1

Introduction

This book concerns the central role of gender in the massive reorganization of lives and livelihoods that accompanied the economic, social, political, and cultural revolutions of industrial capitalism in England. It primarily focuses on the importance of gender in class relations in the second half of the nineteenth century.

England was in the vanguard of the industrial revolution, and it was there, during the nineteenth century, that industrial capitalism came into full flower. In the last half of the century, seeds that had been sown much earlier produced bounteous riches for some, along with bitter fruit for others. Factories replaced homes and workshops, altering landscapes from the level Midlands to the craggy hillsides of Lancashire in the north. Cities and towns swelled to accommodate rural immigrants as novel ways of manufacturing familiar goods replaced older ones and new commodities were produced for sale in markets that often lay an ocean away.

Relations between and among the men and women who created the first industrial nation were transformed by the very development of that society. As working people struggled to secure their livelihoods they found themselves constrained by shifting forms of employment, competition with one another for scarce jobs, and revised legal entitlements, responsibilities, and restrictions. They were forced to improvise new directions for living that altered the familiar routes of the past, and gender distinctions were crucial to these transformed patterns and emerging practices.

The upheavals in people's lives and livelihoods, and the unequal distribution of the costs and benefits of industrial transformation, have been at the center of historical and sociological accounts of this momentous period. Visible disjunctures and fissures in social relationships and their consequences stimulated the development of classical social theory. Following in the pathways defined by Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber, historians and sociologists have shown

us a social landscape being altered by class conflict and industrialization. Their portraits have focused on issues central to this book: class, family relations, and labor politics. However, they have failed to recognize gender as a core feature of the social fabric and its transformation.

The historical and theoretical insights of E. P. Thompson have enriched our understanding of working-class formation during the early part of the nineteenth century.[1] His analysis of working-class culture and political activism stimulated new ways of thinking about class.[2] He narrated the story of how working people used their cultural resources to create class-based political responses to the economic changes that had unsettled and often destroyed their livelihoods. Using an entirely different orientation, an earlier sociological study by Neil Smelser had provoked a generation or more of scholarship dealing with the relationship between family structure and industrial transformation.[3] Although Smelser's argument has been criticized for reducing complex historical developments to abstract structural causes, the evidence he unearthed has enriched what we know about the industrial revolution. He observed, for example, that disruption in family lives may be linked to political activism, a theme that has been explored by feminist scholars.[4] The inquiries of Eric Hobsbawm and, more recently, Patrick Joyce have contributed to our understanding of the latter part of the nineteenth century. Their work has been an important stimulus to studies of factionalism within the working class, capitalist strategies, and the dampening of political protest in the second half of the nineteenth century.[5] Using diverse approaches, these investigations have contributed to our understanding of the development of industrial capitalism in very different ways. They have suggested the importance of culture in class formation, the relevance of disruptions in family life for political activism, and the influence of intra-class divisions and capitalist strategies on working-class solidarity. However, they were limited because they omitted consideration of the involvement of women and failed to recognize the importance of gender in men's actions and experiences.

My work builds on more than two decades of intensive scholarship on the subject of women and work that challenges the gender-blind assumptions embedded in traditional sociological and historical scholarship on this crucial period of history.[6] The first stage of this tradition of feminist scholarship was to demonstrate women's participation in

economic life. This project began with the careful excavation, by such scholars as Sally Alexander for Britain and Alice Kessler-Harris for the United States, of evidence about women in the labor force.[7] In addition to their own work, feminists discovered a tradition of earlier scholarship about women.[8] Using this earlier material, scholars have shown the complex ways that women's economic contributions changed with the development of capitalism, the variations in the location of women's waged work, and the modes and timing of their contributions to working-class household subsistence.[9]

A second stream of scholarship has been instrumental in refashioning our ideas about industrial transformation. Going beyond the observation that women and men have had different family responsibilities, historians and sociologists have revealed the extent and the persistence over time of gender segregation in waged work.[10] The natures of women's work and men's work have varied historically, but two related factors have generally remained constant: both their jobs and their workplaces have been gender-segregated, and only rarely have women supervised men. Although gender segregation of occupations has been documented time and time again, the reasons for its persistence remain elusive.

Recent scholarship has turned to the place of family, work, and community in the construction of masculinity.[11] As long as scholarship focused on women or remained centered on the differences between women's and men's work, our understandings about economic and social transformation could be broadened but not undermined. Recent attention to men as gendered beings and to men's work as having something to do with men as men has been a vital step in undermining gender-neutral accounts of industrial transformation and class formation.

