensifying their own labour. One way some women responded was to negotiate a redivision of domestic labour

among household members, particularly when they took on greater responsibility for financial support.

# CHAPTER XII

## CONCLUSION

The working lives of the women in this study were full of unresolved contradictions. Most of these women had to go to work to earn income for themselves and their families, and yet they were often unable to find jobs or earn enough income to be self-supporting. Although women valued paid jobs primarily for the income, they also sought other benefits - identity, social contact, a sense of achievement, and access to pensions. Just as many jobs in the female labour market did not provide adequate income, they also did not provide the other benefits which women wanted from paid work. Paid employment often meant exhaustion, health problems, stress, lack of time, and frustration. However, despite its drawbacks, the women in this study felt that they needed paid work.

In this chapter I provide a summary of these women's experiences during the 1981-83 recession. I try to show how their worklives were shaped by the changes which occurred within and between the labour market and private households. I describe the variety of experiences among women in the study and I try to develop a range of categories to help explain that variation.

## LABOUR MARKET CHANGES DURING THE RECESSION

During the recession, women's participation in the Saskatchewan labour market continued to increase, and women did not disappear back into the home in response to the economic crisis. The 1981-83 recession did not channel women out of the labour market, but it did generate changes in the distribution of job opportunities within the labour market, which shaped women's work experiences in the paid labour force and in the home.

During the recession, the level of female employment increased, while male employment declined. The decline in job opportunities in traditionally male occupations made it more difficult for women to find work outside female job ghettos. During the recession, the demand for labour in female job ghettos grew, and new jobs were created in clerical, sales, and service occupations. Part time work increased during the recession, with the majority of part time job openings going to women. In general, one can conclude that the sex segregation of the labour market provided an increase in job opportunities for women despite the overall economic decline. Nevertheless, those job opportunities were frequently limited to low-wage, part-time, or temporary positions in female job ghettos.

During the recession, employers tried to reduce labour costs in order to promote capital accumulation or limit government deficits. These cost-cutting strategies produced

job losses, layoffs, and staff reductions which affected both women and men in the labour force. The aggregate data on employment show that job losses fell more heavily on the male workforce, thus refuting the argument that women are the more 'dispensible' workforce to be channelled into the reserve army during recessions.

When examining the intersection of gender and the distribution of job losses, it is important to distinguish between the loss of jobs to the male and female workforce, and the loss of jobs to individual men and women. It is possible for there to be no loss of jobs in terms of the number of women, or men, employed, but a high rate of individual job loss due to high turnover and changes in the distribution of jobs. The fact that there was an increase in jobs for the female labour force as a whole does not address the issue of how individual job losses were experienced and whether gender made women more 'dispensible' in some cases.

While individual job losses accounted for some of the increase in female unemployment during the recession, unemployment also rose because the growth in job opportunities did not keep pace with the rising number of women seeking paid work. During the recession, there was a 50% increase in the number of unemployed women in Saskatchewan. Both before and during the recession, the female unemployment rate was higher than the male

unemployment rate. However, as layoffs and job losses fell more heavily on the male labour force, the actual proportion of the unemployed who were women declined. In other words, women's absolute unemployment situation worsened, but their unemployment situation relative to men's actually improved. Thus there was a tendency toward equalization between the sexes, but it was an equalization of misery.

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN THE LABOUR MARKET

These changes in the labour market affected women's access to jobs, but it is important to differentiate among the effects these changes had on various segments of the female population. Some women were denied access to jobs and remained confined to an active reserve army of the unemployed. Some women who found employment in the insecure jobs within the secondary labour market were unable to gain access to any 'real jobs'. Some women in more stable jobs felt as if their opportunities for advancement were reduced as employers clamped down on labour costs. Women in non-traditional jobs were influenced by the increased competition from unemployed men for a shrinking number of jobs. The lack of job opportunities during the recession caused many women to feel trapped in dead-end, low-paid, or unsatisfying jobs because they could not afford to quit, and their hopes of finding better jobs were slim.

It is important to avoid treating the female workforce as one monolithic entity and to differentiate among the experiences of women in different segments of the labour force. During the 1981-83 recession, women employed in relatively stable, secure jobs were somewhat protected from outright layoffs, although their employers were able to reduce the number of workers through attrition and hiring freezes. Women in relatively insecure positions, with no union protection, were vulnerable to job loss at any time -- because they complained, because they took time off sick, because their jobs were eliminated. In some cases, the recession increased women's vulnerability to job loss if the demand for their labour dropped as a result of declining business, or if their employer took advantage of the recession to replace workers with someone cheaper or more compliant from the reserve army of the unemployed. Declining demand for labour created job losses in non-traditional jobs, where women were often the first to be laid off because of lack of seniority or preference for male workers.

