CHAPTER EIGHT

"Give the Boys a Trade": Gender and Job Choice in the 1890s

Ileen A. DeVault

When Pittsburgh's working-class press asked, "What Shall be Done with Daughters?" its answer, in part, was "Teach them all the mysteries of the kitchen, the dining-room and the parlor."[1] No mention was made of wage earning. For sons, the answer was quite different. "Give the Boys a Trade. . . . You will be insuring the happiness and comfort of your sons, the welfare of those who come after them, and discharging a solemn duty you owe to society and the country."[2] What was the significance of this difference?

Because women in the United States historically have not been encouraged to work outside the home, a considerable literature within women's history has dealt with the factors contributing to or militating against their wage-earning activities. We find this emphasis in studies on the feminization of certain occupations, on women's union activities and militance, and on the history of women wage workers in general. This juxtaposition of issues has supplied many of the most exciting connections made in working-class women's history, forcing us to consider the experiential intersections between family and community issues and workplace concerns.[3]

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[1] *National Labor Tribune*, Oct. 11, 1879 (hereafter *NLT*).

[2] Ibid., Apr. 16, 1892.

[3] The following very partial list represents a much larger body of scholarship. General works include Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), and Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). One of the best-known works on the feminization of an occupation is Margery W. Davies, *Woman's*

Historians of male wage workers have not similarly had to begin by asking why men entered the labor force. For men, wage earning has been taken for granted. "Men's history" therefore provides no framework sufficient to delineate how young men have viewed their occupational opportunities and choices. But this is exactly the question before us now. Comparing women's job choices with men's does more than simply add a new twist to our understanding of men's lives, however. Such a comparison initially highlights the similarities in the processes of decision making by men and by women. Ironically, these similarities in and of themselves ultimately force us to confront the ways in which expectations about gender roles influence the job choice process. This attention to gender has the potential to provide the most fruitful links between men's family, community, and workplace concerns, just as it has done in regard to women.

We can move toward such a gendered understanding of job decisions by exploring the options faced by teenaged women and men seeking training and employment for office work in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the 1890s. Clerical work turns out to be an ideal occupation to examine. Working-class families did not necessarily sit down and make "career decisions" as we think of them today with and for their children. Many, perhaps most, did not enjoy the material conditions necessary for such a procedure; others took for granted progressions within occupations or from one occupation to another. At the same time, when a young person from a working-class family decided to seek office employment, it *was* a decision, since clerical work required specific off-the-job training. Thus, while it might be very difficult to discuss, for example, individual or family "choices" to have young working-class men become common laborers, the movement of similarly placed young men into office work allows us to discuss, albeit gingerly, a range of conscious choices and decisions. This process, in turn, provides us with insight into broader issues of job choice, giving us a new realm of exploration for understanding the history of men's as well as women's labor force experiences.

By the 1890s, hundreds of Pittsburgh's young people gained clerical skills in the city's public school system each year. The high school's commercial department, established in 1868, had always focused on transmitting specific business skills. Enrollment records for the school

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Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870–1930 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982). Examples of the use of such arguments in discussions of women's union activities include the articles in Ruth Milkman, ed., *Women, Work, and Protest* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), as well as Carole Turbin, "Beyond Conventional Wisdom: Women's Wage Work, Household Economic Contribution, and Labor Activism in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Community," in *"To Toil the Livelong Day": America's Women at Work, 1780–1980*, ed. Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

through the 1890s provide a picture of the young people who sought office employment.[4] During that decade the department's student body grew rapidly, simultaneously with changes in its composition. Concurrent with the feminization of the clerical work force, the proportion of young women in the program grew dramatically, especially after the introduction of typewriting into the curriculum in 1894. From the mid-1890s through the first decade of the twentieth century, then, the program's students were about half men and half women.[5]

Who were these aspiring clerical workers? Between 45 and 55 percent of the Commercial Department's students came from working-class families,[6] a percentage lower than working-class representation in the city's population as a whole. But if the Commercial Department underrepresented the working class as a whole, it had an extremely high level of skilled workers in its clientele. While only about 19 percent of Pittsburgh's male workers held skilled manual jobs at the turn of the century, 35 percent of Commercial Department fathers did.[7]

The Commercial Department, then, did not exactly mirror Pittsburgh's residents. The least advantaged members of the population, unskilled workers, were unlikely to have children attending the program. In fact, the high representation of skilled workers' children suggests that the Commercial Department served an elite group within the working class itself. Homeownership figures for the students' families confirm this impression. While only a little over a quarter of the city's population owned homes in 1900, almost half of the Commercial Department students' parents owned their residences in that year.[8] The nativity of Commercial Department students in 1900 also reinforces the idea that the program served a middle group of the city's population. In comparison with the

[4]The extant Commercial Department enrollment records list approximately 3,100 students enrolled from 1890 through 1903. The following collective portrait is based on a sample of 1,844 of these individuals, and a subsample of about 600 of them found in the 1900 census as well.

[5]Pittsburgh, Board of Education, *26th Annual Report* (1894), 2; Ileen A. DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in Pittsburgh, 1870s–1910s" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985), 183–86.

[6]Children whose families were headed by manual workers made up 46% of the program's student body. When we examine only fathers' occupations, this predominance of working-class students becomes even clearer: 19% of the fathers were in the unskilled category and 35% in the skilled category, for a total of 54%. See DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor," 203–6.

[7]John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber have estimated that manual workers made up 72% of Pittsburgh's male wage earners in 1900: *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900–1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 64, table 4. See also Andrew Dawson, "The Paradox of Dynamic Technological Change and the Labor Aristocracy in the United States, 1880–1914," *Labor History*, 20 (1979), 325–51.

[8]U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900: Population, Part II*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1902), 709, table 107. Twenty-six percent of Pittsburgh's population owned their own homes in 1900, while 49% of the Commercial Department parents did.

population of the city as a whole, foreign-born residents were greatly underrepresented in the department, while U.S.-born Pittsburghers were overrepresented.[9]

Why did these relatively well-off working-class adolescents decide to educate themselves for office work? Examining the comparative qualities of clerical work and other job possibilities for both women and men both demonstrates the general factors involved in job choice at the turn of the century and begins to explicate the operation and implications of gender differences.

Our thinking about women's job choices in the late nineteenth century has been informed, as were the choices of women at the time, by the relatively few occupations open to them. Both female socialization and employers' prejudices limited the jobs considered by women at the turn of the century.[10] Most of these wage-earning women were young, single, and living with their parents. Clerical workers provide the extreme example of this tendency: as a group, they were younger than other women workers and even more likely than others to be single and living at home.[11] What considerations did such young women bring to their perusal of the available jobs?

