

regarding the limited success of feminist politics in demasculinizing the field of technology.

However, there is only so much that can be addressed in one work, and the framework developed provides a useful guide to future research as well as an effective means of critiquing many of the recent developments in the gender-technology field. It draws on a range of feminist perspectives, including liberal and radical perspectives, to aid the analysis and to suggest fruitful ways forward for feminism. It places social relations clearly at the centre of our understanding, avoiding the tendency to give too much agency to technology and not enough to feminist politics. The text remains, whilst challenging the utopian perspectives, a positive one — balancing the negative realities with the potential for emancipation. For anyone interested in gender studies, sociology, technology and science, this is a valuable read. Her style is, as ever, engaging and lucid — enabling the reader to traverse a range of the competing perspectives and interpretations which underpin and inform her technofeminist position.

Reference

Wajcman, J. (1991) *Feminism Confronts Technology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

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***The Gender Workplace Health Gap in Europe* by Laurent Vogel. The Trade Union Technical Bureau for Health and Safety, 2003, 341pp. €20**

‘Work hurts’. We were interviewing women about their paid jobs, asking them if they faced any health hazards at work. They said, ‘No’ when we prodded about the light, heat, chairs, sitting or standing position, work organization and so on. But when we asked them to describe their entire day in detail, they reported putting their legs up during the noon break because they hurt so much, or going home at night to bed because their backs ached, or leaving the job entirely because they could not stand the pressure. It was when they were questioned about why they did not identify these as the result of occupational health hazards that they responded that work hurts. Laurent Vogel helps us understand why some women respond this way and why others accept and even promote this response.

The Gender Workplace Health Gap in Europe is a compendium that brings together the research, policies and practices on gender and occupational health in the European Union. Based on a survey of initiatives in research,

action and both national and EU policies, it offers an essential reference for anyone interested in gender, work or health. The nine case studies provide specific examples of research and practices ranging from an examination of flexiworking and mental distress to an interview with a union officer working with checkout staff. Equally important, often neglected research by feminist scholars and by trade unions is integral to the text.

But this book is much more than a catalogue. It provides an analytical frame for assessing research and policies as well as some ideas about ways to address the silences along with the covert and overt practices that are harmful to health. It challenges both our current state of knowledge and the way knowledge is created and used. Woven throughout is the material taken from the survey, much of which is not part of current scientific discourses. As Vogel puts it, 'data collection requires a theoretical framework, which depends partly on research and partly on the scientific community's receptiveness to issues put on the agenda by social movements'.

Vogel argues convincingly that occupational health issues 'speak the language of gender', simultaneously creating and reflecting omnipresent gender inequalities. Addressing these health issues requires an approach which begins with the unequal social relations that operate both within paid workplaces and outside them. The wide variation he documents in the recognition of health hazards and in responses to them cannot, according to him, be explained by political and economic factors alone, although power and profit clearly play a critical role, as does historical context.

Employers' practices are supported and perpetuated by medical knowledge presented as the objective truth. Vogel explores how risk becomes narrowly defined through explanatory models which seek causal links between pathogens and health consequences. Biomedical models predominate, ignoring more complex, long-term and less readily measurable outcomes. Work organization, in particular, receives little attention, as does the interrelationship between the household and the formal economy, except when domestic responsibilities are used to explain away women's workplace ills. Meanwhile, women's reports based on their own experiences, along with the material that comes from unions is often ignored.

Such political, economic and medical factors are 'compounded by the complexity of defensive strategies adopted by the workers themselves'. As Vogel goes on to document, it is not easy for women 'to live with the idea of risk permanently present and a clear perception of the health damage'. Hence the denials we found.

Building on his analysis of the state of gendered knowledge in occupational health, Vogel goes on to trace the policy move from protection and exclusion for women to gender-neutral approaches. While they are presented as taking gender into account, such approaches ignore both the gender-specific consequences of segregated work and the gender relations that are critical to working conditions. It is not only women's health issues that are

left out in the process, but also those of men. However, Vogel sees problems in equality research. Feminist research and, more generally, equity research on work usually ignores workplace health hazards. At the same time, occupational health fails to consider gender and gender relations. Public health ignores occupational hazards. And none of them are adequately linked to each other. Such compartmentalization contributes to, rather than addresses, the health hazards of women and men.

For Vogel, 'the key to altering the organization of work lies in the experience of workers, male and female'. We have, he says, enough research to move forward. What we need now is action based on 'their points of view'.

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