One of the major contributions of this research is its portrayal of the daily life experiences of unemployed women. While the dominant ideology dismisses female unemployment as relatively insignificant, this research reveals the significant impact which unemployment had on women's material and emotional well-being. Lack of income from

their own employment made women financially dependent either upon the state or other family members. The inadequate level of benefits from unemployment insurance or social assistance programs produced serious financial hardships for many women who were unemployed, including both single and married women. Although it is often assumed that women's needs for identity are met within the family, in fact, women are also subject to the bourgeois cultural tendency to define and value people in terms of their position in the paid labour market. As a result, women who were unemployed also suffered from a loss of identity, devaluation, lack of self-esteem, and depression. These psychological consequences of unemployment were recreated time and again as a result of interactions with potential employers, social workers, store clerks, former co-workers, friends, and others.

While government officials and mainstream economists dismiss female unemployment as relatively insignificant, the experiences of the women whom I interviewed reveal that the negative consequences of unemployment are not restricted to men who are unable to fulfill their masculine 'role' of provider. The high level of female unemployment had serious financial and psychological consequences for women in this study. Self supporting women who were unable to find paid work were forced to live on very low income from unemployment insurance or social assistance programs. In

addition, many unemployed co-provider women experienced financial hardships. Nearly every woman whose period of unemployment had lasted several weeks described suffering from depression, loss of self esteem, and feelings of self blame.

The women whom I interviewed did not withdraw from the labour force and disappear into the home when faced with unemployment. They searched diligently for paid work. Some found jobs, some went back to school, some created jobs of their own - but they all showed a commitment to finding paid work and earning their own income. In addition to searching for paid work, women responded to their unemployment by struggling to cope with their situation by stretching their income, or pooling resources with family and friends. A few women also joined together with other unemployed workers in an attempt to deal with their unemployment on a collective and political level.

The on-the-job experiences of employed women were also shaped by the conditions within the labour market. Two key processes which were accelerated during the recession played an important part in reshaping women's conditions of work. The first process was the implementation of further cost-cutting strategies by employers attempting to restore profit levels or reduce government budget deficits. Cost-cutting strategies, a perennial feature under capitalism, were intensified as the recession placed additional restrictions

on the level of investment in production, and on the level of government revenues. Secondly, the recession afforded employers with the opportunity to extend their control over the labour process. The rise in the reserve army of the unemployed had a disciplining effect on employed workers who became more willing to tolerate unsatisfactory conditions of work. Not all employers took advantage of this situation by taking a tougher stance toward their workforce, so some women reported little change in workloads or relations with management.

In many public and private sector workplaces, reductions in the number of workers resulted in the intensification of labour as workers were expected to shoulder additional tasks and increased workloads. Women in service-providing occupations were susceptible to this intensification of their labour because of their commitment to perform their jobs well and provide necessary services. An orientation to service work, and a concern for others made some of the women in this study respond to increased workloads by intensifying their labour and working harder to get their jobs done. Gender related characteristics may make women more susceptible to certain forms of exploitation. In addition, the structure of jobs in which women deal with people, in person or on the phone, makes women subject to blame and harassment when they don't work harder to keep up. Responding to increased workloads by

working harder may be easier to cope with than facing the guilt of providing inadequate services, listening to phones ring constantly, or getting the blame for backlogs of unfinished work.

While women often expressed dissatisfaction with their working conditions, the recession limited the available job alternatives and compelled women to remain in jobs where they felt undervalued and overworked. Even for women whose working conditions did not deteriorate during the recession, there seemed to be additional barriers to any improvements in wages or working conditions as employers tried to keep a lid on labour costs.

While the feeling of job insecurity was widespread and the fear of job loss caused women to suppress their complaints in the workplace, the recession did not result entirely in the disciplining of women workers and the imposition of employers' control over the workplace. Some women continued to struggle for better wages, better working conditions, and more humane treatment from their supervisors. However, the high level of unemployment provided employers with a cheap and available supply of labour to replace workers who persisted in making demands.

