

SECTION II GENDER ISSUES

WOMEN'S WORK: THE FEMINIZATION AND SHIFTING MEANINGS OF CLERICAL WORK

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Introduction

For nearly a century, clerical work has been the archetypal paid job for women in North America. Initially dominated by men, clerical occupations quickly became among the most gender-segregated of all jobs: numerically dominated by women and discursively marked as 'women's work'. Three generations of women's magazines portrayed clerical work as 'the' job for middle-class women, while also being a reachable goal for daughters of the working-class. The expansion of clerical work has been intimately wrapped up with the growth of women's paid work in Canada and the US more generally, thus an analysis of clerical work reflects a wider cultural history of women's paid work outside the home. Moreover, clerical work captures some of the major cultural, social and economic changes to have shaped the late nineteenth and twentieth century: including the shift to a service-based economy powered by huge corporations, the decline of unionized blue-collar jobs, rapid technological change, and of course, the massive influx of women into paid work.

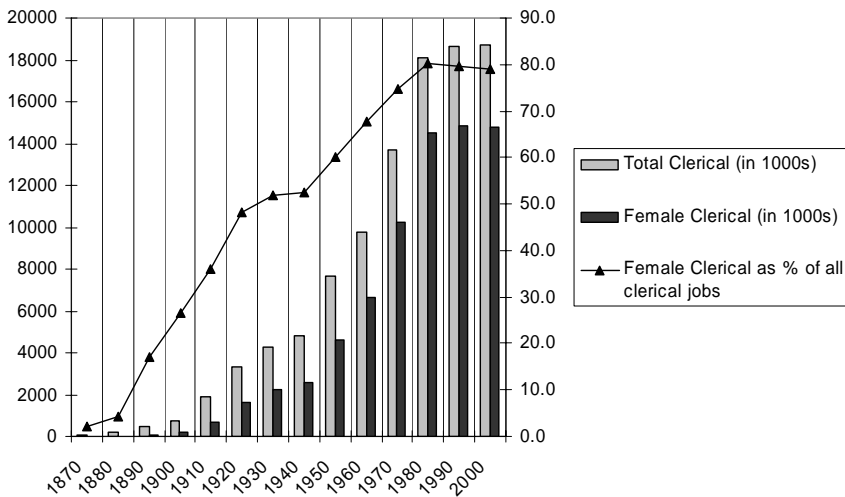
Scholarship on the feminization of clerical work and the production of gender relations in the white collar workplace tends to focus either on the 'early' period from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, or on the period since the 1970s.¹ As a result, these studies analyze clerical work under relatively stable social and economic circumstances. While existing studies provide richly textured accounts of the feminization of clerical work at various points in time, our study adds to existing scholarship by analyzing this transformation over a much broader sweep of time: from the late nineteenth century through to the early twenty-first century. Our discussion is broken out into three time-periods: the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, mid-century to the early 1970s; and the 1970s to the present. This broader and more nuanced periodization enables us to consider how meanings about clerical work have changed across time and under very different social and economic conditions. We argue that even as the idea of clerical work as 'women's work' has proven to be a remarkably durable formulation, the *content* of what this means has shifted considerably under different social and economic contexts.

Our analysis is based on previous studies and additional evidence from the US and Canada. Although these countries obviously have distinct histories (including somewhat different patterns of immigration and public attitudes about

race and ethnicity), we decided to consider them together for various reasons. First, the rise of clerical work is deeply interwoven with the rapid urbanization of North America, and the two countries experienced similar kinds of urban development at roughly the same time, translating into comparable kinds of urban experiences on both sides of the border, especially when compared with other countries. Second, the financial service sectors in both countries expanded and feminized at about the same time, leading to comparable kinds of work experiences, and again this is different than the European case, where these processes took place later. We suggest that for the purposes at issue here, these similarities outweigh the differences, and allow for a farther reaching investigation. Our analysis is based on primary and secondary data from both countries. In addition to reviewing and re-situating existing studies, we use our own findings based on a range of data. Some data were gathered from the published Canadian and US Census (see Figure 1 and Table 1). We collected a 10 percent sample (N=5,491) from the 1901 unpublished nominal census for Montréal and this provides a demographic profile of women at the turn of the twentieth century.² We performed textual analyses of documents and personnel files gathered from the archives of seven key Canadian banks and insurance companies.³ We also conducted a secondary analysis of oral histories collected by the first author in the mid-1980s with 28 white women clerical workers in a Mid-Western U.S. city and of more recent interviews with personnel managers at a selection of major Canadian banks headquartered in Toronto.⁴

In the late nineteenth century, both office work and women in formal wage work were relative rarities. Less than one-fifth of women were engaged in paid

Figure 1
Clerical workers in the United States, 1870–2000



Source: U.S. Census, various years.

Table 1
Women in Paid Labor Force over time, United States and Canada

	<i>% of all women workers employed in clerical and kindred occupations (occupational segregation)</i>	<i>% of clerical and kindred jobs held by women (feminization of clerical work)</i>	<i>% of labor force who are women (feminization of labor force)</i>
United States			
1880	1.7	4.4	14.5
1890	2.8	16.9	16.5
1900	4.1	26.5	17.9
1910	8.9	35.9	19.6
1920	19.2	48.4	20.2
1930	20.9	52.0	22.4
1940	18.4	52.6	26.0
1950	25.8	60.2	29.8
1960	28.5	67.8	35.3
1970	32.5	74.6	40.1
1980	31.9	80.1	48.8
1990	26.2	79.8	48.7
2000	22.3	79.0	49.0
Canada			
1881	na	na	na
1891	2.4	14.3	12.2
1901	5.3	22.1	13.4
1911	9.2	32.6	13.5
1921	18.5	41.8	15.4
1931	17.7	45.1	17.0
1941	18.3	50.1	19.8
1951	27.7	56.7	22.1
1961	29.2	61.5	27.3
1971	34.2	68.9	30.6
1981	36.3	77.8	40.4
1991	30.3	76.8	44.9
2001	25.2	76.5	46.6

Source: U.S. Census, various years; Statistics Canada, various years

work, and the vast majority worked as domestic servants, in factories (particularly textiles, clothing and tobacco) or on farms. Both countries were largely resource and manufacturing-based economies until well into the twentieth century, and the range of jobs open to women, compared with men was limited. However, the growth and rapid feminization of clerical work in the first part of the twentieth century, together with the post-Second World War expansion of a vast array of service sector jobs greatly expanded women's opportunities for paid work. Now both countries are service economies marked by globalization. Almost two-thirds of women are in paid employment, and while occupational segregation persists, women work in a far wider assortment of occupations than they did a century ago. We argue that the century-long feminization of clerical work has been a story in which some of the meanings attached to this job were

made anew for successive generations of women. While the link to respectable, 'middle-class' femininity has been a common thread, in other ways this job has meant different things at different times: from a short-term job prior to marriage, to a way of supporting one's country during wartime, to a job for any stage in one's working life, including after employment gaps due to raising children.

Part One: The Rise and Feminization of Clerical Work in the Early Twentieth Century

The decades around the turn of the twentieth century were a time of tumultuous change in both the US and Canada. Both economies expanded as national and international markets opened up, and large corporations became both increasingly common and more complex. The breathtaking pace of the associated city building saw the emergence of spatially distinct central business districts that became the very heart of economic, political and cultural life not only of particular cities but also in the national imaginary. In downtown cores, skyscrapers sprouted, department stores multiplied and an array of stores, civic buildings and entertainment venues flourished. Each day throngs of people poured into the ornate marble lobbies and, in some cases, onto the elevators of purpose-built office buildings completed in the flurry of skyscraper construction that marked the era. Most of the earliest skyscrapers were for insurance companies and banks; they were intended to be a highly visible and distinctive symbol of the power and importance of the company in question.⁵ Finance and insurance industries grew phenomenally, and were heavily dependent on clerical work as they continue to be a century later.

The growth of office work and the increase in women's labor force participation came together at a particular moment to produce the first wave of rapid feminization of clerical work. In the late nineteenth century, clerical work accounted for a tiny proportion of all workers, less than one percent in the US in 1870 and Canada in 1871. Clerical work in the US grew by over 450 percent between 1900 and 1930, at which point 9 percent of the labor force held clerical jobs. Even during the Depression, clerical work grew, although at a slower pace than before (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Until the early twentieth century clerical work was done almost exclusively by men, mostly in small, paternalistic, family-run businesses.⁶ 'Black-coated workers' as Lockwood famously called them, handled all phases of an assignment, frequently doing tasks considered managerial today. Clerical work was high status work, offered good job security, and for those men in senior positions was a most prestigious job of the sort associated with middle management today. Of course, the ambiguous class position of clerks and white-collar workers more generally has long been the focus of debate, as is captured in terminology such as "the new middle class" and "white-collar proletariat".⁷ Harry Braverman cautioned that the picture of nineteenth century clerks can be overdrawn. "There were clerks—hard-driven copyist in law offices, for example—whose condition and prospects in life were little better than those of dock workers. But by and large, in terms of function, authority, pay and tenure of employment (a clerical position was usually a lifetime post), prospects, not to mention status and their dress, the clerks stood closer to the employer than to factory labor."⁸ In other words, the context is important. John

Ehrenreich's argument about the emergence of the Progressive Era as entwined with the rise of the 'new middle class' of salaried, educated professionals and managers also makes room for the inclusion of clerical and sales workers in this category. But he does go on to note that "as the twentieth century wore on, however (clerical and sales work) were transformed into mass occupations, more appropriately categorized as 'working class' than as 'middle class.' But at the turn of the century, they, at least, still saw themselves as part of the middle class."⁹ However, within more recent conceptualizations of class such as that offered by Stanley Aronowitz, 'working class' should more rightly be understood to include all workers who lack control over the terms and conditions of their employment. Under this definition, even clerks with relative upward mobility would still be considered working class. Aronowitz also adds the important point about the historicity and geographical specificity of understandings of 'class' itself, arguing that the meanings of working- and middle-class necessarily change over time and across space.¹⁰ We were mindful of these scholars' cautionary notes as we tried to make sense of the class designation of clerical work at different points in time.