These developments in feminist scholarship have together challenged the comprehensiveness as well as the bias of previous accounts of working-class history. Yet many sociologists and historians remain unconvinced that gender is central to economic relations. It was not only an absence of evidence about women and work that kept scholars from seeing that "gender matters."[12] The subject of gender could be dismissed, not because there were no observable patterns to women's and men's work, but because no theory of gender existed.[13] In fact, there has been no consensus on the meaning of gender as an analytical concept. Without theory, the differences between women's and men's

experiences of working-class history and in the unfolding of their histories could be explained by "biology" or by "economics." Lacking an argument articulating what gender is and how it works, scholars looked to something that seemed logically prior to gender or prior to the different social positions of women and men in society, something outside gender itself. Without a theory of gender to back up the assertion that "gender matters," working-class history could flourish untransformed by feminist scholarship.

Although there has been a wealth of scholarship showing that gender has influenced class relations and class relations have shaped gender, how and why this has occurred has remained obscure. Later in this chapter I elaborate on a cultural or symbolic approach to gender that suggests why gender is basic to all social processes. I use this cultural approach to demonstrate how gender was constitutive of economic practices and class relations, by examining how work was structured in industries ranging from metalworking and chocolate manufacture to the production of lace, as well as focusing on the relations between capital and labor and between men and women in other textile industries that differed dramatically from one another.

In the lace industry, women and men worked at totally distinct jobs, usually in radically different locations. While adult men made high wages making lace in factories, adult women earned a pittance finishing it at home. In contrast, cotton powerloom weaving was a sexually integrated occupation. Women and men often worked together at the same jobs and were paid roughly the same wages. Even then, however, women and men had different experiences at work and in labor organizations. In the carpet and hosiery industries, women and men often competed with one another for jobs. In those industries, employers often attempted to employ women rather than men, because they could pay them lower wages. Despite the differences among these industries, gender affected class relations in each of them in distinctive ways.

THE PUZZLE OF THE HOSIERY INDUSTRY

Knitted goods were made in the cities, towns, and rural villages of the East Midlands, and especially in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire.[14] The production of knitted garments (generally referred to as the stocking or hosiery industry) at first was organized as a capitalist

putting-out industry. It had been located in the East Midlands since the middle of the eighteenth century. Garments such as stockings and gloves were knitted on hand-powered stocking frames by stockingers or frame-work knitters, who were artisans working for merchant capitalists in their own homes or in small workshops. The trade was slow to industrialize. The first factories using steam-powered machinery opened in the early 1850s, but the putting-out system proved to be resilient, and a significant number of stockingers continued to work hand-powered knitting frames into the 1880s, when the putting-out system went into sharp decline.

Throughout the nineteenth century, women and their daughters in knitting households contributed to household income by seaming stockings or by stitching gloves. They did work that was known as "women's work." Many of the women who worked in the stocking trade finished the knitwear using needle and thread. However, in the hosiery trade a fair number of women and their daughters worked alongside their male relatives to weave the knitted garments. From about 1812 on the industry fell on a long, virtually unrelieved depression. In order to eke out a living from ever-declining piece rates, husband, wife, and older children worked frames. Whereas men were responsible to the capitalist for their knitting, women (and children) who knit worked under the direction of their husbands, who were paid for the family's labor.

The labor force in the early factory hosiery industry was divided much as it was under the putting-out system. Although the majority of women in hosiery worked at finishing the goods or preparing them for manufacture, some women were hired to make stockings on power-driven frames. However, the transfer of hosiery making from its domestic location to the factory involved an important change in the relations of production for women who made stockings by machinery: they earned wages for their work on power frames independently of their husband's or father's employment.

The consequences of this change were profound. When women and men were knitters using the same tools or machines and were equally subject to the authority of the employer in the factory, labor disputes occurred as male and female workers competed for jobs. From the beginning, women were paid less than men for the same work in the factory.

With the development of industrial capitalism and the creation of

enterprises in which workers were hired as individuals, when employers found it necessary to lower their labor costs they often tried to hire women in place of men. Not surprisingly, from the 1860s through the remainder of the century, the all-male stocking-makers' unions were preoccupied with the actual or potential substitution of women for men. As early as 1861, employers in the hosiery industry attempted to hire women workers in place of men and the men fought to retain jobs for themselves. In one incident, police were called in to quell a disturbance created by men assembled outside Mr. James's factory in Nottingham. The men had been discharged and replaced by women. A news reporter commented that the women could "perform the duties connected with the rotary frame as efficiently as men. The pay of the females is, of course, very much less than that given to male operatives."[15]

The hosiery industry was not unique. In many industries, from textiles to metalworking, women and men were thrown into competition with one another. Employers used women to bring down the wage rates of the men. Sometimes women simply were substituted for men, doing the same job but paid from one-third to one-half less than the men had been. At other times, employers altered machinery to make the work less skilled or purchased new machines marketed as "women's machines" and hired women to run them at lower rates than the men had been paid.

