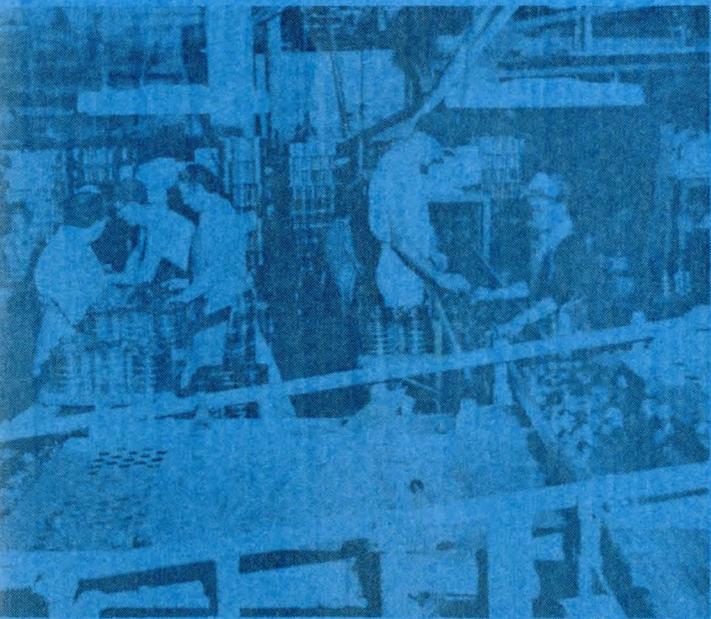


**ON-THE-JOB OPPRESSION**



**OF WORKING WOMEN**

**a collection of articles**



# 'We usually don't hire married girls'

I am 23 years old, I have a B.A. in Spanish literature, I am well traveled, I can speak Spanish and French, and I am a prostitute. . . I am a secretary, a wastebasket, a file-cabinet, a hostess, a messenger boy, and a slave. I am everything but a woman and a human being.

## The interview

During my interview for this job my entire body was numbed. My interviewer kept looking at my legs and talking about how interesting he thought the job would be for me because I would be around men doing interesting work (not mentioning that my work would be boring).

He then looked at my legs again and looked up and gave me a very big paternalistic smile. "We usually don't hire married girls," he said. "We like to have young, pretty and available girls around the office. You know," he added, "it cheers things up a lot."

No wonder so many women fall apart in job interviews—our minds and our abilities are not questioned. It is our bodies and our smiles that are checked out to see if they will fit properly behind a mahogany desk.

I was hired and took the job because I was desperate. I was told I was awfully pretty and would most certainly be an asset to the office. For the first two weeks all the older women did was smile at me with their huge wide plastic smiles. They are not young, pretty or available anymore, so all they can offer is their smiles.

## The job

When I was hired I was told that two people constitute a team that would work on a specific project. "Teamwork" and "togetherness" were the key words used. It didn't take long to realize the real situation—racism, male supremacy, prejudice (you name it), all in one carpeted, IBM-filled office.

The "team" turned out to be a male, making around \$15,000, and a female, making \$6,000. Most girls have the same degrees as the men, or higher ones, but are still in the lower positions. The reason for this, I was told, was that most foreigners (whom the office deals with) don't "respect" women and would feel slighted if they had to deal with "one." (Wasn't that the reason given for not hiring blacks in offices and shops?—blacks would turn away customers!)

My job consists of serving coffee, answering the telephone, typing boring letters, and taking constant orders from my male "partner." I love "taking" letters for him. This gives him a chance to show me how really important he thinks he is. He leans back in his chair, takes a deep breath, and tries real hard to use the biggest words he knows. Dictating letters is a real ego-trip for these guys. It is incredible that the brainwashed females in this office will not admit that they have terrible jobs.

I have now been at this job for two months. My partner has never asked me anything about myself nor asked me to lunch. All he knows about me is that I type and take shorthand. Once in a while he will joke with me, but I am unable to respond. I would only be more of a whore if I did.

## Lunchtime

We secretaries, nurses and administrative assistants have one hour to enjoy the day—lunchtime—and we usually are not even paid for that period. During the summer I attended a "Summer in the Parks" concert every Wednesday from 12 to 1 p.m. Sometimes the concert would run a little after the scheduled time. One could notice that exactly at 1 all the females would get up to go back to work. The males, who had no time clocks to punch, would stay to hear the rest of the concert.

