Review of "Work and Equality in Soviet Society: The Division of Labor by Age, Gender, and Nationality" by Michael Paul Sacks

Marilyn Rueschemeyer, Rhode Island School of Design
come from the upper-middle, middle, and lower social classes” (p. 130). The examination of the wives in the study similarly reveals that they are not an unusual group.

Rape in Marriage’s contribution is primarily empirical and descriptive, but it lays the groundwork for theoretical development in the sociology of gender and marriage. Or rather, it provides evidence that supports the feminist theory and critique of marriage that has already emerged over the past decade or so. Skeptics of the feminist critique must contend with the evidence in Russell’s study and perhaps now will be willing to abandon the functionally harmonious model of marital relationships.

Sacks looks at gender, nationality, and age differences in employment outside agriculture and the variation in these differences across the republics of the Soviet Union. He maintains that national differences are of critical importance for the understanding of how the division of work between men and women varies over time and across regions.

Sacks begins with a review of some of the theories dealing with the link between industrial development and change in occupational gender differences. There does not appear to be a direct association between industrial development and sex segregation within the work force. The independent impact of labor shortages, political pressure with respect to hiring practices, and shifts in the qualifications and characteristics of employed women remains uncertain.

Succeeding chapters discuss variations among major nationality groups and the differences between males and females in each group that are likely to influence the level of participation within the nonagrarian work force; the relative economic development of regions and the structure of nonagrarian employment associated with the development; the distribution of males and females within the occupational structure; and finally, gender differences in employment in those aged 20–29 and 40–49 in the year 1959. A central focus is a comparison between the Russian republic and the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union.

In the Russian republic, Sacks claims male and female representation in the occupational structure remained largely unchanged between 1939 and 1970 despite the high participation of women, their improved educational qualifications, and the political pressures for employing them. He suggests that because women were already working before the 1917 Revolution in the nonagrarain economy, there was an existing sexual division that influenced the future structure of the work force. A subsequent aggravating factor beginning in the late 1920s was the entrance of many rural and conservative peasants into industry.

In the Central Asian republics, a major shift did take place largely between 1939 and 1959 with respect to aggregate occupational differences between males and females; change slowed in the 1959–70 period. Sacks suggests that during the earlier period, the increase of Russian women in Central Asia and the mobilization of indigenous males were important for the decline in occupational differences. Russian women found their education and work experience better rewarded in Central Asia than in the Slavic republics, where there was a shortage of men and a surplus of women. Between 1959 and 1970, there was an increase in the indigenous female work force in Central Asia; the smaller the proportion of Russian women in the work force, the less well women as a group were able to compete with men.

Sacks uses census data from 1939, 1959, and 1970. For a better understanding of recent developments, for example, the female percentages in professional and semiprofessional categories, it would have been important to include later data, however incomplete. As to patterns and changes in gender relations not captured in census statistics, the author states that although there have been discussions about sharing household duties, men still continue to do little. Is that the same for all regions, classes, religious groups, and generations? Studies of other East European societies have shown that variations in attitudes and behavior are related to age, education, and professional status. These differences are also relevant to a question Sacks pointedly leaves open: Would women choose to work if they were not forced to for economic reasons?

Despite some awkward writing, this book is

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valuable for its detailed analysis of the census statistics. It makes a contribution to our knowledge of the place of men and women in Soviet society even though census data have limitations as a basis for a comprehensive understanding.


STEVEN M. BUECHLER
University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Never Done, Susan Strasser presents a theoretically informed, detailed, and generously illustrated history of housework in American society. Trained as a historian, Strasser deftly uses both Marxist and feminist perspectives to interpret a wide variety of evidence concerning changes in domestic labor over the past two centuries.

Through lively descriptions of such tasks as building and tending fires, hauling water, and making and laundering clothes in the premodern era, the book conveys the enormity of the socially unrecognized and economically unrewarded work that often dominated women's lives. Ignored by the larger society, such tasks were the subject of advice by domestic reformers who sought to simplify and rationalize the tasks while simultaneously upgrading the status of women who performed them. Strasser skillfully interweaves the history of housework with the history of ideas about housework, beginning with Catharine Beecher's writings and continuing through the domestic science movement at the turn of the century. By the early twentieth century, corporate capitalism, advertising, and mass distribution were becoming the major influences on the household, and the book concludes with discussions of such recent trends as fast food chains, corporate day-care services, and the like.

The historical narrative is subtly structured by theoretical insights; central among them is the idea that housework has been continually transformed in tandem with other economic changes. From a center of production during much of the nineteenth century, the household became a site for the reproduction of labor-power by the end of that century. Throughout the twentieth century, the household has been transformed into a locus of consumption as commodity production has replaced more and more of the labor traditionally performed in the household. From this historicized vantage point, Strasser argues that the cultural ideology of separate spheres has always obscured important connections between the household and the larger economy and society, although it had a certain material validity as a description of men's and women's work in the nineteenth century that has largely disappeared in the twentieth.

The analysis is consistently attentive to the social relations surrounding domestic labor and the impact of various transformations on those relations. For instance, the advent of electricity and automatic washing machines greatly simplified the onerous task of washing clothes at the same time that it privatized the labor involved and thereby isolated women from one another. In this example and many others, Strasser avoids the opposing sins of romanticizing an idealized past and glorifying a technologized present by underscoring both the gains and losses that accompanied the changes she describes. Recognizing the burdens and pleasures of the past, the work provides a realistic foundation for its criticisms of the growing dominance of the corporate economy over the provision of an increasing number of household services and products and the more general commodification of everyday life.

This masterful study is highly recommended to those interested in women's studies and women's history, American culture, historical sociology, social change, and related areas of interest.

Endnote


B. R. Burg, whose own disciplinary affiliation is left ambiguous, has written a study of sodomy among English pirates or buccaneers operating in the Caribbean during the seventeenth century that he claims is more social scientific than historical in its orientation. His thesis is that these sea rovers were largely homosexual, and that they lived in an all-male world that took a rather matter-of-fact view of this. Burg argues that the men were