In the industrial period when employers hired women for a trade in which men had been working, men's jobs and wages were threatened. The struggle between women and men for jobs resulted in open expressions of antagonism between them in addition to demonstrations of hostility between workers and employers. Frequently the men went on strike or initiated other kinds of actions to preserve their jobs for men only. Whenever the men could figure out a way of maintaining or creating sex-typed jobs, they succeeded in staving off the threat posed by women. However, that success usually failed to prevent an erosion of their wages over the long term, for capitalists were persistent in finding ways to lower their production costs and to secure a wider margin of profit.

It was much less common for employers to hire men to work at jobs in which women had predominated. The major instance of this happening in the nineteenth century was in cotton powerloom weaving. When men worked at a trade in which women predominated, the

low women's wages served to depress the men's wages. Under these conditions, however, the only way men could keep their jobs was to insist on being paid the same wages as women, to eliminate the competition between them.

Important questions are raised by this discussion of gender relations and industrial transformation in the hosiery industry. First, we must understand why women and men generally were found doing different work. Why was occupational segregation—the tendency for women and men to work at different jobs, in different places, and on different machines—so persistent? How did employers' assumptions about gender difference influence their hiring practices and the ways that they structured work and working environments? How were women's and men's patterns of paid employment linked to the conditions under which they lived as husbands, wives, daughters, and sons? When employers attempted to substitute women for men at jobs, why did the men often respond with hostility to the women, and why did they resort to exclusionary tactics? What got in the way of women and men uniting to invent strategies to fight against the ever-present threat to their livelihoods posed by employers who were attempting to lower their production costs? If wages had been equalized to eliminate competition between men and women, would they have managed to build organizations based on equal partnership?

GENDER AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Using the techniques of symbolic or cultural analysis, I demonstrate that economic relations were (and are) in part constituted by gender. I examine a variety of forms of data including written texts, spoken words, and rituals, as well as such other practices as the structuring of career paths and the sexual division of labor in factories, in order to uncover how they depicted men and women and to determine how people interpreted the events in which they were embroiled.

This approach to gender is useful for several reasons. First, it illuminates aspects of social existence that people never explicitly commented on, because they were taken for granted. In contrast to sociologists and anthropologists who study living people, those of us who do historical studies have a difficult time discovering what people have taken for granted or have considered to be common sense. They would only remark on such matters when shared understandings were being

transformed and could no longer be taken for granted. Gender distinctions and their influence on people's behavior are phenomena of this order. They were part of the stock of "what everyone knew to be true." They have seemed to be "in nature."[16] One way to see how gender distinctions were constituted in the past and how they affected people's actions is to examine how gender difference was represented in language, ritual, and other social practices.

Second, numerous social theorists have argued that people's actions are shaped by the meanings or interpretations they have given to the situations in which they were participants.[17] If the theorists are correct, an important task for the historical analyst is to uncover these meanings. Cultural analysis is a powerful way to recover the ways that people construed the events that affected them.

A third reason why this approach is useful is that people make sense of their experiences through interpretations of them that are created by prominent people in public performances or widely available texts. I will refer to these interpretations as *cultural productions*. They are composed of shared cultural symbols which are used to mediate between what is already widely known or understood and the articulation of ideas about something new.[18] They are rhetorical devices meant to persuade.[19] Cultural productions include rituals such as street demonstrations and parades as well as speeches, newspaper articles and letters to the editor, pamphlets, scientific reports, photographs, drawings, and cartoons.[20] City streets, town centers, large meetinghouses, the halls of government, and the media serve as arenas of political contest about meaning. What is said and how it is said are important constituents of the political process.