There are few things we can do during that short time. It is too expensive and not easy to take a bus home to have lunch. A nice relaxing lunch would be nice—but at People's Drug or Linda's Cafeteria that is hardly possible. Have you ever gone to an expensive place at lunchtime? All men. How many working women can afford to spend more than \$1 for lunch? How many restaurants are there that are cheap, relaxing, have good food and are not anxious to get rid of you after you have swallowed the last bite?

I tried taking my lunch and a book and going to the park for lunch. A chance to be outside and read and enjoy the sunshine was very appealing. One day a man masturbated behind me in the bushes as I tried to read. The next day a guy asked me to come to his hotel. On different days I was told various parts of my body were "really fine." For four days I was followed, touched, and generally harassed. On the fifth day I ate lunch at my desk.

The only thing that is open for us to do during that time is shop—whether it's food, clothes or shoes, the stores are all waiting (and panting) with cash registers ready. These stores are the only places where we can be comfortably accommodated during that hour. The drawback is that we must buy.

In my office all the men go out to eat together and all the women go out to eat together. No one has ever broken that unwritten law. The three blacks in the mailroom eat inside. They are not permitted to go out to eat.

When I mention women's liberation to the men in my office they always reply that we women at least have to admit that things have gotten better—equal opportunity act, equal pay and all that. But when you are being oppressed so severely, \$1000 or even \$2000 extra a year doesn't mean very much. Because men are so hung up on money and titles on the door, they feel that we too should be appeased with a larger paycheck and a fancy title like "administrative assistant" instead of plain "secretary."

At the end of my working day I am tired and depressed. The entire day I have been used as an instrument. So I get on a pollution-emitting bus and go home. There I find the baby, the dishes in the sink, dinner to be made, and a husband who wants me to look like Twiggy. And people ask why women want to be liberated.

# The Politics of Housework

By Pat Mainardi

*"Though women do not complain of the power of husbands, each complains of her own husband, or of the husbands of her friends. It is the same in all other cases of servitude; at least in the commencement of the emancipatory movement. The serfs did not at first complain of the power of their lords, but only of their tyranny."*

John Stuart Mill,  
"On the Subjection of Women"

Liberated women—very different from Women's Liberation! The first signals all kinds of goodies, to warm the hearts (not to mention other parts) of the most radical men. The other signals—housework. The first brings sex without marriage, sex before marriage, cozy housekeeping arrangements ("You see, I'm living with this chick") and the self-content of knowing that you're not the kind of man who wants a doormat instead of a woman. That will come later. After all, who wants that old commodity anymore, the Standard American Housewife, all husband, home and kids. The New Commodity, the Liberated Woman, has sex a lot and has a career, preferably something that can be fitted in with the household chores—like dancing, pottery, or painting.

On the other hand is Women's Liberation—and housework. What? You say this is all trivial? Wonderful! That's what I thought. It seems perfectly reasonable. We both had careers, both had to work a couple of days a week to earn enough to live on, so why shouldn't we share the housework? So I suggested it to my mate and he said, it's only fair.

## The same old story

Then an interesting thing happened. I can only explain it by stating that we women have been brainwashed more than we can imagine. Probably too many years of seeing television women in ecstasy over their shiny waxed floors or breaking down over their dirty shirt collars. Men have no such conditioning. They recognize the essential fact of housework right from the very beginning. Which is that it stinks.

Here's my list of dirty chores: buying groceries, carting them home and put-

ting them away; cooking meals and washing dishes and pots; doing the laundry, digging out the place when things get out of control; washing floors. The list could go on but the sheer necessities are bad enough. All of us have to do these jobs, or get someone else to do them for us. The longer my husband contemplated these chores, the more repulsed he became and so proceeded the change from the normally sweet considerate Mr. Hyde into the crafty Dr. Jekyll who would stop at nothing to avoid the horrors of housework. As he felt himself backed into a corner laden with dirty dishes, brooms, mops and reeking garbage, his front teeth grew longer and pointier, his fingernails haggled and his eyes grew wild. Housework trivial? Not on your life! Just try to share the burden.

## Same old dialogue

So ensued a dialogue that's been going on for several years. Here are some of the high points:

"I don't mind sharing the housework, but I don't do it very well. We should each do the things we're best at."

