From 'Chrysler Girls' to 'Dodge Boys': The Emergence of Women in Windsor's Automotive Industry, 1964-1976

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FROM 'CHRYSLER GIRLS' TO 'DODGE BOYS':
THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN IN WINDSOR'S
AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY,
1964-1976

BY

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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From 'Chrysler Girls' to 'Dodge Boys': The Emergence of Women in Windsor's Automotive Industry, 1964-1976

by

Brandi Lyn Lucier

A Major Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research through the Department of History, Philosophy, and Political Science in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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From 'Chrysler Goes to Dream City': The Emergence of Women in Worker's Automotive Industry, 1924-1970 is a study of women auto workers' lack of equality in seniority at the Windsor Spring plant, a Porchester Chrysler Canada. While a small number of women worked in Chrysler's, Windsor, Ontario, piece rates during the 1950s and 1960s, few women worked in passenger car and truck assembly plants because collective agreements between the UAW and the auto manufacturer withheld sex-based job classifications and seniority rules which ultimately limited women's participation in the plant. Based on the idea that women were financially dependent and that men were breadwinners, male UAW leaders adopted a wage strategy that not only justified women's lower wages but also suggested that female workers would receive fewer job and seniority rights than their male co-workers. Though historians have produced many exceptional studies on women auto workers and their role in the UAW, their research over the past fifteen years has neglected the role of women's seniority. This study examines how and why women were discouraged from striking the Windsor Spring plant before and after the amended Quebec Human Rights Code in 1970. Statistical research on equality laws for men and women shows that both the company and union officers acted to have had a stake in continuing the division within the other female union members challenged it through legal reform.

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Abstract

From 'Chrysler Girls' to 'Dodge Boys': The Emergence of Women in Windsor's Automotive Industry, 1964-1976 is a study of female auto workers' lack of equality in seniority at the Windsor Spring plant, a division of Chrysler Canada. While a small number of women worked in Chrysler's, Windsor, Ontario, parts plants during the 1930s and 1940s, few women worked in passenger car and truck assembly plants because collective agreements between the UAW and the auto manufacturer upheld sex-based job classifications and seniority lists which ultimately limited women's participation in the plants. Based on the idea that women were financial dependants and that men were breadwinners, male UAW leaders adopted a wage strategy that not only justified women's lower pay rates but also ensured that female workers would receive fewer job and seniority rights than their male co-workers. Though historians have produced many exceptional studies on women auto workers and their roles in the UAW, their research over the past fifteen years has neglected the issue of women's seniority. This study examines how and why women were discouraged from using their seniority rights by focusing on the Windsor Spring plant before and after the amended Ontario Human Rights Code in 1970 abolished separate seniority lists for men and women. It concludes that both the company and union officials seem to have had a stake in continuing the system even when feminists challenged it through legal reform.
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Introduction

From Women's History to Gender History: An 'Experience' in Learning

While working on the line a few years back at Chrysler's minivan plant in Windsor, Ontario, with three other women in my department, I was totally surprised when a female apprentice showed up to fix my partner's electric gun. As a women's historian I knew that women had been entering nontraditional occupations for the past two decades, but I was not prepared to see what I saw that particular day. Urged by the other male electricians, the female apprentice climbed the ladder not only to fix my partner's gun but also to become the center of attention in an ever-growing crowd of male on-lookers. While three men held the ladder steady for her, others watched looking up from their jobs on the line or turning their heads as they walked by—all the time she struggled with fixing the gun. Up until that time I had always been a staunch supporter of recovering women's experiences in history, but I now knew it would be virtually impossible for me retell this story without including the experiences of the men who watched, laughed, and worked with her that day. Thus, I became an instant defender and supporter of gender history, despite my past objection to its use in women's history.

I not only learned an important lesson about gender relations that day, but my experience changed the entire outlook of this research paper. I now understand masculinity and its place in male breadwinner ideology as an essential subject of research to explain how women were discriminated against in the auto industry and in Canadian Region 7 of the International Union of Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Workers, (UAW). Set on reclaiming the distinct voices of my foremothers and giving historical credit to their struggle in Windsor's automobile industry, I am now equally interested in understanding the gendered process that prohibited them from experiencing equality in the workplace. Though my research methods have not changed, the ways in which I use and view my sources have. Instead of looking for and emphasizing the blatant discrimination faced by female auto workers in the factory, I am focusing on how this discrimination was socially constructed in the auto industry and the union, as well as in the women's lives, families, and communities. Although the seniority principle still remains prominent
in my research, I argue that male breadwinner ideology explains why the women of Chrysler’s, Windsor Spring plant were prohibited from using their seniority to transfer to Chrysler’s other passenger car and truck assembly plants in the 1960s and 1970s.

In an plant-specific historical analysis of two major Windsor companies—the L. A. Young Spring and Wire Corporation of Canada and Chrysler Canada—I show how the seniority principle, like male breadwinner ideology, changed over time and was adapted and changed by male auto workers to keep women from transferring to the more desirable jobs and positions in the auto industry. By relating male breadwinner ideology to seniority I demonstrate how both concepts sustained masculinity in the workplace. This study argues that women were restricted and discouraged from exercising their seniority rights because of the high wages paid to male workers and the UAW’s firm adherence to the ideology of the family wage. Based on the assumption that women were financial dependents and that men were breadwinners, male UAW leaders adopted a wage strategy that was based on the notion that married men deserved and required higher wages and better jobs than female workers. Male auto workers and unionists not only used breadwinner ideology to justify the lower pay rates offered to women but also to ensure that female auto workers were segregated in sex-based job classifications, departments, and seniority lists. Lack of specific seniority rights not only limited women’s participation in the auto industry and the UAW but also ensured their unequal status with their male co-workers. The seniority discrimination female auto workers faced, however, was not the result of individual male ‘choice’ but the result of a deeply rooted social ideology that changed over time and was subject to the constant restructuring of the production process.

Chapter 1 reviews the historical literature written on women in mass production industries and unions in the past fifteen years, with the exception of pathbreaking studies in the field of feminist labour history. This review shows that historians and sociologists have focused either on women’s work during the war years and reconversion (1940-1954) or broader subjects ranging from feminism in the labour movement to gender politics and inequality, but that the period under study (1964-1976) has been underdeveloped, and that the topic of women’s seniority in particular has been neglected. In Chapter 2 the relationship between masculinity, the family wage, and sex-
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segregated seniority systems will be developed to illustrate how male auto workers and unionists used male breadwinner ideology to subordinate women in the auto industry in the 1930s and 1940s. The relationship between male breadwinner ideology and the seniority principle in this chapter will demonstrate the industry and the union's firm adherence to sex-segregation and will be used as foundation for the plant-specific study in Chapter 3. Based on newspaper articles, archival documents, and oral history interviews, Chapter 3 will explore the seniority rights of the female workers at Chrysler's Windsor Spring plant before and after the amended Ontario Human Rights Code abolished separated seniority lists for men and women in 1970. The experiences of male workers will also be explored in this chapter to better understand how class and gender experiences are inseparable in the auto industry and the UAW.
Chapter 1

Women in Mass Production Industries and Unions: A Historiographical Analysis

"Mr. Ford's business is the making of men, and he manufactures automobiles on the side to defray the expenses of his main business." 
–Rev. S. S. Marquis, Director, Ford Sociology Department, 1915-1921

"Women who work outside the home [do so] in order to buy fancy clothes."
–Henry Ford

In 1914, just one year after perfecting the continuously moving assembly line, Henry Ford stunned the automobile industry when he announced that he intended to pay his male workers a minimum of five dollars per day. Extended to married male workers who could demonstrate that they lived with and took good care of their families and to single male workers over the age of twenty-two who could demonstrate thrifty living habits, Ford's profit-sharing plan not only attempted to reduce worker turnover and undercut union organizing efforts but also rationalized the Ford employment and wage structure by reducing and regularizing the number of job categories and pay scales and by limiting the foreman's power of dismissal. Though the plan was extended in 1916, after much feminist protest, to single female workers who supported relatives, historians of women's labour history have interpreted the automobile industry's family wage ideology as a working-class survival strategy that reinforces gender divisions and


3 By 1906 several Ford plants included many "elements of a moving [assembly] line without the motive power to move elements along smoothly and evenly." It was not until the summer of 1913 that the Ford Motor Company "worked out the exact timing to mesh its various lines with overhead conveyors, thereby creating a truly smooth operation that could produce 1,200 automobiles per day." See Joyce Shaw Peterson, American Automobile Workers 1900-1933, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 32-33.


5 Though female wages were high in the automobile industry, women still earned substantially less than men—generally "about two-thirds as much (on an hourly basis) in the pre-World War II era. See Milkman, Gender at Work, 22.
subordinates women as secondary wage earners and domestic caregivers. While I agree that a male breadwinner wage places certain limitations on women's work in the industrial workplace, I would like to suggest that male breadwinner ideology, in such industrial workplaces as the auto industry, needs to be reexamined with a focus on its meaning for men. The auto manufacturers' offer of a high family wage to male workers in return for their alienating work on the assembly line served to reinforce notions of manliness in a deskilled workforce that had very little control over shop floor policies and rates of production.\(^6\) Lacking a clear male prerogative in the workplace, male auto workers not only measured their personal worth as men by their ability to provide adequate living conditions for their family but also marginalized female auto workers in order to protect their status in the workplace and their positions as heads of households.

Although historians have produced many exceptional studies on women auto workers and their roles in the UAW, their research over the past fifteen years has focused either on women's work during the war years and reconversion (1940-1954) or broader subjects ranging from feminism in the labour movement (Nancy Gabin) to gender politics and inequality (Ruth Milkman). This chapter, therefore, will examine the existing historical literature on women in mass production industries and unions looking at masculinity and the family wage, with special emphasis on the automobile industry and the UAW. The chapter is divided into four major sections and focuses on: earlier Marxist and socialists feminists' dual systems theory explaining the exclusion of women from the workforce; the rejection of the dual systems theory by feminist labour historians emphasizing gender analysis; the integration of the family into women's and labour history; and the development of a 'new' gender history showing gender and class as inseparable in lived experience. This chapter will not only illustrate that the period I am studying (1964-1976) lacks a clear and concise analysis of the relationship between masculinity and the

\(^6\) As Ardis Cameron states in her study of labouring women in the mills of Lawrence, Massachusetts "as metaphor, the family wage articulated class difference in a way that encoded economic autonomy as masculine in contrast to the feminine domestic side. Household head, the shop floor, skill, and producer emerged as signs of maleness and signifiers of masculine prerogatives." But in the auto industry men had been deskilled by the assembly line and they had very little control over the shop floor. (Even with unionization the only way to gain control on the shop floor was through work slow-downs or wild cat strikes and both could mean either the reduction of wages or the loss of wages.) And their roles as producers had
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family wage in the automobile industry and the UAW but will also show that the topic of women's seniority rights has been neglected in the writing of feminist labour history.

Inspired in the 1970s by a reawakening of the Canadian Left, 7 feminist labour historians began examining the familial positions and job segregation of wage earning women as "part of an effort to develop a theory of women's subordination in capitalist society." 8 Historians influenced by this new Marxist-feminist theory, Ava Baron and Joy Parr explain, disregarded and ignored gender, and especially masculinity, as a subject of historical inquiry in order to illustrate that "women were important in terms of the male model of history." 9 By exploring topics related to women and women's concerns, feminist labour historians were successful in reclaiming the historical issues they believed had been neglected and demeaned but took for granted men's participation in the labour force and the inseparable relationship between gender and class in

been extremely limited by management. See Ardis Cameron, Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860-1912, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 41.


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lived experience. For example, in what was considered a pathbreaking contribution to Marxist-feminist literature, Heidi Hartmann argued that job segregation by sex was "the primary mechanism in capitalist society that maintains the superiority of men over women, because it enforces lower wages for women in the labour market." By denying female workers a living wage and maintaining their economic dependence on men and on families, segregation by sex within the wage labour market also helped to secure the daily and generational reproduction of the working class through the unpaid household labour of women. At the same time, according to Hartmann, the sexual division of labour in the household was exactly what constituted women as a 'reserve army' of 'cheap' and 'expendable' labour.

Acceptance of class analysis as the framework for labour history, however, "elaborated upon rather than replaced a whole series of conceptual dualisms --capitalism/patriarchy, public/private, production/reproduction, men's work/women's work--which assume that class issues are integral to the first term of each pair and gender is important only to the second." Hartmann's dual systems theory not only assumed that gender and class were independent and separable theories of analysis but also provided "a theoretical rationale for men's working-class historians to continue to bracket as unimportant the mass of feminist research on working women and the sexual division of labour." For example, while Hartmann's dual systems theory correctly identifies the prevailing historical pattern of male workers' (and unions') hostility toward women workers, it does not take into consideration "the conflict between male workers' class and gender interests" because it focuses on "the interests of 'men as men' to explain the dominant historical trend." Ruth Milkman substantiates this point in her study of sex segregation in the auto and

11 Heidi Hartmann, "The Historical Roots of Occupational Segregation: Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex," Signs, 1:3 Part 2 (Spring 1976), 139.
13 Hartmann, "The Historical Roots of Occupational Segregation," 139, 167.
14 Baron, "Gender and Labor History," 17.
15 Ibid., 18.
16 Milkman, Gender at Work, 7.
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electrical manufacturing industries by illustrating how "men actively fought against gender inequality on the basis of self-interest."\textsuperscript{17} Hartmann's theory also fails to consider the impact of social ideology on the sexual segregation and the occupational sex-labeling of women in the workforce. As Veronica Beechey argues, it is too simplistic "to conclude that the sexual division of labour at work was a mere consequence of women's subordinate role in the family."\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, while Hartmann's historical view of "the interdependence between the sexual division of labour at home and at work offered insight into the general functions of sex segregation,"\textsuperscript{19} it did not explain why particular jobs were labeled male or female or how breadwinner or family wage ideology contributed to the sex-stereotyping of women in the workplace.