Cultural productions, then, are crucial to the story to be told in the chapters that follow. They offer their intended audience interpretations of events and experiences that may become a stimulus for political action. These interpretations are particular constructions which cast the events within a limited and limiting perspective. The constructions repress, negate, or remain silent about alternative views. When these interpretations are built into public policies they directly constrain people's lives. When they are articulated by particularly visible and powerful people in their capacities as members of Parliament or heads of state, owners of significant business enterprises, leaders of unions and organizers of strikes and protest movements, or clergymen, they assume greater significance and wider currency than alternative

interpretations offered by those who lack public prominence. In addition, they motivate or suppress action by defining or constructing the subjects to which the discourse applies. They call upon previously formed subjectivities and work on commonsense understandings to generate solidarity and consent. They appeal to particular aspects of people's experiences and connect these experiences to facets of their identities.[21]

Fourth, as I will argue later in this chapter, gender is a pervasive symbolic system which inheres in all social relations, including economic relations. It is primary to the constitution of people as social beings, and it forms a major component of personal identity. Because of these aspects of gender, gender divisions and distinctions are, as many feminist scholars have argued, central to all social processes.

My approach sheds new light on questions the answers to which have eluded scholars who have focused their inquiries specifically on the sex-typing of jobs and occupational segregation. For example, by seeing economic practices as shaped by cultural influences, this study suggests why employers' actions often veered away from the path of "strict economic rationality." By examining the meaning of work and its connections to family life it discloses why competition between women and men for jobs often produced vitriolic antagonism. By illuminating how union leaders generated union solidarity through their rhetoric, this study reveals why women often remained on the sidelines of union activity.

The use of cultural or symbolic analysis, especially the analysis of language, is associated with post-structuralism and post-modernism, and in history it is connected with the recent work of Joan Scott. Her stress on the importance of studying language and meaning, especially as a tool for understanding the importance of gender, has sparked considerable controversy.[22] Many of the critics have feared that symbolic analysis generally, and the analysis of texts in particular, wallows in relativism and ignores the material realities that profoundly affect people's lives.

I share some of these concerns. In particular, I believe it is important to include in one's scholarship a way of acknowledging that "the totality of social practices . . . always outruns the constraints of a given discourse," to quote historian Christine Stansell.[23] In this book I attempt to meet this goal by showing that people construed their experiences in particular ways and that these constructions fit uneasily with

the multiple, diffuse, and varied influences on their lives, some of which affected them deeply. I also examine how gendered class relations created specific obstacles for people as they struggled to make ends meet. Moreover, I suggest that not only the practices in which gender distinctions were embodied, but the representations of gender promulgated by people in positions of power and authority, had important consequences for working people's lives. This book, then, unites social and cultural approaches in the study of gender and economic relations.

Central to this project is my assumption (elaborated more fully later in this chapter) that industrial capitalism was made up of a complex set of interdependent practices that cannot be reduced to, or explained by, purely economic factors. This is not to deny the importance of such economic factors as people's wages, the competition among employers, or the process of capital accumulation. How much people were paid, for example, determined whether and how much they could eat, or whether they could afford clothing and medical care. However, these economic factors did not operate independently from political, social, and ideological factors. For example, employers gained relative freedom to fix men's wages so that they responded to market forces as a consequence of changes both in laws and in what was thought to be the "right way of doing things."

The complex processes producing changes in economic relations are better pictured as a Gordian knot than a linear chain of discrete variables. In any case, what we might think of as purely economic facts such as people's wages did not have the same meaning for everyone, nor was their meaning a narrowly economic one. Wages were adjusted to the age and gender of the worker, sometimes regardless of the task the worker was performing. In addition, wages connected people's lives at work with their lives at home and in the community. This is why I have used the word *livelihood* in the title—to signify that people worked in order to live. They lived primarily in family households, and they lived with their families in neighborhoods and communities.

In short, I am arguing against reducing historical development to simple narratives that see people's actions as determined by some abstract force called the economy. In addition, I am saying that economic relations were (and are) formed in complex ways. Like all social rela-

tions, economic relations were shaped by culture, and concepts of gender were crucial in their formation.

PROBLEMS IN DEFINING GENDER

Gender is a multi-faceted concept that refers simultaneously to the relations between women and men; to their relative positions in society; to ideas about what it means to be woman or man and the qualities of person that make one more or less womanly or more or less manly; to identity and subjectivity. The attributes associated with gender distinctions are constantly changing and are never totally consistent with one another. Even more confusing, the received ideas about what it means to be woman or man do not reflect what real people actually do or are as women and men, although ideas about gender, articulated in social practices, influence their thoughts and actions in many ways. Finally, images of gender organize and transform ideas about the world and become implicated in complex systems of meaning. They are not confined to an explication of the various relations between women and men, but are also used in the construction of political, religious, and scientific understandings. The term *gender* refers simultaneously to social positions, social relations, and ideas about people and to their ideas about themselves.