*Meaning: Unfortunately I'm not good at things like washing dishes or cooking. What I do best is a little light carpentry, changing light bulbs, moving furniture? (How often do you move furniture?) Also meaning: Historically the lower class (Blacks and you) have had hundreds of years experience doing menial jobs. It would be a waste of manpower to train someone else to do them now. Also meaning: I don't like the dull stupid boring jobs, so you should do them.)*

"I don't mind sharing the work, but you'll have to show me how to do it."

*Meaning: I ask a lot of questions and you'll have to show me everything, everytime I do it because I don't remember so good. Also don't try to sit down and read while I'm doing my jobs because I'm going to annoy the hell out of you until it's easier to do them yourself.*

"We used to be so happy!" (said whenever it was his turn to do something).

*Meaning: I used to be so happy. Meaning: Life without housework is bliss. No quarrel here. Perfect agreement.*

"We have different standards, and why should I have to work to your standards? That's unfair."

*Meaning: If I begin to get bugged by the dirt and crap, I will say "This place sure is a sty" or "how can anyone live like this?" and wait for your reaction. I know that all women have a sore called "guilt over a messy house" or "household work is ultimately my responsibility." If I rub this sore long enough and hard it'll bleed and you'll do the work, I can out wait you. Also meaning: I can provoke innumerable scenes over the housework issue. Eventually, doing all the housework yourself will be less painful to you than trying to get me to do half.*

## He's got nothing against it

"I've got nothing against sharing the housework, but you can't make me do it on your schedule."

*Meaning: passive resistance. I'll do it when I damned well please, if at all. If my job is doing the dishes, it's easier to do them once a week. If taking out laundry, once a month. If washing the floors, once a year. If you don't like it, do it yourself oftener, and then I won't do it at all.*

"I hate it more than you. You don't mind it so much."

*Meaning: housework is garbage work. It's the worse crap I've ever done. It's degrading and humiliating for someone of my intelligence to do it. But for someone of your intelligence . . .*

"Housework is too trivial to even talk about."

*Meaning: It's even more trivial to do. Housework is beneath my status. My purpose in life is to deal with matters of significance. Yours is to deal with matters of insignificance. You should do the housework.*

"This problem of housework is not a man-woman problem. In any relationship between two people one is going to have a stronger personality and dominate."

*Meaning: That stronger personality had better be me.*

"In animal societies, wolves, for example, the top animal is usually a male even where he is not chosen for brute strength but on the basis of cunning and intelligence. Isn't that interesting?"

*Meaning: I have historical, psychological, anthropological and biological justification for keeping you down. How can you ask the top wolf to be equal?*

"Women's liberation isn't really a political movement."

*Meaning: The revolution is coming too close to home. Also meaning: I am only interested in how I am oppressed, not how I oppress others. Therefore the war, the draft and the university are political. Women's liberation is not.*

"Man's accomplishments have always depended on getting help from other people, mostly women. What great man would have accomplished what he did if he had to do his own housework?"

*Meaning: Oppression is built into the system and I as the white American male receive the benefits of this system. I don't want to give them up.*

Participatory democracy begins at home. If you are planning to implement your politics there are certain things to remember.

1. He is feeling it more than you. He's losing some leisure and you're gaining it. The measure of your oppression is his resistance.

2. Most radical American men are not accustomed to doing monotonous repetitive work which never issues in any lasting let alone important achievement.

This is why they would rather repair a cabinet than wash dishes. If human endeavours are like a pyramid with man's highest achievements at the top, then keeping oneself alive is at the bottom. Men have always had servants (you) to take care of this bottom strata of life while he has confined his efforts to the rarefied upper regions. It is thus ironic when they ask of women—where are your great painters, statesmen, etc. Mme. Matisse ran a millinery shop so he could paint. Mrs. Martin Luther King kept his house and raised his babies.

3. It is a traumatizing experience for someone who has always thought of himself as being against any oppression or exploitation of one human being by another to realize that in his daily life he had been accepting and implementing (and benefiting from) this exploitation; for someone to realize that his rationalization is little different from that of the racist who says "Niggers don't feel pain" (Women don't mind doing the shitwork); to realize that the oldest form of oppression in history has been the oppression of 50% of the population by the other 50%.

4. Arm yourself with some knowledge of the psychology of oppressed peoples everywhere and a few facts about the animal kingdom. I admit playing top wolf or who runs the gorillas is silly but at a last resort men bring it up all the time. Talk about bees. If you feel really hostile bring up the sex life of spiders. He fucks her. She bites off his head.