The socialist-feminist critiques that followed Hartmann's dual systems theory not only demonstrated the importance of searching for a "historically specific analysis of capitalist patriarchy"\textsuperscript{20} in theorizing labour history but also examined the social construction of skill and its relationship to class and gender. In an important early article, Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor stressed that "skill was not some objective characteristic of a job or worker but rather a social-political construct."\textsuperscript{21} The classification of women's jobs as unskilled and men's jobs as skilled or semi-skilled, Phillips and Taylor suggest, "frequently bears little relation to the actual amount of training or ability required for them." Women's subordinate status in the workplace, therefore, is not the result of discriminatory training programmes or women's lack of knowledge and initiative, but the result of a capitalist-based economy that values masculine skills at the expense of feminine skills. Women workers, they explain, carry into the workplace their status as subordinate

\textsuperscript{17}As Milkman explains, male auto workers and unionists directly challenged unequal pay for equal work among the sexes, "despite its apparent status as a 'women's issue'" because "they feared that their own wage rates would be endangered by female substitution." See Milkman, Gender at Work, 7, 46.


\textsuperscript{19}Milkman, Gender at Work, 4-5.

\textsuperscript{20}Joan Sangster, "Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History: Exploring the Past, Present and Future," Labour/ Le Travail, 46 (Fall 2000), 138.

\textsuperscript{21}Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor were among the many socialist-feminists to point out that Harry Braverman ignored the fact that skills have at least as much to do with ideological and social constructions as with complex, technical competencies, and suggest the reinvestigation of certain groups of workers (especially women) and the construction of their work as unskilled. See Veronica Beechey, "Rethinking the Definition of Work," in Jane Jenson, Elisabeth Hagen, and Ceallaigh Reddy eds., Feminization of the Labour Force: Paradoxes and Promises, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 49 and Maynard, "Rough Work and Rugged Men," 162.
individuals, and this status comes to define the value of the work they do. Thus "skill," Phillips and Taylor argue, "is often an ideological category imposed on certain types of work by virtue of the sex and power of the workers who perform it." As a result, part-time work and 'outwork,' which are often the only options open to women with small children or domestic responsibilities, are almost always classified as unskilled.

Building on Anne Phillips and Barbara Taylor's theory, Jane Gaskell also argued that "skill is a socially constructed category and managing skill definitions is a political process ... a process in which some workers have more economic power than others." Women have been at a disadvantage in this process of managing skill definitions, Gaskell believes, because they have not been represented by strong collective organizations. As a result, "the notion of skilled work is used in a way that devalues the work that women do." Gaskell criticizes Phillips and Taylor for not exploring how the social construction of skill works against women and for not recognizing the socially defined concept of 'ability'. For Phillips and Taylor, the amount of training and 'ability' required are legitimate bases for differentiating among skill levels. But as Gaskell explains, what might be called a "halo effect" acts to increase "the status of men's work, because men do it." According to Gaskell, therefore, 'ability' depends on who is using what criteria and how those criteria are defined in relation to skill. Thus, discussions of skill, these socialist feminists have argued, must "be rooted not only in the relations between bosses and workers, but also squarely within the sexual division of labour, in the relations between women and men."

Though Phillips, Taylor, and Gaskell successfully illustrated how "gender hierarchies [were] integrated directly into capitalist relations," by the defining and classifying of male work

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24 As Gaskell argues, "Phillips and Taylor see gender-distorting skill classifications, much in the way that Braverman sees skill labels being distorted by capitalism." Skill according to Gaskell "should not be seen as an independent variable, a fixed attribute of a job or a worker which will explain higher wages or unemployment, as it is in human capital theory or neoclassical economics." See Gaskell, "Conceptions of Skill and the Work of Women," 14, 24.
25 Ibid., 14.
27 Sangster, Earning Respect, 67.
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as skilled and female work as unskilled or semi-skilled, their studies failed to take into consideration how workers' subjective concepts of masculinity and femininity affected the division of labour. The male worker's belief that skill was linked to manhood not only influenced "the form and content of class conflicts and relations between male and female workers" but also played an important role in the formation of male working-class identity. Skill, according to Craig Heron and Robert Storey, is also best understood "in a specific historical context in which definitions are altered to match the changing dimensions of skilled work and the new characteristics of the skilled worker." Phillips, Taylor, and Gaskell neglect the dimension of change, including the struggle between workers and employers to define and control skilled work and the process in which workers are retrained for jobs that were previously considered skilled within capitalist industry.

Other areas of research in this field, however, do demonstrate the connection of skill and technology to gender and sexual identity. Cynthia Cockburn for example, examined how technological change in the printing industry affected definitions of skill for both male and female hand compositors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in her 1983 study Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change. Cockburn's analysis suggests that once workers have defined the skills requisite for their jobs and have restricted access to learning them, they may be able to retain their position in the skill hierarchy in the face of increased automation through organized strength. Men, Cockburn explains, are at the top of this hierarchy and thus "to feel technically competent is to feel manly." Male hand compositors were not only able to retain their skilled status by restricting and rigorously defending access to apprenticeships but also by "manipulating the definition of the skills required for their jobs" and by "demanding

28 Baron, "Gender and Labor History," 14.
31 See Sonya O Rose, "Gender at Work: Sex, Class, and Industrial Capitalism," History Workshop Journal. 21 (Spring 1986), 121.
exclusive rights to new machines."³³ New technology, Cockburn argues, may not only disrupt
gender relations in the workplace but can also be used to subordinate women, as femininity is
frequently understood to be incompatible with technological competence. Cockburn's dualistic
study of patriarchy and capitalism, however, is problematic because it accepts "the concept of a
sex-gender system in which men dominate women 'inside and outside family relations, inside and
outside economic production, by means which are both material and ideological,"³⁴ instead of
exploring how these concepts and definitions intertwine and contradict each other in the lived
experience of both men and women at home and in the workplace.

The rejection of the dual systems theory developed by Hartmann and improved upon by
Phillips, Taylor, and Gaskell is seen in the work of Joy Parr, Margaret McCallum, Ruth Milkman,
and Nancy Gabin, who place more of an emphasis on gender analysis. Working within the
conceptual framework developed by Heidi Hartmann³⁵, Joy Parr's *The Gender of Breadwinners:
Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* reconsiders the social and
economic change that accompanied industrialization by comparing and contrasting two Canadian
manufacturing communities, Paris, a knit-goods manufacturing centre in which the majority of the
labour force was female, and Hanover, a furniture manufacturing town in which most wage
earners were male. Though Parr carefully investigates how gender was socially constructed in
the workplace and in the household, her rejection of Hartmann's dual systems theory only
complicates her parallel study. Any systematic approach, Parr argues, "that assumes that
everything falls into one category or another, but cannot belong to more than one category at the
same time belies the wholeness of consciousness and experience. Life as we live it is not
subdivided sequentially. We exist simultaneously, rather than sequentially, in the social relations
of class and gender."³⁶ As a result, Parr attempts to challenge fixed dualisms in her study by
"unmak[ing] the chain of binary oppositions"—masculine/feminine, market/non-market,

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³³Rose, "Gender at Work," 121.
³⁴See Cynthia Cockburn, "The Material of Male Power," *Feminist Review*, 9 (Fall 1981), 55 and
Beechey, "Rethinking the Definition of Work," 57.
³⁵Though Hartmann and Parr's approaches differ both are concerned with how capitalism and
patriarchy have effected the labour process.
public/private, wage/non-waged—and "rethink[ing] the categoricalism that cantonizes gender, class, race, ethnicity, and nationality."37 Parr’s approach, however, is not only unsuccessful in demonstrating how definitions of class and gender are multiple and mutable but also fails to recognize the ways in which gender and class intertwine and contradict each other in lived experience. Instead of concentrating on the relationship between masculinity and femininity, manliness and womanliness in both the knit-goods industry and the furniture industry Parr’s study separates them, looking at women in knit-goods and men in furniture. For example, in the section of her study that focuses on the male furniture workers of Hanover, masculinity is defined not only by the various levels of skill involved in cabinet making but also by the manly character the work demanded and conferred. Through waged work, Parr explains, boys not only learned manliness but they also mastered certain disciplines and discriminations that were distinctly male. Jobs requiring similar amounts of skill were also held by the male machine tenders and mechanics in the female mill town of Paris, yet Parr neglects to take into consideration what role masculinity played in this feminine workplace. Though Parr’s argument demonstrates that female workers in the knit-goods industry were capable of earning a family wage, her gender analysis of breadwinner ideology fails to question the impact women’s wage earning had on men’s masculine identities as household heads. Parr’s gender analysis also neglects the many ways in which the relationships between female mill workers and male foremen, machine tenders, and mechanics intertwined and contradicted each other in the workplace. The presence of men in the mainly female knit-goods industry and town certainly had an impact on the way femininity and masculinity were formed, created, and sustained.

Although theories about the sexual division of labour and skill tend to describe women’s paid work as an extension of their domestic duties, Margaret McCallum’s research on Maritime confectionery workers concludes that “a strict gender division of labour was maintained in the factory ... because management and workers shared conventional assumptions that women’s

37Ibid.
role in production should be ancillary to that of men, regardless of the skill required or remuneration earned. For example, management at Ganong Bros. refused to train men as hand-dippers during a help shortage because hand-dipping was considered ancillary and a woman’s job even though they were paid piece-rates, and by maintaining a high level of production, they were able to earn wages well above those paid to some of the male workers. Likewise, though women were responsible for cooking in the home, only men were hired as confectioners because the formulas for making starch-based gumdrops, jellies, and caramels depended upon the knowledge of a highly-skilled craftsman to regulate the variations in room temperature and humidity needed for manufacturing the candy. The gender division of labour in the Ganong Bros. confectionery factory, therefore, was not only determined by “the assumption that women’s participation in the paid labour force was secondary to their domestic role, and that jobs promising higher earnings and better opportunities for advancement should go to men” but also by strongly shared community notions about “what was appropriate.” Thus the division of labour was not based on women doing ‘what they did in the home’ but on just having less power and status in the workplace. Though McCallum argues that skill is “the product both of ideology and of workers’ ability, through collective action, to defend their reputation as skilled craft workers” she fails to connect socially constructed definitions of skill and women’s proper place in the labour force to masculinity and male breadwinner or family wage ideology. While the interaction between gender and technology is explored less by McCallum than it is by Cockburn, the labour-intensive and time-consuming work done by male confectioners had to have had an impact on their own identities as working-class men, as their work was in sharp contrast to the monotonous and tedious work done by unskilled boys and women.

Ruth Milkman, however, closely examines the exclusion of women from the machine-paced organization of production in her industry-specific study of the desegregation and

39 Ibid., 87, 86.
40 Ibid., 85.
41 Ibid., 70.
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resegregation of women in the auto and electrical manufacturing industries during and after World War II. Milkman's comparative case-study analysis demonstrates how "an industry's pattern of employment by sex reflects the economic, political, and social constraints that are operative when an industry's labour market initially forms."\(^{42}\) Once a job is labeled 'male' or 'female,' Milkman explains, "the demand for labour to fill it is sex-specific, barring disruptions of labour supply or a restructuring of the labour process."\(^{43}\) For example, when women were called upon by the auto manufacturers to meet production demands, "they were not randomly incorporated into 'men's jobs'" as vacancies became available. Instead, Milkman, argues "new patterns of occupational segregation by sex were established"\(^{44}\) for the duration of the war within the sectors and departments of the industry previously monopolized by men. Thus the economic mobilization of female workers "led to a shift in the location of the boundaries between 'women's' and 'men's' work not the elimination of those boundaries."\(^{45}\) Milkman attributes the ideology of sex-typing, therefore, to the economic interests of male workers\(^{46}\) and management's strict adherence to the established idioms of sexual division in capitalist development.

In a similar study Nancy Gabin reconstructs the history of women's struggles in the auto industry and its union from 1935 to 1975. Divided into three equally important sections, Gabin's study focuses on the place of women in the organization and structure of work in the auto industry, assesses the relationship of women to the traditionally male-dominated and male-oriented labour movement, and evaluates the significance of feminism for women in blue-collar occupations.\(^{47}\) Despite the indifference and pervasiveness of male domination and hostility in the UAW, Gabin explains that "union membership serves not only as a constraint on but also as a resource for female collective action."\(^{48}\) While women did not overcome the longstanding

\(^{42}\)Milkman, Gender at Work, 7.
\(^{43}\)Ibid., 3.
\(^{44}\)See Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work,'" 338 and Milkman Gender at Work, 9.
\(^{45}\)Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work,'" 338.
\(^{46}\)As Milkman argues, male workers benefit from job segregation by sex because "the concentration of women in poorly paid, insecure jobs ensures that women will perform personal services for men in the household even if they also work for pay." See Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work,'" 339.
\(^{48}\)Ibid., 5.
obstacles to sexual equality either in the auto industry or in the UAW during the 1940s and the
1950s, Gabin argues that women workers “were able to create a political space within the [union]
to advance their interests as women.”\(^{49}\) For example, in the spring of 1944, under the massive
influx of women into the auto plants during World War II, the union established its Women’s
Bureau as an office of the War Policy Division, “thus formally institutionalizing women’s concerns
within the UAW bureaucracy.”\(^{50}\) Though the Women’s Bureau, according to Gabin, ensured the
survival of gender-conscious protest and increased the visibility of women in the UAW, it was
unable to bring about fundamental change in the structure and organization of work in the auto
factories. The women’s efforts, however, provided an important bridge to the late 1960s and
1970s when the resurgence of feminism sparked a renewal of women’s activism within the
unions. McCallum, Milkman, and Gabin’s studies, however, neglect the role the family plays in
women’s and labour history.

Though the search for a “historically specific analysis of capitalist patriarchy”\(^{51}\) extended
beyond the discipline of history to include the theoretical debates of Canadian political
economists and sociologists,\(^{52}\) the history of women as workers, paid and unpaid, and a
gendered history of class formation were only partially integrated into labour history during the
1970s and 1980s. For example, Linda Briskin’s pathbreaking text *Feminists Organizing for
Change* explored “contemporary women’s struggles in the labour movement and in non-
traditional work”\(^{53}\) but failed to take into consideration how definitions of the family, household,

\(^{49}\) As Gabin explains, “despite –or because of –the ideologically conservative climate of the 1940s
and 1950s, UAW women took advantage of the democratic principles of industrial unionism and its implicit
challenge to discrimination on the basis of sex and convinced the union at least to acknowledge the
legitimacy of their goals and purposes.” See Nancy Gabin, “Women and the United Automobile Workers’

\(^{50}\) Milkman, “New Research in Women’s Labour History,” 385.