As offices increased in size and complexity, the demand for clerical workers expanded. There simply were not enough qualified men to fill the demand, and so employers increasingly turned to women, who, not inconsequentially, they could pay less. Employers were initially reluctant to hire women, often for fear of their 'distracting' influence in the workplace. In 1898, one Canadian bank described hiring its first woman stenographer as "an 'experiment' courageously and gallantly undertaken by Mr. Anderson, (regional) manager" in St. John's, Newfoundland.¹¹ The remnants of nineteenth century notions of the 'cult of true womanhood' ('proper' ladies should cultivate the womanly virtues of piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness) continued to feed attitudes that 'women's place is in the home'.¹² As Flora Miller (born in 1925) recalled: "My mother was a farmer's daughter. Her dad thought it was a sin for a girl to go out to work. He thought it was beneath her dignity to work."¹³

The 1910s and 1920s saw impressive increases in the proportion of women going into clerical work, as well as the increasing feminization of those jobs (see Figure 1 and Table 1). The timing is partly related to the substitution of women for men who enlisted in the First World War, but more significant was the huge demand for clerical labor as office work continued its rapid expansion. For instance, even before the War, the availability of Canadian bank jobs was already on the rise and women were moving into them at a faster rate than men. In 1911 only 4 percent of bank workers were women, by 1921, 23 percent were.

The expansion and re-organization of office work was aided by the invention and diffusion of new office technologies, which in turn changed both the division of labor in office work as well as the parameters of corporate culture. For instance, the typewriter was patented in 1873 by Remington, and the Hollerith machine and an early Dictaphone were invented in the 1880s. These and other machines automated and mechanized office work and became important technological conditions for the rapid growth of service sector industries. With these innovations, functions such as record keeping, previously incidental to clerical work became its very essence. Mechanization meant office work could be fragmented into different jobs and many clerical tasks became routinized in

ways that required minimal staff training and offered managers time and labor cost-saving advantages.¹⁴

Automating clerical tasks occurred alongside the downgrading of clerical work's status. Unlike the multi-purpose clerk in the nineteenth century pre-mechanized office, women clerical workers in the early twentieth century rarely enjoyed substantial opportunities for advancement. However, the same was not necessarily true of men, especially those in more skilled clerical work like book-keeping. Further, the feminization of clerical work was not a simple substitution of women for men clerks. Instead *new* types of clerical work came to be associated with women. As Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor remark:

The new class of clerical workers had little in common with the clerks of the previous century, and the skill component of their work was immediately downgraded to typically 'female' abilities—including, as usual, dexterity, ability to carry out repetitive tasks, and so on. In this case it was not that men's jobs were deskilled, and women drawn into them, but that a new category of work was created which was classified as 'inferior' not simply by virtue of the skills required for it but by virtue of the 'inferior' status of the women who came to perform it.¹⁵

One such new category of work was typing and stenography. In 1880 typing and stenography occupied a mere 154 people in the US, only 4 percent of whom were women. Thirty years later 77 percent of the 112,600 typists and stenographers listed in the U.S. Census were women. That women with their 'nimble fingers' were employed to demonstrate these machines is well documented.¹⁶ But the cost-saving advantages associated with these new office machines and the women who operated them were what lay behind this remarkable upsurge. Typewriter companies even stressed this in their advertising. Remington's famous ads in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries used a fictionalized Miss Remington modeled on the then popular Gibson Girl. She was a young, white woman in the typical office worker's stylish outfit; a dark skirt and simple striped shirtwaist blouse. In one such ad she extols the typewriter's "time and labor saving features", and specifically offers the prospective buyer "something more and better for his money than he has ever before obtained in a writing machine."¹⁷

That the Miss Remington in the ads remained unmarried, white, and perpetually young reflects demographic trends among actual flesh and blood clerical workers of the period. Detailed studies of Census data¹⁸ and the records of public and private sector employers¹⁹ indicate that clerical workers were more likely to be unmarried than the general female workforce (1900 US Census data indicate that 96 percent of women clerical workers were unmarried, compared with 86 percent of all women workers). Even in 1930, 82 percent of clerical workers were single, compared with 72 percent of women workers generally. Clerical workers were far more likely to be from white, native-born families than other women workers. Clerical workers were also much younger, for decades the female clerical workforce was dominated by women aged less than 25. For instance, 1900 US Census data indicate that 61 percent of clerical workers compared with 50 percent of non-agricultural women workers were aged less than 25 years old. Even as late as 1949 there was evidence of a continued preference for hiring young single women, most white-collar workplaces actually restricted employment to women under 35, with many expressing a preference for clerical workers under

age 25.²⁰ An analysis of the Bank of Montreal's head office employee records for 1902 to 1923 produced similar findings. The 588 women hired were overwhelmingly white, young and single. Their average age was 20, and 48 percent were aged less than 25 when hired, 98 percent were single, and 70 percent were Canadian-born.²¹

In the popular imaginary, clerical work was promoted as a desirable job for young, educated white women to do for a few years prior to marriage. Emphasizing clerical work as transitory work served several purposes. It calmed men's concerns about the potential downward pressure on wages as well as fears that women would be 'desexed' by paid work and abandon marriage altogether. Claims of the 'inevitable' departure of women for their 'proper' station in life were also deployed to justify discriminatory practices, not only lower pay and small, if any, pensions, but also short career ladders and limited training. Employers often required women to resign upon marriage and refused to hire married women.²² It was not uncommon to find that office work was promoted (including in advice books aimed at young women) as preparing women to be better wives and mothers. As one male manager at Canada's Royal Bank put it, bank training was good for women as "it will make her a companion for a brainy man—and that is worth more than anything else."²³

The Bank of Montreal's employee records show that their women clerical workers were employed for an average of two years. Undoubtedly many did leave to get married, but what is often overlooked is the fluidity of the job market, especially given the concentration and close proximity of office workplaces in the downtown core. Sharon Hartman Strom argues that marriage was merely one reason women quit a job, and not even the predominant one. Women also left for other jobs that paid better, offered promotion and/or better working conditions.²⁴ In Montréal, 17 year old Wilma Jenkins was employed by the Bank of Montreal. She left two years later, not to marry but to take a job at the Bank of Nova Scotia, and her name appears later again in the employee rolls for Sun Life. Each move was associated with an increase in her grade (and presumably pay), and Wilma remained single throughout. It was convenient for employers to maintain a narrative that women were unreliable and not worth training because they would soon 'retire' to marry, rather than acknowledge that many resigned to move on to better jobs with (most likely) their competitors, or that women did not just passively accept any sort of work conditions offered. As Strom argues "(s)tylized discussions of labor turnover diverted attention from women's real grievances in the office and served to reinforce the application of the marriage bar."²⁵

The earliest generations of clerical workers were better educated than other women workers. Clerical workers needed to be literate and numerate. So employers preferred high school graduates, and it was not unusual for clerical workers to have sought special training from private business or commercial school training from institutions like Montréal's Institut Sténographique Perrault or Chicago's Metropolitan Business College. From the 1880 on, such colleges taught typing, stenography and bookkeeping. They grew rapidly and were immensely popular.²⁶ However, the education requirement also served to exclude from clerical work many white women from working class and immigrant families, as well as women of color, becoming another way to keep desirable clerical

work from their reach. Their education levels were usually lower, in large part because their families could neither afford to pay for their education nor forgo their daughters' contributions to the family budget. Generally sizable numbers of working-class women only began moving into clerical work in the 1910s and 1920s, when increased access to education and the rapid expansion of clerical work opened the doors to a wider array of women. That said the doors remained firmly closed to women of color until after the Second World War (the exclusions was not so much by education, but bald-faced racism).²⁷ For instance, in the US between 1890 and 1930, women of color made up 13 to 17 percent of the non-agricultural labor force, but represented less than one percent of women clerical workers until the 1940s.²⁸ For African-Americans entrance was later still. Largely excluded until the 1960s and the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, if they found employment as clerical workers in earlier decades it was usually in African-American owned banks, insurance and real estate companies, and as time went on in the civil service.²⁹

Case studies from Canada provide evidence of similar exclusions by race and ethnicity in clerical workforces north of the border. For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, Montréal was Canada's economic capital, and most of the Canadian financial services firms were headquartered there until the 1970s. Our 10 percent 1901 census data for Montréal show that women in clerical work came from one of three groups: English-Protestant (about 40 percent), Irish-Catholic (30 percent) and French-speaking-Catholic (30 percent). The prominence of English-Protestant women was not reflective of Montréal's population, in which English-Protestants were demographically the smallest, but culturally, economically, and politically the most powerful of the three groups. Employment records show that banks and insurance companies preferred to hire English-Protestants over the other two groups, most likely because of their elevated social status and because most employers were English-speakers themselves and likely shared the cultural values and even social networks of the English-Protestant women they hired. Moreover, archival data from the Bank of Montreal even reveals a strong presence of first-generation British immigrants, with fully one-quarter of all women employed between 1902 and 1923 hailing from the UK.³⁰ Other Canadian case studies also show evidence of employment discrimination among racialized minorities continuing in later decades. For example, Katrina Srigley gathered oral histories of women who had been in paid work in Depression-era Toronto. At a time when job ads in newspapers explicitly called for applicants of a particular race or ethnicity, many of the European-Canadians and Afro-Caribbean Canadians she interviewed recalled specific instances of race discrimination, especially in office work which several believed was reserved only for young, white protestant women. Similarly, Carmela Patrias analyzed records from Federal government agencies and voluntary organizations from the Second World War and found clear evidence that Jews, Afro-Caribbean Canadians, and people of eastern and southern European descent were explicitly refused clerical jobs because of their racialized identities, even when they had excellent recommendations and good qualifications.³¹

Our data and these previous studies should be viewed in light of the different demographic profiles and public attitudes about race and ethnicity in each country. We do not have the space here to address this subject in any detail,

but want to point to two broad brush-stroke differences. First, discourses about race and racism in the US, more so than in Canada, have been more powerfully shaped by the more widespread legacy of slavery, as well as larger populations of African-Americans than Afro-Caribbean Canadians. And second, in early twentieth century Canada, racial and ethnic differences were more likely to be cast as differences between white settler and Asian or First Nations populations, or (as above) between English-Protestant and French-speaking Catholic or Irish-Catholic populations. The legacies of discrimination against women of color and immigrants, with the exception of English-Protestant immigrants, remain in both countries.

Clerical employers' preference for particular sorts of women workers was not merely because they cost less than men, as the dismal experiences of women of color seeking clerical work demonstrate. Employers of the first waves of women clerical workers knew that white, educated women constituted a unique labor force. For instance, the potential supply of such women was substantial not only because women were more likely than men to hold high school diplomas, but also because their range of employment opportunities was very limited, curtailed by prevailing gender stereotypes and expectations. College-educated women seeking 'respectable' paid work could become teachers, governesses or join the newly-professionalizing fields of nursing and social work (although college education was not always a requirement, over this period it became one way women in these occupations legitimized their work and claimed professional status).³² The huge demand for clerical workers expanded the field of opportunity for educated women seeking dignified work, at least if they were white. As Violet Blackman, who arrived in Toronto from the Caribbean in 1921 aged 20, recalled, "regardless of who you were and how educated you were . . . you couldn't get office work and factory and hospital work and things like that you couldn't because they would not give you the job . . . because of the colour of your skin because you were black the only thing that you could get was a domestic. . . . because even if the employer would employ you, those that you had to work with would not work with you."³³ Clerical work in this period was exclusive, as in fashionable and prestigious, but also as in exclusionary because only particular groups of women got employed.