Employer efforts to extend control over the labour process and increase workloads were met with both compliance and resistance. High unemployment and the lack of better alternatives increased the tendency toward compliance with

the terms offered by management. But heavy handed actions by employers to lay off workers or increase workloads also generated resistance as the antagonism of interests became more clear cut. While the recession generated a sense of resignation and suppressed expressions of discontent, it also laid bare the contradiction between workers' needs and the employers' interests. Some women continued to struggle for improvements in their wages and working conditions, but their efforts were frustrated by the willingness of women in the reserve army to accept employment on the given terms. Thus the large active reserve army of unemployed women during the recession constituted a major barrier to efforts to improve the position of women in the workforce.

## RECESSION EFFECTS ON PRIVATE HOUSEHOLDS

The recession generated changes in households' relations to the labour market, as well as changes in the labour market itself. As individuals lost their jobs or were unable to find work, their households' financial resources declined. For individuals whose wages were frozen or whose hours were reduced, the reduction in real wages also had an effect on their households' standard of living.

This loss of income had an impact on women's domestic labour. The most noticeable impact was not the substitution of domestic production for purchased commodities, but the

increased effort to shop carefully, to budget expenditures, to plan what purchases were necessary and what could be foregone. The recession resulted in increased efforts to stretch the budget in those households where real income dropped, where there was some leeway in further reducing expenditures, and where household members had the time to devote to this domestic work. Women from low income households were often stretching their budgets prior to the recession so that the economic downturn had little impact on their work at home. Changes in women's domestic labour during the recession were largely shaped by their households' access to income and resources.

As the recession altered individuals' access to jobs, it also altered economic relations within households. Male breadwinners who were out of work found their wives assuming major responsibility for providing income for the family. Women who were unemployed found themselves financially dependent upon the state or their partners. As income providing shifted within the family, some households responded by reorganizing the division of domestic labour. There was no automatic role reversal of men taking over housework when their wives became the main breadwinners, but in several cases, there was a reassignment of responsibilities. While some men took over childcare, cooking, laundry, and housecleaning on a temporary basis when they were unemployed, other men continued to rely on

their wives to perform the bulk of domestic labour.

It was not simply women's work in the labour market which was affected by the economic crisis, but women's work in the home as well. In households where the income had to be stretched to meet the families' needs, women often engaged in extra work in an effort to save money. Women spent more time shopping for bargains, tending gardens, preserving food, particularly if they were not employed and had time to intensify their domestic labour. For women who were employed at paid jobs, there were physical and time limitations to the amount of additional domestic labour they could assume. It was also true that women's domestic labour could not really substitute for such major expenditures as housing and utilities, so the intensification of domestic labour did not have an impact on substantial portions of the household budget.

## LEARNING FROM WOMEN'S EVERYDAY WORK LIVES

Women often experience the social organization of production as an irrational system, which denies them jobs and devalues their labour, which forces them to work a double day, and which provides them with very limited choices. These women are in a position within the social division of labour to offer a critique of the way that work is organized in our society.

In many ways women already know how their own lives could be improved by changes in the organization of work. Unemployed women are keenly aware of the society's failure to provide enough jobs. And many employed women already know how their own workplaces could be improved, if they had the power to make decisions about staffing, workloads, and the introduction of new technology.

By bringing together the fragmentary and individual knowledge and experiences of a range of working women, hopefully this research helps us to understand the collective experiences of work for women in Saskatchewan today. By focusing on the range of everyday work experiences among women workers, I was hopefully able to add more complex dimensions to our understanding of the relationship between economic crises, the expansion of the reserve army and and everyday experiences of women at home and in the labour market. By beginning with women's experiences in daily life, I became aware of the limits of previous theoretical explanations of the impact of economic crises on women.

The concept of women as a reserve army of labour which can be channeled in and out of the paid work force emphasizes the ways in which women are acted upon by cultural and economic forces in the society. It is a concept which draws our attention to the ways in which unemployment is an inherent feature of a capitalist economic

system and of the possible ways in which patriarchal ideology and the needs of capital intersect to confine women to a subordinate status within the labour market. However, there has been a tendency to refer to women as a reserve army of labour without spelling out in detail just how the concept is being used, what it helps us to understand, and what its limitations are.

