



Working Women in America: Split Dreams

Sharlene Hesse-Biber, Gregg Lee Carter

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Working Women in America: Split Dreams examines the diversity of women's work experiences from pre-industrial times to the twentieth century. One of the book's main themes is the continuity of women's work experience. It highlights that women have worked throughout history, and it seeks to dispel the misconception that women's work is a recent phenomenon. Another theme which runs through the book is the constant tension and multiple role affiliations that women experience. Indeed, the lives of working women are characterized by "split dreams": most women who work are constantly juggling their work and family dreams. Therefore, it is misleading to concentrate solely on the workplace when seeking to understand women's position at work. Rather, one must pay attention to the connections among societal institutions. To this end, the authors argue for and utilize a structural approach --one that examines the ways in which the economy, education, the family, and the polity reflect and influence one another and help reinforce women's subordination. Only when these connections are brought to light, is it possible to begin to formulate alternatives to conventional ideas concerning work, family, and gender roles. Only then, can we begin to alter our world in such a way that the work and family lives of women and men are not "split" but rather satisfactorily integrated in day-to-day reality.

The authors begin by situating their research in opposition to dominant sociological models of work and highlight the political dimensions inherent in knowledge-building. Recognizing that the present is to a large extent a legacy of the past, the authors provide a thorough historical overview of women at work. In doing so, they are careful to examine the diversity of women's experiences by race, ethnicity, class, and age. The economic, legal-political, familial, and educational institutions are then analyzed to show the ways in which they help produce and maintain inequality for women in the workplace. *Working Women in America: Split Dreams* intersperses first-person accounts throughout the book and provides a number of vignettes of women employed in a variety of occupations. It is an ideal text for courses in women's studies and sociology, as well as for general readers interested in women and their work.

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