Most studies of wage-earning women begin by examining economic considerations, including both wage levels and the steadiness of employment. Even the relatively well-off working-class women contemplating clerical jobs would have considered the immediate material benefits of their options for wage earning. A young woman who was not self-supporting would contribute to her family's income, either directly, by handing her wages over to her parents, or indirectly, by using her earnings to buy her own clothing or to supply other needs.[12] At the same

[9]Almost half (49%) of the program's students were the native-born children of native-born parents. Most of the rest were children of foreign-born parents (42%). Foreign-born students made up only 6% of the student body, and 3% of the students were black. See DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor," 208, table 4.2. The comparable figures for Pittsburghers aged 15 to 19 in 1900 are 34%, 43%, 18%, and 5%. See U.S. Department of Commerce, *Twelfth Census, 1900: Population*, 338, table 32.

[10]Elyce J. Rotella, *From Home to Office: U.S. Women at Work, 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), 30–37; Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer, *The Female Labor Force in the United States: Demographic and Economic Factors Governing Its Growth and Changing Composition*, Population Monograph Series, no. 5 (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, 1970), 68–70.

[11]Rotella, *From Home to Office*, 115; Davies, *Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter*, 74–76.

[12]U.S. Department of Labor, *Fourth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1888: Working Women in Large Cities* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1889), 64–65. This study found firm evidence for the participation of women workers in family economies. Of the women studied, 86% lived at home; more than half contributed their entire earnings to their family. The study also reported that "the 5.25 persons to each family [of a working woman] were supported by 2.78 persons at work." Also see Rotella, *From Home to Office*, 41–43, 50–51; Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Co-*

time, since these young, single women did not plan to support themselves permanently, their concerns would have focused on initial and relatively short-term wages, not on opportunities for promotion and wage increases over the course of years.[13]

This short-term view of wage earning both grew out of and influenced more subjective opinions of their choices as well. Looking forward to their futures as wives and mothers, young women entering the labor market sought "appropriate" employment that would either prepare them for or at the least not "ruin" them for their future roles.[14] Questions of propriety in wage earning quickly shaded over into murkier issues of the relative status of different occupations. Individual women combined different aspects of all these considerations in their employment decisions.

In Pittsburgh as elsewhere in the country, women faced a labor market in which only a few jobs were open to them—jobs highly segregated by sex. Although domestic service and the needle trades remained the top two female occupations in 1900, over half of Pittsburgh's women wage earners worked in other "typical" female jobs in the city's cigar, electrical manufacturing, food, and other industries.[15] The women students of the Commercial Department left no journals or memoirs describing how they thought about employment and the various occupations open to them. However, locating these individuals and their families in the 1900 federal census provides some clues. In order to recreate the options as perceived by young women preparing for clerical work and thereby illustrate women's job choices, in what follows I compare office jobs with the other three most common occupations of the sisters of the aspiring female clerical workers: sales, the needle trades, and teaching.[16]

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lonial Times to the Present: (New York: New Viewpoints, 1979), 124; Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women*, 85.

[13]Gary Cross and Peter Shergold, "'We Think We Are of the Oppressed': Gender, White-Collar Work, and Grievances of Late Nineteenth-Century Women," *Labor History*, 28 (1987), 38–42, 48–49.

[14]Kessler-Harris, *Out of Work*, 128.

[15]U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Occupations at the Twelfth Census, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 682–83, table 43. Elizabeth Beardsley Butler described many of these jobs in her study for the Pittsburgh Survey, *Women and the Trades* (1909; rpt. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984). In her article "Technology and Women's Work: The Lives of Working-Class Women in Pittsburgh, 1870–1900," *Labor History*, 17 (1976), 58–72, Susan J. Kleinberg overstated the impact on women workers of Pittsburgh's heavy industrial base. In fact, Pittsburgh's female labor force participation rates were comparable to those of other late-nineteenth-century expanding midwestern industrial cities such as Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit.

[16]I located 424 of the female Commercial Department students in the 1900 manuscript census. The families of these women included 261 female siblings listed as gainfully employed, 106 of them as clerical workers. Of 155 sisters who did not seek clerical jobs, 21% worked as teachers, 24% as saleswomen, and almost 24% in the needle trades. See

Table 8.1. Working conditions and benefits for four female occupational groups, 1890s

Occupational groups	Weekly wages[a]	Weekly hours[a]	Unemployment (percent)[b] 1890	1900	Benefits/conditions[c]
Clerical workers	$8.00–9.00	54–57	5%	9%	Might be paid for vacations, illness
Clerks	6.92		4	7	
Stenographers and typists	9.55		8	13	Safe, clean working conditions
Bookkeepers	9.08		5	9	
Teachers	12.00 (50 weeks) 16.67 (36 weeks)	32½ (school hours)	38	58	Summers off Crowded market Supervision of personal life
Saleswomen	6.00–7.00	58	8	13	Seasonal overtime and unemployment Poor working conditions
Needle trades	6.00	58	11	21	Seasonal
Milliners	7.24		–	26	Wide range of working conditions
Dressmakers	6.50		–	18	
Seamstresses	5.50		–	19	
Factory operatives	4.84		–	–	

[a]*Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,* pt. 3, *Industrial Statistics* (Harrisburg, 1894), sec. A; U.S. Bureau of Labor, *Work and Wages of Men, Women, and Children,* 11th Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1895–96 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897); and U.S. Bureau of Labor, *A Compilation of Wages in Commercial Countries from Official Sources,* 15th Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1900 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1900). For saleswomen and the needle trades, also see Elizabeth Beardsley Butler, *Women and the Trades* (1909; rpt. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), 408–9. For teachers' wages, see Lila Ver Planck North, "Pittsburgh Schools," in *The Pittsburgh District: Civic Frontage,* ed. Paul Underwood Kellogg (New York: Survey Associates, 1914), 269; Pittsburgh Board of Education, *37th–38th Annual Report* (1905–6), 11–12.

[b]U.S.Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890,* pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897), 712–13, table 118; U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Occupations at the Twelfth Census, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 682–83, table 43.

[c]See Ileen A. DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in Pittsburgh, 1870s–1910s" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1985), 87–105.

Table 8.1 presents the material conditions of women in these four occupational categories—clerical work, teaching, sales, and the needle

DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor," 96–97. These three occupations also showed up most commonly in late-nineteenth-century discussions of the female jobs "replaced" by office work.

trades. Teaching provided the highest wages, though teachers also experienced the highest levels of unemployment. Clerical wages and working conditions compared favorably with both saleswork and the needle trades. Both clerical work and teaching required some sort of formal training before one entered the job market. In return for this investment in time, energy, and money, women in these jobs gained material benefits in terms of both wages and working conditions. Although average wages were not as high for clerical workers as for teachers, there were many more office positions available. Investment in clerical training provided a more sure "return."