White, educated women who identified with, and as 'middle-class' offered employers a chance to retain both the class standing and education pedigree associated with black-coated male clerks (but at lower wages). The manners, bodily comportment, and values of such women also made them preferable to educated working-class men who likely lacked the same sort of social and cultural capital.³⁴ Employers routinely used family background as a criterion for hiring a woman, and employment records and job adverts provide evidence of the significance of 'breeding' and respectability in the clerical labor market.³⁵ The Bank of Nova Scotia's employment records from the 1900s and 1910s show that applicants were asked what kind of associates and friends they had and how they behaved outside of business hours. Letters of recommendation for women typically spoke to the applicant's character (often a veiled reference to their sexual purity) and that of their families, sometimes with reference to convent training or membership in specific congregations or parishes.³⁶ These records also reveal that workers were expected to comport themselves with middle-class notions of

dignity and propriety outside the workplace. Rule 46 of the *Employee Handbook of Rules and Regulations* stated: "Unexceptionable conduct in private life is required of all officers of the Bank. Any irregularity, extravagance, or suspicious associations must be reported to the General Manager."³⁷ Once hired, another way office work was discursively marked as 'middle-class' occurred through the kinds of leisure activities employers provided for their staff. In the first decades of the twentieth century the Bank of Montreal, the Bank of Nova Scotia and Sun Life Assurance Company all sponsored winter ski-trips to the Laurentian Mountains, year-end gala balls, and sports outings for golf, tennis and badminton as ways of fulfilling expectations about middle-class leisure.

That office work was considered white-collar work in the early twentieth century, with all the class implications that came along with that, is one of the ways that clerical work was distinctive from other jobs open to women. Economic need meant that the vast majority of women in the workforce in the late nineteenth century hailed from poorer, minority or immigrant families, and most worked in factories, or as domestics or low-wage caregivers in hospitals, orphanages or asylums.³⁸ As dignified and genteel work, clerical work was desirable and 'appropriate' work for young women from 'respectable' (white) families who choose or needed to work. Although clerical workers, whether women or men, have long held an ambiguous class position, their work was clearly white-collar rather than blue-collar work. In her study of US civil service clerks from 1862 to 1890, Cindy Aron noted that "the great majority of these women's fathers worked either as professionals, white-collar workers, small businessmen, or federal clerks. Less than one-fifth of their fathers labored at manual jobs, and of these nearly all were skilled craftsmen such as carpenters, stonemasons, or engravers."³⁹ Toward the very end of the century, Aron found that the women clerks were slightly more likely to come from "the lower edge of the middle-class" with an increasing proportion having fathers as clerks rather than professionals or businessmen. The Montréal 10 percent sample of women workers from the 1901 nominal census offers a similar picture. Where the occupations of the fathers of women clerical workers could be determined, 37 percent were in professional or white-collar occupations. Another 35 percent were skilled tradesmen, most of them self-employed (most likely fitting into the 'old middle class', a group declining with the rise of salaried work, and sometimes facing precarious financial situations).⁴⁰ A further 22 percent were so-called unskilled laborers or in manufacturing, and the remaining 6 percent were employed in other jobs. However, about half the fathers working in unskilled jobs were employed as messengers—a job which brought them into a variety of white-collar workplaces (sometimes messengers were classified in the Census as clerical workers). It is entirely plausible that these fathers helped their daughters find employment with the companies they themselves worked for, or with which they had frequent professional contact. Then as now, word-of-mouth and social networks were a primary way that people found jobs.

A critical but often overlooked aspect of the feminization of clerical work is that women were drawn to such jobs, not merely relegated to them. As Kessler-Harris puts it, a range of processes came together to create "an evolving labor market in which women were chosen, but in which women also choose."⁴¹ And clerical work was desirable work. From the women's perspective, clerical work

offered greater job security and better opportunities for promotion than most other jobs open to them at the time. It was also much better paid and often allowed for greater direct personal contact among workers, and between workers and managers.⁴² Clerical work might not have been marked in the same ways as the 'female professions' such as social work which was being re-envisioned around notions of 'expertise' and membership in professional organizations.⁴³ Nevertheless, clerical work carried with it a higher social status than most other forms of work available to women during this period. Unlike domestic work or factory work, it was mental rather than manual work, had shorter working hours and took place in a safe, clean work environment. Not only were the working conditions attractive, but the popular images of clerical work were appealing and working in an office had a degree of panache. Indeed, being a typist or stenographer or more generally a 'business girl' became emblematic of an exciting new urban womanhood: the sophisticated independent working girl who enjoyed the relative freedom of being away from the watchful eyes of her parents, working in the heart of bustling downtown, often in the shiny skyscrapers, perhaps even in mixed sex workplaces.⁴⁴

Despite the fact that wages for clerical work were a fraction of those for men's professional jobs, and the work itself was increasingly routinized, companies nevertheless expended considerable energy to *position* clerical work as a middle-class occupation. Similarly the women themselves articulated clerical work as respectable, dignified work, especially compared with other sorts of waged work. Clerical workers could set themselves apart from, and as superior to most other women workers, especially those in factories and domestic work. In this way, as Daniel Walkowitz has similarly argued about social work, clerical work marks the emergence of a gender-specific notion of middle-class employment in which prestige and status is decoupled from remuneration.⁴⁵

However, it is important not to overdraw the 'collar divide'. Clerical work was also desirable work for aspiring young women from a range of family backgrounds. For example, Ileen DeVault's study of Pittsburgh shows that some manual workers' families invested in their daughters' education so they could train for clerical jobs and perhaps achieve social mobility by crossing the collar line.⁴⁶ This may well have been the case for the 1901 Montréal families of unskilled workers whose daughters were clerical workers. This raises other questions about the contribution of clerical workers' wages to their families' budgets. A favorite explanation for why it was appropriate that clerical workers received 'pin money' was that they lived at home and were supported by their parents (typically their fathers). Yet even among women identified as middle-class a major motivation for going into clerical work was economic need.⁴⁷ For example, while the 1901 Montréal Census shows that 60 percent of the women clerical workers did live with their fathers, there was one quarter who lived in households headed by widowed mothers. It is likely that their father's death prompted their entry into paid work to support surviving family members.⁴⁸ This suggests that clerical wages were more important to household budgets than employers realized or wanted to acknowledge, and this would increasingly be the case as more women from less well-to-do families entered clerical work after 1910 or so.

Clerical work in this first era was an attractive employment option for women who would have considered themselves middle-class, and for those aspiring to

this status. Office work was also seen as reputable work by the families of potential clerical workers. Too often accounts (and even scholarship) position the young woman clerical worker as passive participant, duped into accepted lower wages and boring work. As Sharon Hartman Strom makes clear “(o)ffice jobs were the best jobs available to women between 1900 and 1930. Women understood this and made rational choices for the future by investing in commercial education and taking office jobs.”⁴⁹

Part Two: Clerical Work at Mid-Century

The mid twentieth century saw further significant increases in the clerical workforce (see Figure 1). In Canada, clerical jobs increased from 7 percent of all jobs in 1941 to 17 percent in 1971. For the same period in the US, they rose from 9 percent to 17 percent: an increase of 183 percent. This was an enormously important period in the feminization of clerical work. Clerical jobs held by women rose a staggering 300 percent between 1940 and 1970. After reaching the tipping point (50 percent) by 1940/41, the rapid rate of feminization continued, especially in the US where by 1970, women held 75 percent of all clerical jobs and about one-third of women were thus employed (see Figure 1 and Table 1). World War Two expanded women's employment opportunities in a range of industries. The now iconic posters aimed at drawing women into the workforce portrayed a new patriotic womanhood. In the US, the best known is, of course, Rosie the Riveter in her blue overalls, red headscarf and showing her biceps, declaring “we can do it”. A less well known poster depicts a young, white woman saluting from behind her typewriter, “Victory waits on your fingers—Keep'em flying, Miss USA” and in small copy “Uncle Sam needs stenographers, get civil service information at your local post office”.⁵⁰ It was not only Uncle Sam who needed stenographers, so did the business world, and not only during war-time.

The booming war economy meant women in white-collar workplaces were given positions of responsibility formerly only available to men: not only as bank tellers, but also auditors, bookkeepers, and occasionally accountants or supervisors (of women), although women managers (even temporarily) remained rare, especially in Canada. In 1935 there were virtually no women tellers in US banks and women clerical workers still worked away from the public eye. By 1950, 45 percent of bank tellers were women and by 1960 the number had risen to 69 percent.⁵¹ At Canada's Royal Bank women accounted for only 21 percent of the staff in 1939, but by 1945 this number had risen to 71 percent.⁵² Although the percent fell after that point, it never dropped to pre-war levels.

The vibrant post-war economy also offered men a wider range of lucrative occupational options than they had before the war. Indeed, mass unemployment in the Depression led to the underemployment of middle-class identified, educated men who then took lower level clerical jobs. After the war, many men did not return to these jobs. In the last months of the war, Dorcas Campbell, a rare woman bank executive, surveyed a range of “bankers” (seemingly all men) at large American banks for an article in *The Boroughs Clearing House* (a major trade magazine) about “women's services during the war emergency”.⁵³ She “heard praiseworthy remarks far beyond (her) greatest expectations.” Campbell

also found that banks were facing two major problems. First they had “surveyed their prospects of recapturing the veteran after the armistice (and found) many have a 50 percent rejection by their ex-employees. Fifty percent are not returning to old routines, old salaries and old ambitions.” Second, the banks “began to ask if they could hold on to the women. They were not persuaded by rumors that the woman would be resigning in large flocks when their men came marching home.” Campbell noted that strategies in response to these two problems involved plans “to sell a preferred group of men on the advantages of returning to the bank” and also having “awakened to the realization that women were essential to a smooth running organization, (asking) how can we hold on to the women?” Analysis such as Campbell’s flies in the face of received wisdom that women demurely retreated from their patriotic war-time paid work to allow men to take up their ‘rightful’ place in the workplace. As with the First World War, women may have lost war-time manufacturing jobs (the Rosie the Riveters), but clerical work and other sorts of service sector jobs had been attracting women since well before the war and that continued unabated after the war.⁵⁴

