Women's Work and Men

Generational and Class Dimensions of Men's Resistance to Women's Paid Employment in State-Socialist Poland (1956–1980)

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ABSTRACT

Through the use of selected contemporary sociological research and prolific collections of largely unpublished memoirs, this article analyzes men's attitudes toward the paid employment of women—particularly married women—in post-Stalinist Poland. The personal narratives reveal an increasing acceptance of women's work outside the household over time and across generations. A significant shift in Polish men's attitudes to a greater acceptance of women's paid employment took place in the younger generation, born in the 1930s and 1940s and socialized after World War II. However, hostile attitudes of working-class men toward working women persisted, based on a continuing aspiration to uphold the male breadwinner family model.

KEYWORDS: breadwinner model, personal narratives, state socialism, women's work, working-class masculinity

In 1955, a film entitled *Irena, Go Home* was screened in cinemas across Poland.¹ Against the wishes of her husband, a foreman in a Warsaw factory, Irena struggles to find paid employment. Having secured work as a hairdresser, Irena is faced with her husband's opposition as he states in the title of the film. Although Irena's husband has a female colleague at the factory, he does not consider this blue-collar worker to be a "woman." The film concludes with Irena realizing her goal: having secretly taken driving lessons, she becomes employed as a driver, leaving her child with a neighbor and challenging the patriarchal dominance of her husband.

This film addresses the issue of women's employment—a central tenet of Stalinist industrialization—during Poland's Six-Year Plan (1949–1955), and it also reveals a significant feature of this process: men's resistance to the paid employment of women outside the home. This issue has been neglected in scholarship on women's work un-

der state socialism, with only a few studies examining men's resistance to women's advancement on the shopfloor and the struggle to maintain gender-based hierarchies.²

However, the real struggle over women's wage work took place within the family, not the workplace. In the film, Irena's husband is not opposed to women at work, but rather to having a working woman in his home. Working women challenged the model of marriage and family in which roles were strictly delineated: men were the breadwinners, women took care of the home and children. In *Masculinities*, Raewyn W. Connell argues that "masculinity and femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meanings in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition. . . . Masculinity as an object of knowledge is always masculinity-in-relation."³ Changing patterns of women's employment and conceptualizations of women's roles under state socialism have undoubtedly had an impact on masculinity, an impact that merits further exploration. The private dimension of men's resistance to the employment of married women has been addressed in only a few studies of gendered labor regimes in communist countries.⁴ In his study of shopfloor gender dynamics in early state-socialist Hungary, Mark Pittaway has explicitly related this resistance to "working-class masculinity."⁵ Recently, scholarship on men and masculinities in postwar Central and Eastern Europe has challenged the argument that state socialism did not attempt to reshape men's roles in the family, by providing examples on both discursive and practical levels.⁶ This article contributes to this discussion by exploring continuities and change in men's roles within the family.

This article discusses men's approach to married women's work outside the household in post-Stalinist socialist Poland (1956–1980) from a family perspective.⁷ By tracing the motivations behind men's resistance, as well as the basis for a growing acceptance of married women's employment, this study addresses the issue of breadwinning and its importance for masculine identity. I understand the male breadwinner model as both an ideology and a reality, in which the husband is the sole financial provider for a family; such a social role has been a crucial factor in the construction of men's identities. In state-socialist Poland, new discourses and social changes weakened the idea of masculinity based on a breadwinning wage, encouraging some men to search for new ways of understanding their role within the family, particularly through companionship.⁸ As Christine von Oertzen and Almut Rietzschel have shown, a male breadwinner ideology existed on both sides of the German Iron Curtain, albeit in different forms. Despite a political drive for the employment of women in East Germany, this ideology "was not ostensibly demolished, but lived on beneath the surface."⁹ Their study explored debates about working women as well as the "legal institutionalization of breadwinner ideology." In contrast, this article attempts to go beyond an analysis of normative masculinity by focusing on popular understandings,¹⁰ contributing to scholarship on the gender history of state socialism by analyzing men's responses to the unprecedented and rapid expansion of women's employment, and adopts an intersectional approach, taking gender, generation, and class into account. I argue that a significant shift in Polish men's attitudes to a greater acceptance of women's paid employment took place in the younger generation, born in the 1930s and 1940s and socialized after World War II, but that this was socially skewed, with attachment to the breadwinner family model persisting among working-class men.

