



# The Experience and Meaning of Work in Women's Lives

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In the past, social scientists have relied predominantly on traditional models of work to understand women's experiences. These models, however, have been based on men's occupational experiences, which have been assumed to be the same for women. More recently, researchers and theorists from a variety of disciplines have begun to challenge earlier assumptions as inaccurate reflections of the realities for female workers. Newer studies have concentrated on the historical and social reasons for women's employment and career choices, including changes in economy, family, and social conditions.

To provide a deeper understanding of women worker's realities by including the meaning they make of their work experiences, the editors have assembled the research of social scientists from various disciplines whose investigations focused exclusively on this subject. Their qualitative methodology provides a forum for women to voice issues, raise questions, and share self-reflections about their work experiences and the meaning they make of their work in the context of the rest of their lives.

The common themes that are interwoven within the fabric of women's work experience are: the need to expand traditional definitions of what constitutes "work;" the fluid nature of boundaries between personal life and work life; the importance of the relational aspects of their work; the issues related to the uses of power at work; the role of work in the development of women's sense of self and personal identity; and the degree to which women's work experience is colored by discrimination and sexism.

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