\(^{51}\) Sangster, “Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History,” 138.

\(^{52}\) For examples of early work, Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto: Canadian
Women and their Segregated Work*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984); Pat Armstrong and Hugh
Armstrong, “Beyond Sexless Class and Classless Sex: Toward a Feminist Marxism,” *Studies in Political

\(^{53}\) The emphasis of Briskin’s research is not on the issues of women’s organizing inside the union
movement, for example, sexual harassment, pay equity, or childcare, but on the strategy of separate
organizing. By focusing on the strategies of separate organizing, instead of the issues of women’s
organizing in mixed unions, Briskin demonstrates how “the rubric of separate organizing ... is intrinsically
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gender, and subsistence “transmitted, shaped, and reshaped” working-class experience and life. To ignore the family, Bettina Bradbury argues, “is to eliminate one of the important bridges between women’s history and working-class history, a bridge that has the potential to tell us much about working-class survival, class reproduction, and the social construction of gender in Canada’s past.” To write the history of the totality of the working class, Bradbury explains, historians not only need to reconceptualize the way they define the working class and work but also reexamine the processes of class reproduction and acknowledge the marital status and familial positions of male and female wage earners instead of viewing them as autonomous individuals or as sex categories. Therefore according to Bradbury, “struggles and strategies originating in the household were as important to standards of living as those on the job.”

Although Bradbury equates manliness with skill and family leadership, her connection between masculinity and male breadwinner ideology is underdeveloped but certainly implied. Changes in the workplace, Bradbury suggests, not only threatened a man’s ability to provide for his family but also threatened to “unravel the fabric of male personal identity intricately woven from pride in skill and family headship.”

The relationship between masculinity and male breadwinner ideology is also implied in Martha May’s historical analysis of the family wage at the Ford Motor Company and its impact on the processes of reproduction and gender divisions within the family. Introduced by Ford in 1914, the profit sharing plan not only guaranteed “the company’s edge over its competitors in related to gender-specific experience.” Besides taking into consideration gender-specific experiences, Briskin also focuses on the multiplicity of women’s experiences of separate organizing based on race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and age. Such studies, she explains, help to underline the race-specific experiences of gender. See Linda Briskin, Nancy Adamson, and Margaret McPhail, eds., Feminists Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women’s Movement in Canada, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 91 and Sangster, “Feminism and the Making of Canadian Working-Class History,” 139.

Bettina Bradbury, “Women’s History and Working-Class History,” Labour/Le Travail, 19 (Spring 1987), 24

Ibid., 25.

Ibid., 24.


See Bradbury, “Women’s History and Working-Class History,” 35 and Rose, “Gender at Work,” 125.

Also known as the Five Dollar Day.
production and marketing but also insured each male worker the possibility of earning a minimum of five dollars per day. But the Five Dollar Day, May argues, not only "operated to turn a family wage into a subtle form of social control exercised by management over workers and the work process" but also "reinforced gender divisions and a subordinate female role." Family wage or male breadwinner ideology, May explains, worked against the interests of working-class men, women, and families "by accepting and deepening a sexual double standard in the labour market." In addition, the family wage ideal not only gave employers the occasion to manipulate wages and create competition among workers but also confined "both males and females to gender roles which impeded individual opportunity and expression." Though May seeks "to demystify the hidden relationships between sex, gender, and class," her analysis ignores the relationship between masculinity and male breadwinner ideology and how the family wage took shape as an adult male prerogative and identity. Therefore rather than examining the processes that "encoded economic autonomy as masculine" and dependence as feminine, May centers the majority of her attention on reclaiming women's place in the history of the family wage. Though May's approach to feminist labour history neglects "the role gender plays in shaping work and people's experiences of it" her analysis is exceptional when compared to the many "sexless" studies produced by historians of the automobile industry and the UAW in the 1980s.

60 "Closier examination of why the company chose to award this extraordinary sum to its workers, when the average daily pay for an unskilled male auto worker in Detroit was around two dollars and forty cents, revels the plan as an incentive means of furthering the company's edge over its competitors in production and marketing, and of maintaining an open shop." See Martha May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage: The Ford Motor Company and the Five Dollar Day," Feminist Studies, 8:2 (Summer 1982), 409.

61 May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage," 400.
63 Ibid.
64 May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage," 400.
65 Cameron, Radicals of the Worst Sort, 41.
66 In her conclusion, May states, "the family wage, as ideology, served to divide the working class for a temporary gain, at the great expense of its female members. See May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage," 418.
67 While more working-class historians now include some reference to women in their studies, most working-class histories continue to fall into the category of "sexless class." See Baron, "Gender and Labor History," 8.
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While some historians have made passing references to workers' manliness in their gender studies, very few have successfully researched and questioned "the nature and role of masculinity on the job." As Steven Maynard noted in a 1989 critique on the fragmentary nature of the "new" working-class history, even important Canadian studies on working men, "analyze how men's identities were made by their class position and through the labour process, with only an obligatory gesture toward the study of gender." As a result, these gestures, Maynard explains, "do not entrain an analytical frame through which to track masculinity as a historically constitutive part of these working men's identities, but rather have the contrary effect, of invoking a very narrow and essentialist notion of masculinity that makes their gender identities seem natural or given." Recognizing that male workers have historically made very "explicit connections between their work and their gender identity as men," Maynard argues that the incorporation of masculinity into working-class studies not only "makes sense" but is also essential to understanding the social construction of class and gender in labour history. Historians, therefore, need to recognize that, "like workers' skills, their masculinity (or femininity) is also socially constructed." When, for example, foreman Bob Gillis stated that his female workers at Chrysler Canada's truck assembly plant "work[ed] just as well as the men," his compliment not only commended the women for their hard work on the line but was also layered with gendered meaning, as "good workers and unionists" in the auto industry were "defined in

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69 Masculinity here refers to the subjective or the individual consciousness rather than the objective. As Joy Parr explains "masculinity had been naturalized so effectively that it seemed without a name of its own. The words to describe its properties always seemed to attach more readily to something else, to the artisan's skill, the colonial administrator's burden, the pastor's wisdom, or the entrepreneur's acumen." See Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice," 17.
72 Ibid., 166.
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terms of manliness." Because male workers and unionists "have long used the work they do as a measure of self-worth," the question of their manliness, Maynard argues, "is a historical question, not a biological given of masculinity or maleness." Thus, working men's masculinity, Maynard explains, is not only an important aspect of study in Canadian labour history but an aspect that is frequently overlooked by feminist labour historians who claim the importance of women's experiences in their studies of skill, unionization, and worker militancy.

Despite their lack of attention to masculinity Wayne Lewchuk explains that it was feminist labour history, "directed at understanding the experiences of women at work" that had the most "profound impact on our understanding of men at work." A focus on gender, Lewchuk argues, not only "encourages us to think of men and women as bringing both economic and gender interests to the workplace" but also forces us to "acknowledge that patterns of conflict and cooperation between employers and employees need to be studied in terms of both sets of interests." Lewchuk demonstrates this point in his study of fraternalism as a managerial strategy at the Ford Motor Company by illustrating how women's exclusion from the workplace was part of a larger scheme by Ford "to reshape masculinity along lines more consistent with conditions in a mass-production factory." The fraternal system or 'men's club' not only helped male workers "adjust to a world of monotonous repetitive work" but also "shifted both gender norms at work and standards of labour productivity." As a result Ford and his managers reestablished the status and authority of men in the family and the role of working-class men in society. The possibility of "male workers participating in the restructuring of work contrary to their economic interests in

74In his study of the Ford Motor Company, Lewchuk is more successful in creating a gender history that focuses on the relationships between men and women—a focus that May does not sufficiently develop in her study of breadwinner ideology and the Five Dollar Day. Wayne Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony: Fraternalism as a Managerial Strategy at the Ford Motor Company," The Journal of Economic History, 53:4 (December 1993), 825.
75Ibid.
76Lewchuk maintains that women were not excluded from production at the Ford Motor Company because men were being paid a high wage, but rather because "it was unclear if time could be converted into effort as efficiently in a mixed-gender workforce." See Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony," 833.
order to protect their gender interests," Lewchuk argues, is not only an example of how "gender norms change over time" but also illustrates how the daily interactions and relationships between men and women are socially constructed.

Though the historical studies of Milkman, Gabin, May, and Lewchuk trace women's oppression in the auto industry and the UAW to an exclusively male workplace and union, their gender analysis focuses solely on how gender is created within production and ignores how gender is constituted through people's lived experience outside of production. As Baron argues, gender is not "a set of ideas developed separately from the economic structure but a part of it," built into the "organization and social relations of work." In learning to work and in working, in struggles between workers and employers over the nature and meaning of work, "both sides construct and contest definitions of masculinity and femininity." These contests over gender meanings not only "provide clues as to how gendered subjectivities are constructed" but also help us "move forward in developing a gendered labour history."***

Finally the development of a 'new' gender history that recognizes the ways in which gender and class are inseparable in lived experiences will be examined through the work of Pamela Sugiman and Gillian Creese. Sociologist Pamela Sugiman successfully demonstrates this point through a historical case study of female auto workers in Oshawa, Ontario, from 1937 to 1979. In Labour's Dilemma Sugiman focuses on the negotiated contracts and collective agreements between UAW Local 222 and General Motors to demonstrate how union leaders and auto manufacturers often engaged in contradictory and discriminatory practices toward female auto workers. Although the women of Local 222 were successful in eliminating all sex-based provisions in contracts when they challenged the Ontario Human Rights Code in 1970, Sugiman argues that the UAW is still a patriarchal institution that needs to foster a greater understanding of the politics of gender and race among the majority of its membership. Male unionists, Sugiman explains, not only take gender inequalities for granted but also act on the idea that working men deserve to occupy a privileged position in the industry. Because they are a minority, feminist

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*ibid., 825-26.*
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unionists have been forced to develop a unique type of unionism that combines conventional union principles yet incorporates ideas about women's equality in a way that is acceptable to working-class men. In short, Sugiman explains, these women have developed a feminist unionism—a type of unionism that has been "shaped by relations between men and women, as well as between employers and workers."80

Arguing against traditionally gender blind Marxist analyses, Sugiman reveals the need to reassess traditional theories of worker resistance by examining the struggles of UAW women for gender equality. Sugiman also introduces "the concept of 'gendered strategies' in an attempt to link the material realities of workers' lives with their subjective experience of gender and class."81 Sugiman uses this concept of gendered strategies to explain the ideological basis and scope of the women workers' struggles. For example, women's "campaign for equality," Sugiman argues, "was gendered not because women led and defined it, but because it was inspired and informed by a feminist critique of the gendered politics of company men and union men." These politics, Sugiman explains, largely rested on "prevailing assumptions that women were either financial dependents and/or secondary wage earners, and that men deserved to work in sex-exclusive environments."82

A similar approach to gender and unionized work is taken by sociologist Gillian Creese. In Contracting Masculinity, Creese explores the origins and challenges to masculine privilege within BC Hydro's Office and Technical Employees' Union from 1944 to 1994. Creese's study not only questions how class, gender, and race are negotiated as part of the bargaining conditions of work but also explains how processes of gendering practiced by office workers become

79Baron, "Gender and Labour History," 37.
81By looking at changing gendered strategies over time, Sugiman argues, "we can better understand the complex relationship between subjectivity and consciousness, reason and intent, ideology, structure, and struggles for social change." See Pamela Sugiman, "'That wall's comin' down': Gendered Strategies of Worker Resistance in the UAW Canadian Region (1963-1970)," Canadian Journal of Sociology, 17:1 (1992), 1 and Sugiman, Labor's Dilemma, 26.
82Ibid., 23.
Written with attention to both historical locality and general processes at work, Contracting Masculinity also examines “the creation of masculinist culture and practices after World War II and the role of the union in establishing the boundaries between men’s work/breadwinner wages and jobs appropriate for women.” Under this system female workers not only received lower pay for jobs that were “evaluated as equal in the company’s ‘clear-cut and scientific’ job evaluation process,” but were discriminated against by male unionists who feared that cheaper female employment “might displace men from their jobs.”

Owing to the reemergence of feminism in the 1960s collective bargaining strategies that favoured the rights of male breadwinners gradually gave way “to assumptions about gender neutrality, which were in turn challenged by trade union feminism that articulated women’s issues.” Creese argues both that women’s issues were still construed in the 1990s as the only union issues with “gender-specific consequences” and that the “‘main business’ of the union has continued undisturbed by feminist insights.” Creese contributes this lack of recognition not only to the union and company’s continued acceptance of the dominant familial ideology of the male breadwinner’s right to good employment but also to the social conventions surrounding marriage and motherhood when the union formed in the 1940s. Although the later shift to gender neutrality “made the masculine subject largely invisible,” union priorities and practices “still produced differential consequences in a workplace hierarchy” that continued to privilege men. During the 1960s women’s issues were defined “less as workers’ rights than as women’s special

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84 Creese, Contracting Masculinity, 6.
85 Ibid., 63.
87 Ibid., 437, 445.
88 In the 1940s and 1950s, Creese argues, “most female members were young, single, and worked at B.C. Electric for at most a few years, due to social conventions around marriage and motherhood. In this context the construction of a male subject of labour negotiations was understandable, and most women probably endorsed the breadwinner ideal.” See Creese, “Gendering Collective Bargaining,” 445 and Creese, Contracting Masculinity, 60-65.
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needs, and traditional union operations remained largely unquestioned. The union, Creese argues, maintained definitions of skill during this period through labour negotiations that were initiated from the perspective of a particular male subject. The worker on behalf of whom the union negotiated in the 1940s, Creese explains, was presumed to be a family breadwinner who was a full-time, long-term, relatively skilled, white, heterosexual, male worker. Valuable as this study is, however, Creese does not provide as much information on how female employees viewed their work roles in the office in relation to the male breadwinner ideal.