I argue that it is through cultural processes—the elaboration of ideas, ideologies, and symbolic representations—that gender affects all social structures and social relations. Many past efforts to define the concept of gender and understand how it works have foundered on the distinctions between materialism and idealism or between thought and action that are implicit in most theories. That dualism makes it difficult to discuss the relevance of cultural forms for social life.[24] These dualisms appear in most historical and sociological analyses, but they are particularly pervasive in studies of economic relations and social class. In such studies culture is too often seen as epiphenomenal, as generated by material conditions rather than being in material conditions.[25] Representations of meaning are viewed as reflections of social reality rather than as being constitutive of social reality. That is to say, they are conceptualized as abstractions rather than as depictions.[26]

This dualism also underlies the view that imagines an analytic abstraction, the economy, to be the prime mover of social reality, which

can explain all social processes. Although this kind of thinking is often associated with Marxian analysis, in fact it is implicit in neoclassical economics and in sociological approaches to the study of gender and work that have been influenced by economic theories.[27] Raymond Williams has made this point well: "It is . . . noticeable that in the twentieth century, the exponents of capitalism have been the most insistent theorists of the causal primacy of economic production. If you want to be told that our existence is governed by the economy, go to the city pages of the bourgeois press—that is really how they see life."[28] Economic determinism and dualism persist in those strands of Marxism that emphasize the distinction between base and superstructure and the idea that the economy is "determining in the last instance."[29] The role of culture and the issue of the interrelatedness of the multitude of social relations that comprise social life continue to be disputed by Marxist scholars.[30]

The debates about gender and class among different strands of feminist thought have mirrored those within Marxism. The argument that capitalism and patriarchy are separate systems is based on a narrow view of materialism which bifurcates meaning or ideas and action.[31] In order to place gender relations and economic relations on an equal footing, dual systems theories, as they are called, attempt to make gender as "material" as economic relations.[32] If the study of capitalism is concerned with the way the forces of production and the relations of production drive the motor of capital accumulation, yielding profits to capitalists through their exploitation of workers, then patriarchy is thought to be a system by which men benefit sexually and economically by subordinating or exploiting women.[33] Those who argue for a single system of patriarchal capitalism or capitalist patriarchy either relegate gender to the realm of ideology while leaving economic relations grounded in the material world, or claim that patriarchy is ultimately subsumed by capitalism and see the cause of women's subordination to be their biological role in reproduction (that is, their material bodies), which becomes either part of the dynamic of capitalist exploitation or a focus of class conflict.[34]

The connections made by Raymond Williams among language, ideas, imagination, feeling, lived experience, and practices dissolve the materialism/idealism duality. Williams's ideas provide a starting place for thinking about gender and how it is "in" the practices of capitalism and class relations.[35] He insists on the importance of grasping "the

whole social process," not mistaking such abstractions from it as "the economy" as historically autonomous.[36] Williams understands language to be a socially structured system of multivalent symbols, and thought or consciousness to be an inner language made up of the multivalent symbols by means of which people communicate with one another. He argues that thought and action, consciousness and material production are not separable. Finally, he suggests that ideologies or particular systems of meaning never fully capture the lived experience of people, even if they become so accepted as to be seen as common sense.[37] These systems of meaning constitute experience for people by interpreting it, but they do not exhaust it. Experience not interpreted remains in imagination, and, as structures of feeling, act as a resource to be mobilized through political movements.

These ideas suggest a way of understanding how gender works. The social meanings of masculinity and femininity are expressed in a variety of practices that constrain people's lives. Just as humans cannot meaningfully be abstracted from society because through language they are constituted as social beings, so too we cannot view people as outside gender, as neuter.[38] The relations between gendered people are part of the social whole, and, as such, cannot be treated as though they constrained people's lives in isolation. Furthermore, the meanings of gender are legitimated through being naturalized.[39] These meanings are reproduced without question, through everyday practices, and they become embedded in the structures constituted by those everyday practices.[40] Social actors often are unaware that these assumptions are guiding their activities. This conception of meaning, one not restricted to conscious thought and intention, helps us to understand why gender divisions are continually being reproduced by employers who do not question the idea that ordinarily men rather than women should have skilled jobs.[41] However, because images of gender difference always fail to capture the complexities and the multiplicity of lived experience, representations of gender are continually being contested and are inherently unstable.