The Second World War also gave a tremendous boost to office machine sales. Employers introduced more office technology and increasingly installed women as operators to substitute (yet again with lower pay) for male clerks. Bookkeeping machines were especially popular. Earlier the typewriter helped the feminization of stenography and typing, but bookkeeping had been jealously guarded as an elite, male-dominated job, and feminization occurred later. In 1930, 63 percent of bookkeepers were women, by 1950 78 percent were.⁵⁵ As C. Wright Mills chronicles in his seminal *White Collar*, the nineteenth century bookkeeper “was at the very center of the office world” and among other things, was the firm’s accountant. Writing in 1951, Mills laments, “The bookkeeper has been grievously affected by the last half century of office change: his old central position is usurped by the office manager, and even the most experienced bookkeeper with pen and ink cannot compete with a high-school girl trained in three or four months to use a machine.”⁵⁶ New rounds of automation thus, once again helped shift the meanings and practices of clerical work, this time with “high-school girls” and machines doing the work of bookkeepers. Illustrating Phillips and Taylor’s remarks about skill as gendered noted earlier, new forms of clerical work emerged—the more routine aspects of bookkeeping were split from more ‘skilled’ aspects, with distinct gendered and social status implications. Mechanization required “office machine operators”: Mills’ “high-school girls” with a few months training, and by 1950, 83 percent of these operators were women. At the same time, the *profession* of accountancy, which barely existed before the war, expanded rapidly in the post-war period; in 1950, 85 percent of accountants were men.⁵⁷

The unprecedented and sustained levels of economic expansion following the war (fuelled by the expanding consumer culture, the baby boom and, especially in the US, the arms race and the space race) turned the US into “the first ‘service economy’ in the history of the world”.⁵⁸ Most of the post-war net employment growth was in the service sector, and with that came a flood of opportunities for women’s paid work (see Table 1). Consider the case of Betty Darlington, who began her first job as an accounts clerk for a large insurance company in the Mid-West in 1939 when she was not quite eighteen. She stayed there until

1961 when she left to become a full-time housewife. Commenting on that period of her life, Betty recalled:

After the war when all those men came home, *everyone* wanted a car. People had money coming out of their ears, so *everyone* wanted a car. Maybe they hadn't had a car before, but everyone wanted a car and everyone wanted insurance on that car and (the insurance company) burst the seams out of the building, they grew so fast. It was amazing. (Betty, born in 1922, aged 64 when interviewed).

Betty's observations reflect national trends. Between 1948 and 1963, employment in the finance and insurance industries in the US grew by 80 percent, compared with 18.5 percent for total employment.⁵⁹ And in the 1950s whereas clerical jobs grew by 58 percent, those filled by women grew by 80 percent (see Figure 1).

The expanding demand for clerical workers occurred just as young, white, single, high-school educated women, like Betty Darlington, were increasingly in short supply. In fact their numbers declined markedly between 1940 and 1960 in both countries, because of the small birth cohorts associated with the Depression, an increase in the school leaving age and increased enrollment in school and college than in earlier decades. The labor shortages and the increased demand for clerical work also occurred alongside the re-emergence of the cult of domesticity, updated for the mid-twentieth century. The median age of first marriage for women in the US fell to about 20.2 years old (the lowest for the entire century) and increased fertility led to the baby boom. Many women in the oral history project made remarks like Linda Duncan's:

We knew that once we got married, if we didn't get pregnant right away, we would soon after, there wasn't the pill back then. Once all those babies came you couldn't work anymore, you had a full-time job right here at home. (Linda, born about 1928, aged 60 when interviewed).

The post-war period is replete with modernist images of women as domestic managers surrounded by new domestic appliances and other consumer goods in the ostensibly modern home. The idealized, so-called traditional family came into its own, with modernist forms organized around prosperity and mass consumption. Gaining newfound cultural purchase in the context of mass suburbanization, the homebound housewife and full-time mother was a powerful and easily recognizable symbol of women's 'proper' role and place in the home, as Betty Friedan famously noted—and challenged—in her 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*.⁶⁰ In 1956, 17 year old Toinia Simpson married her high school sweetheart and within a year had the first of three children. In high school she had "just filled in time waiting to get married" by taking classes in shorthand, typing and book-keeping, "you know, all that secretarial stuff," but never worked outside the home until 30 years later. Toinia described herself as having been the typical 1950s suburban housewife and mother. Reflecting on her upbringing and first marriage, she remembered:

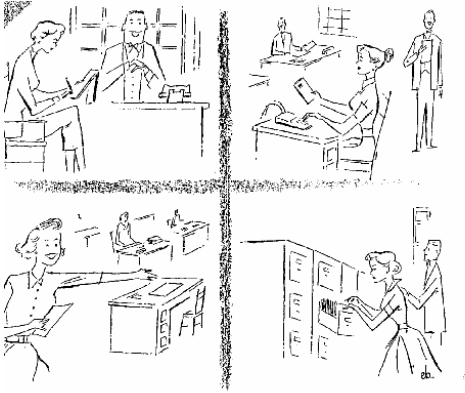
My first husband didn't want me going out to work. I never read *The Feminine Mystique* until I divorced him and went to college (in secretarial science) in the

late 70s, but that basically covered how I was brought up. I could have been a secretary, or a teacher, or a nurse, but there was nothing else really open to girls. (Toinia, born 1939, aged 48 when interviewed.)

In the mid-1970s, when her children were teenagers, she wanted to enter the workforce, but her husband resisted and this contributed to their subsequent divorce. Toinia had “done nothing but be a wife and mother” but she had schooling in “all that secretarial stuff”, so she decided to get an associate’s degree in secretarial science, since, as she put it “I had a hard time visualizing (myself) as anything other than a secretary.” Women in the 1950s and 1960s, even those seemingly embracing the cult of domesticity like Toinia, were not dupes, demurely maintaining the home sphere. Just as Strom commented about women in the first third of the century, they made rational choices based on the range of options available to them.⁶¹ They were aware of their limited opportunities and many voiced dissatisfaction with them either at the time or later. As Toinia recalled, with some bitterness, “I could have been a secretary, or a teacher, or a nurse, but there was nothing else really open to girls”.

As office work ballooned in the 1950s, and the preferred supply of clerical workers (like Betty and Toinia) remained in short supply, employers accustomed to having no problems hiring women fresh from high school faced severe shortages. In the late 1950s banks, insurance companies, and utility firms were among the most heavily impacted.⁶² As a result, many firms invested in advertising campaigns explicitly aimed at young, white high-school educated women. In the late 1950s, Sun Life Assurance of Canada was circulating brochures in high schools. One such brochure was aimed at young women in Montréal and is narrated by the line-drawn “Susie Smith” who had “left High School about a year ago” and “wanted to work in an office.” The slim booklet contains eleven pictures, but only two depict work. One of those two pictures contains four smaller images (see Figure 2).⁶³ Susie is in the bottom left hand corner introducing the accounting department where she works. Susie tells us, there are “many different jobs to be done. Perhaps you want to become a typist or stenographer, do accounting or mathematical work, or operate a business machine.” The other picture of work in the booklet shows a woman sitting at a desk looking at mail with an enormous sun behind her. The accompanying text, headed “pleasant surroundings”, describes the offices as “bright and cheerful and the people are friendly as can be” and then goes on to describe how “It’s easy to get to work by train or streetcar, and, in the evening, we are right on the spot for stores, theatres, etc.” This last comment indicates the growing importance of consumption in addition to occupational status in the formation of mid-century middle class identities. Similarly, the other nine images show Sun Life’s facilities (the “pleasant cafeteria” and the “comfortable lounge”) and non-work activities (the Staff Association’s glee club, tennis, bowling and drama groups). Promoting these particular sorts of benefits has resonance with the sorts of ‘middle-class’ inflected activities of decades past when Montréal employers organized ski-trips, gala balls and golf, tennis and badminton competitions. Indeed the Susie Smith pamphlet includes a double page spread (the largest in the booklet) showing young women sailing, swimming, golfing and relaxing at a lake, generally understood as leisure activities of the affluent.

Figure 2
Susie Smith of Sun Life, 1950s (estimated)



I know you are thinking about your first job now and, before I tell you why I think the Sun Life is a good boss, I want to tell you that, while I work in an accounting department, there are many different jobs to be done. Perhaps you want to become a typist or a stenographer, do accounting or mathematical work, or operate a business machine. There are jobs in all these branches and probably more that I have not yet heard all about.

Source: Sun Life Financial Corporate Archives

Rather than focusing on the work itself, the brochure paints a picture of the kind of lifestyle choices afforded by employment in a prestigious international company. Work by day, leisure and consumption—potentially with friends made at work—after hours. The brochure does not mention wages (although Susie says “starting salaries are attractive”), nor does it describe how one might advance within the company; rather, it ‘sells’ Sun Life as a modern, comfortable workplace in a cosmopolitan setting.⁶⁴ That Sun Life chose to emphasize the non-pecuniary aspects of the workplace cannot be separated from the important detail that by the 1950s, it was generally manufacturing jobs that paid higher wages to women, not clerical work as it had been in earlier decades.⁶⁵ Promotional booklets like this one echo earlier discourses that office work is a good job for white, educated young women, even though by the 1950s they would be receiving lower wages than they might elsewhere. Of course, one option for employers faced with continuing shortages was to increase wages and benefits to attract applicants from the dwindling supply of preferred workers. But a less costly alternative was to hire older and married women, which both solved the labor crisis and maintained lower wage levels. Although less wide-spread and vigorous than in the past, attitudes still remained that married women’s place was in the home (especially given the reappearance of the cult of domesticity). A 1939 National Industrial Conference Board study found that 84 percent of US insurance companies and 65 percent of banks had marriage bars (the highest among all the industries studied).⁶⁶ So in 1940, women clerical workers were still more likely to be single (two-thirds, compared with 44 percent of women in other occupations), and younger than other women workers (their median age was 27, compared with 34 for other women).⁶⁷ After 1940, age and marital restrictions fell away, but a preference for younger workers remained a marker of clerical work. For instance, a 1963 issue of *Banking* about hiring clerical personnel acknowledged the scarcity of qualified personnel and problems with turnover. Proposed

strategies for attracting potential clerical workers including “entertain(ing) high school students and teachers at teas and luncheons to sell them on a career in banking.”⁶⁸

Yet, despite the cultural power of the stay-at-home housewife, married women’s employment actually rose by 42 percent during the 1950s in the US. In 1940, 14 percent of married women were in paid work, by 1960, 31 percent were, as were nearly 40 percent of all mothers with school-age children (and there were similar patterns in Canada). Actual lived lives of women simply did not correspond to the stylized versions of women from this period. As Susan Hartmann has argued, based on the proceedings of a 1957 National Manpower Council conference on the topic of waged work in the lives of married women, the supposed sanctity of women’s role in the home starkly contrasted with the needs of a mass-consumer society and the kind of labor force—and public policies—it required.⁶⁹ The image of the supposedly typical 1950s housewife was built on ideals about white, heterosexual, middle-class femininity. For many immigrant and less affluent women, and almost certainly most women of color, being a full-time wife and mother was never a realistic option. Many families simply could not forgo the wages. Even in 1900, 26 percent of married women of color, compared with 3 percent of white women, were in paid work; by 1940 the figures were 27 percent for women of color and 13 percent for white women.⁷⁰

Attitudes about the propriety of (white) married women in paid work (especially if they were mothers and/or in full-time jobs) were still mixed and subject to broad social debate at mid-century, but outright discrimination was less widespread than in the past. That married women were increasingly common in the office is evident in the increasing reference to them in bank employee magazines and trade magazines. One 1958 *Canadian Banker* piece, titled “A Banking Career and Marriage” remarked that “it is now both customary and commonplace for married women (except those with small children) to work in banks and elsewhere. . . . it has now become the custom for almost all married women without children, and more and more mothers of older children to go out to work.”⁷¹ The growth of married women’s employment in the 1950s and even into the 1960s was concentrated among older married women (aged 45–64).⁷² Given the history of limited occupational options, a significant proportion of these older married women would have had previous office work experience to draw on.