The psychology of oppressed peoples is not silly. Jews, immigrants, blacks and women have all employed the same psychological mechanisms to survive. Admiring the oppressor, wanting to glorify the oppressor, be like the oppressor, wanting the oppressor to like them. Remember that blacks and Jews at one time felt whites and Germans really were superior.

5. In a sense all men everywhere are slightly schizoid—divorced from the reality of maintaining life. This makes it easier for them to play games with it. It is almost a cliché that women feel greater grief at sending a son off to war or losing him to that war because they bore him, suckled him and raised him. The men who foment those wars did none of those things and have a more superficial estimate for the worth of a human life. One hour a day is a low estimate of the amount of time one has to spend "keeping" oneself. By foisting this off on others, man has seven hours a week—one working day more to play with his mind and not his human needs. Over the course of generations it is easy to see whence evolved the horrifying abstractions of modern life.

### Evolution of struggle

6. With the death of each form of oppression, life changes and new forms evolve. English aristocrats at the turn of

the century were horrified at the idea of enfranchising working men, were sure that it signalled the death of civilization and a return to barbarism. Some working men even fell for this line. Similarly with the minimum wage, abolition of slavery and female suffrage. Life changes but it goes on. Don't fall for any crap about the death of everything if men take a turn at the dishes. They will imply that you are holding back the revolution (their revolution). But you are advancing it (your revolution).

7. Keep checking up. Periodically consider who's actually doing the jobs. These things have a way of backsliding so that a year later once again the woman is doing everything. Use timesheets if necessary. Also bear in mind what the worse jobs are, namely the ones that have to be done everyday or several times a day. Also the ones that are dirty. It's more pleasant to pick up books, newspapers, etc. than to wash dishes. Alternate the bad jobs. It's the daily grind that gets you down. Also occasional help from him.

Make sure that you don't have the responsibility for the housework with occasional help from him. "I'll cook dinner for you tonight" implies that it's really your job and isn't he a nice guy to do some of it for you.

8. Most men had a rich and rewarding bachelor life during which they did not starve or become encrusted with crud or buried under the litter. There is a taboo that says that women mustn't strain themselves in the presence of men—we haul around 50 pounds of groceries if we have to but aren't allowed to open a jar if there is someone around to do it for us. The reverse side of the coin is that men aren't supposed to be able to take care of themselves without a woman. Both are excuses for making women do the housework.

9. Beware of the double whammy. He won't do the little things he always did because you're now a "liberated woman," right? Of course he won't do anything else either . . .

I was just finishing this when my husband came in and asked what I was doing. Writing a paper on housework. Housework, he said, *Housework?* Oh my god how trivial can you get. A paper on housework.

# Lower your voice-

When people come into contact with a phone company employe, usually the operator, they are ready to scream. If the operator were to respond humanly to this rage, and reveal her own rage, total bedlam would ensue. The primary quality required of an operator is maintaining a courteous front at all times, to prevent violent interchange. Over the phone the operator must totally erase herself. She cannot make jokes, show anger, reveal emotion.

Only women can be counted on to be operators, not because we are passive or dumb, but because jobs for women are scarce and—as members of a lowly caste—we are forced to do the shitwork for everybody else.

## Physical surroundings

Inside the company office, operators are forced to deny their personalities. Each operator's office contains two long rows of switchboards with 25 "girls" to a row.

The operator must enter her chair from the left and leave from the right. She must face the switchboard at all times, never turning her eyes to the side or looking behind her. She may not swing her arm across the back of the chair. She may not cross her legs. She may not chew gum but may suck quietly on a life saver if she must. If she needs help, she turns on a light above her seat which summons the supervisor, who stands behind the operator and converses with her through the circuits. This method of communication is rude and dehumanizing.

## The operator's voice

The operator is always referred to as "she" and the customer is "he." "She" must always be respectful to the customer. Even if "he" calls her a "filthy bitch" she does not have the right to express anything but courteous acceptance.

An operator may never interrupt a customer who is rambling off "his" name, address and phone number too fast. She must wait until "he" has finished and then ask him to repeat it all again. And the operator takes the blame if "he" gets angry at having to repeat his information.

The operator is expressly forbidden to show any humanity to either the calling party, the other operators, or the called party (unless, of course, a mother should break down on the phone because her son has been wounded in Vietnam, in which case the operator may mumble some condolence, but not too much).