Although work in the auto industry differed from the office work at B.C. Electric, both Sugiman and Creese associate masculinity with the union’s adoption of a family wage strategy. Though union men participated in stereotyping women as temporary workers whose employment would be terminated upon marriage, employers’ consequent use of women in both industries as a cheap and expendable source of labour also meant that many working men viewed women employees as a threat rather than as partners in a unified struggle. The strong emphasis placed upon men’s responsibilities as breadwinners, Sugiman argues, not only helped define their identities as men but also justified unionists’ approval of a variety of discriminatory plant practices. According to Sugiman, however, “the particular form that a gendered strategy assumes rests on the extent to which structure impinges on ‘choice’ at different points in history.” Male auto workers and unionists, therefore, had relatively little ‘choice’ in accepting the discriminatory practices that subordinated women in the workplace.

While Lewchuk, Sugiman, and Creese’s interpretation of the UAW and OTEU’s male breadwinner ideology will be used as the underlying theory in this analytical study, I would like to add a gendered analysis of the seniority principle to their theory. Though the seniority issue received much attention in the pioneering works of Ruth Milkman and Nancy Gabin, their focus centered on how “union leaders ignored established seniority procedures in order to rid their

90 ibid., 439.
91 ibid., 9.
ranks of women instead of focusing on how seniority, like male breadwinner ideology, emerged as a sign of maleness and a signifier of masculine prerogatives within the workplace and the union. As illustrated in this chapter, therefore, definitions and concepts of masculinity are not only absent from many historical analyses of the auto industry and the UAW but are also lacking in working-class studies that explore the roles of men in the family. By examining the historical relationship between the auto industry’s family wage and masculinity, historians can better understand not only how men’s and women’s identities were made by their class position and through the labour process, but also how the auto industry and the UAW developed as gendered institutions in which masculinity conferred more power and privilege than femininity. Detailed studies of the process of seniority also offer historians of the automobile industry and the UAW alternative explanations of how women were discriminated against on the shop floor and in the union.

With the introduction of the moving assembly line in 1913 work was not only broken down into repetitive and monotonous tasks but also produced at a speed that was timed and altered to management’s specifications and advantage. To regain a sense of control and identity in a workplace that both deskilled and reduced their power in the production process, male auto workers defined themselves through their ability to provide an adequate living wage for their families. When women entered the auto plants as a cheap form of labour, male workers not only feared that management would displace them but they also feared losing their privileged position as breadwinners in the home. The establishment of the seniority system in the auto industry in the 1930s, examined in the following chapter, served in part as a strategy to prevent that loss.

93 See Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice," 17.
94 In her study men’s and women’s collective bargaining strategies in one office union, historian Gillian Creese suggests that “the process of gendering not only constructs masculinity and femininity in a given time and place, it also intersects with relations of class and racialization to define varying degrees of power and privilege. Although men and women are both gendered subjects, in most contexts masculinity confers more power and privilege than does femininity within the same class and race. See Creese, “Gendering Collective Bargaining,” 438.
Chapter 2

The Seniority Issue and Women Auto Workers’ Job Rights in the UAW Canadian Region, 1930-1940

“Never had there been such a device for speeding up labour. You simply moved a switch and a thousand men jumped more quickly. It was [like] an invisible tax... [and] even if a worker learns about it, it is like the tax in that he can do nothing about it. If he is a weakling, there are a dozen strong men outside waiting to take his place. Shut your mouth and do what you’re told!”

—Upton Sinclair

“One of the most priceless possessions still retained by modern man is what is called manhood ... Would you be a MAN—free, proud, independent, POWERFUL? Then get together with your fellow worker, ORGANIZE YOURSELF, and you will be in a position to proudly look into the eyes of foremen, straw bosses, and all the world and say: I AM A MAN.”

—Auto Worker News, 1927

From 1900 to 1937 the nature of work in the auto manufacturing industry underwent extensive changes with the introduction and development of mass production, machine tool technology, moving assembly techniques and one of the largest and most powerful unions in North America. Work that had once involved considerable exercise of skill and autonomy was replaced by increasingly unskilled tasks requiring extreme “dexterity, guidance, ability, and a nervous endurance to carry through dull, monotonous, fatiguing rhythmic operations.” Male auto workers not only became alienated from their tasks under this new Fordist system but also experienced a loss of decision-making power—workplace independence they associated with masculinity. To compensate for the deterioration in working conditions auto manufacturers not only increased employees’ wages but also introduced the strategy of fraternalism in the early twentieth century to reconstruct the concepts of masculinity inherited from the nineteenth century. “Fraternalism,” historian Wayne Lewchuk explains, “replaced paternalism as a managerial strategy to convert labour time into effort, a strategy that limited employment opportunities for

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2Auto Worker News (October 1927), 4. Also quoted in Lewchuk, “Men and Monotony,” 824.
3Peterson, American Automobile Workers, 1900-1933, 30.
women." Though Lewchuk argues that "women were excluded from production not because men were being paid a high wage, but rather because "it was unclear if time could be converted into effort as efficiently in a mixed–gender workforce," this chapter will argue the opposite. It is my argument that women workers were in fact excluded from production because of the high wages paid to male workers and the union's firm adherence to the ideology of the family wage whereby these high wages were considered inappropriate for women. Fearful that women in the workplace would take their jobs and positions as breadwinners in the family, male auto workers used the ideology behind the family wage to transform the newly won seniority principle into a tactic to subordinate women in the industry. This chapter, therefore, will demonstrate how male unionists used male breadwinner ideology to keep women auto workers from using their seniority rights in the workplace.

Both men and women workers fought hard to establish the seniority principle in the nonunion era "as a symbol of fairness and uniformity," but the principle that most UAW members considered as their most important gain was rarely extended to women auto workers on equal terms. While many male unionists supported the idea of pay equity for women when the issue arose during World War II, because they benefited economically from its implications, very few supported women's struggle against seniority discrimination. Motivated in the late 1930s by concerns about greater job security for auto workers, union men considered the seniority principle "a means by which to avoid the favouritism and arbitrary dismissals of early times." Although UAW leaders adopted a narrow definition of unionism that advanced "the general principles of democracy, equality, and worker unity," they failed to question blatant sex-based inequalities in employment, union, family, and the community, "thereby reinforcing divisions that employers had

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4Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony," 825.
5Ibid., 833.
6Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 17.
7By the end of 1942 UAW membership in Canada had increased by 50 per cent, marking the largest gain of any region of the International Union. In November 1941 Ford workers won recognition of the UAW as their exclusive bargaining agent. The following year Chrysler workers joined the union as well. General Motors' workers in Oshawa organized earlier in 1938. All "Big Three" auto companies in the United States recognized the UAW by 1941. General Motors organized first in 1936-37, Chrysler followed in 1939, and Ford finally organized in 1941. See Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 16.
8Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 5.
established long before the union was formed. A closer look at the establishment of the UAW in the late 1930s and the struggles workers endured over the seniority principle will illustrate the union’s unequal treatment of women and the union as a gendered institution.

Closely tied to the idea of job security, the seniority principle was regarded by auto workers and UAW members as one of the most important gains of industrial unionism in Canada. Since the industry was highly seasonal with long shutdowns for model changeover, “absence of seniority rules meant that long-serving employees had no assurance of being recalled to their jobs” when production of new models began after plants were retooled. Employers’ preference for “young, vigorous, quick men not past thirty-five” also permitted management to lay off the oldest workers in age and length of employment for excuses such as “lack of cooperation” or “inefficiency.” Older workers, therefore, were not only the first to be dismissed but also the least likely to be recalled. Rather than acquiring greater job security, wrote an anonymous GM employee in the United Automobile Worker,

the longer a man worked in the plant, the more insecure his position became. If management thought it was possible to replace an older man by some younger man ... the older man, who had given the best part of his life to the industry, was turned out on the street... Foremen had complete discretion with respect to who would work, with the result that workers paid sums of money to foremen in order to protect their jobs ... presented gifts to the foremen ... [and] did personal jobs for foremen, such as repairing their cars, cleaning their basements, painting their houses. When rumors of a layoff began to circulate, the worker had no way of knowing whether or not he was going to be laid off, inasmuch as he had no protection or security whatsoever, ...would put his nose to the grind-stone and work harder than before, hoping that the foreman would notice his greater effort and reward him by keeping him on the job and laying off his fellow worker. Every worker in the department did likewise and, ... the production in that department increased greatly the day or two before the layoff.

The threat of layoff not only increased plant production but also worker output so that management could reduce the number of “inefficient” workers to maintain the customary work week for those “efficient” workers who remained with the company. It also created tension and

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10Ibid.
11Ibid.
12The employment records of GM’s Fisher Body Pontiac Division show that long-service workers of both sexes were laid off for ‘lack of cooperation’ or ‘inefficiency.’” See Milkman, Gender at Work, 30.
competition among long-serving employees and new hires. Thus, while workers' struggle for the implementation of the seniority principle was initially an attempt to assert some measure of control over their employment in the auto industry, it also served as "a means by which to avoid favouritism, exploitation, and bribery." The seniority principle not only served as a kind of "social insurance against the effects of aging" but also helped to limit competition among workers who would otherwise "undercut conditions by offering to produce more or accept lower wages" in order to retain their jobs.

Although both male and female auto workers fought hard to establish the seniority principle "as a symbol of fairness and uniformity," the UAW's standard seniority system, governing transfer, layoff, and recall procedures, was initiated to protect men's seniority and male classified jobs. Instead of the, arbitrary, unpredictable, and disorderly standards imposed by auto manufacturers, the UAW wanted length of service to be the sole consideration in determining job rights. But rather than negotiate contracts for plantwide seniority based solely on length of service, the UAW also arranged for seniority to be determined by job classification and department. This formula, known as "non-interchangeable occupational group seniority," not only specified separate non-interchangeable seniority lists for men and women but also reinforced the existing pattern of female employment and gender segregation. The 1937 agreement between General Motors and UAW workers in Oshawa, for example, stated that "in any department in which both men and women worked, the sexes should be divided into separate and non-interchangeable occupational groups." Negotiated into the union's contract with GM, this

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16 Auto-assembly and body plants were the focus of the UAW's first campaigns in the mid-1930s. Considered "the heart of the industry, these plants employed relatively few women. Representing just 5 per cent of the operatives in auto-assembly plants and 10 percent of those in body plants, women were also segregated in one or a few nearly all-female departments." See Gabin, Feminism in the Labour Movement, 17.
17 Separate seniority lists were also established in the United States for Black men and boys but in Canada black men were such a minority that "employers did not use them to undercut white men by paying them lower wages or hiring them as strikebreakers." See Pamela Sugiman, "Privilege and Oppression: The Configuration of Race, Gender, and Class in Southern Ontario Auto Plants, 1939 to 1949," Labour/ Le Travail, 47 (Spring 2001), 96-97.
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clause meant that during a lay-off, "women could move only into 'women's departments.' Since women's "seniority was specific to their sex," they could not 'bump' male employees in different job classifications or departments to retain their job even though men could bump into female jobs. Thus, a man with three years seniority at GM might retain his job, while a woman with ten years seniority with the company would be laid off. When "a man transferred to a woman's job, he would receive the male rate," but when "a woman resumed the job, she would receive the lower female rate." While the clause was "not intended to exclude women from the industry," Gabin argues, "it did serve to limit women's job opportunities in auto plants." Although UAW leaders supported the theory of a plantwide seniority system, in practice their narrow definition of seniority not only failed to question the institution of sex-differentials but was also successful in reinforcing this discriminatory practice. In fact, during the mid-1930s "the UAW became a staunch defender and advocate of separate seniority lists" as a means of preventing management from replacing "male workers with cheaper female labour in order to reduce wage costs." While job displacement rarely occurred during the depression years, the UAW still found it necessary to reinforce the sex-differentials in separate seniority systems established by management in the nonunion era. The basic pattern of female employment, therefore, remained unaffected by the establishment of the seniority principle in the auto industry. The UAW was formed as a male

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18 Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 51.  
19 Though seniority lists were supposed to be non-interchangeable they often operated to male workers' advantage and were used in practice, if not in theory, to protect male jobs from female workers. Women's jobs were determined by their sex whereas male jobs were determined by what jobs were available in the plant. Because women were viewed as temporary workers, their jobs were considered available to any male worker.  
21 Ibid., 34.  
22 Gabin, Feminism in the Labour Movement, 34.  
23 Ruth Milkman explains, that "two key changes occurred in the 1930s that might have been expected to alter the sexual division of labour in the industry. The deep economic crisis led many contemporaries to fear that employers would replace male workers with cheaper female labour in order to reduce wage costs. Yet this occurred surprisingly little during the depression. Some incidents of female substitution were reported, but the overall effect of the economic downturn was to stabilize the previously established sexual division of labour, even in the hard-hit auto and electrical industries." See Milkman, Gender at Work, 27.
institution in the late 1930s on the premise of male seniority rights and remained a masculine institution in practice until the early 1970s.\(^\text{24}\)

While the seniority principle gave women some protection from sexual harassment and favouritism, the UAW’s firm adherence to the ideology of the family wage meant that married women’s seniority rights were protected much less than single women’s or men’s. Guided by an assumption that women were financial dependents and that men were, and should be, breadwinners, male UAW leaders adopted a wage strategy that was based on the notion that, as breadwinners, married men deserved and required higher wages and better jobs than other workers, especially women.\(^\text{25}\) During the 1930s, discrimination against married women was not only practiced by auto workers but was also widely accepted among male UAW leaders. The strong emphasis placed upon men’s responsibilities as breadwinners not only helped define their identities as men\(^\text{26}\) but also justified unionists’ approval of a variety of discriminatory plant practices. Although auto manufacturers preferred not to employ married women, “either because they did not want to violate conventional notions of women’s proper place and arouse contemporary anxiety about men’s unemployment or because they regarded wives and mothers as unstable and unreliable employees,” more married women than single women worked in auto plants during the depression years.\(^\text{27}\)

Although hiring practices varied from plant to plant during the 1930s, many married women were forced to lie about or conceal their marital status “in order to obtain and retain their jobs.”\(^\text{28}\) Married women who were not given “voluntary quit slips”\(^\text{30}\) and remained employed in the

\(^{24}\) Sugiman argues that from 1937 to 1979 UAW leaders made few attempts to alter these patterns. See Sugiman, \textit{Labour’s Dilemma}, 5.