This research project has brought to light some of the weaknesses of the conception of women as a reserve army of labour when applied to the question of what happens to women during a period of economic crisis. The idea that women form a reserve which can be easily channelled out of the labour market in times of labour surplus fails to account for the actual growing participation of women in the labour market. This is not to deny that there are pressures on women which keep them out of the labour market - the lack of jobs and the lack of daycare being the most significant. However, there are also counter-tendencies pushing women into the labour market where they continue to look for paid employment to meet their needs. Women's increased financial and psychological dependence on wage labour has reduced the likelihood that women will disappear back into the home.

The concept of women as a reserve army of labour gives us an understanding of how capital views women in the labour market but it does not give us an understanding of the importance of wage labour to working women themselves.

There is an underlying assumption that wage labour is 'secondary' to women, who are defined primarily in terms of their position within the family. Again, while this is useful in understanding the dominant ideology surrounding women's work, it does not reveal the extent to which that ideology has been undermined. Women's increased participation in the labour market, their persistent search for jobs in the face of unemployment, and the growth of employment in female job ghettos all contradict the assumption that women would disappear back into the home in a time of labour surplus. The concept of women as a reserve army treats women workers as a class of workers who can be removed from the labour market to suit the needs of capital and deposited within the family which the dominant ideology defines as woman's sphere. The reserve army thesis seems to assume that this dominant ideology continues to hold sway among women workers themselves, when I think, in fact, it is an ideology which women workers seriously challenge.

This research revealed a complex range of experiences among women workers and significant divisions which exist within the female workforce. It demonstrated the need to go beyond simplistic references to women as a reserve army of labour and to spell out the varying ways in which women workers are affected by the expansion of the reserve army of the unemployed. We need to avoid overgeneralizations that women are being pushed back into the home or that women are

the last hired and the first fired without sufficient attention being given to the limited applicability of those statements.

What we need to do is develop a more complex understanding of the relationship between women's work and the capitalist mode of production. This research project has attempted to contribute to the development of that theory by examining what happened to women's work in a period when the the reserve army of labour was expanding. This research is only a beginning in an attempt to grasp the nature of the changes which are reshaping women's work in a time of economic crisis. Further work needs to be done which differentiates in a more systematic way between the various segments within the female workforce.

## WOMEN'S VARIED RELATIONS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

In developing a theory of women's work in relation to capitalist economic crises, it is important to avoid overgeneralizations which reduce the varieties of women's experiences into one overarching category. It is useful to distinguish among groups of women whose relations to the wage labour market are significantly different. Connelly (1978) initiated this process by distinguishing among three groups of women: employed women, the institutionalized inactive reserve (housewives), and the active reserve of unemployed women seeking work. The active reserve was

further divided into the floating reserve (women who went in and out of jobs), and the stagnant reserve (women in marginal, part-time, or irregular jobs, or women on welfare).

I have found part of Connelly's typology useful, but I have revised it to more accurately reflect the variations in experience among the women whom I interviewed. The following is a proposed set of classifications for women's various relations to the labour market.

A. The Inactive Reserve: Women Not Seeking Paid Work

1. Women who are full time housewives, economically dependent upon their partner's wages.
2. Women not seeking paid work because of domestic responsibilities or the lack of available job opportunities, who are economically dependent on the state for welfare payments to support themselves and their families.

B. The Active Reserve: Women Seeking Paid Work

1. Chronically unemployed or underemployed women who continue to search for jobs.
2. Floating unemployed women who are in and out of work because their jobs are temporary or undesireable.
3. New entrants or re-entrants to the labour market who are looking for jobs.

C. Employed Female Labour Force

1. Women in female job ghettos where flexible labour demand creates many temporary, part-time, and unstable jobs.
2. Women employed in female job ghettos where labour demand is relatively stable.
3. Women who have recently gained access to non-traditional jobs.

Women in the reserve army of the unemployed have basically two options: economic dependence within the family or economic dependence upon the state. Only women who are in the category of the floating unemployed, who are between jobs and who have contributed previously to the unemployment insurance program are eligible for state administered unemployment insurance benefits. The remaining women in the reserve army must depend either upon their families for financial support, or on state run welfare programs.

The employed female labour force is divided in terms of location within a segmented labour market and in terms of differences in women's status as income providers within their households. Many women are the sole providers for themselves and their families. Many women share responsibility for providing income with a partner or other household member. Of this latter group, most women

provide necessary income to meet their families' needs, while some women's earnings are more supplemental as a result of their household's access to greater financial resources.

## EFFECTS OF THE RECESSION ON VARIOUS GROUPS OF WOMEN

The impact of the economic crisis on women's experiences in the labour market is best conceptualized by specifying the variations among different groups of women.