The office was not only changing because of the increased presence of married women, in the 1940s and 1950s some women of color were successfully applying for and being hired as clerical workers. The numbers were still small, and US Census data suggests that Asian-American women and Latinas were more likely to be hired than African-American women. This may be due to the fact that in many respects Latinas and Asian-Americans in the US occupy a ‘racial middle-ground’ between categories of white and African-American, and so faced less virulent forms of racism than African-Americans in their job searches.⁷³ Similarly in Canada, Afro-Caribbean women were still more likely to be in domestic work. Indeed an immigration program was introduced in the mid 1950s aimed explicitly at bringing Caribbean women to work as domestics. Even recently arrived white immigrants from southern Europe rarely got clerical jobs in Canada.⁷⁴ In the US, a 1940 Women’s Bureau survey of 330 firms in five cities re-

vealed that 50 percent had an explicit policy against hiring African-American women into clerical jobs. It is not surprising then that the 1940 US Census showed a mere 1.5 percent of African-American women working in clerical occupations as compared to 27 percent of white women. By 1960 there was still a significant gap: 8 percent of African American women were in clerical work, compared with about 34 percent of white women. In contrast, by 1960 almost one-third of Chinese- and Japanese-American women, 24 percent of Filipina-Americans and about 21 percent of Latinas were clerical workers. It was not until the 1960s that significant numbers of African-American women were hired into clerical work (which we return to in the next section).⁷⁵ Betty Darlington (introduced earlier), who worked for a large insurance company in the 1940s and 1950s, remarked "For all those years when I was there we didn't have any black people and a rare woman got promoted." It was not until she returned to work in the 1970s that she worked with African-American women at another insurance company that she thought, "was one of the first private companies to take on black girls."⁷⁶

The arrival of older, married women in offices signaled another shift in, or more accurately an addition to, the meaning of clerical work for women. Clerical work had long been construed as an interlude between high school and marriage, or increasingly motherhood. By mid-century it had longer-term potential, a line of work to return to once children were older. As Veronica Strong-Boag argues "this return, or the second stage of marital paid employment, was a major development of the 1950s".⁷⁷ Clerical tasks could be organized into part-time jobs ('mothers' hours') which not only meant cost-savings for employers, but also helped allay lingering concerns that full-time paid work for women was incompatible with marriage, and especially motherhood. Many of the women involved in the oral history narratives who came of age in the 1940s and 1950s fitted this profile. For instance, Lydia Baxter who was born in 1923, married at 20 and had the first of her four children at 21, went back to work part-time as a receptionist in a doctor's office in the early 1960s.

As more married and older women returned to clerical work, there was a realignment of attitudes about their suitability for clerical work. In part this was because of changes among younger women (not least of which was the dwindling supply of them), but also because the actual experience of employing older women was likely different from what employers expected. Studies of employers in the 1950s and 1960s found managers extolling the virtues of older versus younger women clerical workers. Some employers felt that older women had superior skills in shorthand, spelling and grammar, even typing. Older women were seen as more dependable and having a stronger work ethic, apparently because of their stricter upbringing relative to the more permissive upbringing of 20 year olds. There was less turnover and absenteeism among older women, and some employers argued that their role as housewives and mothers made them less self-absorbed than younger, single women.⁷⁸

This rescripting of attributes attached to different groups of women clerical workers cannot be untangled from the fact that the social and cultural practices of young, educated women had changed. Better access to education fuelled their personal ambitions: they had recognizable advantages in a tight labor market

and acted accordingly (just as Wilma Jenkins did in turn of the twentieth century Montréal). Moreover, younger women's relatively higher skill level helped expose the shortcomings of clerical work, especially in terms of the pay, short career ladders, and other workplace discrimination. By the end of this middle period, the sort of women who in the past would likely have been drawn to clerical work, were increasingly less satisfied with what was seen by many as low paid, dead-end jobs.

Part Three: Clerical Work after 1970

In 1977, Louise Kapp Howe coined the phrase "pink-collar ghetto" to describe the crowding of women into lower-paid, lower-status service sector jobs like clerical, sales and service occupations. Providing an example of Aronowitz's argument that identity-based social movements have been hindered by their failure to sufficiently problematize class formation, Howe observed that despite the women's movement and legislative change, the majority of American women remained as occupationally segregated as their turn-of-the-century counterparts.⁷⁹ In 1973, a group of women office workers in Boston formed 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women to address economic injustice and work-life balance issues faced by women in female-dominated occupations. In 1977, eight women bank workers in Willmar, Minnesota formed the state's first bank union and went on strike over workplace discrimination. A key aspect of Second Wave feminism was highlighting workplace inequalities. At the same time, various levels of government in the US and Canada continued to enact legislation to ease constraints hampering women's entry into and success in paid work.

During the 1960s and especially the 1970s women entered the labor market in massive numbers. In 1960, 38 percent of women were in paid work, in 1970, 43 percent were, by 1980, 51 percent were, and now this number is about 60 percent. Over this same time period, men's participation rates fell and now almost half of all paid workers are women (see Table 1). The story for clerical work is more complex. In the 1970s clerical work continued to attract a massive proportion of women workers (36 percent in Canada in 1981, 32 percent in the US in 1980) and feminization continued apace (in 1980, 80 percent of the US's clerical workers were women, in Canada it was slightly lower) (see Figure 1 and Table 1). After 1980, the century-long trends began to change, clerical work grew much more slowly (indications are that it has actually declined since 2000), it began to account for a smaller proportion of women workers, and the feminization of clerical workers leveled off. More generally, since the 1980s gendered occupational segmentation in both countries has become much less stark, and the pink collar ghetto less prominent (see Figure 1 and Table 1). And, of course, there has been a sizable increase in women (notably white women) in management and professional occupations.⁸⁰ In the US, between 1970 and 2000, the proportion of women in professional or managerial jobs rose from 12 to 28 percent.⁸¹

Despite these changes, clerical work remains an important source of employment for women; currently employing 22 percent of the US female labor force and 25 percent in Canada. Clerical work has also further opened up to a more diverse group of women, creating new job opportunities for a broader array of

women than in the past. By the 1950s many groups of women of color in the US were able to get clerical jobs, but African-American women had to wait longer. Increased educational attainment, tight labor markets, collective action (like the Civil Rights Movement) and legislative gains in the 1960s and 1970s meant that African-American women could more easily obtain clerical and other white-collar work than their earlier counterparts, although they still faced discrimination in the workplace. However, by the 1980s the racial-ethnic gap among women clerical workers had virtually disappeared. In 1960, only 8 percent of African-American women were in clerical work, by 1970, 21 percent were (compared with about one-third of white women for both years).⁸² Between 1960 and 2000, the proportion of African-American women employed as clerical workers in the US increased by an incredible 1,193 percent, compared with 143 percent for white women. For African-American women clerical workers, a huge amount of that change took place in the 1960s and 1970s, and while growth was slower in the 1970s and 1980s, it was still well above the growth in African-American women's overall employment (in the 1990s both rates were about the same). As Michael Katz and his colleagues note, "the movement of black women into white-collar work was stunning" especially in light of the racist employment practices in the earlier part of the century.⁸³

The cultural changes associated with clerical work in the last third of the century are tied to the extensive economic restructuring of the period. This era is marked by the end of post-war prosperity in the early 1970s, a shift toward flexible production, the globalizing economy and the rise of non-standard employment: sub-contracting and temporary jobs such as those described in Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Nickel and Dimed*.⁸⁴ Between 1940 and 1970, real wages for men grew by about 2 to 3 percent per year, so for some two-parent families one income was sufficient to cover the mortgage and consumerism associated with middle-class living. But in the early 1970s real wages stagnated and in the 1980s they actually dropped. The rapid decline of manufacturing industries that traditionally provided high-waged jobs for men (even those with relatively little education) meant men's middle-income jobs quickly disappeared.⁸⁵ It became difficult to obtain and maintain what had come to be considered a middle-class lifestyle on one (or even two) incomes. This coupled with decreasing housing affordability helped forge the way for the rapid increase in dual-earner households.⁸⁶ Since mid-century, married women's paid employment rates rose steadily. In the 1950s about 25–30 percent of married women were in the US workforce, by 1970 40 percent were, and today about 61 percent of married women are in paid work (Canada's rates were 38 percent in 1970 and 64 percent in 2001). In 1967, the earning of wives' in Canada accounted for 25 percent of dual earner families' income, by 2000 their contribution reached 35 percent. In the U.S. two-earner married couples in 1960 were about 25 percent better off than 'traditional' couples; now two-earner couples are more than twice as well off.⁸⁷

These broad economic and cultural changes are linked with further shifts in the meaning of clerical work. Several women in the oral history narratives talked of returning to clerical work to bolster their families' standard of living (including in some instances saving for their children's college education) or in response

to the increased insecurity of their husband's job. For instance Rhonda Gutowski recalled that:

I went back to work in the mid-70s when my youngest daughter was in fifth grade. I went because of financial need, and because my husband had always worked for (a large manufacturing company), but there's been times when he's been laid off for a while and had to find another job. (Rhonda, born 1938, age 48 when interviewed).

Rhonda had planned to go back to work, it just happened sooner than she expected because of the uncertainty of her husband's job. Increasing numbers of women began working full-time, including those with young children. Not only did it become unusual for young, white, educated women to retreat from the labor market on marriage or child-birth, but increasingly the expectation was not to leave paid work for any substantial amount of time. For example, Clare Lieberts, married with a three-year old child, said:

I went back to work (soon after her son was born) because I've always worked. I think I'll work my whole life. Anyway, it's an economic necessity for us that I work. That's how it is now; the two-income family has replaced the one-income family of my parent's generation. Anyhow with my education and upbringing I want to work. Housework has never interested me and being a stay-at-home mom would never satisfy me. (Clare, born 1958, aged 28 when interviewed).