\(^{26}\) As Joy Parr explains in her study of class and gender identities in two small industrial towns, “husbands often measured their personal worth as men by their ability to meet their households’ needs for cash. They were particularly likely to compare themselves in this regard with their fathers, and their wives’ place in the household with their mothers.” See Parr, \textit{The Gender of Breadwinners}, 198-199.

\(^{27}\) Gabin, \textit{Feminism in the Labour Movement}, 36.

\(^{28}\) In Michigan, for example, of the 15,406 women employed in 1940 in production at auto plants, 4,316, or 28 percent, were single and 9,349, or 61 percent, were married. See Gabin, \textit{Feminism in the Labour Movement}, 36.

\(^{29}\) Gabin, \textit{Feminism in the Labour Movement}, 37.

\(^{30}\) A “voluntary quit slip” was the most common way of laying-off or firing a married woman. When given the slip women basically admitted to lying about or concealing their marital status to the company. See Sugiman, \textit{Labour’s Dilemma}, 130.
auto industry were not only criticized by their fellow employees but also held very insecure positions in the plant. As Sugiman explains, “employers commonly placed married women on work shifts and seniority lists separate from those of other (male and female) employees, and assigned them a temporary status.” Women who had employed husbands faced extreme hostility for “taking jobs away from men who were the sole support of their families” and for “selfishly seeking to enhance the standard of living of their families at the expense of self-supporting” single men and women. “All these married women working in the shop do not have children,” two single women who themselves had been laid off asserted in a letter to the United Auto Worker. “They have a double income and luxuries, swell furnished homes, and all drive nice cars,” they further complained. “There should be action to put these women in their place, which is home, seniority or no seniority.” While the union was required to protect married women’s seniority rights, union leaders usually only tolerated the presence of married women in the auto plants until a layoff occurred, when, “following jointly negotiated agreements, they were the first to be dismissed regardless of seniority.” Union contracts and agreements frequently included these inequitable clauses because negotiators assumed that married women were adequately supported by their husbands’ wages. Thus, by reinforcing the idea that men were breadwinners and women were financial dependents, union leaders legitimized domestic ideology not only in the minds of working-class men and women but also in UAW contracts and negotiations. The UAW’s failure to challenge these discriminatory ideologies and practices against married women workers not only reinforced women’s economic dependence on men but also clearly demonstrates women’s subordinate position in the union, the industry, and the home.

In addition, both married and single women were subject to verbal harassment and intimidation by fellow workers, stewards, and local union officers. Tactics of this sort were not

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31 Ibid., 57.
32 Originally quoted in the United Auto Worker, January 29, 1938, also quoted in Gabin, Feminism in the Labour Movement, 37.
33 Ibid.
34 Because the concept of sexual harassment during this period was more rudimentary than it is today it is harder to ascertain exactly what constituted sexual harassment in the 1940s. See Sangster, Earning Respect, 98. Furthermore, as Sugiman explains, “amicable relations were often reinforced by family ties.” For example, “in the small communities of Oshawa and St. Catherines, workers lived together as husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and fathers and daughters. Given the dominance of General
only used to coerce women into leaving their jobs, but were also used to prevent women from filing grievances against management for sexual discrimination. Historian Nancy Gabin suggests the ability of local unionists to succeed in this type of intimidation “helped to conceal both to outside observers and sometimes to international officers the extent of their collusion with management in discriminating against female employees.”  
Thus, by confining women to sex-specific jobs in the plants and by denying their seniority rights, “employers [and union leaders] never fully relinquished the image of women as secondary wage earners, undeserving of full rights in the workplace.” It is precisely because of the strength of these ideas and images that many male unionists tolerated employers’ unfair treatment of women workers and ignored the gender component of social inequality. Consequently, these ideas not only fractured worker resistance but also resulted in the marginalization of women in the UAW and the construction of unionism as a masculine pursuit.

The pervasiveness of the family wage ideal, however, did not rest simply on the force of tradition. As Sugiman explains, “the idea of a male breadwinner figured prominently in men’s desire to exclude women. Yet, despite its strength and persistence, this ideology was not necessarily rooted in a single and uniform logic. Rather, men often drew on culturally dominant beliefs selectively, to legitimize their different interests over time.” The social construction of man as breadwinner “bestowed upon men certain privileges—privileges that included material gains, such as higher rates of pay and comforts in the home, but also extended to the subjective.” During the 1930s, breadwinner ideology reinforced in male auto workers and UAW leaders “the perception that the union and the workplace were rightfully masculine domains in which men could affirm their gender identity.” As women became a more viable force in the industry towards the end of the 1930s, men advocated this family model more strongly and loudly than in

Motors as an employer in these towns, family relationships extended beyond the home and into the workplace.” As a result, this type of situation could prevent a woman from filing a harassment grievance against management or the union because her family’s employment might be affected by her coming forward with such an accusation. See Sugiman, Labour’s Dilemma, 90.

Ibid., 189.
Ibid., 55.
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...the past. "They were in that male attitude, the women's place is in the home, the man is the boss ... and all this kind of crap," remarked a female GM employee.

But as Sugiman points out, it was not only male workers and union leaders who voiced such attitudes during the depression era. Guided by the social conventions surrounding marriage and motherhood, both married and single women often accepted and rationalized the ideology of 'woman's place' and surrendered their jobs to male workers, instead of fighting for their seniority rights and their place in the industry. While most married women in the auto industry worked during this period for financial reasons, the majority "grew up believing that they would become full-time homemakers, economically dependent on a man."40 As a result, women auto workers not only generally agreed with "the prevailing sentiment that married women should not have jobs while male breadwinners were desperate for work" but were also often very "reluctant to replace men directly" when job openings became available in the industry. Mrs. Helen Gage, who worked at the Packard Company in 1933, clearly illustrates this point when she states, "I refused to take a man's job, which would have taken away from him, his wife, and his children his weekly wage. ... I, for one, would not give my job up to another woman, but I will give my job up to a man, as a man has more responsibilities than a woman."41 Thus, the union's firm adherence to the idea of a male-breadwinner family and a family wage strategy not only figured prominently in UAW leaders' desire to exclude women from work in the auto manufacturing and parts plants but also played a significant role in women's acceptance of separate seniority lists and the sexual division of labour.

39 Ibid., 189.
40 This statement is particularly true of married and single women who worked before and during the Second World War to help support their families in the absence of a male breadwinner. As is illustrated later in the chapter with the example of Rosie the Riveter, women who performed men's jobs during the war were either expected to quit or transfer to other jobs. While many women accepted this arrangement, others realized that a male breadwinner alone could not support a family's financial needs and continued to work. See Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 95.
41 While single women would violate the rights of their married sisters, very few would violate the rights of male breadwinners. The precarious economic times of the depression often pitted married women against single women, widows and divorced women against working wives. See Milkman, Gender at Work, 32-33.
in the auto industry. The union's firm adherence to a male breadwinner ideology during the 1930s also illustrates prevalent societal norms and women's consent to those norms.

Although women's labour historians "initially concentrated on establishing women workers as historical agents who actively resisted conditions that oppressed them," their present analyses of working women's lives reveal that in many "instances women accepted and even cooperated in reproducing conditions that oppressed them" because the sexual division of labour in the workplace simply made sense in the culture of the time. The sexual division of labour was not only "related to definitions of skill, but also to the creation of men's and women's jobs, to forms of authority and supervision, and to one's ability to engage in unions or to the experience of unemployment." The sexual division of labour was both "consonant with their own experience of female work" (which was considered temporary, unskilled, and inferior to men's) and with "their own participation in an ideology of sexual difference and female domesticity." Definitions of masculinity and femininity were also moulded in the home, utilized in the streets, and assimilated in clubs and unions, shaping "the assumptions and identit[ies] that both men and women workers took with them as they entered and left the factory gates." As a result, concepts of gender and class were often inseparable in the lived experience and consciousness of working-class men and women.

While historian Ruth Meyerowitz believes that women auto workers accepted the industry's sexual division of labour and male breadwinner ideology because they lacked a feminist consciousness and independent feminist movement in the 1930s, women's acceptance of this ideology is more complex than Meyerowitz's explanation. According to historian Ava

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42 As I will later demonstrate with examples from the 1960s, there are numerous "variations in the degree of men's resistance to women, as well as in their adherence to conventional domestic ideology." See Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 189.
43 Ava Baron, "Gender and Labour History," 27.
44 Sangster, Earning Respect, 5.
46 Sangster, Earning Respect, 5.
47 As Sugiman explains, in order to fully understand worker consciousness and action we must recognize the ways in which gender and class are inseparable in lived experience. Only by treating them as purely abstract concepts can we view them as distinct." See Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 7.
Baron, women workers often made choices “between their class and gender interests on the basis of their historically specific experiences.” For instance, female auto workers often opted to support the patriarchal family, the sexual segregation of work, and men’s higher wages instead of fighting for their own specific women’s issues because it allowed them to play a larger and more independent role in the labour movement and the UAW. From the women workers’ vantage point, Baron explains, such support provided positive advantages; it not only “increased female solidarity” but also “made men less competitive and more willing to cooperate with women’s labour activity.” In other words, it deflected male hostility that could have resulted from direct challenges to male power. While Meyerowitz argues that women neglected their feminist consciousness to support the class issues they had in common with their union brothers, Baron’s approach actually demonstrates how women “selected the most beneficial choice on the basis of their assessment of the alternatives available.” Thus, Baron’s approach not only “provides valuable insights into how working women viewed roles of class and gender,” but also shows how they accepted and rationalized the auto industry’s dominant breadwinner ideology. This approach also gives insight into the feminist unionism women auto workers established in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Although the ‘Big Three’ auto makers had all recognized the UAW as the bargaining agent for their workers by 1942, UAW leaders did not draw women auto workers into the union on equal terms with men during the Second World War. While employers in the auto industry were initially quite resistant to the idea of hiring women to do ‘men’s jobs,’ they were forced to hire women when the reserve pool of male civilian workers had been exhausted and could no longer meet the increased demands of wartime production. The massive influx of women into the auto plants during the 1940s not only challenged management’s beliefs about women’s capabilities as industrial workers but also created “the potential for fundamental shifts in the composition,

49Baron, “Gender and Labour History,” 28.
50Ibid.
51Ibid.
structure, and direction of both the union and the industry.52 But, as sociologist Ruth Milkman explains, "a closer look at the actual experience of women industrial workers during the war years ... suggests that the retrospective feminist construction of their place in history is apocryphal."

Although women were hired to do 'men's jobs' during the war "on a scale unparalleled before or since,"53 their employment did not result of a feminist campaign. While the publicly glamourized image of Rosie the Riveter, baring her muscles in her coveralls and bandanna, undoubtedly helped validate this assumption, it was her image as a temporary worker, uprooted from her home and family that symbolized her womanhood in the auto industry.54 The image of Rosie not only confirmed the popular belief that women belonged in the home but also contributed to the pre-war sexual division of labour which helped to ensure that women would continue to view themselves as family members first and workers second. Thus, when women were called upon by the auto manufacturers to meet production demands, "they were not randomly incorporated into 'men's jobs'" as vacancies became available. Instead, Milkman argues, "new patterns of occupational segregation by sex were established" for the duration of the war within the sectors and departments of the industry previously monopolized by men. So, Rosie did a 'man's job,' but "more often than not she worked in a predominately female department or job classification."55

While these "new patterns of occupational segregation by sex" created a clearly demarcated 'woman's place' in the auto plants' various divisions and departments, the industry remained masculine in both structure and organization—largely unchanged from the nonunion (1930s) era.

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52 The massive influx of women into the auto plants made ambiguous the once-rigid boundaries between men's and women's work and produced the resources for a challenge to sexually discriminatory employment practices. Note that the key words in this sentence are 'created' and 'potential'. See Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 27.

53 Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work," 337.

54 While Rosie the Riveter was an American creation, Canadian employers also used misleading propaganda to ensure the public that women's employment in wartime industries would be temporary. For example, in the summer of 1943 McKinnon Industries (a parts plant for GM) promoted women's war work in local department store windows. In public view, the women performed the jobs that they undertook daily in the plant. The theme of the display was 'the major role being played by Canadian women on the industrial front.' Company officials reported that over 10,000 visitors viewed the exhibit. For more information see Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 21.

55 Occupations are often re-gendered as women move into previously all-male domains, and the result is new patterns of segregated work. See Milkman, "Redefining 'Women's Work," 338.
Though male union leaders increased their recruitment of female members during the war years and directly challenged unequal pay for equal work, both the union and the auto plants remained highly sexist environments that used various measures to reinforce the unequal position of women workers. While many women strongly supported the principles of unionism, female representation in the union remained extremely low in the 1940s because few women were encouraged by UAW leaders to seek local union office and participate in union affairs. Women who did manage to occupy positions within the union usually engaged in subordinate tasks on an intermittent basis, while male leaders had complete control over the union's administrative operations. Male union officials not only gave little attention to matters that exclusively concerned women but also failed to seriously address "the link between disputes about equal pay for equal work, seniority rights, and sexed-based inequality." As Sugiman explains, male unionists not only took gender inequalities for granted but also continued to act on the idea that working men deserved to occupy a privileged position in the industry.