Young women's choices took into account much more than simply material conditions, however. Even as opportunities for women's wage earning increased, ethnic divisions contributed to and reinforced the hierarchy of desirability within the female job market. Table 8.2 illustrates these divisions. Immigrant women dominated the ranks of domestic servants and of workers in specific manufacturing occupations, such as tenement cigar makers. Other manufacturing jobs drew most heavily upon native-born women with immigrant parents. Saleswork also attracted women of foreign parentage, though native-born women with native-born parents were represented in this occupation beyond their proportion in the female work force as a whole. Teachers included almost equal proportions of native-born women with native-born and with foreign-born parents. Virtually all of the city's clerical workers were born in the United States; 50 percent of them had American-born parents, while the parents of another 42 percent were immigrants, mostly of German and Irish stock.[17] These divisions developed from the convoluted interaction of English-language requirements for some jobs, employers' prejudices and desires for a malleable work force, and the preferences and prejudices of the women workers and their families.[18]

These ethnic variations highlight the less tangible qualities of clerical work for Pittsburgh's female wage earners. The female labor market exhibited the tensions inherent in the widening economic and social gap between native-born or old immigrant group workers and the city's new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Maintaining the ethnic identifications of certain occupations encouraged native-born women and those from the old immigrant groups from northwestern Europe to enter the labor force. Both clerical occupations and teaching provided waged work virtually "untainted" by any peer contact with the new

[17]U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of Women at Work* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1907), 286–89, table 28.

[18]See Ryan, *Womanhood in America*, 120–21; Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 137–38; Maurine Weiner Greenwald, Introduction to Butler, *Women and the Trades* (1984), xvii.

Table 8.2. Nativity of Pittsburgh's female labor force, 1890, 1900, 1910, by job category (percent)

	Native-born			
	(native-born parents)	(foreign-born parents)	Foreign-born	Nonwhite
1890				
Total female work force	25.1%	36.5%	37.3%	4.1%
Clerical workers	40.3	51.1	8.3	0.4
Teachers	47.6	44.9	6.8	0.7
Saleswomen	35.2	54.7	10.0	0.2
Needle trades	30.4	49.1	18.4	2.1
Servants	18.6	27.1	48.6	5.7
Female population	31.3	38.5	27.5	2.7
1900				
Total female work force	28.4	37.6	26.7	7.3
Clerical workers	50.1	42.5	6.9	0.5
Teachers	46.5	45.5	7.5	0.5
Saleswomen	35.3	51.5	13.0	0.2
Needle trades	31.4	47.8	17.7	3.1
All manufacturing occupations	27.9	49.2	20.6	2.3
Servants	17.8	28.4	41.0	12.8
Female population	33.2	39.1	23.5	4.2
1910				
Total female work force	30.6	36.6	24.6	8.3
Clerical workers	50.7	43.5	5.5	0.4
Teachers	49.0	41.1	9.4	0.5
Saleswomen	37.8	50.4	11.2	0.6
Needle trades	35.1	41.2	19.1	4.7
Servants	15.6	21.1	46.2	17.1
Female population	34.0	37.7	23.6	4.7

Sources: U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897), 712–13, table 118; U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Occupations at the Twelfth Census, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 682–83, table 43; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Population: 1910* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1914), 4: 591–92, table VIII.

immigrants.[19] Given teaching's limited employment opportunities and crowded applicant pool, the rapid growth of clerical work made it an ideal aim for young native-born women.

[19]Native-born teachers came into contact with immigrants, but as their superiors, not as their peers.

Several other qualities of clerical work also contributed to its high status in the female working-class job market. A stenographer or typist in a working-class family reflected the family's material well-being. If not exactly the conspicuous consumption of the middle classes, it was a kind of "conspicuous employment," representing a family's investment in time, education, and accouterments.[20] Clerical work required first of all a specific and relatively high level of education. At a time when only a small portion of teenagers attended school beyond the eighth grade, sending a child to school beyond the compulsory age of fourteen suggested to friends and neighbors a secure and comfortable standard of living.[21] Having a daughter attending the high school also implied that the family could afford to forgo her household work and take advantage of the ready-made clothes and store-bought foodstuffs becoming increasingly available at the turn of the century. But the Commercial Department was not just "high school": the program trained these young women for the top of the working-class female occupational hierarchy.[22]

Office employment also required a high standard of clothing; just entering the clerical job market called for a substantial investment in appropriate attire.[23] Even if a working-class clerical worker kept her entire salary for herself and therefore did not need to dip into the family coffer to maintain her wardrobe, she had to own at least parts of the wardrobe simply in order to apply for jobs. Over the years, women office workers and their advocates often discussed what came to be known as "the clothes problem." Possible solutions to the "clothes problem" all required substantial material resources and therefore contributed to the conspicuous employment qualities of clerical work.[24]

Furthermore, while most female clerical workers evinced little interest in advancing into middle management positions, clerical work did hold out the promise of a different sort of "promotional opportunity." Encouraged by rumor, fiction, and suggestive jokes, young women working in offices could always hope to marry the boss—or his dashing young

[20]This is a variation on what Hanna Papanek identified as wives' work of "family status production." See Papanek, "Family Status Production: The 'Work' and 'Non-Work' of Women," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 4 (1979), 775–81.

[21]Of the children eligible for high school in Pittsburgh in 1908, 5.1% were enrolled: U.S. Immigration Commission, *The Children of Immigrants in Schools* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1911), 9.

[22]Susan B. Carter and Mark Prus, "The Labor Market and the American High School Girl, 1890–1928," *Journal of Economic History*, 42 (March 1982), 166.

[23]Remington Typewriter Company, *How to Become a Successful Stenographer* (n.p., 1916), 62, 65–66; Peter R. Shergold, *Working-Class Life: The "American Standard" in Comparative Perspective, 1899–1913* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 169, table 44, and 199, table 56. A woman's tailored wool suit cost $10 in Pittsburgh in 1901, one-eighth of the average Pennsylvania family's clothing expenditure in that year.

[24]Remington Typewriter Company, *How to Become a Successful Stenographer*, 62–63; *Phonographic World*, June 1900, 593 (hereafter *PW*).

son. Though these highest of hopes were rarely fulfilled in reality, office work did provide women with employment that did not isolate them entirely from male companionship, even if actual tasks were segregated by sex. Fellow clerical workers, company sales personnel, and visiting businessmen all became part of an expanded pool of marital possibilities.[25]

Clerical work thus occupied a special position within Pittsburgh's female job market, one that allows us to examine women's occupational choices and the complex interaction between material and subjective considerations and short- and long-term goals. In respect to material considerations such as wages, hours, seasonality, and working conditions, office work enjoyed considerable advantages over female occupations other than teaching. In the case of teaching, a tight job market often outweighed that occupation's other benefits. The rapid expansion of clerical work at the turn of the century provided constant openings for qualified young women. At the same time, clerical work also offered less tangible status benefits. The conspicuous nature of the training and apparel necessary for entry into a clerical job reinforced ethnic and intraclass divisions, within both the female job market itself and the city's working-class neighborhoods. Work in Pittsburgh's offices also held a special appeal to young working-class women as popular fiction contributed to fantasies of socializing with bankers and industrial magnates in downtown streets.