Rising divorce rates and more single parent families also increased the labor force participation of women through the 1970s and 1980s. Toinia Simpson (introduced earlier) began what she called "her first real job" in 1976 following her divorce and in response to wanting to provide for her three teenage children. But she also wanted to nourish her sense of self-fulfillment. Rhonda, Clare and Toinia exemplify some of the new modalities of clerical work that emerged at the end of the twentieth century, as well as the new meanings attached to the role of waged-labor in women's lives. There are multiple, even competing meanings associated with clerical work. It is still a job some women do until they have children and something they return to when their children are older. Women in the oral history narratives described clerical work as being readily available to them, not only from a geographic perspective, as in close to home, but also because they felt employers in this field would be less concerned about a gap in their paid-work history. Clerical work offers opportunities for women from a range of backgrounds to contribute to their family's income. However, since the mid-1960s young, white, educated women (long the preferred clerical labor supply) have been less likely to be content with low-paid pink collar work, and more likely to pursue professional and managerial careers. In both the US and Canada, the increased emphasis on equal opportunities and educational attainment (which, it must not be forgotten, particularly benefited white, middle-class women) has had important effects on clerical work (and women's paid work more broadly). More than ever before, women with higher levels of education are more likely to be in paid employment and to remain so not only after marriage but also when they have children.

The oral histories included interviews with young, single, white, high-school

educated women who, like generations of women before them, went into clerical work straight after graduation. Certainly some stated they were content with their choice. Others felt clerical work was only the first stage of their work life. Megan Triplett, for example, said:

Soon I'm starting a new job, it's in the same field, but it is a step up the ladder for me . . . I'm hoping that job will be an opportunity that will open some doors into other areas, as well as maybe getting me back into higher education. (Megan, born 1960, aged 26 when interviewed).

As a young, unmarried, educated white woman from a middle-class background, Megan embodied the preferred clerical worker of the first part of the twentieth century. But for Megan, clerical work is “a step up the ladder,” suggesting yet another set of meanings for clerical work for women, but ones with echoes of what clerical work meant for *men* in the late nineteenth century. Megan also illustrates how young women's lives have changed as a result of women's struggles for fertility control, and educational and economic equality. And of course, she illustrates how uneven those gains have been. Her race and class afforded her all sorts of advantages still not enjoyed to the same extent by many less privileged women.

At the same time, the familiar discourse about ‘appropriate’ work for ‘respectable’ women is still being deployed at the beginning of the twenty-first century; although these depictions share the representational field with other kinds of narratives. A number of the women in their oral histories described going into (or returning to) clerical work after several years of being full-time stay-at-home mothers because they felt it was an appropriate job choice for women of their social standing. Donna Simek's remarks can be interpreted as representing clerical work as reinforcing appropriate racialized femininities and class identities.

We have some friends, he works for the state and has a real hoity-toity position, but his wife works for (a large beverage company). She certainly make more dollars an hour than I do. But he's out to meet and greet and go to luncheons and the dinners and all that hoopla, and she works in a beer-canning factory if you will. I don't think he is ashamed of it, but he never advertises it. (Donna, born 1951, aged 35 when interviewed).

Donna said that she could never do the same job as this friend, even though her friend earned much more money. She did not consider working in “a beer-canning factory” as suitable work for a white woman with a husband in a “hoity-toity” job. So for Donna, much like her counterparts from earlier decades, clerical work offered a socially sanctioned form of paid employment that coincides with specific subjectivities.

Other women also reiterated seemingly durable narratives about clerical work as ‘women's work’ that draw on femininity as a cultural resource. Pat Flynn articulated this most strongly when she justified her work as a receptionist in a large suburban office this way:

I always like it better when the receptionist is a woman. I don't think visitors feel comfortable when it's a man. It's like, why is he doing that job? Doesn't he want something better? Maybe he's gay or something (laughs). And anyway I think that

people are more comfortable being greeted by a woman, maybe asking her to bring them coffee and being able to chat with them until their appointment (Pat, born 1950, aged 36 when interviewed).

Pat's comments fit with research about men 'doing gender' in feminized jobs such as temporary clerical work and secretarial work.⁸⁸ These scholars argue that such men disrupt the gender order because their gender performances do not match with gendered expectations generated by the hegemonic masculine ideal of the male breadwinner. Some men in these studies faced challenges to their masculinity, including suggestions they should "get a real job" or assumptions that they were gay. A woman in such a job is unproblematic even though women in these jobs frequently *are* sole breadwinners, just like a number of the women who contributed to our oral history narratives.

As Figure 1 and Table 1 suggest, relatively more men are taking on clerical work, and it is becoming less numerically feminized. If some, like Pat, question the masculinity of men in clerical positions, others have seen the increase in male clerical workers as changing the feminine identification of clerical work. For instance, personnel managers recently interviewed in two Toronto-based Canadian banks⁸⁹ remarked:

There's a lot of male call center officers, it's quite common now. I think that a lot of young people are attracted to these jobs, male and female, with different backgrounds, and I think the bank is changing, slowly. (Personnel Manager 1)

Although our bank still is feminized, there's more men in clerical work than before. But I think men often do those (clerical) jobs on the way to doing something else. It's clearer for men this is not the end of the line. Even our chairman, believe it or not, was a teller at one time, but I'm sure he didn't do it very long (laughs). (Personnel Manager 2)

These personnel managers both note that at their banks more men are in clerical work than in the past. The first manager suggests that not only are relatively more men going into clerical work, but that clerical work now attracts people from "different backgrounds" (which was his careful way of saying racial and ethnic diversity), as well as young people. So in that way the motif of clerical workers as youthful still persists. The second manager suggests clerical work is a temporary occupation for men, a step toward "doing something else", yet another echo of what clerical work meant for men a century earlier.

Although clerical work continues to be an important source of employment for women and increasingly for men, the character of such work has changed considerably. Just like the two earlier periods, late twentieth-century technological developments have profoundly transformed clerical work. The invention and diffusion of computer-related innovations facilitated the development of small, inexpensive data-processing systems and put automation within the budgets of even the smallest firms. Linda Duncan described how her first job (in the 1950s) involved using a manual typewriter, but when she was interviewed she had "just recently learned how to operate a word processor" and when asked how she felt about that, said "Oh it's just great. I won't ever go back to straight typing." During the 1980s technological changes such as those experienced by

Linda led to a flurry of research on the negative impacts of 'visual display terminals' (VDT's) and about how personal computers were re-shaping office practices and clerical work.⁹⁰

Technological changes had other impacts too. In the early part of this most recent era, clerical work, especially in finance and insurance industries, remained secure work even in the face of layoffs in other sectors like manufacturing. In fact growth in clerical work remained robust even during the recessions of the 1970s and 1980s.⁹¹ But by the late 1980s things were changing (see Figure 1). By the 1990s, the growth in clerical work stagnated in both the US and Canada, and industries like banking and insurance, traditionally heavily dependent on clerical work, started shedding clerical workers. For example, when the US banking labor force began shrinking in 1989, much of the decline was in clerical work.⁹² And in Canadian banking almost 10,000 Canadian bank clerical jobs were lost between 1986 and 1996, and women bore the brunt of that, in fact the male clerical workforce actually increased absolutely during those years.⁹³ Some scholars raised concerns that the risk of clerical job loss was greater for women of color, especially as they tended to occupy the lower occupational rungs.⁹⁴ Technological change contributed to the loss of jobs. One Canadian bank's personnel manager described how "for a number of years we were consolidating centers that were highly administrative and clerical workers had a high turnover or redundancy risk, because of technology or automation." For instance, automated teller machines (ATMs) and on-line banking meant job losses since fewer bank tellers are needed when more customers use electronic banking options. Thus, unlike in earlier periods, the automation of clerical work negatively and disproportionately impacted the numerical representation of women. But it simultaneously benefited men who often dominate newly created technical and professional jobs such as computer programming.⁹⁵ In the US, the proportion of bank workers in clerical jobs declined between 1975 and 1995, but the share in professional jobs increased from 9 percent to 18 percent. As a group, bank employees can now be said to be more skilled, but in large part that is because the automation of lower-skilled clerical positions means there are fewer jobs for less-educated workers than previously.⁹⁶ However, the big picture is not merely one of automation, deskilling, or even job loss. New kinds of jobs across a range of skill levels are being introduced, for instance in data-processing and call-center work, as well as accounting and computer programming. Many of these new jobs place considerable value in feminine-coded 'people skills'.

These newer rounds of technological change impact where clerical jobs are located. The skyscrapers and smaller offices that sprouted up in downtowns in the early part of the twentieth century were the place of work for most clerical workers. Starting in the mid 1960s, developments in communications technologies enabled a spatial separation of different functions. Routine 'back-office' functions such as data-entry, payroll, billing, and claims processing could be in different locations from 'front-office' work requiring face-to-face contact with clients and other businesses. A company's corporate functions might remain in high-rent areas downtown, while routine aspects of office employment were relocated to sites with lower land and labor costs. Initially these back-offices were located in suburbs, where employers hoped to draw on labor supplies of white, married, relatively well-educated suburban women, an update of the 'ideal' cler-

ical worker that graced the office in early decades of the twentieth century.⁹⁷ This new geography of employment cannot be disconnected from the employment and residential geographies of people of color, or the legacies of public policies that actively encouraged suburban growth, white-flight from the cities, and disinvestment in cities. As African-Americans and Latinas, especially those with low-incomes, are more likely to live in central cities, the increasing relocation of routinized functions (or even all functions) out of central cities has meant decreased local clerical job opportunities and lengthy reverse commutes for women (and men) of color living in cities.

Certain sorts of clerical jobs are located even further from the corporate front office. Call centers, for instance, are often located in strip-malls on the urban fringe or in more distant small towns and rural areas.⁹⁸ More recently, the globalization of services (in addition to manufacturing) means it is increasingly common for routinized jobs to be out-sourced overseas to countries with an even lower-wage, but well-educated, Anglophone workforce in places like India, Jamaica and Singapore. That this globalization of clerical work most often involves women of color demonstrates how transformations of work are gendered and racialized, and the work is again reinscribed as feminized and racialized with limited opportunities for advancement and few transferable skills.⁹⁹ While clerical work continues to hold powerful gendered, racialized and class associations, new geographies of clerical work emerge along with new conceptions of the role waged-labor should play in women's lives. Yet at the same time certain narratives re-emerge in modified form, and some meanings associated with clerical work and women's paid work generally are the direct descendants of arguments made earlier in the century.