While women workers' fight for seniority rights equal to those of men in the auto industry was more complex than this chapter suggests, it does illustrate the various tactics auto manufacturers and male UAW leaders employed to subordinate women's position in the industry and maintain their positions in the home. Though the seniority principle was considered one of the basic tenets of industrial unionism, it did not apply equally to all industrial workers. Male auto workers and union leaders used their dominant positions in the industry and cultural norms surrounding the male breadwinner ideal to exclude women from this "improper place." Even as the two-worker family began to emerge as the norm in the inflationary era that began in the 1960s many unionists clung to the old ideal of securing a family wage for their family members. The massive influx of women into the auto manufacturing and parts plants also had little if any effect on the way women were treated in the industry. Most auto work was synonymous with masculinity, and the UAW guaranteed that it remained that way until the 1970s. Thus, despite the UAW's egalitarian origins, female auto workers were not drawn into or accepted within the union.

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56 Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 62
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on equal terms with men. This continued to be true in the 1960s and 1970s as feminist challenges began and ultimately brought down the separate seniority system.
Chapter 3

‘Well they call me the workin’ man, I guess that’s what I am:’ Integrating Gender and Seniority at the Chrysler Spring Plant, 1964-1976

“I’m on the tough side. I never let them [men] walk all over me!”

- Linda St. Antoine

“We are definitely paid more than the average workforce.”

- Martin Lucier

“When I think back on it now … I can’t remember any short women … they were basically as tall as I am.”

- Gordon Dunn

This chapter examines how the seniority principle operated in a specific auto plant to demonstrate how seniority affected both male and female auto workers. An industry specific historical analysis of the seniority principle has several advantages. First, it examines how seniority was applied within a particular company and how that company maintained seniority rules and regulations. Second an industry specific analysis allows for a more detailed look at the people involved in the seniority disputes and how these disputes were solved to the workers’ satisfaction. A smaller focused study also allows the historian to concentrate on the roles these players had in the development of their own experiences. This chapter will focus on two separate companies to illustrate how the mechanisms used by male workers and unionists to discriminate against women in the auto industry during the 1930s and the 1940s as described in Chapter 2 were still being used to prohibit or limit women’s entry into Chrysler’s passenger car and truck assembly plants in Windsor, Ontario, during the 1960s. It will then address what happened after the amendment of the Ontario Human Rights Code in 1970 eliminated the sex-based seniority system.

In the fall of 1925 Walter McGregor, president and general manager of the Ideal Fence and Spring Company of Canada, announced in Windsor’s Border Cities Star that the company, along with the Leggett and Platt Spring Bed Company, had been acquired by L. A. Young

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2 Linda St. Antoine, Interview, 11 April 2001, LaSalle, Ontario (Young Spring and Wire/Chrysler-Local 444).
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Industries, Inc., of Detroit.\textsuperscript{5} Established in 1909, L. A. Young "enjoy[ed] a wide reputation throughout the United States" and "all those connected with [the merger were] sanguine of satisfying results being obtained under the plant.\textsuperscript{6} Previously a manufacturer of bed springs and furniture cushion springs, the Ideal Fence and Spring Company, under the merger with L. A. Young Spring and Wire, was retooled to produce seat springs and trim for Chrysler, Ford, American Motors and Studebaker.\textsuperscript{7} While the Ideal Fence and Spring Company reportedly employed a "hundred steady men\textsuperscript{8} at the time of its merger, L. A. Young Spring and Wire Industries would not only grow to employ "several hundred steady men and women" but also to become the "largest manufacturer of automobile cushions in the Dominion\textsuperscript{9} by 1935.

Although business in the company increased remarkably in the years during the Depression working conditions were far from satisfactory. A lack of control over the work process and low pay rates influenced the workers of L. A. Young Spring and Wire to join UAW Local 195 in calling a strike on 11 May 1937.\textsuperscript{10} L. A. Young general manager C. E. Platt was aware of the workers' demand for a "minimum wage of 75 cents an hour, 10 cents an hour increase for employees receiving more than that, and time and a half for overtime\textsuperscript{11} but was unwilling to recognize the UAW/CIO affiliate as the negotiators for the workers' demands.\textsuperscript{12} Within hours of the announcement workers had already formed a heavy picket line outside the factory and were meeting at the local Hungarian Hall on Langlois Avenue. But what had started as a peaceful strike suddenly turned violent when Mayor Wigle showed his support to L. A. Young Spring and Wire by calling in police guards to protect the thirty-five replacement workers the company had

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[5] "Two Windsor Factories Figure in $600,000 Merger," \textit{The Border Cities Star}, 27 August 1925, 3.
\item[6] ibid.
\item[7] ibid.
\item[8] ibid.
\item[9] ibid.
\item[10] By 1937 the company had around 300 production workers on the payroll 70 of which were female workers. See "L. A. Young Industries Have Record Number of Workers," \textit{The Windsor Daily Star}, 28 December 1935, 7 and "Arrested in Picket Line," \textit{The Windsor Daily Star}, 13 May 1937, 5.
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'Well they call me the workin' man, I guess that's what I am:' Integrating Gender and Seniority at the Windsor Spring Plant, 1964-1976

hired to help break the strike. Although violence on the picket line resulted in the arrest of at least three male strikers, the Windsor Daily Star reported that "the most diligent picket ... was a woman who, as each car passed, stuck out her tongue and screamed, 'Yah, yah--stinking yellow rats.'"13

The pickets carried by the workers which read "'No more beer for Pete,' 'No more silk shirts for Kollie,' and 'No more bline [sic] pig and chuin [sic] tobacco'"14 not only illustrated their fear that the strike was far from being over but also implied that workers had to buy beer and chewing tobacco for the foremen in order to keep their jobs. Despite the workers' fears that their struggle would result in a long drawn out strike,15 negotiations came to an end on 19 May 1937 when an agreement was signed between L. A. Young Spring and Wire and the UAW.16 Upon hearing the news "men, women, and girls emerged from the Hungarian Hall ... singing and cheering and hastened towards their homes for dinner" as work was to resume in the McDougall street plant at 1:30 that afternoon.17

The tentative agreement not only provided 328 male and female employees with a graduated minimum wage and time and a half for overtime but also provided for "a working week of five nine-hour days and a clause to protect all striking employees from discrimination."18 Under the new agreement female workers were to receive "a minimum of 32 ½ cents per hour for the first 30 days of employment, 37 ½ cents per hour for the next 30 days and 40 cents per hour thereafter," whereas the male workers received "a minimum of 45 cents per hour during their first 30 days, 50 cents per hour during the next 30 days and 55 cents per hour thereafter."19 Seniority rights were also carefully safeguarded in the tentative pact, and a "shop committee of five

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12 Piatt would not recognize the union because he believed that "the majority of [his] employees didn't want the union." See "Arrested in Picket Line," The Windsor Daily Star, 13 May 1937, 5.
14 ibid.
15 During the strike a couple of workers, fearing that their jobs would not be reinstated after the strike, reportedly told coworkers at the Hungarian Hall that they were crossing the picket lines and returning to work. Their announcement was meet with "boos and commotion" and "the girls yelled 'dirty rats.'" See "Expect Settlement of Strikers Today," The Windsor Daily Star, 18 May 1937, 3, 10.
16 The negotiations did not cover the deadlock at Walker Metal Products. See "L. A. Young Strikers are Back at L. A. Young Strikers are Back at Work," The Windsor Daily Star, 19 May 1937, 3, 14.
17 ibid.
18 ibid., 3.
members—was placed in the plant to deal with all grievance procedures. Though the UAW/CIO had an enormous impact on increasing wages for male and female workers in the late 1930s, women workers still earned substantially less than men because wage differentials were linked to sex-based job classifications. As Pamela Sugiman explains, as long as women performed work that was labeled ‘female’ and had been traditionally performed by women, the lower rates were accept[ed] and defended in the industry by both male and female workers.

But while Margaret Chauvin was placed on the UAW negotiating committee during the 1937 strike to represent the female employees of L. A. Young Spring and Wire, the UAW gave little attention to the special needs of women workers. A few years later, for example, section (30) of the 1945-1949 collective agreement between L. A. Young Industries and UAW Local 195, for example, stated that the company "will not discriminate in the hiring of employees or in their training, up-grading, promotion, transfer, lay-off, discipline, discharge, or otherwise, because of race, creed, colour, national origin, political affiliation, sex or marital status," but female employees were still fired upon marriage because section (20) of the agreement overruled section (30). Section (20) stated,

no new employee being married will be employed unless it can be proved to the satisfaction of the Company that she is the sole support of herself and her family. Any single girl now in the employ of the Company or who in the future may be in the employ of the Company shall, upon becoming married, cease to be employed by the Company.

This section not only reinforced conventional ideology about woman’s proper place but also confirmed the unequal status of women in the industry and the UAW. Collective agreements that included clauses like section (20) of the negotiation between L. A. Young Spring and Wire and

\[20\]bid.
\[21\]Women often upheld gendered ideas and practices in order to protect their restricted position in the auto industry. See Sugiman, Labour’s Dilemma, 42, 137.
\[22\]The company becomes L. A. Young Industries of Canada in the 1940s.
\[23\]ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 170, File "L. A. Young Industries Ltd., Windsor, 1945-1949," Amendments to Agreement with L. A. Young Industries of Canada from UAW Local 195, 6.
\[24\]ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 170, File "L. A. Young Industries Ltd., Windsor, 1945-1949," Memorandum of Agreement between L. A. Young Industries of Canada and the UAW, 8.
the UAW also allowed the company to lay off and dismiss married women in massive numbers after the Second World War.

Jobs and seniority rights were also clearly defined as ‘male’ or ‘female’ in section (16) of the 1957 collective agreement between Young Spring and Wire Corp., of Canada and UAW Local 195. In the 1957 agreement

upon completion of ninety (90) calendar days within any period of twelve consecutive months, a female employee shall be entitled to have her name placed upon an occupational group seniority list of female employees and a male employee shall be entitled to have his name placed upon an occupational group seniority list of male employees.

Although section (16) was not intended to exclude women from employment at Young Spring and Wire, it did serve to limit women’s job opportunities in the industry and the union. Separate male and female seniority lists not only gave management considerable “flexibility in distributing layoffs between men and women” but also controlled the classification of jobs by sex. Under agreements that provided for departmental or occupational group seniority women employed in predominately or exclusively female departments or job categories were not permitted to ‘bump’ men on jobs elsewhere in the plant. Separate seniority lists, therefore, were not only “designed to prevent women from competing with men” for the same jobs but also denied women the right to displace a male employee with less seniority” in order to retain their own jobs within the company.

Though women’s opportunities were limited at Young Spring and Wire, during the 1950s and 1960s female workers tended to draw increasingly on the tools of resistance constructed by

26 ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 170, File “Young Spring and Wire Corp. of Canada Windsor, 1958,” Memorandum of Agreement 3 July 1957, 14.
27 Especially since the language of the collective agreement was written in masculine terms. Section (54) of the 1957 collective agreement between Young Spring and Wire Corp., of Canada and UAW Local 195 stated “throughout this agreement whenever the masculine is used, it shall be construed as including the feminine where the contract or nature of the case requires.” See ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 170, File “Young Spring and Wire Corp. of Canada Windsor, 1958,” Memorandum of Agreement 3 July 1957, 11.
28 Milkman, Gender at Work, 40.
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working-class men in the early years of unionization—the UAW grievance procedure and the collective agreement. While shopfloor resistance among women workers sometimes took the form of individual resistance, it was most commonly expressed through group action. For example, in 1958 Aza Zielinski and four of her female coworkers placed a grievance with UAW 195 claiming that they had been laid off from Young Spring and Wire while "certain men in the department ... were used to cover the jobs which had normally been done by Miss Zielinski and the others who were on lay-off." As a result, Zielinski and the other female workers "lost several hours pay on two particular days and in addition were not entitled to holiday pay for Christmas and New Years [sic] as they did not work within thirty days of the named statutory holidays." The union, however, responded to the women's complaint by explaining that "the men who had not been laid off were still part of the reduced working force and that on such a lay-off the only right such an employee has is to be recalled to work on the basis of seniority." While the Agreement in question did not set out specific jobs for male and female workers, "certain classifications [were] set out as male and others as female" in the plant.

In this particular dispute, the union agreed that there had in fact been "work for females to do but these jobs had been given to men." The more senior males "were breaking into the jobs of the females" as there was "nothing in the Agreement, which prevents jobs normally performed by females being done by males." It was also customary, Judge Arrell explained, "to have two seniority lists, one for males and one for females with no interchangeability between the two lists." Judge Arrell concluded, therefore, that "the lay-off had been proper and that those who had been laid off had no right to exercise their seniority until they were recalled to work. The union has not

30 The grievance procedure is key to the union contract. Union-negotiated grievance procedures have been widely regarded as the most systematic and effective means of dispute resolution in workplaces." See Patricia Gwartney-Gibbs and Denise Lach, "Gender Differences in Grievance Processing and the Implications for Rethinking Shopfloor Practices," in Dorothy Sue Cobble, ed., Women and Unions: Forging a Partnership, (Ithaca and New York: ILR Press, 1993), 299.
31 ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 170, File "Young Spring and Wire Corp. of Canada Windsor, 1958," Grievances 1958 in the Matter of the Labour Relations Act, RSO., 1950, Chapter 194, between Young Spring and Wire and the UAW (Local 195), 3-4.
32 Judge Arrell was the umpire in this grievance case between Young Spring and Wire and UAW Local 195.
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established any breach of the Agreement and the grievances in dispute should be dismissed.”

Zielinski and her coworkers, however, were never recalled to work. As this example indicates, women auto workers “relentlessly protested their restricted position in the industry, yet they were bound by a collective agreement that institutionalized sex-based job classifications and seniority systems.” Separate seniority lists not only meant that women with high seniority could be laid off if there were job cuts in the ‘female departments’ while lower-seniority men remained in the ‘male departments’ but they also prohibited women from applying for a ‘man’s job’ even if she were qualified.

While Young Spring and Wire figured prominently in the Windsor Daily Star during the 1940s and the 1950s for its devastating explosions and fires, the company did not figure in the news again until its acquisition by Chrysler Canada on 18 December 1964. Although Windsor Spring (plant 8) was covered by a separate collective agreement with the UAW, every effort was made to bring the company’s “workers under a common agreement” with Chrysler Canada, Limited. The UAW membership of Windsor Spring was also transferred on 1 October 1965 from Local 195 to Local 444 (Chrysler) by a vote of 107 to 1. Seniority rights, based on the continuing separate male and female lists were strictly guarded during this acquisition, and all Young Spring

33 ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 170, File “Young Spring and Wire Corp. of Canada Windsor, 1958,” Grievances 1958 in the Matter of the Labour Relations Act, RSO., 1950, Chapter 194, between Young Spring and Wire and the UAW (Local 195), 3-4.