In the immediate postwar period and throughout Stalinism (1949–1955), the party-state encouraged the rapid expansion of women's employment using both propaganda and economic policies such as low wages.¹¹ However, these policies were revised during de-Stalinization (1955–1958). In her pathbreaking book on women workers in postwar Poland, Małgorzata Fidelis positions "the return of the male breadwinner" as a significant component of the backlash against women's equality that occurred during de-Stalinization.¹² Male blue-collar workers demanded higher wages for themselves and an increase in family allowances to make working mothers "return home." For many workers, the traditional family based on a sexual division of labor was the desired model they expected to be reintroduced under post-Stalinist socialism. As Fidelis argues, this shift in gender policies helped politically legitimize the post-Stalinist regime for many workers. Thus, by generating such expectations after 1956, party-state policies contributed to strengthening the male breadwinner model as the desired ideal. In the immediate post-Stalinist period in Poland, men's work was prioritized and widely perceived as more important; women's work was conceptualized as additional, secondary for both the state and the family.¹³

Despite heated debates on limiting women's employment during de-Stalinization, the party-state in Poland only introduced modest incentives for women to leave paid work, such as a slight increase in family benefits, making it difficult if not impossible for many couples to (re)establish the male breadwinner family model. Women's employment continued to increase, as did the proportion of married women among workers and working women among wives. In the late 1950s, leaving aside agricultural work, around 30 percent of married women were employed; in the early 1980s, 64 percent of married women had income from work, while 25 percent were "dependent on the husband."¹⁴ Therefore, in the period under analysis, the proportion of married women in Poland working outside the household increased from a third to approximately two-thirds of all married women. Like other state-socialist countries, such as Hungary, as described by Susan Zimmermann, many families relied on the dual-income model: "under 'real existing' socialism the world of work (in the sense of gainful employment) was dominated by the economic model of 'two earners—one family income' (actually: 'one male earner and one female earner—one family income')." ¹⁵

This increasing participation of women in paid work contrasted with the conservative turn in the regime's discourses and policies. From the early 1970s, family rhetoric and a celebration of women's maternal functions and identities, plus policies of extended maternity leave and increased family allowances, were combined in the Polish state's efforts to boost natality.¹⁶ As Piotr Perkowski observed, "the Secretary General [Edward] Gierek himself had little understanding for changing social roles and emancipation, promoting the traditional idea of a male as the head of the family."¹⁷ In the 1970s, the party-state discussed allowances for non-working wives, a measure that would further strengthen the breadwinner model. In such an ambiguous context, with the economy heavily reliant on working women and state policies intended to both increase women's employment and create possibilities to—at least temporarily—retreat from paid employment to raise children, tensions around the issue of working women increased. This article explores these tensions and how men resisted and made sense of these social transformations.

Sources and Methodology

This article is based on two categories of sources: sociological studies and polls on work and the family conducted in the post-1956 period, and contest memoirs—personal narratives by men and women in response to calls announced in the press during the 1960s and 1970s. Although I have not uncovered any study that emphasized men's resistance or general attitude to women's work, sociologists did ask questions that raised these issues, producing insightful answers and comments. While sociological expertise from the period has considerable limitations,¹⁸ particularly in relation to gender, these studies provide statistical data and authentic opinions, and with critical analysis can be useful sources of knowledge.

In the tradition of the interwar biographical method developed by Polish sociologists, postwar memoir contests focused on the experiences of ordinary people. No longer solely related to scientific activity, they became a popular form of communication, widely used and popularized by the press. The post-Stalinist period witnessed a boom in contest memoir writing, with around eighty contests a year being announced by various institutions.¹⁹ As Małgorzata Szpakowska has observed, awareness of deep cultural and social changes in Polish society as a consequence of war and occupation, as well as postwar sociopolitical changes, roused interest in accounts of private life.²⁰ My research draws on around five hundred unpublished memoirs, responses to four contests relating to marriage and family life, in 1962, 1964, 1965, and 1974, and a published volume of a contest focusing on men's roles as husbands and fathers in 1973.²¹ Memoir authors were born between the late nineteenth century and the early 1950s, a broad generational scope that enables the evolution of men's approaches to the family and women's work to be traced. Authors also originated from different social classes, providing an opportunity to map the diversity of men's attitudes. This study relies mostly on men's narratives, although I also use a number of women's narratives to illustrate husbands' resistance to the employment of their wives.

As personal narratives, contest memoirs can provide "a vital entry point for examining the interaction between the individual and society in the construction of gender."²² In her study of Soviet masculinities, Erica Fraser has shown how studying men's subjectivities through ego-documents can reveal the construction of masculinities. She has stated that "personal narratives can be a particularly rich source for investigations of masculinity, precisely because the male narrator's process of emplotting himself into his own story reveals a variety of masculine identities at work."²³

Contest memoirs showcase individual behaviors and decisions that link to cultural norms. Ideas relating to gender roles that are embedded in the contest memoirs indicate the various models available to the authors, and those they identified with and wished to replicate. We learn from the memoirs, for example, whether men favored the male breadwinner model, and their reasoning. I use an "ethnographical generalization" model, in which narratives are understood as "symptomatic of cultural constructions at play in the wider culture," as they "reveal the constraints and opportunities imaginable at a certain point in time or particular social location."²⁴ Through these sources and methodological approaches, we gain a better understanding of the "constraints and opportunities" relating to men's ideas about the employment of married women.