This brief outline of the factors considered by young women entering the clerical work force illuminates the basic considerations that went into women's job choices. The immediate material conditions of a job, such as wages and working conditions, were important whether the individual woman was self-supporting or planned to contribute to her family's wage pool, directly or indirectly. Beyond this consideration, less objective factors also entered into women's decisions. Especially for the young women who made up the majority of women wage earners at the turn of the century, more subtle distinctions involving status gradations played a large role in decisions once material goals were achieved. Such considerations operated both for the individual young woman and for her family. Maintaining a young working woman's personal honor was believed to affect her marriage changes in the future and also reflected her family's social standing in the community.

Young men's objectives upon entering the job market were both similar to and different from women's. Men, like most women, might first hold an immediate objective: to gain employment and contribute to the

[25]See DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor," 326–36; short stories in *NLT*, Apr. 20 and Aug. 3, 1899, and in *PW*, 1905; Cross and Shergold, " 'We Think We Are of the Oppressed,' " 47–48.

economy of their family of origin.[26] Men also held an explicitly gendered long-range objective. In line with their assumptions that they would eventually become the primary wage earners of their own families, they took into account a range of factors that influenced their future earning capabilities. Necessity forced many young men (even among those who aspired to clerical employment) to focus on the first objective; immediate earning power, at almost any level, outweighed considerations of long-term benefits. Others enjoyed material conditions that allowed them to concentrate on the second objective, participating in extended training in order to gain future benefits. For these young men, short-term economic gain became incidental, or, in some cases, temporarily irrelevant.

In moving toward both short- and long-term objectives, four categories of considerations came into play. The first category includes the material benefits of different jobs—wages foremost, but also hours and other working conditions. These material benefits had both short- and long-term aspects; beginning wages often varied widely from the possible peak earning rate for an occupation, and peak earnings were reached at different ages. In addition, hours of work and safety provisions on the job played an important role in determining the overall length of a man's working life.[27] Beyond these material conditions, young men also had to consider the training required for different jobs: was there any? how was it acquired? how did it affect the course of earnings over time? Often closely related to training was the opportunity for promotion. Were low beginning wages or a long and possibly expensive training period eventually rewarded by compensatory remuneration of one sort or another? Finally, perceptions of the status of various occupations also played a role in young men's job decisions. These status perceptions involved competing cultural values arising from class and ethnicity as well as from the rapidly changing ideals of the dominant culture. Occupational status was worked out from the interplay of these values. Young men's job decisions took into account all of these factors.

The task of comparing clerical work with other job opportunities is trickier for men than it is for women, if for no other reason than that men have a wider range of options before them, even when limitations imposed by class and ethnicity are taken into consideration. An examina-

[26]Shergold assumes that children stop contributing to family income at 21 years of age: *Working-Class Life*, 80. Other research has found variously that most people married in their early twenties and that half remained single into their late 20s: John Modell, Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., and Theodore Hershberg, "Social Change and Transitions to Adulthood in Historical Perspective," in *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century: Essays Toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City*, ed. Theodore Hershberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 324.

[27]See Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, "The Labor of Older Americans: Retirement of Men On and Off the Job, 1870–1937," *Journal of Economic History*, 46 (1986), 23–26.

tion of the occupations of the brothers of the male Commercial Department students illustrates the problem.[28] Among a group of 118 brothers who were not themselves in clerical jobs, occupations ranged from laborers through sausage makers, wire winders, glassworkers, carpenters, draftsmen, machinists, tobacco dealers, dentists, brokers, and many others. However, when grouped together by characteristics of skill, industry, and status, the most common of the brothers' occupations fall into three groups. The first group consists of sales jobs—low-level white-collar positions enjoying social status roughly equivalent to that of clerical work. Over 18 percent of the clerical workers' brothers held sales positions, well over the representation of salesworkers in the work force as a whole.[29] The second group consists of skilled trades for which the time required to be spent in training was basically equal to that devoted to formal education for clerical positions. Over 28 percent of the brothers entered skilled trades. The third group represents less choice than necessity. It consists of those jobs whose very short training periods matched their low returns in both social status and wages. Laborers and unskilled or semiskilled factory workers make up this group. Over a quarter of the aspiring clerical workers' brothers found employment in such jobs, 17 percent as laborers and almost 9 percent in miscellaneous factory jobs.

We can begin to explore the comparative advantages and disadvantages of these three groups of jobs, and thereby to explicate men's job choices, by examining wage rates. Though wages alone cannot tell the entire story, they do highlight a number of the objectives young men pursued when they sought jobs.

Pittsburgh's male clerical workers, like male office workers elsewhere, earned about $15 a week at the turn of the century. Within and among different clerical occupations, men's wages varied widely. These variations seem to reflect long-term opportunities for male clerical workers. Thus male clerks' earnings averaged about $11 a week but ranged from a low of $3 to a high of almost $29. Bookkeepers earned on average over $19 a week, though here the range of wages was astounding, from a minimum of $5 per week to a maximum of $40 per week. Such wide variations in earnings within occupational categories suggest changes over the course of years. Beginning their careers at fairly low wages, male

[28]Of the male students, 214 were found in the 1900 manuscript census. The families of these men included 201 male siblings listed as gainfully employed, 83 of them as clerical workers.

[29]Salesmen made up about 3.5% of the male work force in 1890, 1900, and 1910: U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897), 712–13, table 118; Bureau of the Census, *Occupations at the Twelfth Census, 1900*, 682–83, table 43; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Population: 1910* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1914), 4: 591–92, table VIII.

clerical workers could hope eventually to earn $30 to $40 a week. This career view of clerical jobs becomes even clearer when the wages for these jobs are compared with the wages of male stenographers, the most rapidly feminized occupation. The range of stenographic pay for men was relatively small, from $10 to $15. The predominance of women stenographers affected these male wages, as did assumptions that while a man might *begin* his career as a stenographer, he would soon move on to a different and more highly paid position. As one observer noted, "What gentleman engaged in the position of stenographer, does not look forward to the day when he will be the dictator, and someone else will be occupying the position he now occupies?"[30]

Like the wages of male clerical workers, the wages of Pittsburgh's salesmen varied greatly, from a minimum of $8 a week to $40 or more. Most of this variation arose from the different situations in which salesmen found themselves, and particularly from the distinction between retail and wholesale positions.[31] Retail salesmen earned between $8 and $25 a week. Early-twentieth-century observers attributed these variations to years on the job.[32] At the same time, salesmen for manufacturing firms earned considerably higher wages than their retail counterparts. Researchers for a 1900 federal study examined the wage records of fourteen of the country's major corporations and found that these companies' traveling salesmen earned an average of about $2,000 a year, or $40 a week. The minimum reported was $1,079 ($21.58 a week) and the maximum was $5,000 a year ($100 a week).[33]

To some extent, retail and wholesale jobs represent the difference between entry-level sales positions for men and their possible long-term financial benefits. For salesmen, then, both the range of wages within the two types of sales jobs and the difference in the overall wages between them provide evidence of the long-range material benefits of sales jobs for young men. These differences are also apparent in the age and marital status of men in the two types of sales jobs. Census figures reveal that salesmen in stores tended to be young (about 40 percent were under twenty-four years of age in the 1890s) and a majority of them were sin-

[30]*PW*, March 1889, 144; DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor," 121–23.