34 In a grievance placed by Audrey Bennett and Katherine Fenton on 24 February 1960 the Umpire used Judge Arrell’s 1958 decision as precedence to dismiss the women’s case. See ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 170, File “Young Spring and Wire Corp. of Canada Windsor, 1960-1962,” Young Spring and Wire Corporation of Canada Limited and Local 195 UAW Award of the Umpire, 24 February, 1960, 1-6.

35 Sugiman, Labour’s Dilemma, 126.


38 New plant name under the Chrysler acquisition. Also sometimes recorded as the Young Spring Division.

39 This Agreement expired 1 March 1966. See ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 170, File “Young Spring and Wire Corp. of Canada Windsor, 1965-1966,” Acquisition of Young Spring and Wire by Chrysler Canada Limited, 17 September 1965.

40 Ibid.

41 See ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 170, File “Young Spring and Wire Corp. of Canada Windsor, 1965-1966,” Meeting notice from UAW president Alix Sinkevitch (Local 195) and ALUA, UAW Canadian Regional Office (Region 7), Box 96, File 8, “Local 444, 1967,” Local 444; A Record of Progress, 26.
and Wire workers were considered Chrysler employees with the right to exercise their seniority during transfer and lay-off.

Chrysler, however, was not the only auto manufacturer in the province of Ontario to maintain separate seniority lists for both male and female workers. Limited by the company's sex-based job classifications and the 1961 Seniority Agreement between General Motors and Local 222, women auto workers in Oshawa were also restricted to a small number of jobs in the only female department (the wire and harness department) in the plant. The transfer of the female-dominated cutting and sewing departments from Oshawa to GM's Windsor plant not only resulted in the loss of an overwhelming proportion of the female workforce but also in "the elimination of 300 to 400" predominately "female jobs." By 1968 the company's restructuring was severely felt when women with seniority dating back to 1962 were laid off for fifteen months, while GM continued to hire male employees.

While this discriminatory practice angered and frustrated the company's female employees, GM and the UAW continued to uphold the 1961 Local Seniority Agreement that stated, "The seniority rights of men, women and boys shall be exercised only in separate seniority classifications and shall not be interchangeable," and paragraph 62 (7) of the GM Master Agreement which read, "It is understood that female employees cannot make application for jobs vacated by male employees or vice versa." Driven by this anger and frustration, "a small group of about seven" outspoken and politically minded women from UAW Local 222 decided to confront sex discrimination collectively in both the industry and their union. "We kept fighting this and saying that this isn't right," reported union activist and GM employee Bev McCloskey. And when employers and union officials ignored their protests for change, the women were forced to extend their demands beyond the union and the workplace and utilize

\[\text{42} \text{Sugiman, "Unionism and Feminism in the Canadian Auto Workers Union 1961-1992," 173.}\]

\[\text{43} \text{bid.}\]

\[\text{44} \text{Just as in the 1930s and 1940s this seniority clause was implemented by the company and the UAW as an attempt to exclude women workers from certain parts of the plant in order to preserve jobs for male breadwinners. Thus, working men still viewed women as competitors for desirable jobs. See Sugiman, "That wall's comin' down," 6.}\]

\[\text{45} \text{Sugiman, "Unionism and Feminism in the Canadian Auto Workers Union 1961-1992," 173.}\]
another tactic that union men had long relied on—the lobby for legislative rights. Legal rights, they strongly believed, would provide a foundation for more effective struggles in the future.46

Recognizing that the Ontario Human Rights Code, 1961-1962, "prohibited discrimination on the basis of colour, race, creed, and national origin" but not sex or marital status, the Women's Committee of Local 222 launched an organized campaign to amend the Act. "Sex" in the Human Rights Code, "is not a dirty word," a unionist advised women members. "It is the right of every working woman to earn a decent living. It won't end discrimination, but with the law behind them ... [women] can get better wages and opportunities in every field."47 Securing the legislative amendment, therefore, became the committee's central goal. In pursuing this goal, the women from Local 222 aligned themselves with middle-class feminists in academic and artistic circles in Toronto. "We hooked up with the feminists in Toronto. We wrote Briefs ... We used to go up and lobby the Labour Minister. We would go up and we would sit in the gallery,"48 recalled one activist. After participating in numerous protest marches, letter writing campaigns, and lobbying efforts in the provincial legislature, the women were successful with their goal. In the spring of 1970, after much delay, the Minister of Labour declared that Bill 83 to amend the Ontario Human Rights Code was to have its final reading in the Legislature. In December 1970, the bill was passed into law. It stated "no person shall maintain separate seniority lists, etc., refuse to train, promote, or transfer, pregnancy, grant a leave of absence six weeks prior, shall not permit her to work six weeks after, with no loss of opportunity or benefits twelve weeks, every person guilty of an offense and on conviction if a corporation or trade union, is liable to a fine of $3,000."49 Insofar as legislation supersedes collective agreements, moreover, unions and employers in Ontario were consequently forced to eliminate all sex-based provisions in company contracts.50 As a result, seniority lists were amalgamated and women workers were allowed to transfer into any department or job in the GM plant. An examination of the process between Young Spring and

46Sugiman, Labour's Dilemma, 165.
47Ibid.
48Ibid., 166.
49Ibid., 255n89.
50Sugiman, "Unionism and Feminism in the Canadian Auto Workers Union 1961-1992," 175.
Wire and Chrysler Canada, however, reveals that female workers were often discouraged from using their seniority to transfer to Chrysler's other passenger car and truck assembly plants in Windsor.

By the time of the L. A. Young purchase and the Ontario Human Rights Code amendment, Chrysler was well established in Windsor. On 17 June 1925, just eleven days after the Chrysler Corporation was founded in Detroit, Michigan, Walter P. Chrysler began car production in a small plant on Tecumseh Road in Windsor, Ontario. In an attempt to make the Windsor plant independent from its affiliates in the United States management was allowed to carry out a fixed policy of using Canadian labour and material in building its cars. In 1925, the company's 181 employees "built two cars an hour—eighteen a day—from parts passed down to the assembly floor through openings in the ceiling." Increased production in 1926 and 1927, however, forced the company to "purchase 70 acres of farmland in suburban Walkerville" for the construction of a new 280,000 square-foot passenger car assembly plant—"the nucleus of today's Windsor Assembly plant." In the 1960s Windsor Assembly plant (WAP plant 3) produced every model for the Canadian market—all Chrysler lines, Dodge, Plymouth, Valiant, convertibles, two-doors, four-doors, wagons, and even the Barracuda. The first Dodge trucks rolled off the assembly line at the Tecumseh Road Truck plant (plant 1) in 1931 and Chrysler Canada starting manufacturing engines (plant 2) for the Canadian built Plymouth, Dodge, DeSoto, and Chrysler passenger cars just south of the car plant in 1937. In 1976 the newly built Pillette Road Truck plant (plant 6) supplemented the Tecumseh Road Truck plant, which built light—and medium-duty trucks until 1978.

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51See "Capacity Doubled in Meet Demand," The Border City Star, 31 December 1925, s.5, 4-10.
54Interview with Gordon Dunn.
55The Chrysler engine plant was located right behind Windsor Assembly Plant on what is now Grand Marais Road. The old plant has been transformed into office space for the company. See Price and Kulisek, Windsor 1892-1992, 122.
56Ibid.
'Well they call me the workin' man, I guess that's what I am:' Integrating Gender and Seniority at the Windsor Spring Plant, 1964-1976

Built on a 92-acre site about a mile from the company’s Windsor Assembly Plant, the new Pillette Road Truck plant for the assembly of light-duty trucks was both modern and innovative. The interior of the new plant was not only painted brightly and lighted with “the most modern lighting available for a manufacturing plant” but also had “conditioned air which kept the temperature in the plant at a constant 72 degrees.” All shipping and receiving areas were inside the plant so that workers were not hampered by weather conditions and production plans for the van-type vehicles called for 160 units to be made on one daily shift. Managed by Jim Quinn, a Toronto native who had worked for Chrysler in the United States and Canada for over twenty-three years, and staffed with an experienced workforce from Chrysler’s other operations in Windsor, seniority in the new plant was not only high among male workers, but the workforce was also supplied with men who had never worked with women in heavy assembly.

While the impact of the Spring and Wire integration into Chrysler Canada can be traced through archival documents and newspaper reports, oral interviews offer historians “a way of getting at information and insights not otherwise available in the extant record.” Although Joan Sangster argues that “we need to avoid the tendency ... of treating oral history as a panacea designed to fill in the blanks in women’s or traditional history” the oral interviews in this chapter were approached in a way that allows the experiences and the voices of the workers to enhance the historical research. Each interviewee in this project engaged in open conversation with the interviewer and was asked a number of questions concerning their family background, education, childhood, and their entrance into the workforce as well as questions concerning their work experiences at Chrysler Canada. In oral history and social history these types of questions are important for understanding how past events have shaped people’s recollections and how memory is constructed. It is also important to ask interviewees for background information so that their experiences are not generalized and categorized into one subjective group for the purposes

58 Lowest seniority in the Pillette Road Truck Plant was seven years. See "Windsor’s $44-million Job Bonanza," The Windsor Star, 26 November 1975, 37.
'Well they call me the workin’ man, I guess that’s what I am:' Integrating Gender and Seniority at the Windsor Spring Plant, 1964-1976

of the project. Interviewees were given the right to remain anonymous in the final version of the study but declined the option as they felt it was unnecessary. In the end I found that it was my connection as a fellow auto worker that had the greatest impact on making my interviewees feel comfortable with the interview process. My ability to relate to the interviewees’ experiences and struggles and my extensive knowledge of their working environment not only allowed the interviewees speak freely but also made them feel that they were telling their stories to someone who recognized the important roles they had played in the auto industry.

The three interviewees were all Canadian born, white, heterosexuals of English-Canadian and French-Canadian working-class backgrounds, but their individual experiences at Chrysler Canada were quite different. Martin Lucier started working on the line at Chrysler’s passenger car assembly plant (plant 3) in 1969 after working as an apprentice mechanic at General Radiator, Cooper Automotive, and McCallum Transport. Lucier’s father, who was a general foreman at Chrysler’s passenger car assembly plant, helped him apply for the job. Lucier is still working for Chrysler Canada\textsuperscript{61} at the Pillette Road Truck plant and does repairs in the plant’s front end. Linda St. Antoine started working at Young Spring and Wire in 1964 when her mother, a Loblaw’s employee, told her they were hiring. St. Antoine was one of the first women able to use her seniority to transfer to the Pillette Road Truck plant in 1976. She retired from her position as department coordinator in the front end at the Pillette Road Truck plant in 1999. Gordon Dunn started working at Chrysler Canada in 1964 at the passenger car assembly plant where he worked for $2.45 an hour grinding welds off trunk doors in the metal shop. Before his job at Chrysler he worked in a canning factory with his father. Dunn retired from his position as janitor on the midnight shift at the Pillette Road Truck plant in 1998. Both Lucier and St. Antoine were born and raised in Windsor, Ontario. Dunn was born on a farm near Brockville, Ontario. The remainder of this chapter discusses the memories of Lucier, St. Antoine, and Dunn and their relationships with other workers on the shop floor. Concepts of masculinity and femininity are not


\textsuperscript{61}Now DiamlerChrysler.
'Well they call me the workin' man, I guess that's what I am:' Integrating Gender and Seniority at the Windsor Spring Plant, 1964-1976

only explored within the factory but also examined in relation to each other in the experiences of the two men and one woman interviewed.

With the acquisition of Young Spring and Wire by Chrysler, Linda St. Antoine recalled a number of changes that she perceived as beneficial. For example, she remembered how lenient Chrysler was with the women's dress codes. When "we [the women] worked for Young Spring and Wire they [management] made us wear scarves on our heads to hold our hair back, which nobody does now especially in a factory, and safety glasses and we couldn't wear any pants shorter than short pants [capri pants]. It was really hot in there [the factory] because there was no air [conditioning]." However, when Chrysler acquired the Spring plant the women were allowed to wear whatever they liked to work as long as they adhered to safety rules. Besides being given the freedom to wear what they wanted to work, the women at the Windsor Spring plant also received a pay raise and were required to do less work in the day than had been the case before the acquisition. At Young Spring and Wire workers were required to make a certain number of parts in the day and, if production was behind, workers could expect to do eight hours of work in five hours to catch up. As St. Antoine remembers, "we had to make so many [sic] in eight hours. It seemed like piecework because you were working so hard. It was so fast." Women were also paid the same hourly rate as men under the collective agreement with Chrysler:

When I first starting working at Young Spring and Wire we took a vote on whether the women wanted to be paid 5 cents an hour less to do less hard work because the women were weaker. Women are weaker ... I always said women can't do as strong a work as men. I voted for it because I didn't want to do the heavy work the men did ... 5 cents was nothing but the women didn't go for it because they wanted equal work for equal pay.

Although St. Antoine disagreed, Given the choice between lesser pay for lighter work or equal pay for equal work the majority of women chose the latter because they wanted full equality in the workplace—they did not want to be seen as workers who needed special gender-specific treatment based on difference. As Sugiman explains, the women's gender consciousness may

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62 Interview with Linda St. Antoine.
63 Young Spring and Wire was commonly referred to as the Spring plant after the acquisition.
64 Ibid.
'Well they call me the workin' man, I guess that's what I am:' Integrating Gender and Seniority at the Windsor Spring Plant, 1964-1976

have been “tempered by a keen awareness that their union brothers distrusted and resented the distinct status of a minority group.” But while the female workers seemed to be enjoying some of the same privileges as the male workers at the Spring plant, they were prohibited from using their seniority to transfer to other jobs in Chrysler’s passenger car and truck assembly plants in Windsor—a right that was afforded to all male workers.