Correspondence or a friendly word to a familiar operator's voice is grounds for reprimand. One woman who has been an overseas operator for 30 years got to know a Saigon operator through letters and occasional greeting on the job. The Saigon operator married a GI and came here to visit the U.S. operator. Since then the American operator has been forbidden to work the Saigon circuits.

Repression of any possible humanity is aided by official company language, consisting of the abbreviations and initials operators use with each other, pat phrases for customers, and the exaggerated enunciation required—careful, modulated tones which often lead to the nasal "operator voice"—a fine cover-up for the rage burning deep inside the average operator.

## The hierarchy

The supervisor's job is a little higher in status than the operator's, but she is in constant danger of being "busted back to

the board." A 62-year-old woman who has been working for the phone company since she was 19 was made a supervisor after 32 years on the job. After 9 years as a supervisor she was busted back to the board and it took the union two years to get her back to supervisor. It usually takes less than a year to become a supervisor.

The company holds out the chance of climbing the hierarchy but normally only to the position of supervisor or upstairs secretary, since management rarely comes up through the ranks but comes straight from college.

The highest pay for an operator is \$2.15 an hour, or \$86 for a 40-hour week. After 6 months on the job, operators receive a note in the mail: "Congratulations! You will now receive \$1.00 a week more."

The supervisor monitors her charges' progress by listening in on them unannounced. Above the supervisor is the ATOM (Assistant Traffic Operating Manager). The ATOM monitors the supervisor under her as well as the operators under her supervisors. The ATOM relays orders from the TOM (Traffic Operating Manager) who has some 300 women under her.

Everyone in the office, including the ATOMs, is monitored by the TOM from her office inside a glass cage at the side of the room. And on another floor, the Public Utilities Commission is monitoring the customer's phone call.

The TOM is the only woman who meets with "the men"—the executives. Whenever they come to check the office or bring in visitors, the TOM is the official greeter. As they enter her office, the TOM rushes to tell the ATOMs to tell the supervisors to tell the operators to lower their voices, swallow their gum, hide their life-savers, and give the impression of quiet efficiency. The operators in pants must hide in the back of the room. One time "the men" came through, the TOM sent four women home for wearing pants.

"The men" come through the office and look around as they graciously chat with the TOM and compliment her on her "good group of girls." "The men" also shop around for particularly attractive and well-groomed girls who might be given the honor of a job "upstairs" as a secretary at higher pay.

The regimentation and terminology reminds one of the army—such as the "induction center" where operators report for orientation. The ATOMs and the TOM are the brass. Work schedules are called "turns of duty." Everyone belongs to "the force."

The phone company also resembles elementary school. The building itself is barren, with entrances policed by two rent-a-fuzz who check passes. Noses are counted every 15 minutes to insure that operators do not play hookey.

If an operator wants to go to the toilet, she puts on her overhead light to signal the supervisor. When the supervisor comes, the operator says, "May I have a minute?" (Saying anything but this euphemism causes raised eyebrows.) If permission is granted, the operator signs out and must be back in three minutes. Operators may not smoke in the john while "on a minute."

Operators must conform to dress regulations. The Union won the right for women to wear slacks, but then passed another regulation specifying that the demand did not include blue jeans. Supervisors are told that wearing pants means no promotion.

If she feels ill, an operator must convince her supervisor to let her go home. Once an operator died at the boards—she had been denied permission to leave. "We do make mistakes," an official admitted. There is no sick leave. Every absence is taken out of the operator's pay.

## The cafeteria

Operators live in parallel isolation from one another. Since the possibility of relating to the "girl" two inches from her left elbow is slight, the only time to be together is during the two 15-minute breaks and the 30-minute lunch. And any two people do not have the same breaks for any sustained period of time.

The cafeteria is a grim room where inedible food can be bought for outrageous prices. With only a half hour for lunch, the operator is forced to eat there or bring her lunch. On the graveyard shift, the cafeteria is closed and operators must walk to an all-nite plastic diner.

Each office has its own lunch table and the familiar faces talk to each other about the terrible day they're having, the cranky customers, the utter frustration of trying the same calls for two hours, and the nagging bitchiness of supervisors who hate "new girls" for their ineptness. (Almost everyone is a "new girl"—the turnover rate is 60% in six months.)

Since an operator is never allowed to react on the spot, it all builds up inside. No matter how much she hates telling her little anecdotes during break, she finds herself doing it. She just has to get it out and search for sympathy. She receives a little support from the other "girls" and goes back to the board to begin again.