Conclusion

Clerical work provides a lens through which to understand women's participation in the North American wage-labor market since the late nineteenth century. The feminization of clerical work was not and is not a smooth, linear process. Over time clerical work has changed, as have the meanings attached to it. Up to about the 1940s clerical work illustrated a story of women's expansion into the wage-labor market, the feminization of certain kinds of labor, and the coding of office work as a good, 'respectable' job for (certain groups of) women: notably young, white, educated women prior to marriage. In the middle third of the twentieth century clerical work became an increasingly important source of income for married women. By this time clerical work was emblematic of women's waged work, and provided a primary source of income for women who were single as well as married, including a small but growing number of women of color. Women's participation in the clerical workforce after the Second World War illustrates the importance of women's paid work to both the Canadian and US economies at mid-century, despite the potency of the iconographic stay-at-home housewife in the cultural imaginary. The advance of the women's movement in the 1960s as well as wage compression beginning in the 1970s produced new meanings about clerical work and women's paid work. Whereas in the early decades of the twentieth century clerical work provided a means by which women could claim relative freedom and autonomy, by the

1970s women in clerical work—as in other sectors of the wage-labor market—became increasingly vocal in challenging wage discrimination and barriers to advancement in white-collar workplaces. Yet even in the new century clerical work continues to serve as a necessary means of survival. Despite its shortcomings, clerical work still constitutes an important employment sector for North American women throughout the life course, particularly for those returning to wage-work later in life.

Our paper has addressed themes of gender and work while remaining sensitive to the dynamic and mutable nature of each of these concepts. We have sought to avoid treating woman as a monolithic group and have emphasized that at different moments it has been specific categories of women who went into clerical work. Likewise, we have highlighted some of the ways in which ‘gender’ itself is not a static category, but rather an idea that is made and re-made over time, including through workplace practices. Indeed, by examining clerical work over a broad sweep of time we have contributed to existing scholarship by showing the durability of positioning clerical work as ‘women’s work’ even as understandings about the nature of womanhood, the ‘gender’ of wage-work, and how wage-work relates to the rest of life have all changed.

Finally, by way of concluding we would like to signal a few possible avenues for future research in this area. That gender is a key component of the history of clerical work is well understood, and within this body of literature some attention has also been paid to other axes of difference, particularly in terms of who was excluded. However future research taking a long-term view of the history of clerical work might take up themes raised in recent transdisciplinary research. For instance, whiteness studies could inform an analysis of how clerical work became racialized as white and the role of white privilege in clerical labor markets for both white women and women of color. Similarly the re-emergence of class analysis offers an opportunity to look back at the ways clerical work has been embedded in both the cultural as well as the economic processes of class formation. The ambivalent class position of clerical workers could be explored through middle class studies and the new working class studies which pay particular attention to the subjectivities, habitus and the production of meanings and understanding.¹⁰⁰ A further theme could be focussing on the agency of clerical workers, which would also offer a corrective to portrayals of them as passive participants. While studies of union organizing among clerical workers already exist, exploring resistance over a broader sweep of time could offer significant insights into the politics of the workplace as well as the shifting politics of identity. Certainly, as technological innovation, globalization and changing cultural circumstances create new contexts for understanding labor history, we submit that clerical work will continue as a rich area of investigation.

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ENDNOTES

We are grateful to several archivists who provided wonderful research assistance and advice, as well as to the reviewers for their helpful comments on improving our paper.

1. Margery Davies, *Women's Place is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870–1930* (Philadelphia, 1982). Graham Lowe, *Women in the Administrative Revolution: the Feminization of Clerical Work* (Toronto, 1987). Ileen A. DeVault, *Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh* (Cornell University Press, 1990). Lisa M. Fine, *Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870–1930* (Philadelphia, 1990). Sharon Hartmann Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900–1930* (Urbana, 1992). Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870–1930* (Baltimore, 1994). Jerome P. Bjelopera, *City of Clerks: Office and Sales Workers in Philadelphia, 1870–1920* (Champaign, IL, 2005). Case studies for more recent periods include: Louis Kapp Howe, *Pink Collar Workers: Inside the World of Women's Work* (New York, 1977); Rosabeth M. Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, (New York, 1977); Evelyn Glenn and Roslyn Feldberg, "Degraded and deskilled: The proletarianization of clerical work" in *Women and Work: Problems and Perspectives*, eds. R. Kahn-Hut, A. K. Daniels, and R. Colvard (New York and Oxford, 1982); Rosemary Crompton and Gareth Jones, *White Collar Workers: Deskillling and Gender in Clerical Work*. (London, 1984); Linda Valli, *Becoming Clerical Workers* (Boston and London, 1986); Heidi Hartmann H., R. Kraut and L. Tilly, eds., *Computer Chips and Paper Clips. Technology and Women's Employment, Volume I* (Washington, D.C, 1986); Heidi Hartmann, ed., *Computer Chips and Paper Clips. Technology and Women's Employment Volume II: Case Studies and Policy Perspectives* (Washington, D.C, 1987); Rosemary Pringle, *Secretaries Talk: Sexuality, Power and Work* (London, 1989); Carla Freeman, *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work, and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean* (Durham, 2000).

2. The 10 percent sample data includes information on the name, age, place of birth, language/s spoken, religion, position in household, marital status, employment, and income of women aged 15 to 29. These sample data were used to explore how clerical workers compare to the broader population of similarly aged women, whether in waged work or not.

3. Canada has a national system of banks that is currently dominated by the so-called 'Big Five' banks (Bank of Montreal, Bank of Nova Scotia/ Scotiabank, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce/ CIBC, Royal Bank, and Toronto-Dominion Bank), most are the result of several rounds of mergers dating back to the nineteenth century. We gathered material from the archives of each of the five major domestic banks, as well as the Sun Life Assurance Company, and the Banque d'Hochelaga, a major Quebec bank that initially targeted francophones.

4. The original intent of the interviews with the clerical workers was to explore their decisions to enter paid work and strategies for combining family and employment obligations. The women were drawn from a random sample of women clerical workers listed in the *Polk's City Directory*. The interviews were open-ended and relatively unstructured, so an enormous amount of information was gathered. In the secondary analysis for this paper, special attention was focused on the 18 women in their 40s, 50s and 60s, especially those whose interviews with more of an oral history component (for an example of the original analysis, see Kim England, "Suburban Pink Collar Ghettos: The Spatial Entrapment of Women?," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83:2 (1993): 225–242). The interviews with personnel managers in Toronto were aimed at address-

ing questions about the linkages between the banks' occupational profiles and decisions about the location of the banks' back offices and branches.

5. Kwollek, 1994; Fine, 1990.

6. David Lockwood, *The Black Coated Worker* (London, 1958). Also see Davies, 1982; Lowe, 1987; Kwolek-Folland, 1994; and Oliver Zunz, *Making America Corporate: 1870–1920*. (Chicago, 1990). Michael B. Katz, Mark J. Stern and Jamie Fader, "Women and the Paradox of Economic Inequality in the Twentieth-Century," *Journal of Social History*, 39:1 (2005).

7. Lockwood, 1958; Braverman, 1974; Glenn and Feldberg, 1982; Crompton and Jones, 1984; Lowe, 1987; DeVault, 1990; Zunz, 1990. Also C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York, 1951). Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1974). John H. Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination: A History of Social Work and Social Policy in the United States* (Ithaca, 1985).

8. Braverman (1974), 294–5.

9. Ehrenreich (1985), quote from p. 29.

10. Stanley Aronowitz, *How Class Works: Power and Social Movements* (New Haven, 2003).

11. Jessie MacDonald Murray, "Woman in the Banking World: What it means to her and to it," *Journal of the Canadian Banker's Association*, 23:4 (1916): 315–320.

12. See the *Journal of Women's History* Spring 2002, for a retrospective on Barbara Welter's classic 1966 essay "The cult of true womanhood, 1820–1860."

13. Flora Miller is one of the women who contributed to the oral histories of clerical workers. All names are pseudonyms. Concerns like those raised by Flora's grandfather were surely informed by moral panics about the social and moral well-being of young women adrift in the big city, untethered from the social restraint and surveillance of family and small town community.

14. See Braverman, 1974; Davis, 1982; Lowe, 1987; Zunz, 1990; Fine, 1990; Strom, 1992. Also see Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, 2003). William H. Leffingwell, who wrote *Scientific Office Management* (New York, 1917) was a strong proponent of standardizing and routinizing office work practices by adapting the scientific management techniques of F.W. Taylor's time and motion studies and Henry Ford's flow-line principles to office work. Many tasks still needed to be completed by hand, and only the largest companies had the labor or the capital to afford these scientific office management systems. But there were savings to be made, especially as women could be installed as machine operators with relatively low pay.

15. Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor, "Sex and Skill" in *Feminism and History*, ed. J. W. Scott (New York, 1996), quote pp. 324–5.

16. Davies, 1982 remains the classic here.

17. Advertisement appeared in the *Montreal Daily Gazette*, 6th January 1910.

18. Elyse Rotella, *From Home to Office: U.S. Women at Work, 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor, 1981). Lowe, 1987.
19. Fine, 1990; Cindy S. Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service: Middle-Class Workers in Victorian America* (Oxford, 1987). Michèle Dagenais, "Itinéraires professionnels masculins et féminins en milieu bancaire: le cas de la Banque d'Hochelaga, 1900–1929," *Labor/Le Travail*, 24 (1989): 45–68. Kate Boyer, "Place and the politics of virtue: clerical work, corporate anxiety, and changing meanings of public womanhood in early twentieth-century Montréal," *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 5:3 (1998): 261–276.
20. William Noland and E. Wight Bakke, "Routine clerical workers qualifications" in *Workers Wanted: A Study of Employers Hiring Policies, Preferences and Practices*. (New York, 1949). Also see Valerie K. Oppenheimer, *The Female Labor Force in the United States: Demographic and Economic Factors Governing its Growth and Changing Composition* (Berkeley, 1970).
21. This is a lower figure than for the US (where more than 90 percent were native-born). The national origin of the Bank of Montreal's foreign-born workers demonstrates Canada's status as a Dominion of the United Kingdom: 71 percent of them were from England or Scotland, fully one-fifth of all the women hired.
22. On marriage bars in the US, see Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap: An Economic History of American Women* (New York, 1990). Also Strom, 1992; Kessler-Harris, 2003.
23. Quote appears in Duncan McDowall, *Quick to the Frontier* (Toronto, 1993). On married women's paid work, see Goldin, 1990. On marriage, kinship and domesticity in the corporate office, see Kwolek-Folland, 1994.
24. Strom, 1992.
25. Strom, 1992, p. 192. And women clerical workers did voice their grievances. They engaged in collective action creating workers organizations and attempted to form unions. See Roslyn L. Feldberg, "'Union fever': Organizing Among Clerical Workers, 1900–1930," *Radical America* 14 (1980): 53–67, and Sharon Hartman Strom, "'We're no Kitty Foyles': Organizing Office Workers for the Congress of Industrial Organizations," in *Women, Work, and Protest*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Boston, 1985).
26. Davies, 1982; Aron, 1987; Lowe, 1987; DeVault, 1990; Fine, 1990; Kessler-Harris, 2003.
27. This does not mean that women of color (and poor women) were not active in pushing for improvements in their employment opportunities and working conditions during this period. See Mimi Abramovitz "Learning from the History of Poor and Working-Class Women's Activism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 577 (2001): 118–130.
28. Rotella, 1981; Kwolak-Folland, 1994, Kessler-Harris, 2003; Bjelopera, 2005. Also see Mary C. King, "Black Women's Breakthrough into Clerical Work: An Occupational Tipping Model," *Journal of Economic Issues* 27:4 (1993): 1097–1125.

