

Wanted: Attractive Beauty for Office Duties

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When women began to be incorporated into the work force, they were tried at different jobs. Within offices they started to substitute the old male secretaries who began to move into other areas.

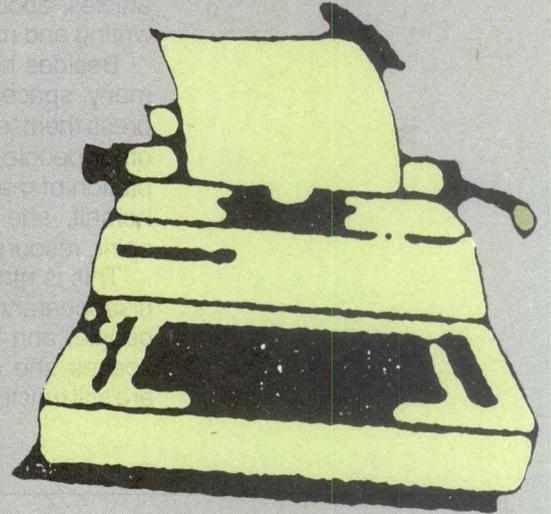
The women offered a series of comparative advantages for the employer. They proved to be as responsible as men. In general they accept lower wages and their psycho-physical image fits wonderfully into this type of work. The fact that a woman is considered "more pleasant, prettier and more cordial" than men, plays a role in her hiring.

This "presence" that is demanded of secretaries hides an unacceptable discrimination that is missed many times even by the secretaries themselves. This is considered to be a natural fact, though it is not natural, for example, to look for a sales representative who is six feet tall and has blue eyes.

The secretary, like the housewife, is a collaborator, her work is considered a kind of support. It is not this "helping" factor, however, that bothers secretaries. It is the conditions that are imposed on women: authoritarianism, underestimation, a rigid hierarchical structure, lack of creativity and the exclusion of individual development. The idea of support or help is changed into the expression of a relationship that is basically unequal and discriminatory.

One major problem faced by secretaries in their work is related to the disorganization in which they are expected to function.

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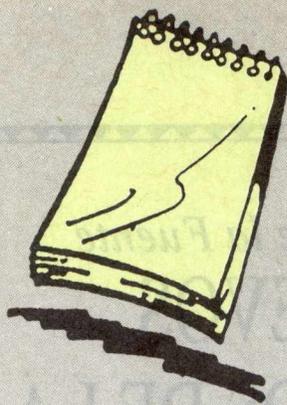
This is expressed in many ways: a duality of orders, an overload of work, useless repetition of tasks, etc. Such events are the ones that most irritate the secretaries in their work. We think that this is also related to another aspect of their job: the ambiguity of her functions that comes from a particularly close relationship with the boss.

This relationship generates a series of loyalties where reservation and discretion form an important part of the job. This factor generates a situation of maximum ambiguity in which tasks are not clearly defined and where the will to do things "to please the boss" becomes the essence of the work.

Some 52 percent of secretaries themselves state that loyalty and reservation are more important qualities than technical ones.

These come in second place. Thus, we have a profession where obligations are highly unspecific. The tasks involved here are, for example: attending to the public and to the boss, paying the boss's personal accounts, keeping his check book, reminding him of his wife's birthday, keeping order, giving a good impression, smiling whenever possible, being well dressed, being polite with the clients, etcetera, etcetera.

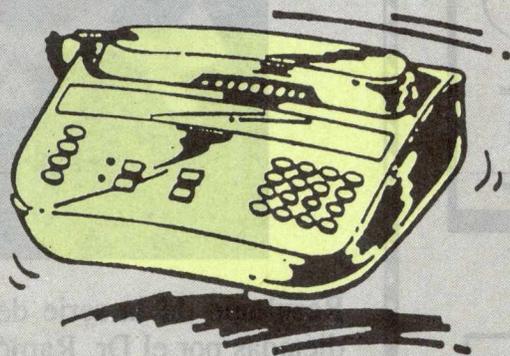
In the office, the woman is subjected to a kind of mini-double working day in which her job as woman-helper becomes another advantage for the employer.



Just as we don't "see" a clean house, we also don't "see" a type-written paper with no errors. These are services rendered that enable everything else, that which is really "important", to be accomplished. At home, we can then eat and live together. At the office, the boss can carry out his business.

The invisibility of housework also now extends to the area of paid work. The work of the woman does not shine, even though the floor might.

There is a contradiction in the fact that secretaries state women are capable of taking over and being boss, and at the same time they say they do not like to work under a woman boss. They declare that while a woman who is boss is working, she is still worried about running her home and thus is not competent as a professional.



This is why secretaries say that a woman does not make as good a boss as a man. In our sample, there was not one secretary who would prefer to work with women as bosses:

They're "domineering", they can't make a distinction between their roles at home and at the office and "they make everything neurotic". These difficulties among women themselves, contribute to maintaining sexual discrimination.

Promotion is very slow or sometimes just doesn't exist for secretaries. In our sample, of the 73% of secretaries who had worked for more than four years in a company, only 8% had been given a promotion at least once. Mobility within the office turns out to be excessively rigid for the women who soon learn that their present jobs are the only positions they can aspire to.

In relation to job satisfaction we have found an interesting piece of data. Since the relationship boss-secretary demands

very close collaboration, and also demands that there must be a "golden mean" of understanding on both sides, the way the secretary is treated becomes an essential factor in the secretary's job satisfaction.

Seventy-eight percent of the secretaries considered that the most important factor to evaluate a boss was to look at the warmth with which he treats his subordinates.

Thus, fair treatment is linked with the notion of job dignity. On many occasions, good treatment has hidden poor working conditions, low wages and low expectation of promotion.

Sexual harassment to which secretaries are subjected to is a problem that 68% of the sample declared as being "frequent". At the same time, the percentage that this factor occupies in relation to causes of job dissatisfaction is significant. Harassment constitutes and affronts the individual and labor rights of women and must be openly confronted without fear. We do not have any stipulation of this matter in our laws, but in other countries this matter is being addressed.

In relation to union participation we have found that most women, for different reasons, do not participate in union activities.

Solutions to increase participation of married women in unions are multiple. The secretaries themselves have proposed some of these. Children, for example, could be taken care of when there are union meetings. Training courses could be held within certain time frames that would not keep the woman out of her house all day long. There could also be the creation of a space for discussion of the problems and specific demands of women in relationship to the whole concept of trade unions.

We consider it of utmost importance that the union movement reflect on the sexual segregation that exists in jobs and that it propose measures to make a more flexible structure of the rigid molds that have been imposed on men and women. There must be an end to job selection based on the sex of the person. There must also be an end to demanding "attractive presentation" as a job requirement. The denouncement of sexual harassment and the promotion of the idea of shared domestic responsibility are some of the demands that unions, especially women's unions, should begin to address if they wish to move towards more democratic societies.