[31]U.S. Bureau of Labor, *A Compilation of Wages in Commercial Countries from Official Sources: 15th Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1900), and *Work and Wages of Men, Women, and Children: 11th Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1895–96* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897); Meyer Bloomfield, ed., *Readings in Vocational Guidance* (Boston: Ginn, 1915), 527.

[32]John R. Commons and William M. Leiserson, "Wage-Earners of Pittsburgh," in *Wage-Earning Pittsburgh*, ed. Paul Underwood Kellogg (New York: Survey Associates, 1914), 132.

[33]Jeremiah W. Jenks, for U.S. Department of Labor, "Trusts and Industrial Combinations," Bulletin no. 29 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1900), 684.

gle. In 1900, over half of the salesmen in stores were unmarried, while only a third of commercial travelers were.[34] To some extent, then, the different sales occupations represented different life stages. However, the retail sales ranks did include some older, married men as well. Sheer numbers worked against movement from retail to wholesale positions, since retail workers made up at least 80 percent of all Pittsburgh salesmen. While some of these men's colleagues eventually moved from retail into wholesale positions, others remained in an occupation dominated by men less encumbered by family responsibilities, a situation that worked to lower wages. Salesmen's wages have thus suggested to us not only the movement up from beginners' wages but also the operation and limitations of one set of promotional opportunities.

The wages of skilled manual workers illustrate a different type of career ladder and the training it required. Of the 28 percent of the clerical workers' brothers who entered skilled trades, 11.5 percent became machinists, while almost 8 percent entered the building trades and just over 6 percent became skilled workers in the iron and steel industry. The young men who entered these occupations began with low wages and few skills, but counted on reaching the ultimate security provided by skilled trades. Table 8.3 illustrates the average earnings possible for three of these skilled occupations: machinists, carpenters, and plumbers. The table does not include skilled occupations in the iron and steel industry because comparable data are not available. The most highly skilled workers in iron and steel, such as rollers and heaters, earned as much as $35 to $45 a week at the turn of the century.[35] Theoretical fifty-two-week earnings for these men reached $2,000 and over, but in fact many worked only half to three-quarters of the year, so that they actually earned only $1,000 to $1,500 annually.[36]

All of these skilled trades required some sort of training period, though not always a formal apprenticeship. In the iron and steel mills, both working-class tradition and employer policies encouraged a process

[34]U.S. Census Office, *Report on Population . . . 1890,* pt. 2, 712–13, table 188; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Occupations at the Twelfth Census, 1900,* 682–83, table 43.

[35]Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation, Pittsburgh Works, Payroll and Tabulating Department, "Earning Records, 1862–1901," in Archives of Industrial Society, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh, records a maximum for heaters of $42.00, for rollers of $45.50; John A. Fitch, *The Steel Workers* (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1910), 301–5, gives $37.32 as a maximum for heaters, $44.58 for rollers.

[36] David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 39–40. See also Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 58 and 308–19, tables A.1, A.2, A.4. Charles A. Gulick, Jr., claimed that even in the "prosperous year" of 1910 it was probably impossible to work more than forty-five weeks: *Labor Policy of the United States Steel Corporation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), 63. The *NLT* constantly noted which mills were open or shut, and the general market conditions for iron and steel.

Table 8.3. Annual earnings possible in three skilled occupations, Pittsburgh, 1890–1908

	Average weekly wages	Earnings for 52-week year	Workers unemployed 1–3 months (percent)	Earnings for 39-week year
Machinists				
1890s[a]	$12.25	$ 637.00	8.7%[b]	$ 477.75
Before 1904[c]			9.0[d]	
Union scale:				
Minimum	16.20	842.40		631.80
Maximum	21.60	1,123.20		842.40
1906[e]	18.49	961.48		721.11
Carpenters				
1890s[a]	16.74	870.48	14.8[b]	652.86
1890s[f]	18.79	977.08		732.81
1903 (union)[g]	21.00	1,092.00	18.3[d]	819.00
1906[e]	21.02	1,093.04		819.78
1907–1908[c]				
Union scale	24.00	1,248.00		936.00
Nonunion	21.00	1,092.00		819.00
Plumbers				
1890s[a]	18.53	963.56	8.9[b]	722.67
1894 (union)[c]	21.00	1,092.00		819.00
1901 (union)[c]	24.00	1,248.00	9.0[d]	936.00
1907 (union)[c]	27.00	1,404.00		1,053.00

[a]U.S. Department of Labor, *Wages in the United States and Europe, 1870 to 1898*, Bulletin no. 18 (September 1898), 678, 673, 681.

[b]U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897), 712–13, table 118.

[c]John R. Commons and William M. Leiserson, "Wage Earners of Pittsburgh," in *Wage-Earning Pittsburgh*, ed. Paul Underwood Kellogg (New York: Survey Associates, 1914), 140, 154, 162.

[d]U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Occupations at the Twelfth Census, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 680–81, table 43.

[e]Peter R. Shergold, *Working-Class Life: The "American Standard" in Comparative Perspective, 1899–1913 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982)*, 46, 62.

[f]*Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, pt. 3, *Industrial Statistics* (Harrisburg, 1894), B.3.

[g]*Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, pt. 3, *Industrial Statistics* (Harrisburg, 1903), 469 (returns from United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners).

whereby men worked their way up from unskilled to skilled positions. This process could take years, though gaining a position through relatives who worked at the same mill might speed it up some.[37] The other occupations under consideration had more formal apprenticeships,

[37]Commons and Leiserson, "Wage-Earners of Pittsburgh," 141–42; Fitch, *Steel Workers*, 13, 141–42.

though their actual operation depended on union strength in the particular trade. Plumbers and steamfitters maintained the strictest apprenticeships, ranging from three to five years in length. The 1907 union scale, for example, specified four classes of workers: the steamfitters themselves, earning $24.00 a week; junior steamfitters, or "second men," young men in the last years of their apprenticeships, earning $16.50 a week; "experienced helpers," apprentices after their first three months at the trade, earning $13.50; and "inexperienced helpers," who earned only $9.00 a week.[38]

Other trades encountered situations that made it impossible for them to regulate apprenticeships fully. Carpentry apprenticeships supposedly took three years in the mid-1890s, but even then, many carpenters never served any at all. On the one hand, many young men picked up carpentry skills without formal training. On the other hand, by the turn of the century mechanization began to minimize skills further, as carpenters increasingly only put together pieces produced in planing mills.[39] Machinists experienced the most dire consequences of the increased division of labor. Despite their increasing numbers, by 1907 only about a third of Pittsburgh's machinists were "all-round" men, able to operate a wide range of machines. The rest were "specialists," operating a single machine that performed a single function. The all-round men, generally members of the machinists' union in Pittsburgh, still maintained formal apprenticeships and received the highest wages.[40]

In all these occupations, then, young men could expect to earn moderate wages during several years of training before achieving the high wages of the skilled positions. Unlike the formal education required for clerical positions, training for skilled trades combined immediate earnings with future possibilities.