29. Kwolek-Folland, 1994. In his study of office and retail clerks in Philadelphia, Bjelopera (2005) found that among African-Americans clerical work did not become heavily feminized. In 1920 four-fifths of them were men.
30. Boyer, 1998.
31. Katrina Srigley, "‘In case you hadn’t noticed!’: Race, Ethnicity, and Women’s Wage-Earning in a Depression-Era City," *Labour/Le Travail* 55 (2005): 69–105; Carmela Patrias, "Race, Employment Discrimination, and State Complicity in Wartime Canada, 1939–1945," *Labour/Le Travail* 59 (2007): 9–42.
32. On occupations see Fine 1990; Kessler-Harris 2003; Davies 1982. Also see Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity* (Chapel Hill, 1999). For Canada, see D. Suzanne Cross, "The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in Nineteenth-Century Montreal," in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, eds. G. A. Stelter and A. Artibise (Ottawa, 1977), pp. 255–281.
33. Violet Blackman is a significant figure in Canadian history. She was a founding member of the Universal Negro (African) Improvement Association and also helped to build the Negro Credit Union. The quote comes from her interview with Dionne Brand, *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario, 1920s–1950s* (Toronto 1991), p. 37–38.
34. Boyer, 1998; Pringle, 1989.
35. Aron, 1987; Fine, 1990; Kwolek-Folland, 1994.
36. Personnel Files Nos. 16, 45 & 91, Bank of Nova Scotia Archives; Stenographer’s Book, Bank of Montreal Archives. Also see Boyer, 1998.
37. Bank of Nova Scotia Employee Rules and Regulations book, item 353.
38. Kessler-Harris, 2003.
39. Aron, 1987, p. 42.
40. Mills, 1951, Ehrenreich, 1985.
41. Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 109.
42. Lowe, 1987; Strom, 1992.
43. Walkowitz, 1999. Also see Ken Moffatt, *A Poetics of Social Work: Personal Agency and Social Transformation in Canada, 1920–1939* (Toronto, 2001).
44. Boyer, 1998; Estelle Freedman, "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s," *Journal of American History* 61 (1974): 372–93. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1985).
45. Walkowitz, 1999.
46. DeVault, 1990.
47. Aron, 1987; Lowe, 1987.

48. The 1901 Montréal nominal Census data also show that 16 percent lived with blood relatives, likely as boarders with extended family members. Such an arrangement that would have saved money and maintained "respectability"; an important issue for young unmarried women living apart from their parents. Boarding with relatives would have allowed daughters to maintain family and religious traditions, while at the same time allowing parents to keep closer tabs on daughters than they might have otherwise.
49. Strom, 1992, p. 10. Also see Fine, 1990.
50. Produced by the Royal Typewriter Company for the U.S. Civil Service Commission (National Archives and Records Administration Still Picture Branch).
51. Myra H. Strober and Carolyn L. Arnold. "The Dynamics of Occupational Segregation among Bank Tellers" in *Gender in the Workplace*. eds. Clair Brown and Joseph A. Pechman, (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 107–48.
52. Royal Bank archives, "Women in Royal Bank", unnumbered document. See also McDowall, 1993.
53. Dorcas Campbell, "Women in Today's Banking World" *The Burroughs Clearing House*, 1:1 (1945): 16–18. Campbell was a formidable force. She became the first woman Vice-President of East River Savings Bank, she also achieved many other 'firsts' in her 30 year banking career. She was the author of two books on banking careers (including one explicitly aimed at women). She frequently appeared in the pages of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* often via announcements about her public lectures and activities in professional organizations. When she died in 1959, a 340-word obituary appeared in the *New York Times*.
54. Goldin, 1990. Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canada's Wage-Earning Wives and the Construction of the Middle Class, 1945–60," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29:3 (1994): 5–25.
55. Margaret L. Hedstrom, "Beyond Feminisation: Clerical Workers in the United States from the 1920s through the 1960s", in G. Anderson ed., *The White-Blouse Revolution*, (Manchester, 1988), 143–69. Sharon Hartman Strom, "Machines Instead of Clerks': Technology and the Feminization of Bookkeeping, 1910–1950," in *Computer Chips and Paper Clips: Technology and Women's Employment*, ed. H.I. Hartmann (Washington, D.C., 1987), 63–97.
56. C. Wright Mills (New York, 1951), quotes are from p. 191 and p. 206.
57. Strom, 1987
58. Victor R. Fuchs, "The Growing Importance of the Service Industries," *The Journal of Business*, 38:4 (1965): 344–373.
59. Fuchs, 1965.
60. Freidan's critique of the Cult of Domesticity was already quite pervasive in popular culture of the day. See Joanna Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post-War America, 1945–1960* (Philadelphia, 1994).
61. Strom, 1992.

62. Miriam Hussey, "Personnel Policies During a Period of Shortage of Young Women Workers in Philadelphia" (1958) cited in Oppenheimer, 1970.
63. Sun Life Financial Corporate Archives, box 407, employment matters.
64. A second brochure from the same period called "Where are You Going, my Pretty Maid?" informed potential employees that: "By deciding to become associated with the Sun Life of Canada you will be linking up with a modern organization which takes pride in providing congenial and healthy surroundings for its employees." (Sun Life Financial Corporate Archives, box 713, pamphlet).
65. Lowe, 1987; Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920–1960* (Toronto, 1995).
66. Oppenheimer, 1970; Goldin, 1990.
67. Oppenheimer, 1970.
68. Henry O. Ruhnke, "Selecting clerical personnel," *Banking*, (Nov 1963). Even in 1970 a larger proportion of women clerical workers were less than 24 years old than was the case for women in other occupations (Hedstrom, 1988).
69. Susan Hartmann, "Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960*. ed. J. Meyerowitz (Philadelphia, 1994), 84–100.
70. Goldin, 1990. Also see Strong-Boag, 1994 on Canada.
71. Naomi Bristol Mallovy, "A Banking Career and Marriage," *Canadian Banker*, 65:2 (1958): 93–97 (quote from p. 93).
72. Goldin, 1990.
73. Eileen O'Brien, *The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living Beyond the Racial Divide* (New York, 2008).
74. Dionne Brand, *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario, 1920s–1950s* (Toronto, 1991). Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal, 1992).
75. Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei, *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston, 1991). King, 1993; Goldin, 1990. The five cities in the 1940 survey were Houston, Los Angeles, Kansas City, Richmond, and Philadelphia.
76. Betty's remarks about private companies reflects how African-American women found clerical work in the public sector far earlier than in the private sector (see Amott and Matthaei, 1991; Michael B. Katz, Mark J. Stern and Jamie Fader, "The New African American Inequality," *Journal of American History*, 92:1 [2005]).
77. Strong-Boag, 1994, p. 6.
78. Oppenheimer, 1970; Hedstrom, 1988; Goldin, 1990.

79. Louis Kapp Howe, *Pink Collar Workers: Inside the World of Women's Work* (New York, 1977). Aronowitz, 2002.
80. Barbara Reskin, "Sex segregation in the workplace," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19 (1993):241–270; F. Blau, M. A. Ferber and A. E. Winkler. *The Economics of Women, Men and Work, 4th Edition* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: 2002); N.M. Fortin and M. Huberman, "Occupational gender segregation and women's wages in Canada: An historical account" *Canadian Public Policy*, 1 (2002): S11–S39.
81. Katz, et al. "Women and the Paradox of Economic Inequality in the Twentieth-Century," 2005.
82. Amott and Matthaei, 1991; King, 1993.
83. Katz, et al "The New African American Inequality" (2005), the quote comes from p. 89. The growth rate of clerical work versus that of the overall labor force dropped sooner (1980) for white women than African-American women.
84. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (Henry Holt, 2001). Also see David Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1989). Ash Amin, *Post-Fordism: A Reader* (Oxford, 1994).
85. Chinhui Juhn and Kevin M. Murphy, "Inequality in Labor Market Outcomes: Contrasting the 1980s and Earlier Decades," *Federal Reserve Bank of New York Economic Policy Review*, 1:1 (1995): 26–32. Frank Levy, *The New Dollars and Dreams: American Incomes and Economic Change*. (New York, 1999); Lester C. Thurow, "Wage Dispersion: 'Who Done It?'" *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics*, 21:1 (1998): 25–37.
86. Mark E. Edwards, "Home Ownership, Affordability, and Mothers' Changing Work and Family Roles" *Social Science Quarterly* 82:2 (2001): 369–383; Elizabeth Warren and Amelia Warren Tyagi, *The Two-Income Trap: Why Middle-Class Mothers and Fathers are Going Broke* (Basic Books, 2003).
87. Levy, 1999.
88. Kevin D. Henson and Jackie K. Rogers, "'Why Marcia, you've changed!' Male clerical temporary workers and the doing of masculinity in a feminized occupation," *Gender and Society* 15:2 (2000): 218–238. Rosemary Pringle, "Male secretaries," in *Doing Women's Work': Men in Non-Traditional Occupations*, ed. Christine L. Williams (Newbury Park, CA, 1993).
89. See note 4 for information about these interviews.
90. Heather Menzies, *Women and the Chip*, (Toronto, 1981). Hartmann, Kraut and Tilly, 1986; Hartmann, 1987. There was a lively debate about the deskilling of clerical work and whether clerical workers were becoming 'proletarianized'; this discussion was firmly rooted in class analysis, and arguments that this round of automation would finally blur the distinction between white-collar clerical workers and blue-collar workers. See Braverman, 1974; Glenn and Feldberg, 1982.
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