Although a small number of female upholstery sewers worked at Chrysler’s passenger car assembly plant on Drouillard Road in 1935, the majority of female workers were relegated to the Spring plant in the 1960s and 1970s because the company did not have the proper washroom facilities to maintain a larger female workforce. According to St. Antoine, however, Chrysler used the ‘lack of facilities excuse’ as a way to prohibit women at the Spring plant from using their seniority to transfer into the other plants. As she explains,

they [Chrysler management] didn’t offer us that ... they didn’t want women and the government decided with this equal thing women had to be given a fair shake [sic]. Chrysler didn’t want women. They never did offer for us to go to the other plants, that’s because they didn’t want us. They didn’t have any washrooms for us. When they finally built plant 6 [Pillette Road Truck Plant] the government at that time was pushing for women to have equal whatever [sic] so we had the offer to go over there.

While no evidence is available from the company’s side about the refusal to transfer, St. Antoine’s statement explains a workers’ perception of why women were limited to the Windsor Spring plant.

It also illustrates the apprehension many of the women felt about transferring to the other assembly plants. As St. Antoine remembers,

the other women were afraid to go over there [Pillette Road Truck plant] when they first asked us if we wanted to go over there when they were building the plant. A lot of women said yes and then they backed out ... they were afraid. The reason I went was because they said we would have conditioned air and I didn’t know what conditioned air was but I knew it had to be better then no air at all.

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65 Interview with Linda St. Antoine.
67 “The lack of information about these women in the Windsor Daily Star, as compared to the ‘Chrysler Girls,’ not only indicates the women’s temporary position in the workplace but also suggests that their employment in the auto industry was regarded as socially unacceptable. See “Chrysler’s $100,000 Bonuses Issued Today,” The Windsor Daily Star, 14 February 1936, 3 and “Distribution of bonuses Brings Joy to Chrysler Employees in Windsor,” The Windsor Daily Star, 15 February 1936.
68 Here St. Antoine is referring to the change in the Ontario Human Rights Code in 1970.
69 Interview with Linda St. Antoine.
70 Ibid.
'Well they call me the workin' man, I guess that's what I am:' Integrating Gender and Seniority at the Windsor Spring Plant, 1964-1976

The women were afraid to transfer because they knew the work at the Pillette Road Truck plant would be harder and more physical than the work they performed at the Spring plant and they also knew they would be entering a workplace where men had never worked with women. As Gordon Dunn explains, "I never worked with women in a factory and I didn't know what it would be like ... If there'd be any problems. I hesitated before going."71 Though Dunn transferred to the Pillette Road Truck plant before production began in January 1976 to "help get it up and running,"72 he knew that because of the change in the Ontario Human Rights Code the plant would eventually start hiring women. St. Antoine and the two other women who transferred to the plant before the second shift was implemented in August of 1976 faced little harassment, compared to the women who followed, because the integration was easier with only three women and because they were placed on jobs that were not necessarily on the line—jobs that could be defined as typically female jobs.73

However, when the Pillette Road Truck plant "became liberated"74 in the fall of 1976, the story changed. The seventy-five women that entered the plant, out of the 1,000 employees hired through the application process to fill the second shift, met not only with a hesitant male workforce but also with a corporate policy that had them changing their bodies to fit Chrysler regulations. The women who passed the two-week training period were required to weigh 140 pounds and be at least five-feet, five inches in height to enter what Windsor Star reporter C. A. Patch called a "man's world."75 Though the majority of the women passed the weight and height requirement, Patch reported that new worker "Debbie Hesman didn't let a pound and a half stand between her and her new job on the assembly line at Chrysler Canada's Pillette Road truck plant." In the two days before her medical examination, five-foot, five-inch Hesman "managed to put away enough food to bring her up to Chrysler's 140-pound minimum weight requirement."76

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71Interview with Gordon Dunn.
72Ibid.
73St. Antoine started at the Pillette Road Truck plant on the instrument panel line and then transferred to the office. The other two women worked at the end of the line in the shipping department; one of the women placed the shipping papers in the trucks.
75Ibid., 1.
76Ibid.
'Well they call me the workin' man, I guess that's what I am:' Integrating Gender and Seniority at the Windsor Spring Plant, 1964-1976

sure was worth it," stated Hesman in the Windsor Star's report. "I know I'd be bored to death working in an office. I love factory work, and the guys I work with have been friendly and have helped me. I'm really happy."77 While foreman Bob Gillis stated that working with women was "a change" that did not bother him, he was not so sure that the men on the line viewed the new women workers the same way. As Gillis stated in the Windsor Star's report, "the main thing is to keep an open mind; and that's what I'm doing. A few of the guys don't really like working with women, but once they get used to it, everything will be fine."78

The interviews suggest, however, that in actuality the integration was not so simple. The male workers, as Martin Lucier explains, resented the women workers because they [the women] would come in and they would say I can't do that job or they [management and the union] would stick them in a department that was easier for them to work in than say the metal shop. I think people complained ... they get paid the same money as I do they should do the same job as I do. When guys complained they'd [union] say she's only there temporarily [sic]. They would complain to the union about it; then the union would have to go to the foreman; then they would have to move the women around. They'd ship them out of the department and put them where they belonged and then they either did their job or they were shipped off to another department. Basically what I think they were doing, they were shipping them around and hiding them so people wouldn't complain about them because they knew they couldn't do the job, but they were paid the same as we were.79

Lucier's statement not only illustrates how male workers used the concept of equality in the workplace to keep women from entering male-dominated departments and jobs but also shows how the male workers adhered to a strong definition of equal pay for equal work. Hiding the women and "shipping them around" from department to department not only protected the male workers' jobs but also tested the strength and endurance of the female workers.

Debbie Hesman told the Windsor Star that "the guys I work with have been friendly and have helped me,"80 but her comment obscures the fact that female workers were limited to jobs on the line at the Pillette road Truck plant because their low seniority prohibited them from transferring into the more desirable jobs in the plant's front end. But as Lucier explains, women

77 Ibid., 5.
78 Ibid.
79 Interview with Martin Lucier
'Well they call me the workin' man, I guess that's what I am:' Integrating Gender and Seniority at the Windsor Spring Plant, 1964-1976

were and still are exempt from these jobs because they lack the physical strength needed to perform them. When asked if a woman could perform his repair job in the front end, Lucier stated:

I don't think a woman would be able to handle it. There's a lot of physical strength you need for my job, so I don't think a woman could do it. They could if they tried it, but I have my doubts that they could handle my job. There's a lot of pushing and pulling. I have to pull, take off, pull out the wheels, I set up the front ends. I set the caster and camber on the wheels and there's a lot of pushing and pulling involved when the truck's on the ground. You have to pull the wheels out. The job I got [sic] takes a long time to learn and if you don't stay at it every day it's easy to forget.61

St. Antoine also believed that certain jobs were suited for women and others for men stating:

The women cannot do all the same things as the men and they're so stubborn ... they want this equal [sic] but women aren't equal with men. There's no way they are ... men are bigger and stronger then women are and they're supposed to be; that's the way they're built. That's the way life is.82

The idea that women are physically weaker than men not only contributed to women's subordinate role in the auto industry but also helped to define certain 'easier' jobs as suitable for women and 'harder, more demanding' jobs as suitable for men. Although Dunn believes that the entrance of women into the Pillette Road Truck plant actually made many of the jobs easier for both sexes,83 women still perform many of the same jobs they did over thirty years ago. Despite their fight for equality, the majority of women are still found in many of the auto industry's cut and sew departments, shipping departments, and inspection departments while only a minority work "in the metal shop welding."84

Therefore while the addition of 'sex' in the Ontario Human Rights Code in 1970 aided Linda St. Antoine and the two other female auto workers in their fight to use their seniority rights to transfer to Chrysler's other passenger car and truck assembly plants in Windsor, Ontario, from 1964 to 1976, the Human Rights Code was unable to eliminate the strong gender divisions that had developed in the Pillette Road Truck plant. When Chrysler Canada hired women in 1976 to

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60 Patch, "Debbie Solved a Weighty Problem," The Windsor Daily Star, 5.
61 Interview with Martin Lucier.
62 Interview with Linda St. Antoine.
63 In his interview Gordon Dunn stated "what women have done in the workplace is made a lot of jobs easier. I'm not saying easy but easier. So they've [women] actually made the jobs easier for men too."
fill the second shift there was still some question in the minds of the male workforce about whether or not women really belonged in a truck assembly plant. The male auto workers' and unionists' reluctance is not only evident when St. Antoine tried to use her seniority to transfer but also in the way women were treated once they began working at the truck plant. Women's low seniority kept them from the more desirable front end jobs and allowed them to be 'shipped around and hidden' in departments where men would not complain about their presence. Despite their status as full-time employees at the Pillette Road Truck plant, women were also seen as 'temporary' workers in many departments where men used their knowledge of the union to have the women removed. Thus, while the entrance of women into the Pillette Road Truck plant 'liberated' the auto industry in Windsor, it also reinforced it as a masculine domain where male workers held more power and privilege than female workers.

84 Interview with Martin Lucier
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seniority principle was fought for by both male and female auto workers in the non-union era, but after unionization the principle that promised to protect workers’ rights was not equally applied to female workers. The auto manufacturers and the UAW developed ‘non-interchangeable occupational group seniority’ systems and separate seniority lists for men and women in an effort to keep women from occupying their high paying jobs in the industry.

Both the company and union officials seem to have had a stake in continuing the system even when feminists challenged it through legal reform. The ability in the 1960s and 1970s to reject a woman’s right to use her seniority to transfer to another auto plant within the Chrysler Corporation sustained the idea that women’s proper place was in the parts plants, and it reinforced auto assembly plants as masculine ‘spaces.’ Males with high seniority were not only privileged with coveted jobs in the front end but also carried a certain status from their long-term employment in the company. Seniority not only created power relations and hierarchies among men and women but also among men with high seniority and those with relatively low seniority or no seniority in the company. Though the 1970 amendment to the Ontario Human Rights Code amalgamated male and female seniority lists and educated women on their rights in the auto industry, long-standing societal ideas about women’s proper place were harder to break. Male hostility towards female auto workers was still prevalent in 1976 because many male auto workers still believed that women were unsuited for factory work in passenger car and truck assembly plants. The women who did try succeeded, but not without a fight. They were moved from department to department to avoid angry male workers who used the rhetoric of equal pay for equal work to prove that many women were unable to perform their ‘highly desired’ and ‘physical’ jobs. Thus, while the company and the union in the 1970s could no longer keep women from entering the auto industry, they were still able to use their power and privilege in the UAW and Chrysler to keep women from participating in the auto plants on a equal basis with their male co-workers.
While I found that many historians and sociologists of the auto industry neglected the subject of seniority in their studies, I was able to piece together the history of the seniority issue from a few good monographs, newspaper articles and archival documents.¹ But piecing together the history of the seniority principle was not enough to understand how and why it operated to keep women from participating fully and on the same terms as men in the auto industry. What I found most striking in my initial research was that the principle of seniority functioned very much like male breadwinner ideology, in that its maintenance and use by male auto workers and unionists had the same results in keeping women out of the industry. Like male breadwinner ideology, seniority rights were used by male auto workers to limit the type of work women could perform in the auto plants, the departments they could work in, and the rights they had in the workplace. And like male breadwinner ideology, seniority rights and privileges were strongly upheld and protected by male auto workers and unionists.

I concluded that seniority developed along the same lines as male breadwinner ideology by searching for the constants in the history of the auto industry—that is, in an industry that is continuously changing what factors have remained the same over time? By process of elimination I was left with high wages and unionism. Introduced by Henry Ford in 1914 the Five Dollar Day was not only developed to maintain control over his workforce and undercut unionizing efforts but also as a tactic to instill a sense of manliness into a workforce that had been severely deskillled with the introduction of the moving assembly line in 1913. The Five Dollar Day, therefore, not only allowed the male auto worker to become the sole supporter for his family but also created in him a sense of self worth. The ability of male auto workers to support their families on a breadwinner wage, however, was challenged in the 1930s when women began entering the auto industry. While the union was able to uphold male breadwinner wages by keeping women's wages significantly lower than men's, they were not able to keep women from entering the industry. Fearing that the cheaper female labour would take their jobs and positions in the factories, male auto workers devised a new strategy to limit women's participation in the auto plants.

Conclusion

From ‘Chrysler Girls’ to ‘Dodge Boys’: The Emergence of Women in Windsor’s Automobile Plants, 1964-1976

As a fourth generation auto worker I often wondered why I was the first female in my family to work in the auto industry. Unable to find a sufficient answer from my male family members, I turned to my training as a historian to answer the many questions I had about women’s role in the development of the auto industry and the UAW. What I found not only surprised me but also interested me enough to devote an entire M.A. major research paper to the subject. While working on the line at Chrysler’s minivan plant in Windsor an older male employee told me about the women he used to work with at the Windsor Spring plant. Though I was aware that Chrysler had had other plants in the city that were demolished for new development, I had never heard of the Spring plant before. When I asked my male coworker what they made at the plant, I was immediately intrigued when he said seat cushions. The first thing that jumped to my mind was that the women were employed at the plant to work in the traditionally female ‘cut and sew’ departments. The seat cushions, however, were not sewn at the plant. Instead Windsor Spring manufactured the springs and wires in the seats and sent them elsewhere to be assembled. Again, I immediately thought that women were employed at the plant because the manufacture of springs and wires was delicate and tedious work that woman were supposedly well suited for because of their smaller hands and fingers. When my male coworker told me that the work at the plant was equally distributed among men and women, I was not discouraged, but interested in finding out what made these women workers special. Although the initial focus of this study centered around the female workers’ experiences in the Windsor Spring, I soon discovered that these women were discriminated against when they tried to use their seniority rights in transfers and lay-off—rights that were accorded to male workers.

To understand why the women at the Windsor Spring plant were denied their seniority rights, I had to not only research the structure of the automobile industry and the UAW but also to take a closer look at the seniority principle and how it developed in the early years of unionization.
Vita Auctoris

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