Of course, many young men did not have the luxury of plotting out this type of long-term strategy. Over a quarter of the aspiring clerical workers' brothers found employment as laborers or factory operatives. These jobs usually required no experience; starting wages equaled peak wages. Almost 17 percent of the brothers were listed as laborers in 1900. Some of these men may in fact have been working in entry-level positions in the skilled trades, but others were concerned more with immediate employment than with future opportunities. Laborers earned between $7 and $12 a week, depending on the employing industry. Easy entrance created a highly competitive situation. Many were hired by the day or by

[38]*Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, pt. 3, *Industrial Statistics* (Harrisburg, 1894), sec. B.

[39]Ibid., B.4; Walter E. Weyl and A. M. Sakolski, for U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, *Conditions of Entrance to the Principal Trades*, Bulletin no. 67 (1906), 690, 694.

[40]Commons and Leiserson, "Wage-Earners of Pittsburgh," 140–41; Weyl and Sakolski, "Conditions of Entrance," 686–89.

the hour as casual laborers; even the high unemployment figures given in the 1890 and 1900 census probably underestimated the tenuous nature of this type of employment.[41]

The almost 9 percent of the brothers employed in miscellaneous factory jobs worked in positions virtually unknown to their fathers, in the new world of semiskilled factory work. Businesses such as the Westinghouse electrical supply plants in East Pittsburgh hired these young men at weekly wages between $9 and $12. Though these wages barely differed from those for laboring jobs, factory employment provided more job security. These positions also represented the city's expanding industries. While skilled industrial trades declined in the city's traditional industries such as iron and steel and glass, the new factory jobs expanded.[42] They provided steady work to an increasing portion of the city's work force.

This discussion of wage rates faced by male clerical workers and their brothers has thus touched on at least three out of our four initial job choice objectives: immediate and long-term financial gains, promotional opportunities, and training requirements. How did the perceived status of various jobs—the fourth objective—enter into the picture? As we will see, status distinctions involved all of the factors already discussed and more.

A short story in Pittsburgh's working-class press in 1898 began with the following mock job advertisement: "Wanted—A bright boy to begin at the bottom of the ladder in my office and gradually work up by his own conscientious efforts until I can take him into partnership and marry him to my only daughter."[43] This male version of the typical success-through-marriage story of women's fiction offered both romance and promotion. Not only fiction promulgated such dreams of success. Journals directed toward clerical workers assured their male readers that advancement was not only possible but forthcoming. The encouragement offered actually held out two possibilities for promotion. The most widely talked about was also the least likely: the young man's meteoric

[41]Shergold, *Working-Class Life*, 240–41, table 2; Commons and Leiserson, "Wage-Earners of Pittsburgh," 119–21. In 1890, 27.47% of laborers were unemployed for one to twelve months; in 1900, 37.58%: U.S. Census Office, *Report on Population . . . 1890*, pt.2, 712–13, table 188; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Occupations at the Twelfth Census, 1900*, 682–83, table 43.

[42]U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910: Manufactures, 1909, Reports by States, with Statistics for Principal Cities* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1912); Commons and Leiserson, "Wage-Earners of Pittsburgh," 135; Glenn E. McLaughlin, *Growth of American Manufacturing Areas: A Comparative Analysis with Special Emphasis on Trends in the Pittsburgh District* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, Bureau of Business Research, 1938), 195.

[43]"An 1897 Boy's Story," *NLT*, Apr. 7, 1898.

rise to partnership and wealth. Arguing against the effortlessness of fiction, other authors emphasized individuals' skills and initiative, stating repeatedly that promotion within business bureaucracies came from individual effort.[44]

But less sensational promotional goals also existed. In the course of a *Phonographic World* debate over the merits of business versus railroad office work, one of the railroad proponents pointed out that, in addition to promotional opportunities, railroad work assured the clerical worker of employment unaffected by business failures.[45] Especially for working-class youths, well aware of the vagaries of the economy, this kind of bureaucratic stability might have been as attractive as the more sensational success stories.

The actual availability of promotional opportunities is quite difficult to ascertain. For example, the majority of railway officials in the late nineteenth century began their railroad employment in clerical and sales positions, although, as Stuart Morris has pointed out, "the number of higher executive positions relative to the total number of employees was never very high."[46] Some railroad clerks realized this. The *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine,* commenting in 1902 on the formation of the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks two years earlier, pointed out that some clerks had finally "realized that all clerks could not hope to be 'general managers' and most of them would spend their days trying to 'figure out' how a $40-salary can be made to pay the expenses of an American family."[47] The same situation prevailed in banks, especially as they expanded and the number of low-level clerical workers mushroomed, and in virtually all offices; as businesses elaborated office hierarchies, they created many more clerical than managerial positions.[48] Nonetheless, for young men making initial job choices, rumors of possible futures might easily outweigh less alluring realities.

The male students of Pittsburgh's Commercial Department began their working careers as clerks, bookkeepers, and stenographers. For example, Charles Fuhr, John Flood, Joseph Crowley, and Jacob Baschkopf all worked as bookkeepers when they were twenty-five years old. Ten years

[44]*PW*, March 1889, 145; May 1889, 183; April 1905, 261–67; January 1905, 67; *Accountics,* April 1897, 10–13.

[45]*PW*, June 1889, 215. See the debate in *PW* over chances for promotions in railroad versus business offices: May, June, July, and August 1889, 183, 215, 237, 277 and November 1890, 70. *PW* also ran many notices of railroad employees' promotions. An ad for the Success Shorthand School in *PW*, January 1905, 89–90, tells the stories of young men stuck in clerical ruts until they learned shorthand and advanced to other clerical jobs.

[46]Stuart Morris, "Stalled Professionalism: The Recruitment of Railway Officials in the United States, 1885–1940," *Business History Review,* 47 (1973), 324.

[47]Quoted in Harry Henig, *The Brotherhood of Railway Clerks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937), 11.

[48]See DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor," 18–79.

later, none of them listed his occupation as "bookkeeper," though none was a captain of industry, either. Jacob Baschkopf worked as an insurance inspector. Joseph Crowley, after working for over fifteen years as a bookkeeper, had become an undertaker. John Flood worked as an office manager in the central business district, while Charles Fuhr had become an auditor in the bank in which he had started his employment. These examples reflect the range of promotional possibilities open to the Commercial Department students. Much of their upward progression came through bureaucratic promotions. Banks provide the clearest examples of this progression. By the turn of the century, few young men expected to enter banking employment as a clerk, teller, or bookkeeper and end up owning a bank. But banks were known for their job security; once employed by a bank, a man could expect to progress by logical steps through its departments. The other side of the bank employment coin, however, was that job security and bureaucratic promotions were often guaranteed only within a single bank.[49] If Charles Fuhr, working as an auditor in 1915, had chosen in that year to seek a job at another bank, he might have had to start again at the bottom as a simple bookkeeper.