Men's Resistance to Women's Work from a Generational Perspective

In the aforementioned film, Irena's husband explicitly forbade her from working, but she resisted and eventually managed to persuade him she should work. In real life, however, things could be far more complicated. The memoirs provide examples of women who successfully challenged their husbands, negotiating their own extra-domestic roles, but a lack of any marital collaboration often left wives extremely overburdened with housework.²⁵ Men's hostility to their wives working was evident throughout the period under study. In this section I map this resistance and the underlying reasoning and demonstrate that men's resistance was far more pronounced in older generations, those socialized before the state-socialist period.

In a 1960 poll on women's employment conducted by the state-run public opinion center, Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej (OBOP), 27 percent of women who had no paid work declared this was due to their husbands' resistance.²⁶ Memoirs by women show that such opposition was often accepted during the 1960s. "My husband forbade me from working, saying that he can support the family himself," declared a woman from a small town in Eastern Poland, born in the 1930s and married in 1952.²⁷ The author later regretted her economic dependence: the marriage was unhappy and due to lack of professional skills she could not find work when she left her husband. Clearly, the argument behind a wife "staying at home" related to a family model based on male breadwinning. Women's responses to male resistance varied according to their own understandings of gender roles and hierarchies.

In their memoirs of family life, men emphasized their role in shaping the family model. A skilled male worker, born in 1932 and married to a female accountant, both with secondary education, declared that he "did not let her think of going to work."²⁸ His memoir reveals multiple tensions over gender roles and power relations; while he was jealous of any male attention she might receive and reproached her for not being a virgin when they married, she accused him of failing to support the family. The author stopped his wife from working outside the household despite the family's economic difficulties.

Jealousy was referred to by other men as a reason to oppose the employment of their wives, revealing attempts to control and restrict them to the private sphere.²⁹ This argument echoes a long-standing fear that originated in the nineteenth century surrounding the alleged immorality a woman would face by working outside the home. A female memoir author declared she had resisted her husband's "insane jealousy" by going to work and leaving him for good.³⁰

The primary motivation behind men's opposition to their wives working related to the ideal of the male breadwinner family model and men's identity as breadwinners. Analysis of men's memoirs shows that this attachment was far more pronounced among older generations, who aspired to put the ideal into practice. A male author, born in 1886 and married in 1909 to a working woman, explained that his wife no longer needed to work as he could "support the household"; later, they "even hired a housekeeper."³¹ In his perception, a wife working outside the home meant the husband had failed to perform his breadwinning role, a perception shared among memoir authors from the older generation.

An engineer born in 1919, and married to a teacher in 1952, “imposed” his decision that his wife relinquish her job when their first child was born in 1955. Although he acknowledged that this decision “postponed her professional goals and other personal ambitions of higher nature,”³² it was right that his wife had “sacrificed” her personal fulfillment for the children. Once the children had grown up, the husband not only accepted his wife’s return to her profession, he “assumed” he must then “engage more in household duties.”³³ Here, the central issue was not the male breadwinner model, but rather the conviction that a mother’s care is best for young children. Women’s work was accepted only when she had fulfilled her “primary” obligations.

Maternal duties and “adequate” childcare were raised by many memoir authors. “Woman’s work is a problem for children’s upbringing,” stated a male teacher born in 1914 and married in 1938, who praised “the traditional family” and a “father’s absolute authority.”³⁴ In the older generations, men’s resistance to women’s employment was as much the result of their self-perception as breadwinners as an understanding of husbandly authority and gender roles within the family.

Polls reveal that by late socialism, open resistance to wives working had declined. During the early 1980s, when the majority of those socialized before 1945 were no longer economically active, the proportion of married women who did not work because of a husband’s resistance comprised only 9 percent of non-working women.³⁵ These results confirm a generational change evident in the narratives.

Working-Class Masculinity and Persistence of the Male Breadwinner Ideal

Memoirs reveal a more nuanced picture of men’s attitudes toward women’s work outside the home than the opinion polls, which were blind to the importance of class. The male breadwinner model maintained strong support from working-class men into the 1980s. The persistence of working-class attachment to this family model may relate to both pre-communist traditions and the impact of changing and ambiguous policies regarding women’s employment in the post-Stalinist period. This persistence engendered diverse strategies to maintain the breadwinner model in the face of unfavorable economic conditions and state policies supporting the dual-income model.

