

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND GENDER DIFFERENCE

The industrial revolution is a pivotal social transformation in Western societies. Discussed in detail in Chapter 9, we focus here on its influence on gender (see Chapter 7).

The transformations of the industrial revolution had a significant effect on social understanding of gender. There was little gendered division of labour in agrarian work: men and women worked on farms together, close to where they lived. Work in cities, however, was much more ordered and rationalized, and occurred in big factories—institutions that had precise rules and regulations that were strictly enforced. This meant that work became clearly separated from other aspects of life, in both time and space. Indeed, work in the city was clearly separated from the slums and tenements in which the ordinary worker lived.

During this period, work became segregated by gender—men and women no longer worked side-by-side. Women did undertake manufacturing work, including in textile factories, but they worked far more in domestic service than men, who primarily worked in big factories within or linked to cities. Importantly, the majority of factories were gender segregated, and so men and women were separated *structurally* during this period—to the extent that the notion of men and women working side-by-side, and equally contributing to work as they had on the farm, receded.

Feminist sociologist Francesca Cancian (1987) describes these changes as the creation of and separation into gendered spheres, suggesting that expectations of what it meant to be a man or woman bifurcated as a result of the industrial revolution. This is because the changing environment of work necessitated that men be tough and unemotional; and, given the levels of poverty and associated poor health, they were also exhausted after long days of manual labour. In this context, men showed their love and dedication to family through this hard work.

At the same time, the majority of women's labour moved from work that provided financial reward to domestic and caring work, instead. As such it moved from the public to private sphere, becoming unpaid and unseen. By being confined to the private or domestic sphere, this also robbed women of economic agency—denying them an important practical source of independence in a period where gender inequality had become enshrined in law (see Chapter 7). In this context, women were expected to show their contribution to the family through emotional expressiveness and domestic efficiency. Accordingly, the antecedents of men's stoicism and women's emotionalism were born

during this period.

The reasons for these changes in work practices are complex. Hartmann (1976) argues that men actively excluded women, banning them from unions. She suggests this was in order to maintain male privilege within patriarchal societies. Humphries (1977) contends that it was in order to guard against the loss of men's jobs caused by technological innovation. Given our discussion of gender as a form of social division in Chapter 7, we suggest that a gendered analysis is appropriate in understanding this division.

While the industrial revolution erected boundaries around what women and men were 'supposed to' do and be, these changes also sowed the seeds for the first wave of women's political independence (Hargreaves 1986). The city provided a population density that meant women could congregate and organize politically (Smith-Rosenberg 1985). The seeds for the first wave of feminism, and the social and political transformations of the 20th century, were thus sewn.

References

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