AT&T has lice in its switchboard. Often operators suffer from lice bites on their faces, arms and legs. Operators must get used to receiving minor shocks when they plug in. Occasionally an operator will scream or fall off her chair from a bad shock.

That women operators are policed and bossed by women makes the work experience even more devastating. Women managers are in a far less secure position than men; they must continually fight to maintain control where men can assume it. Besides, they have to contend with women who act like themselves when men aren't around.

Operators dress for comfort, are less disguised by make-up, are less shy, less careful about what they say, and, in general, harder to control than if they were typists in an office under men. In order to maintain control, women managers are forced to conduct constant campaigns to humiliate "their girls."

Male bosses are duty-bound to respect the myth of the "mysterious" woman. In the Man's world, women are considered empty-headed fools. But no man would dare tell them how to dress, when to go to the bathroom, or take an aspirin. The phone company's military discipline is maintained through women bosses who, by virtue of their sex, are granted the license to investigate and regulate all habits, personality traits, and the normally regarded "private spheres" of an employe's life.

The boss has the right to refuse bathroom permission to an operator, to veto the kind of perfume she wears, to pull her into the glass cage and lecture her about her body odor, her hair style, her vocabulary or her life insurance. The company grants no sick leave to "girls" and a sick operator may be denied permission to go home and rest. The ATOM considers herself competent to diagnose illness and prescribe medicines which the operator is forced to swallow.

Women managers must do these things because, as women, their authority is constantly under question, because with no men around, women do become more "natural" and less willing to be servants.

The motionless sitting in a confined position for long hours, the combined physical and emotional constriction, the para-military organization, the constant petty harassment and humiliation (at a wage scale lower

than that of most men), all make the operator's job brutal and lobotomizing. The company understands that women from ages 15-25 and mothers who need staggered hours are the only ones who would put up with these conditions.

Understanding the special indignities and degradation working women are subjected to is only a first step. No one has yet figured out how to hurdle the enormous obstacles of building a movement of women workers. Women, the most despised cast within society, have little leverage on the job. Existing unions are controlled by men for men and refuse to fight against women's oppression.

Furthermore, many women who work go home at night to another full day's work of child-care and housework. Burdened by two jobs at the price of half of one, they have little time to spare. Kept out of the world in an isolated and marginal existence, women have little understanding that power relationships exist at all, and their egos were long ago smashed by despair.

Women have a tough job ahead, but the rage is there and will some day explode.

*The above article, written by telephone operators, originally appeared in Tooth and Nail, P.O. Box 4137, Berkeley, Calif. 94704.*

swallow  
your gum

# Woman's place in the hospital

By Jean Tepperman

*From grade school on, one of the nice things girls are told they can be is a nurse. I would say I wanted to be a doctor and people would say, oh, why don't you be a nurse, it's so much nicer, more feminine.*

This is how nurses and nurses' aides from five Boston area hospitals described "the woman's place" in the hospital hierarchy:

"There is no communication between nurses and doctors, no explanation of why a particular procedure is being done. . . nurse is a waitress or a handmaiden, running errands, doing paperwork. She is given no credit for being able to understand why a particular procedure is being carried out."

"Interns and residents need to use the nurses as a scapegoat. The residents and the chiefs of services pressure the interns, then they pressure the nurses."

Below the nurses are orderlies (male) and nurses' aides (female). Many of the people who fill these jobs are black and Puerto Rican. Of Boston's 3000 nursing students, only 71 are black, and of the 1300 medical students only 14 are black.

But at every level, women have it worse:

"In Cambridge City the base pay for nurses aides is \$87.50; for orderlies it's \$95. But I end up doing just exactly what an orderly does. The only difference is in the job description he's supposed to help move the patients. In fact, nurses and nurses' aides usually do it. That's partly because there aren't very many orderlies, but also because of the doctors' attitudes—the nurses aides get sent to do stupid errands."

"The doctor is more likely to ask a female nurses aide for help with a procedure than an orderly—they're geared to having female assistants, no matter what color uniform they've got on. . ."

The same distinctions are made at the level of doctors:

"If a male intern gets upset and says something it's because he's been working hard, it's too bad, everyone tries to console him. When a female intern gets upset, everybody says, stupid woman, why did she go into medicine. If she can't handle it, why doesn't she get out?"