A WORKING DEFINITION OF GENDER

Gender is a classificatory system that depicts the differing positions of women and men in society. It is a system of meanings articulated in practices that position women and men differently and that structure

their lived experience in different ways. Societies differ not only in the content of the meanings of gender but also in the extent to which gender segregates the life experiences of women and men and the extent to which there is overlap in their experiences. Historically, gender distinctions have represented and constituted differences in power.[42]

In Western society, people are assigned to the mutually exclusive social categories of *woman* and *man* solely on the basis of anatomical sexual differences. All other similarities and differences between people are irrelevant to the categories. Regardless of what else may characterize their lived experience, all persons with female genitalia are women, and all persons with male genitalia are men.[43]

In our society, as in most others, people have believed that anatomical differences signaled other crucial differences. One that was especially stressed in nineteenth-century thought was the physiological capability of women, but not men, to bear and nurse children. Note, however, that nineteenth-century categorizations placed a woman in that category whether or not she could or did bear a child (whether or not she was fecund; whether or not she was too young or too old to be fecund). Her sex defined either her potential, her current status, or her former situation. A stress on the differences in reproductive function between women and men made other similarities between them irrelevant, and the differences among women and among men were erased. As Mary Poovey writes, "the similarity of women's childbearing capacity became more important than whatever other features distinguished them."[44]

If a society were to stress reproduction in its depiction of men as well as women, then all men would be thought of as inseminators regardless of whether they could or cared to inseminate. However, in nineteenth-century Britain, although gender distinction was predicated on "essential" biological difference, men were not perceived to be "sexed"; their biological roles were not a focus of attention. Rather, representations of gender in Victorian England stressed the equation of women with biology or nature, and men with culture. Women were "the sex."[45]

Gender categories have also been associated with other attributes that have nothing to do with anatomy or physiology. In the nineteenth century these attributes were counterposed as oppositions: men were

active, independent, strong, rational; women were passive, dependent, weak, emotional. Furthermore, the cultural meanings associated with being woman and being man were assumed to be "in nature," to be "in" the original anatomical and physiological difference between women and men. Gender categories were believed to indicate the essence of the person; if the person did not match the attributes of the category, he or she was thought to be deviant.[46] Sorting people into the categories *woman* and *man, female* and *male,* was a moral process mistaken for something "real," something "natural."

The attributes of gender were used to differentiate among people of the same biological sex. For example, in the nineteenth century *manliness* was a term that differentiated men from one another. Manliness often meant being honorable. A male person could gain manliness from the work that he did, from his ability to support his family, from his behavior as a trade unionist or as an employer in labor negotiations. To be a man in British society was associated with the value of "independence." In that way manhood was contrasted not only with womanhood but with boyhood.[47] In addition, manliness was linked in a complex system of representations to the revered Victorian value of respectability. To be manly was to be honorable and respectable, which meant being brave, strong, and independent. For a woman, by contrast, to be honorable and respectable meant to have the virtues of sexual purity, domesticity, and motherhood. Women were not legally independent persons, and images of dependency as a character trait as well as in law coexisted uneasily with the realities of working-class women's lives as they struggled to provide a livelihood for themselves and their families. Ironically, working-class men were considered legally independent individuals, but they were dependent not only on their employers, to secure a livelihood, but often on their wives and children, their legal dependents, who contributed economically as well as in other ways to household survival. The association of different values with being male and female shows how these ideological constructions placed particular interpretations on the lived experiences of working-class women and men.

These constructions and people's experiences often contradicted one another. For example, the complementary ideals of the male breadwinner who earned a family wage and the woman who devoted herself to full-time domesticity could not be realized by the majority of work-

ing-class married couples. The tensions between the ideal and the reality, between the constructions of masculinity and femininity and lived experience, were a fertile source of political rhetoric in labor disputes.

In addition to representing distinctions between people, gender appears to be such a central way of representing difference that it can become emblematic, creating distinctions in a host of physical objects and mannerisms such as articles of clothing, types of food, rooms in houses, and styles of eating and drinking. Finally, as Joan Scott has insisted, gender is a fundamental way of constituting power relations.[48] In short, I am arguing that gender is a symbolic system for representing difference. It is more akin to language than it is to any other social process.

Language is a set of social symbols that create distinctions. These symbols can vary in meaning and use, but in order for them to communicate meaning they must be understood. Similarly, gender is a process of making distinctions in ways that are widely recognized and understood. The language of gender is expressed in a variety of social practices that position people differently in relations of power. In nineteenth-century England, these positions were linked to differential access to political and economic resources.