Women in the Inactive Reserve Army were pushed into the labour market out of economic need as the economic crisis took its toll on household income. Declining real wages, lost income from partners' unemployment, or declining real income from social assistance benefits led to an exodus of women from the inactive reserve into the active reserve. The growing financial pressure on private households pushed many women into actively seeking paid employment.

For women in the Active Reserve Army, the recession meant increased competition for jobs and prolonged periods of unemployment, with the financial and psychological consequences. Women unable to find paid work were compelled to depend on their families or the state for financial support, which was frequently insufficient to meet their needs. Women who engaged in unsuccessful job searches faced repeated rejection and often suffered from depression and low self esteem.

Within the Active Reserve Army, chronically unemployed women experienced difficulty finding paid work, but the recession did not make a major difference in their daily lives. For women in the floating reserve army, increased competition during the recession made their job searches more difficult and often led to a lowering of their expectations regarding the type of job they would accept. These women often felt as if their choices were very limited and they had to accept whatever jobs they could find, despite low pay, irregular hours, or lack of job security. As a result, these women often found themselves accepting jobs which would last for a temporary period of time after which they returned once again to the active floating reserve. New entrants or reentrants to the labour market were adversely affected by the increased competition for jobs during the recession. People without recent experience in the paid labour force were at a disadvantage in applying for jobs and they often faced prolonged periods of unemployment. As labour force participation among women increased during the recession, this segment of the female population grew.

The experiences of employed women also varied during the recession. Women who were employed in female job ghettos where the demand for labour was unstable were threatened with the loss of their jobs, as businesses folded, temporary jobs expired or employers reduced the

size of their workforce. These women were susceptible to layoffs and reductions in their hours of work. These women were the most likely to go back and forth between temporary employment and the floating reserve. The short job tenure associated with employment in this segment of the labour force shaped women's work histories and placed these women at a disadvantage when seeking more permanent work. The growth in service sector jobs, the growth in part time jobs, and the use of temporary grant workers to provide government sponsored services all suggest that this segment of the female labour force expanded during the recession. Women employed in this segment of the labour force often reported that they had no better alternatives in the job market and that they had accepted temporary or part time work because no 'real' jobs were available.

Women employed in female job ghettos where demand for labour was stable were not really threatened by layoffs and sometimes felt that the recession had made very little difference in their paid work situation. However, women working in stable female occupations within the public sector were seriously affected by government budget constraints which limited or reduced staff numbers through hiring freezes or attrition. As a result of government efforts to control public sector wage costs, women working in the public sector often experienced an increase in their workloads. While understaffing and increased workloads

affected many women in the public sector, the implementation of cost-cutting strategies was not uniform throughout the public sector. While some women encountered an increasingly intransigent management which demanded an intensification of labour, other women experienced little change in their workload or their relations with supervisors. Women who were employed in stable jobs and were not threatened by layoffs often reported that they felt stuck in their present jobs. They felt as if their chances for advancement in their workplaces were severely limited and made worse by the recession. The recession had an adverse effect on women's opportunities to change jobs or to get jobs reclassified to a higher pay scale.

Women employed in non-traditional jobs also suffered the threat of layoffs or increased workloads during the recession, but they faced particular problems as a result of their position within the sex-segregated labour market. Women who had only recently gained access to certain occupations, such as mining, were frequently low on seniority lists and therefore most susceptible to layoff during staff reductions. In addition, women in non-traditional occupations often faced a declining demand for labour in those occupations coupled with an historical preference for male workers.

While the recession offered employers the opportunity to take an increasingly tough stance toward their workforce,

employers' actual responses to the recession varied from workplace to workplace. The growing competition from the large number of unemployed women actively seeking work had an adverse effect on women's wages and working conditions within the employed labour force. Women who complained about working conditions or who tried to organize for changes in their workplaces were sometimes easily replaced by women from the active reserve army, who were desperate to find jobs. The high level of unemployment during the recession discouraged many women from expressing their dissatisfaction with their wages and conditions of work. And the easy accessibility of cheap female workers from the active reserve army made employers quite resistant to offering any improvements in women's wages or working conditions.

The specific details which distinguish one woman from another offer numerous possibilities for posing additional questions in an effort to explain the variation in women's responses to their work situations on the job and in the home. Hopefully, this documentation of women's daily life experiences will contribute to the development of a grounded theory of women's work as it is shaped by the interacting transformations occuring within the labour market and private households.

