



Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930 (Women in American History)

Sharon Strom

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By World War I, managers wanted young women with some high school education for new "light manufacturing" jobs in the office. Women could be paid significantly less than men with equivalent educations and the "marriage bar"--the practice of not hiring or retaining married women--ensured that most of them would leave the workplace before the issue of higher salaries arose. Encouraged by free training gained in high schools and by working conditions better than those available in factories, young working-class women sought out office jobs. Facing sexual discrimination in most of the professions and higher-level office jobs, middle-class women often found themselves "falling into" clerical positions. Sharon Hartman Strom details office working conditions and practices, drawing upon archival and anecdotal data. She analyzes women office-workers' ambitions and explores how the influences of scientific management, personnel management, and secondary vocational education affected office workplaces and hierarchies. Strom illustrates how businessmen manipulated concepts of scientific management to maintain male dominance and professional status and to confine women to supportive positions. She finds that women's responses to the reorganized workplace were varied; although they were able to advance professionally in only limited ways, they used their jobs as a means of pursuing friendships, education, and independence.

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