These ideas suggest in an abstract way why gender is deeply embedded in all social relations, including those that have been considered to be primarily or solely economic relations. To put it simply, people enter employer-employee relationships as gendered beings unless something happens that actively suppresses the salience of gender. Nineteenth-century employers were influenced by images of gender when they hired workers, structured the work process, and governed their workplaces. They imagined skilled workers to be by definition men, and their actions produced employment opportunities structured by the assumption that workers lacked domestic ties and responsibilities. The notion of a woman worker, especially a working mother, was a contradiction in terms. Work was constructed on the presumption that workers were nonmothers.

Because gender was deeply embedded in the structuring of employment, working-class women and men had different working situations. Women were paid less than men. Women were often supervised by men, but men were never supervised by women. Women and men had different kinds of responsibilities for their families. Because of the way masculinity was constituted, the struggles between male workers

and their employers were over issues concerning gender and class simultaneously. Because of the way femininity was constituted and connected to masculinity, male leaders of working-class organizations and activities defined workers as men and shaped their organizing and solidarity-making strategies accordingly.

In this study I focus on the construction of masculinity and femininity at work in the household and workplace. Ideas about what it meant to be man and what it meant to be woman were certainly also articulated in a host of social institutions, including the chapel, the press, the music hall, clubs, training institutes, and self-improvement associations, and in informal leisure activities. I believe, however, that household and workplace, family and employment were at the center of the lives of both men and women of the working class.

Although this study stresses the ways that gender shaped social, political, and economic relations, the relationship between gender and class is neither simple nor unidirectional. While analytically we may speak of class and gender as distinct processes, people's lives are intersected by class and gender relations simultaneously.[49] In nineteenth-century England gendered class relations fostered the development of working-class associations and institutions which, in turn, affected images of gender. This is most clearly seen in the ways that participation by skilled men and male artisans in political, fraternal, and labor organizations bolstered their shared identity as men.[50] The masculine ideal of the breadwinner, which assumed a wife's primary allegiances to be those of housewife and mother, was articulated by skilled male trade unionists, especially the cotton spinners, and by participants in the Ten Hours campaign and the Chartist movement for universal male suffrage.[51] The very associations created by skilled and artisanal working men to cope with their political and economic disadvantage were crucial in revising images of gender, creating new meanings of manhood and womanhood.

CAPITALISM AND CLASS

To accumulate wealth and expand enterprises, the economic institutions of capitalism depend on the labor of workers who sell their labor in order to subsist. However, capitalism is more than an economic system. The development of capitalism, as I indicated above, involved interconnected political, social, cultural, and economic transforma-

tions. Thus, when I use the term *capitalism* I mean social and economic practices, centered on private property and the accumulation of wealth, that contain within them multiple cultural influences. Gender has been among the most important of these cultural influences.

In this book I explore some of the ways that capitalism developed as a gendered set of practices. To do this, I examine how employers structured their work force, organized the labor process, and managed their workplaces. In addition, I show how images of gender influenced state policies and how those state policies were central to the development of industrial capitalism and constrained the conditions under which working-class women and men created livelihoods.[52]

Capitalist practices both depended on and created waged workers (male and female proletarians). However, what it meant to be a worker, how those meanings were created through political practices, and the consequences of that creation for class struggle or relations were not preordained by an abstract logic of capital accumulation. Rather, both the character of class relations and the nature of working-class formation were historically contingent.

Ironically, although the absence of a theoretical construction of gender has inhibited the incorporation of gender analysis into social theory, the lack of a clear consensus about the meaning of *class* has not kept it from being a central point of sociological and historical analysis. Scholars have continued to conflate class position with class experience and class experience with political action, retarding progress in understanding working-class formation.[53] One difficulty faced by contemporary scholars has been the issue of structure and agency in the interpretation of class formation.[54] The problem for class analysts is to recognize both that people's lives are deeply affected by their position in the relations of production and also that their responses depend on how their experiences have been interpreted.[55]

In this study I use the terms *working class* and *working classes* to describe wage-earning people in contrast to employers. By using the term *class* instead of the more neutral *employees* I intend to signify that working people were subordinated to those who employed them. Working-class people shared with one another limitations on their capacity to create their livelihoods which stemmed from their class position. In the following chapters I attempt to show how gender affected those limitations, the conflicts between workers and employers about them, and the extent to which the workers were able to forge

inclusive organizations in their struggles. In other words, I examine the consequences of gender distinctions and relations for class relations and for working-class formation.