By attending to the experiences of women, this research not only adds to our knowledge of women's work, but it also

contributes to the development of a new perspective in the sociology of work. Studies of women's work cannot simply be tagged onto the existing body of literature. Focusing on women's experiences calls attention to the need to rethink and reformulate basic concepts and categories pertaining to the study of work for both women and men. This research should add to the ongoing discussion and development of socialist feminist theories of women's work, which provide the most complete framework for understanding the social relations which shape the daily lives of working people.

## INTEGRATING CLASS AND GENDER

One of the major theoretical tasks facing socialist feminists is the successful integration of gender and class in the analysis of relations of production. The failure of classical Marxist analysis or mainstream sociological stratification theory to adequately address the sexual division of labour has led to various attempts to reformulate the concept of relations of production to incorporate more than the 'sex-blind' categories of capital and labour. There are various positions which have been taken regarding the relationships between gender and class. On the one hand, Benston (1969) treats 'women' as a class by arguing that women's position in the family creates a special relation for women to the capitalist mode of production. Women's economic dependence upon men, their

indirect relation to wage labour, and their responsibility for domestic labour were seen as the distinguishing characteristics of women's relation to the capitalist mode of production. By focusing on women's common relation to the capitalist mode of production, this approach obscured the divisions and differences among women. However, previous attempts to distinguish among different classes of women had usually derived women's class positions from that of their husbands or fathers, thus ignoring gender differences in the relation to wage and domestic labour. Today the majority of Canadian women have their own direct relation to the labour market, while continuing to reside in households where they perform the majority of domestic labour and are indirectly dependent on the wage labour of a man.

I think that the most successful integration of class and gender has to incorporate an understanding that individuals' relations to production include both relations to the labour market and the domestic division of labour. At the same time, individual's relations to the labour market and the domestic division of labour must be understood as taking place within the context of private households. Variation in the composition of households and variation in households' relation to the wage labour system create differences among women who occupy the same position in relation to the occupational structure. For example, a

16 year old minimum wage earner in the service sector, whose parents are professionals, has a different class experience than the 40 year old single mother supporting herself at the same job. The relations within the household, in terms of domestic division of labour and division of financial resources, need to be seen as interacting with relations within the labour market. While focusing on women has drawn attention to the inter-relatedness of household and labour market experiences, this insight should also be extended to the analysis of men's experiences.

In my research I found that women's daily life experiences were significantly shaped by their own direct relation to the labour market. Women who were in the active reserve army of the unemployed shared many of the same experiences -- economic dependence, financial hardship, depression and loss of self esteem. However, the experiences of women in the reserve army were also shaped by the private households in which they lived. Unemployed women who were sole providers were forced to depend on the state for inadequate social assistance payments. Unemployed married women's experiences varied according to their husbands' access to employment and income. Women who were employed in stable, long-term jobs had fundamentally different experiences than women who were channelled into temporary, part-time, and insecure jobs. While employed women's experiences varied according to their location

within the workforce, their experiences also varied according to the meaning which they attached to their paid work. For women who experienced an increased dependence on their wages within the private household, their relation to paid employment shifted from being somewhat voluntary or supplemental to being increasingly necessary and compulsory.

In conclusion, women's daily work experiences are best understood as being shaped by women's positions within the overall relations of production, which include relations within private households, relations within the labour market, and relations between private households and the labour market. Variations in these relations will, to a great extent, account for the variations in experience among working women.

Variations in these relations also help to clarify the different processes which affect women's work during economic crisis. The growth of the reserve army of the unemployed, for example, affects private households access to wages, pushing some women from the inactive to the active reserve. It also affects women in the active reserve who face a more difficult time finding paid work; and it affects employed women by providing employers with the opportunity to alter the terms of employment and extend their control over the workplace.

While the small sample of women in this study prevents drawing any general conclusions about the impact of the

economic crisis on women's work, it does provide us with a framework with which to pursue further analysis of the variations in women's experiences in times of economic crisis. The range of experiences revealed in this study appear to be rooted in the structure of relations within and between the labour market and private households and the processes operating within that structure at a time of economic crisis. It is now possible to frame more specific questions to pursue in further research, by identifying the specific processes, e.g. the reduction of staff or the redistribution of work, and tracing its effects on specific groups of women, such as those entering the labour market, in permanent stable jobs, in temporary, part- time jobs, or facing unemployment.