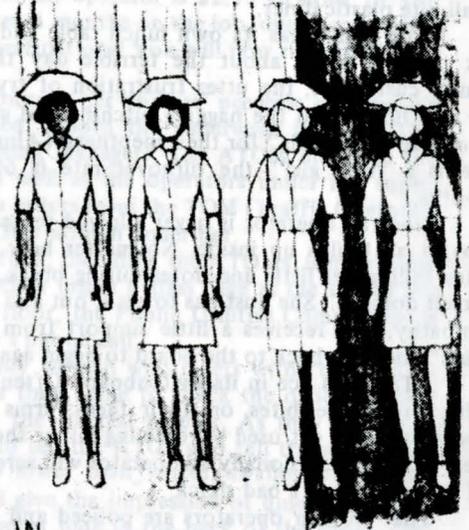
But not many women get to be interns at all:

When I was applying to med school they had loosened up—they were admitting 3% blacks and 3% women—but the problem is the whole attitude with which you are admitted. They always point out to you how few women are admitted, and tell you women drop out, do stupid things like get married, get pregnant. Wo-

men can't stand the pressure. But women get the worst, most difficult patients, get made fun of the most, have to stay up the longest."

So women are channeled into "women's jobs"—and then treated accordingly:

"I think what happens to nurses, from my experience in nursing school, is that they are taught this purity line, they are



pure, looked up to—all this propaganda—then they get into the hospital and wow—a ton of bricks falls. They are overworked, considered stupid by the doctors, who they're taught will just love them."

A woman's work is never done; one of the main grievances of nurses is the long hours, and the fact that nurses usually have to work different shifts on different days, because of the nurses' shortage. But the main complaint of nurses and aides is the contradictory demands made on them by doctors:

"A lot of times, a nurses' aide is not given enough information, then blamed if something goes wrong. We are never told what's happening to the patient."

## Nurses get no information

Doctors seldom give nurses any information except what they are supposed to do:

"There's almost no interaction and it's frightening—you're working in such a life and death situation."

"Very often when you ask them questions they feel you're questioning what they're doing."

Doctors often do not respect the information nurses can give them:

"Most doctors have very little concern for things that a nurse might have noticed about a patient—he just wants to know if she carried out his orders."

One of the nurses we talked to was once on duty when a baby got sick, began

to twitch and turn somewhat blue. She called the intern and told him she thought the baby was having the beginning stages of meningitis, but the intern didn't believe her. Finally he called a doctor, but told him, "The nurses seem to feel the baby is sick," implying that they didn't know what they were talking about. The doctor came, but didn't do anything. Two days later the baby died of meningitis.

In response to doctor's attitudes nurses learn to play the "doctor-nurse game," which is just the ordinary man-woman game translated into hospital work.

"Never tell a doctor what to do or make a direct suggestion—suggest things so he thinks it's his own idea."

According to a paper in the American Journal of Nursing "Every nurse interviewed felt that making a suggestion to a physician was the equivalent to insulting and belittling him . . . some nursing instructors explicitly tell their students that their femininity is an important asset to be used when relating to physicians."

There are other ways a nurse's job forces her to play traditional women's roles:

"You have to assume a schizophrenic way of living. You relate to people professionally, calling everyone sweetie and dear—whole fake front. This is taught in nursing school. Then you go back to the nursing station and assume the other image, with all your frustrations showing . . ."

"Another part of it is the image that the male patients have of nurses. Every dirty old man that ever comes into a hospital feels that he has the right to pat his pretty nurse's ass."

In spite of the oppressiveness of the nurse's job, it has been very difficult for nurses to organize against the hospitals:

"A lot of the women say it would take away from the humanitarian aspects of nursing."

The American Nurses Association, according to one group of radical nurses, "began as a beautiful development in the struggle for women's and human right" but "has now turned into a rigid, uptight, absolutely non-democratic institution."

The ANA is less conservative than the AMA: it supported medicare and "nurses in general are more for preventative medicine because they don't benefit from illness the way doctors do."

### Strike for three months

In the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital in LA, nurses went on strike for two or three months, and won their demands for better working conditions, but many nurses still resist the idea of unions, while

most AFL-CIO unions aren't relevant to problems in the hospital.

First, they usually try to organize nurses and "professionals" separately, thus preserving the hierarchy in the hospital. Second, they are not always very active, to say the least. One nurse we interviewed did not even know she was in a union until her friend told her all the nurses in her hospital were automatically members, during our interview.