Overall, an examination of the former Commercial Department students fails to reveal any significant job mobility for these male clerical workers. Beginning their employment careers as low-level clerical workers, they generally stayed within the confines of that occupational rank.[50] Looking at our range of male occupations, then, we see that, although popular perceptions suggested great promotional possibilities for clerical workers, the reality of clerical work was more connected to the stability of bureaucratic employment. Long-term prospects could be best in clerical work, although wholesale positions, often sharing the same promotional ladder and pool, were quite comparable. Skilled workers might hope to be self-employed someday, but even that was a more modest aim than the clerical worker's dream of commercial or financial greatness. And, as mentioned earlier, even without such astounding success, the bureaucratic stability of employment in banks, railroads, and other large corporations outweighed the vagaries of industrial employment—accident, age, and technological obsolescence chief among them.

Looking at the more immediate future, however, young men who desired clerical employment faced a crucial obstacle. Unlike other occupations, office jobs could be obtained only after a course of formal and nonremunerative education. For Pittsburgh's young men, therefore, cler-

[49]Amos Kidder Fiske noted in 1904 that a bank's chief clerk, the second in command under the cashier (one of the bank's officers), had usually risen through the ranks, and that some banks hired only at the very bottom rungs, with the expectation of promoting their employees: *The Modern Bank* (New York: Appleton, 1904), 198–99.

[50]DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor," 307–38, discusses the career trajectories of Commercial Department students.

ical work entailed many of the same social considerations it did for women. The characteristics of "conspicuous employment" operated in similar ways. Education for clerical work not only provided necessary skills but also imparted a level of social status in and of itself. Similarly, young men, too, had to invest in a new set of clothes in order to enter office employment. At the same time, however, these status considerations functioned differently in men's decisions than in women's. Clerical work's status features played an important role in some young women's decisions to enter the labor market at all. Since young men did not face the decision whether to work for wages or not, conspicuous employment characteristics were more equivalent to material considerations in their decisions to seek clerical work.

At the same time, ambiguous (and often contradictory) distinctions between manual and nonmanual labor contributed to young men's perceptions of the social status of office employment. The United States has always fostered a schizophrenic view of manual labor.[51] One set of traditions has glorified the individual who worked with his hands and scorned those who didn't—lawyers, politicians, financiers. Certainly Pittsburgh's workers upheld a working-class version of this tradition in the late nineteenth century, basing trade union and political power on their belief that it was their labor that created the city's—and the nation's—wealth.[52] The alternate tradition argued that "Americans very naturally are disinclined to manual labor."[53] Although middle-class observers tended to decry this tendency among workers' sons, many workers seem to have understood and supported their children's decisions. Even the city's "aristocracy" of skilled labor often tried to escape from the very work they glorified, becoming full-time unionists or politicians or, in the case of clerical training, seeking something "better" for their sons. Less skilled industrial workers found less to glorify in their work and more to gain from having their sons escape it. One commentator quoted in the *National Labor Tribune* pointed out that "many of the men who are metaphorically weeping over the desperate position of the

[51]See, e.g., Daniel T. Rodgers's discussion in *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), esp. 180.

[52]See DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor," chaps. 4 and 5, as well as *NLT* for 1870s–1890s; Francis G. Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877–1919* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984); Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Gregory S. Kealey, "Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: Prospects in the 1980s," *Labour/Le Travailleur,* 7 (Spring 1981), 67–94; David Montgomery, "Labor and the Republic in Industrial America: 1860–1920," *Le Mouvement Social,* 111 (April–June 1980), 201–15; Richard J. Oestreicher, "Industrialization, Class, and Competing Cultural Systems: Detroit Workers, 1875–1900," in *German Workers in Industrial Chicago, 1850–1910: A Comparative Perspective,* ed. Hartmut Keil and John B. Jentz (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983).

[53]*NLT,* Sept. 7, 1893.

young American who is barred out from the opportunity to learn a trade would not have their own sons serve an apprenticeship."[54] "No matter what you do," another author argued, "whether it be bookkeeping, measuring milk, handling a pick or running an engine, it is the man, not the work . . . that makes him and his labor, respectively, respected or despised."[55]

For young men choosing to enter office occupations, two central signifiers of masculinity appear to be operating in contradiction. On the one hand, there is the glorification of (hard) manual labor as intrinsic to masculine identity. On the other hand, there is what could be called a "social" definition of masculinity, based on the ability of the "real man" to support his family. The latter is embodied in calls for the "family wage," the former in defenses of male predominance in jobs in which the entrance of other groups, especially women, threatened to displace men.[56] In fact, clerical work did not fall into this last category. Since the clerical sector was the most rapidly expanding sector of the labor market at the turn of the century, women could enter office jobs without posing this type of threat. In addition, the sex segregation of individual jobs within the clerical sector ensured that women would be seen as even less competition in this way.[57] In this setting, then, the social definition of masculinity was more crucial; a man's image of himself as a family's breadwinner could very well outweigh any sense that manual labor alone embodied masculinity. Clerical work, which implied steady wages for many years, could therefore seem to be superior to most turn-of-century industrial jobs, which carried with them the threat of premature disability or death.[58]

[54]*NLT*, May 16, 1895. See the quote from John Fitch, below, for an example of middle-class concerns.

[55]*NLT*, Sept. 7, 1893.

[56]Cf. Martha May, "Bread before Roses: American Workingmen, Labor Unions, and the Family Wage," in Milkman, *Women, Work, and Protest*, 1–21, and Ava Baron, "Contested Terrain Revisited: Technology and Gender Definitions of Work in the Printing Industry, 1850–1920," in *Women, Work, and Technology: Transformations*, ed. Barbara Wright et al., 58–83 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987).

[57]Between 1870 and 1920 the U.S. work force as a whole increased by 328%. In comparison, the clerical occupations increased by 3,818%. Alba M. Edwards, for U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Comparative Occupation Statistics for the United States, 1870–1940* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 104–12. As late as 1900, women made up only 29.2% of clerical workers in the United States: U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *Women's Occupations through Seven Decades*, Bulletin no. 218 (1947), 75, 78. Only the job category of stenographers and typists was fully feminized at this time, with women making up 76.6%. The next closest category consisted of "bookkeepers, cashiers, and accountants," which was only 29.1% female in 1900: Davies, *Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter*, 178–79, table 1.

[58]On the psychological reverberations of the male role of family provider, see Jessie Bernard, "The Good-Provider Role: Its Rise and Fall," *American Psychologist*, 36 (January 1981), 1–12.

By the turn of the century, new ethnic divisions appeared within the male labor force as well, exacerbating other social distinctions among occupations. The new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe filled the unskilled and semiskilled jobs created by technological innovations and the further subdivision of labor in the skilled trades. John Fitch found the results of this development in Pittsburgh steel mills in 1908: "Many American boys fancy that they degrade themselves by entering into competition with a Slav for a job. Accordingly, lacking experience and hence skill, they shut themselves out of the avenues of approach to the better mill positions."[59] Already by 1900, foreign-born workers made up 39 percent of Pittsburgh's male work force, while clerical, sales, and many skilled manual jobs were dominated by native-born men. Table 8.4 illustrates these divisions. Thus, just as the female labor market was stratified by nativity and ethnicity, so was the male labor market.