## WOMEN'S CONSCIOUSNESS AND RESPONSES TO THE RECESSION

Women's needs for paid employment condition their responses to changes in the labour market during a recession. Women in this study remained in the labour market during the recession and were committed to finding or keeping their paid jobs.

The dominant ideology defines women as economic dependents whose needs for income, identity and achievement are satisfied by their roles within the family. However, women's needs are not always met in the ways prescribed by

the dominant ideology. Since the women in this study experienced both financial and psychological needs for paid work in their daily lives, they were not inclined to respond to the recession by dropping out of the labour force. The meaning which these women attached to their paid work was not shaped simply by an ideology which denied the significance of female employment. Instead, their consciousness of their need for paid employment often contradicted that ideology of female domesticity and economic dependence.

In analysing the impact of economic crises on women's work, I concluded that it was necessary to take account of the forces causing women to develop a strong attachment to their own participation in the labour market. Understanding the meaning which women attach to their paid work is necessary to understand how women behave and respond to changes in the labour market in times of crisis. It is important to see women as conscious actors, whose consciousness is shaped by daily life, rather than passive recipients of an ideology of domesticity which makes them respond to a crisis only in ways which are functional to capital. By focusing on daily life meanings of paid work, I was able to develop a more accurate conception of women's consciousness which encompassed women's resistance to being manipulated to fit the needs of capital.

The daily reliance of sole provider women, and many co-provider women, on their own wage labour represents a major challenge to the ideology of women as economic dependents. If anything, the economic crisis increased the reliance of many households on women's wage labour. The increased dependence of families upon women's earnings reinforced women's attachment to the paid labour market, causing some women to enter the labour market and causing some of those already employed to assume greater responsibility as income providers. The exploratory nature of this study does not enable me to draw any definite conclusions about the extent of these changes in the broad population, but it does point to the need to examine not only women's labour force participation, but the meaning which it has for them. We cannot really understand the impact of the crisis on women's daily lives unless we know why their access to jobs and the nature of those jobs is a matter of great importance to them.

Women in this study were subject to forces beyond their control which restricted their job opportunities and shaped their conditions of work. But women were not simply passive victims buffetted about by changes in the labour market. They were also conscious actors attempting to shape their own daily lives within the limits prescribed by available alternatives. Armstrong and Armstrong (1984) have pointed to the tendency in Marxist feminist theory to see the ways in which capital benefits from women's subordination without

also seeing women's resistance to that subordination.

> Women at best appear primarily as victims, at worst as being prepared to collude in their own oppression. It is time to put women back in their own history.... (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1984, 13)

This research revealed the importance of examining women's daily lives in order to find out how women respond to an economic crisis. By beginning with women's own experiences, it was possible to develop a clearer picture of women's consciousness and their reasons for responding to the crisis in ways which made sense to them. This provides an important corrective to the one dimensional view of women as victims of the crisis whose response is mechanistically determined by the needs of capital. In this research, women's responses to unemployment are revealed as having a more dialectical character, involving both compliance and resistance. The lack of job opportunities did not result in an automatic reduction in the supply of women workers. In fact, women asserted their needs for paid work by entering the labour market in greater numbers, by persisting in their search for jobs, by creating jobs for themselves, and by attempting to increase their chances of finding employment by increasing their level of education. While women were victimized by employer's decisions which resulted in unemployment, women struggled to overcome that victimization, to find work, and to cope with the financial and psychological hardships imposed as a result of

unemployment. Employed women often responded to the lack of job opportunities by remaining in unsatisfying jobs because they perceived few alternatives. While some women responded to wage controls and increased workloads with compliance, they also attempted to improve or protect their working conditions from further deterioration. In response to increased reliance on their own wages, some women negotiated a reduction in their own domestic workload, while others intensified their workload in order to stretch reduced income. The nature of women's struggles in their daily lives is seldom addressed in the literature on women and economic crises. It is important for us to place real living women and their conscious activity at the center of our inquiry of economic crises and women's work.

By documenting the daily work experiences of some women during the 1981-83 recession in Saskatchewan, I have been able to develop a more detailed framework for understanding the range of experiences which I found. I have identified some major differences in women's relationships to the labour market and within private households. I have identified some of the changes occurring in the labour market and in private households as a result of the recession and have shown how women's daily lives were affected by those changes. The expansion of the active reserve army of labour, the redistribution of job opportunities, employer strategies to reduce labour costs,

and employer efforts to extend control over the workplace were shown to have an effect on women's access to jobs, the nature of those jobs, and the conditions of work. Declining real wages, social service cutbacks, rising unemployment and the shifting distribution of employment were seen to have an impact on private households' income, domestic workload, and division of labour.