The fight against the hospital hierarchy, like the fight for socialized medicine, means smashing the power of the AMA over the organization and politics of health care. The relatively small group of doctors, nearly all white males, who control medicine in this country have been fighting to keep their power, which is strengthened by their ties with the people who run hospitals and health industries (drugs, equipment).

As part of the challenge to that power, some groups of nurses and nurses aides connected with the Student Health Organization and Women's Liberation are getting together to talk about how they can fight against the structure and attitudes of the "doctor-nurse game."

# Be charmed

By Shulamith Firestone

The bar is an essentially male kingdom. Women are still uncomfortable there

There are, first, the 'dates', the wives, the companions. They are allowed to enter the world only on the arms of escorts. That is, they are granted entrance vicariously on the strength of the man they accompany, in much the same way that a Negro may be allowed into an exclusive club if accompanied by one of its regular clientele. This occasional excursion into the male domain is a modern innovation. In the case of wives to reassure and appease them ("You see, dear, I'm not doing anything so glamorous out here," or "You see, dear, how I included you in all aspects of my life.") and in the case of 'dates' to snow them with all the glamour of the male world ("See how at ease I am in this important and frightening world.")

In the other category are the 'loose' women, those more readily sexually available, and thus held in some contempt, like shopworn goods. They know the game well, fit into it. They have a definite place in the male world. In fact that world could not exist as it does without them. They are the relief from the good women. They occupy a peculiar limbo status, not the woman's world, not the man's world, but a woman OF the man's world. They have a very specialized function.

Among the 'loose' women there are different gradations: There are the strict hustlers, generally to be found in the lower type bars. They are usually heavy drinkers, they are used to the bar scene and it shows. The more professional the bar hanger-on the more comfortable she is in the scene. She is needed and wanted, she has a definite and quite clear place. She can be imperious to waitresses, flirtatious and friendly enough with the bartender to wheedle free drinks or sob on his shoulder.

Then there are the girls who come in for pickups. Of these there are, again, the more and the less experienced. Those who make a habit of this have the beginnings of a weary look, almost like a whore's. They're still usually young enough to attract men, but old enough to know they won't find love. The less experienced, the occasional-pickup girls tend to look scared and shy. They usually come in pairs and huddle at corner tables and waver in their choice of a drink. Sometimes they are even too scared and ashamed to succeed. But if they are desperate enough they keep coming back getting a little bolder each time.

## Minus the sex

And then there are the waitresses. Of all the above categories, the waitress is perhaps the best feminine role from which to observe the bar scene objectively. Being a part of the 'establishment' she is not dependent on an escort, and thus gains a certain freedom of movement. She still comes into the category of a 'woman in the man's world,' and thus must tolerate a lot of easy familiarity from strange men—her function tends to be that of a whore minus the sex—the doling out smiles and sympathy and small ego-buildups for men eager to repair bruised selves away from home.

Yet she is also, in a strange way, protected by the invisibility of her service class. She is, after all, a waitress. And she has to serve people. She has a rough job to do. The rest is packaging. And even when the packaging is pretty, people, including women, do not see her. A man may have a vague recollection of a soft bosom or a pretty smile as he leaves his tip and lurches out the door, but essentially *he does not see her*. She is merely 'that cute little waitress.' But when the service or the bar itself is bad, "there goes her tip." All the fanny pinching and flirtation are dropped instantly as soon as she makes a clumsy (human) move, and spills something on his pants or barks back at him. Then she is suddenly not 'that cute little waitress' but rather 'lousy service in this place.'

In the order of hierarchy, the waitress is at the bottom. The job is transient, fly by night. In some places a girl can make a lot of money. But the risks are great. (Sound familiar?)

## Customer always right

At the top, funneling into the owner's pocket, is the clientele. The customer is always right. The owner trembles before the customer. But if the owner is smart, he won't hang around his own place too much. He only makes everyone below him nervous, and generally exposes his fear, which is bad for morale. He comes in only on big or special nights and to tighten the place up when things are slack. Generally it is best for him to hire a tough bartender who will do the dirty work for him, and generally will do it better.

The bartenders, if there are more than one, have rankings based on experience, toughness, smarts. The bartender must be able to handle many situations more complex than mixing a good drink, though he must be skilled at that too. Then comes the doorman or any other transient male personnel. Then (yes!) the musicians if there are any. They are treated well only if they are big names bringing in a lot of money.