Like clerical work for women, clerical work for men occupied a unique niche in the job market. While other available jobs provided either comparable material benefits or similar social status, clerical work seemed to provide it all. For young men who could afford to defer immediate earnings in order to gain the necessary training, clerical work's long-term material benefits proved well worth the effort and the wait. In addition, just as it did for women, clerical work's social status also appealed to native-born working-class men. For these young men, clerical work fitted into their expectations of being future family-wage earners.

This description of young men's decisions to become clerical workers illustrates working-class men's job choice considerations. While their economic circumstances forced many young men to consider the immediate material conditions of a job first and foremost, their long-term job horizon ensured that they would always be cognizant of a job's extended benefits. Young women, assuming that their futures held marriage, were concerned with the relative propriety of the various jobs open to them. In the constricted female job market, clerical work was the only occupation that not only held out the potential for meeting appropriate partners but also might actually increase a woman's social status. For this reason, the status of clerical work might actually encourage a woman to enter the paid labor force even if she had no pressing financial reason for doing so. Young men, of course, would not be persuaded to enter the labor force because of a job's status; they expected to be employed most of their lives. They were, however, as concerned as women with how marriageable different jobs made them. For young men, marriageability depended less on status or propriety than on the stability and level of future earn-

[59]Fitch, *Steel Workers*, 145.

Table 8.4. Nativity of Pittsburgh's male labor force, 1890, 1900, 1910, by job category (percent)

	Native-born			
	Native-born parents	Foreign-born parents	Foreign-born	Non-white
1890				
Total male work force	24.6%	27.4%	43.5%	4.5%
Clerical workers	48.5	37.4	13.4	0.8
Salesmen (stores)	43.2	36.8	19.9	0.1
Carpenters	41.7	23.7	33.9	0.7
Machinists	32.9	30.3	36.6	0.2
Laborers	11.8	19.0	62.3	6.9
Male population	30.7	35.7	30.2	3.4
1900				
Total male work force	26.4	27.9	38.9	6.8
Bookkeepers and accountants	53.6	34.6	11.6	0.2
Salesmen	43.1	36.1	20.0	0.7
Carpenters	46.3	24.4	28.3	1.0
Machinists	35.5	35.6	28.6	0.3
Laborers	11.2	20.0	57.3	11.5
All manufacturing occupations	23.4	30.3	42.7	3.7
Male population	32.1	35.8	27.3	4.9
1910				
Total male work force	28.0	27.3	39.1	5.6
Bookkeepers and accountants	55.4	33.9	10.4	0.3
Salesmen (stores)	44.8	33.1	21.6	0.5
Carpenters	38.6	23.5	36.1	1.7
Machinists	30.2	32.9	36.5	0.5
Laborers (blast furnaces, rolling mills)	6.6	14.6	76.2	2.6
Male Population	35.0	34.1	28.9	5.0

Sources: U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, pt. 2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1897), 712–13, table 118; U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Occupations at the Twelfth Census, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904), 682–83, table 43; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Population: 1910* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1914), 4: 591–92, table VIII.

ings. Men's perceptions of their future familial role as primary bread winner thus led them to focus more on long-term economic considerations when they chose an occupation. In fact, for relatively well-off

working-class men, considerations of such things as future earnings and employment stability might well have overshadowed immediate benefits.

As we noted earlier, studies of women's wage-earning choices have looked at the ramifications of those choices for women's union activities and militance and for the feminization of certain occupations. The same sort of work can be profitably done for men, as well. If young women's individual and collective activities in the labor market were affected by their assumptions that they would one day marry and no longer have to work for wages, how were young men's activities influenced by their knowledge that they would have not only to go on supporting themselves and/or contributing to the family coffers, but also to support first a wife and then a growing family? The task now facing scholars of "men's labor history" is to apply the insights on men's job choices suggested here to different male workers' situations.

In my own research on clerical workers, understanding the context of young men's job choices helps decipher the ambiguous class position of office jobs. On the one hand, clerical work was only marginally at the top of the job market for men, although it was more clearly so for women. On the other hand, for both men and women, clerical work reinforced other tendencies toward separation of a native-born working-class elite from the largely immigrant unskilled workers of the turn of the century. In addition, contradictory notions of masculinity in manual and nonmanual occupations operated in the context of an expanding office work force made up of both men and women. The combination of all these intersecting factors does not explain away clerical work's ambiguities, but it does make them more comprehensible.

Thinking about men's job choices suggests profitable research that could be carried out on a number of other topics as well. For example, looking at the very different motivations between the job choices of young men entering the skilled trades and unskilled jobs, what can we say about the role played by family concerns? The often desperate "decisions" made by young men in taking unskilled jobs suggests a possible link between the economic powerlessness such unskilled workers experienced on the job and their family responsibilities. What effect did this linkage have on unskilled workers' collective actions? How did the existence of other wage earners in a family influence these male workers' behavior? At what point did they become willing to risk their own wages?

For organized skilled workers at the turn of the century, the linkage between workplace and family concerns is just as crucial, though in different ways. These men chose (and often worked to gain over the course of years) trades that would provide not only themselves but their entire families with what they assumed would be a comfortable standard of

living. The unionist's ideal "family wage" would cover not only food, clothing, and shelter, but also comforts such as the pianos so many middle-class observers expressed surprise to see in turn-of-the-century skilled workers' homes.[60] Again, understanding the job choices made in an effort to attain this standard of living may help us to comprehend the force with which skilled workers responded to attacks on their "manhood."

It seems redundant (but is unfortunately not unnecessary) to say that this response emphasizes the gendered nature of the famed "manliness" of turn-of-the-century skilled workers. Davis Montgomery has described how "the workers' code celebrated individual self-assertion, but for the collective good, rather than for self-advancement."[61] The process by which these skilled workers chose their jobs suggests an intermediate step: between the "collective good" of the union and the "self-advancement' of the individual stood the smaller collective unit of the male-headed household. The sense of what it meant to "be a man" thus not only holds the potential of explicating workers' relationships with their employers and supervisors but also redounds back to their original choices of occupations, and in so doing prefigures family roles and relationships. These examples only begin to touch on the ways in which exploring male workers' job decisions may open up new areas for research. Just as it has done for women's labor history, raising these issues holds the potential of uncovering new insights into the connections between men's workplace concerns and their family and community experiences. A labor history that fully takes gender into account in this way will be that much richer and, perhaps, that much more true to the realities of working-class life in the past.

[60]One example of middle-class observers' attitudes is seen in Margaret F. Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (1910; rpt. Pittsburgh: Center for International Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 1974), 85.

[61]David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 204.