Scholars following and revising E. P. Thompson's theory of class formation have argued that class is the process by which a set of people collectively act in opposition to capitalists, or the process by means of which they see themselves as a class and use the term to define their experience.[56] Historically, however, these collective actions or definitions have not included all those people whose livelihoods have been constrained by their class position. So as not to lose the sense of limitation and constraint that haunted the lives of working people generally in the nineteenth century, I use the term *class relation* to refer to the structured inequality between workers and capitalists, and *class formation* to signify the collective action taken by some or all workers in response to that inequality. In what follows I attempt to show that gender distinctions and relations were involved in shaping both class relations and working-class formation.

Even scholars who have tried to avoid a mechanical understanding of class formation often assume that deviation from class unity is what must be explained, as though unified class action would happen if nothing intervened to stop it.[57] However, as historian Geoff Eley has written, "The 'unity' of the working class, though postulated through the analysis of production and its social relations, remains a contingency of political agitation."[58]

What needs to be made problematic is how interests are created. We cannot assume that they are inherent in social conditions. Interests are constructed through politics, and these politics create collective identities.[59] They are constructed, however, in relation to the social conditions under which people live. They are not abstract social constructions fabricated without reference to people's lives.[60] Rather, interests are produced through a discursive process that interprets the conditions of people's existence and the constraints on them. These articulated interpretations are prerequisite to collective action.

People operate under many different kinds of constraints, stemming from their various but simultaneous social positions.[61] Political practices involve suppressing the salience of some of these positions and aspects of people's identities and emphasizing others. Unity or solidarity is a fragile accomplishment, and it must be explained by showing how it was accomplished.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

No precise time-frame for this study is possible, because different industries underwent significant alterations at different time periods. Separate processes within the same industry were marked by different time schedules.[62] The cotton industry, at the vanguard of the industrial revolution, is a good example, with power spinning preceding powerlooming by three decades. Cotton spinning ceased to be a domestic, putting-out industry by the 1780s, when the process was moved out of cottages into workshops or sheds. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, spinning was done by steam-powered machines in factories. However, it was not until the 1830s that the power loom was perfected and factory weaving became widespread. The knitting industry was transformed by steam power only after midcentury. The first steam-powered hosiery factories opened in the 1850s, but hand- and foot-powered frames were operated in domestic workshops until the end of the century. Steam power had been introduced to the lace industry by the 1850s, and it rapidly came to be the general method by which lace was made. Lace finishing remained a hand industry and has continued to be done primarily on an outwork basis, largely as a homeworking industry, to the present day.

Industrial capitalism did not affect the organization of production in all industries in a uniform fashion. Some industries were transformed by labor-intensive methods rather than by steam power and remained a source of home or workshop employment for both women and men throughout the nineteenth century. Mechanization in one division of an industry often resulted in an intensification of hand labor in other processes within the same industry. For example, as I have said earlier, lace was made by men using steam-powered machines in factories, but was hand-finished by women and children, the majority of whom worked in their homes or in the homes of nearby middlewomen. As hosiery making was transformed, first by the invention of hand- and foot-powered machines and then by steam, the work of finishing the goods by hand increased. The existence of regional variations within some industries further complicates the possibility of generalizing about the specific ways that work was reorganized by industrial capitalism.[63]

Although I rely on secondary material from the entire century, I use a range of primary source material about events in the latter half of

the century to create scenarios about how gender affected the development of capitalism, for it was during those years that industrial capitalism was becoming preeminent.

Chapters 2 and 3 show how industrial capitalism was gendered. I show in Chapter 2 that employers built gender distinctions into the ways they organized work and into the ways they managed their work force. Economic institutions were (and are) connected to other institutions such as the state, discussed in Chapter 3, which generated policies affecting working people's lives at home and at work. In Chapter 4 I show how those constraints affected women's waged and unwaged work as they attempted to provide for their families. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss conflicts that developed over time in the carpet industry as employers attempted to deal with competition and male and female workers fought to preserve their livelihoods. In Chapter 5 I examine the range of views of class relations held by the participants in the disputes. In Chapter 6 I demonstrate how these same conflicts were interpreted as gender antagonism and connect this antagonism to emerging notions of masculinity, domesticity, and respectability. In Chapter 7 I examine the one industry, cotton powerloom weaving, in which women and men did not compete for jobs (because they earned equal pay), to determine whether or not their relative equality led them to form strong and unified trade union organizations. In the final chapter I assess what I have learned about gender and economic relations as they relate to public policy and the relationship between class and gender. In particular I focus on the importance of recognizing the complex, interacting practices that turned the past into the present.