# APPENDIX A

## APPENDIX A

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. I freely consent to take part in a research project being conducted by Kay Willson, a sociology graduate student, under the supervision of Dr. Barrie Thorne, her faculty advisor.

2. I understand that this research is designed to study the impact of the economic crisis on women's work in Saskatchewan, and that the reseach involves interviews with women about everyday work experiences on the job, at home, and in the search for paid work.

3. I understand that the interview will take 1-2 hours and will focus on recent developments in job opportunities, working conditions, wages and housework.

4. I understand that I am not required to answer any questions against my will and that I am free to discontinue the interview at any time without penalty.

5. I understand that the interview will be recorded on tape but that these tapes will only be heard by the interviewer and her advisor.

6. I understand that portions of the interview will be included in the written results of the research project but that my identity and the name of my specific workplace will be kept in confidence and that I will remain anonymous.

7. I understand that further explanation of the research and/or the final results of the study will be made available to me at my request.

8. I understand that my participation in the research does not guarantee any beneficial results to me.

I have read and understand this consent form:

_____

Signature Date

# APPENDIX B

## APPENDIX B

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

Interview Number _____

1. Age
2. Marital status
3. Nationality
4. Language
5. Education - years
   - degrees, certificates
   - other training
6. Household - number/ages of children/adults
   - children/dependents not living with you
7. Income - personal income and source
   - other income earners in household
   - estimate of total household income
8. Employment status
9. Current or most recent paid job

# APPENDIX C

## APPENDIX C

## ORIGINAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Work History

1. What kinds of paid jobs have you held in the past ten years?
2. Why did you take those jobs? Were other jobs available?
3. How long did you work? Why did you leave?
4. Were you unemployed during the past ten years? When? Why?
5. How has your household changed in the past ten years?
6. Have there been any major changes in the kind of work you do at home?

### Paid Employment during Recession

1. Tell me about your job. Describe a typical day at work.
2. How many women/men work there? What jobs do they do?
3. Has this division of work changed in the past few years?
4. Have there been changes in the number of workers? Layoffs? Attrition?
5. What hours do you work? Have they changed in the past few years?
6. Did the tasks and duties at your job stay the same?
7. Did the workload stay the same?

8. Did your employer introduce any new technology?
9. Any other changes during the recession which affected your job?
10. What were your wages during the recession? Any raises?
11. Are your wages affected by the minimum wage guidelines?
12. Describe your employer's attitude toward workers - male and female.
13. Any changes in relationship between management and workers during the recession?
14. Any changes in people's attitudes toward their jobs?
15. What do you like about your job? Would you like to keep working there in the future? Do you feel free to change jobs?
16. Have you ever tried to make any changes at your workplace? What do you think would happen?
17. Do you belong to a union?
18. Do you have any particular problems at work because you are a woman?

Unemployment during the Recession

1. Have you been unemployed since 1981? When? How long? Why?
2. Can you describe your experiences looking for work?
3. What kind of jobs were you looking for? What was available?
4. What were employers' attitudes toward you?

5. Did you have any particular problems because you were a woman?
6. What kinds of problems did your unemployment create?
7. What income did you have when you were unemployed?
8. Describe experiences applying for UIC, welfare.
9. How would your life have been different if you'd found paid work?

Work at Home during Recession

1. Describe who does various household jobs, childcare.
2. Has responsibility for housework and childcare changed at all in the past few years? Describe the circumstances.
3. Has the economic situation had any effect on your work at home?
4. Has your household income changed as a result of unemployment or cutbacks?
5. Have you had to work harder to stretch your income? How?
6. Have you been affected by any cutbacks in government services?
7. Has the recession affected how you or other members of your household feel about the future?
8. Are there any other problems in your household which you feel the result of the economic situation?

Summing Up

1. Are there other aspects of your work you want to talk about?
2. Anything else you want to say about the impact of the recession on your life? Your family?
3. Would you like to receive a summary of the research results when the project is completed?
4. Thank you very much for your cooperation. Do you have any suggestions for improving the interview? Things that aren't clear? Other topics?

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