Blue-collar workers revealed a strong attachment to constructing their prestige on an ability to support their family and not letting their wives work outside the home; women’s responsibility for housework went unquestioned. A study in Warsaw of skilled workers and their wives, conducted in the early 1960s, discovered that women in the families of skilled workers also supported the breadwinner model; not having to work was seen as a sign of prestige and prosperity. Sociologist Halina Najduchowska revealed that these women “proudly declared that they had never seen what a factory looked like inside, that their husbands had always known how to earn and support the family, and never let them work.”³⁶ A male factory worker interviewed for the study declared that the “best profession for a woman is marriage.”³⁷

A memoir by a miner, born in 1939 and therefore representative of a younger generation than the workers interviewed by Najduchowska, shows the persisting popularity of the male breadwinner model. The author, who feared he “earned too little to be able

to support a family," met his wife at the mine, where she worked in aboveground services. She was dismissed from work when they married, revealing a practice of relating women's employment to marital status. As official employment reduction policies from the late 1950s stated that workers who had financial support should be the first to lose their jobs, many married women were dismissed whenever there was "overemployment" or men needing work during the late 1950s and early 1960s.³⁸ Although the memoir author above was initially disappointed, he found that "having a wife at home, who prepares a meal on time" meant more to him than any financial considerations.³⁹ A non-working wife was a guarantee that traditional gender roles would be performed and the male breadwinner model was particularly engrained in mining communities.

A memoir by a male blue-collar worker born in 1928, illustrates the perception of women's work as an undesired burden, a necessity only if the husband does not fulfill his role. The author remembered his own father as "an *authentic worker*, a bricklayer." However, he had a propensity for alcohol and no stable work. The author's mother, who had four children and her own mother to support, worked in a factory. The father was taken to Germany as a forced laborer during the war and never returned. "Our mother was working very hard to be able to raise us."⁴⁰ The author contrasted this situation with his own family: he worked "for the household" while his wife "took care of the children."

In 1960, 46.5 percent of married women who worked outside the home declared their husbands were not happy with the situation.⁴¹ Just as working-class cultures differ according to occupation, position in the worker skills hierarchy, social environment (established working-class background or recruited from rural areas), and region, so do workers' perceptions of married women's employment. Among skilled workers in Warsaw in the early 1960s, a study found the view that women should not work outside the household "equally popular in families where the wife works and in those where she doesn't." Such attitudes reflect the persistence of the male breadwinner ideal.⁴² In Łódź, a city with a long tradition of women working in the textile industry, male workers demanded higher family allowances in order to support families without their wives having to work. However, in general, they accepted the employment of married women.⁴³ In Nowa Huta, a steelworks built near Cracow during the Six-Year Plan, only half the male workers recruited from the countryside were positive about wives working in the late 1960s.⁴⁴ The material available does not provide a full picture, and these differences require more research, especially with regard to workers from rural communities. In the countryside, on the one hand, male dominance in the family persisted, but on the other hand, women's work was traditionally recognized, and there was less resistance to it.⁴⁵ In general, however, the memoirs display working-class men's attachment to the breadwinner family model.

Many memoir authors associated women's work with the financial requirements of the family and stressed that wives took on paid work only when necessary. A clerk born in 1934 and married to a blue-collar worker cited education as his "greatest achievement." Only when the couple's second daughter was born could the family no longer survive on one salary.⁴⁶

In working-class families, a husband's allegiance to the breadwinner family model often persisted even if his wife went out to work. A sociological study revealed that

male workers, even when happy about their wives working, preferred them to stay at home, highlighting a tension between the financial benefits of having a second salary, and the attraction of the breadwinner model.⁴⁷ A memoir by a man born in 1920 and married in 1941, relates how the birth of the blue-collar couple's three children required the wife to work outside the home. Previously the couple had lived "in line with the old method: I made decisions, and my wife had the kitchen and children." Although the wife began paid work, she retained responsibility for the household duties: her husband, in reference to the double burden as a consequence of—or price for—emancipation, stated that her work had now "doubled."⁴⁸ What particularly stands out in this testimony is the husband's acknowledgement of the emancipatory power of employment, emphasized in socialist-communist views on women's emancipation. The author describes his wife "becoming independent" in her new job, perhaps perceiving this in largely economic terms, rather than personal fulfillment.

The persistence of the breadwinner model relates to continuities with the pre-communist period and the particularities of state-socialist policies toward women's employment. Historically, the employment of working-class women, usually in low-paid and unskilled jobs, has been widely perceived as a necessity. In the late nineteenth century, when working-class women started to be employed in industry in significant numbers, married women's work was deemed to be of lower status than men's, disruptive for family life, and morally dangerous; as historian Anna Żarnowska has argued, married women's prestige depended more on her domestic role than employment.⁴⁹ The patriarchal family model dominated, and a working wife was seen as proof of the family's low status.⁵⁰ During the interwar period, the vast majority of women working outside the home were unmarried. Depending on the region, and leaving aside the textile industry in Łódź, only 8 to 13 percent of workers' wives had jobs at this time, although these statistics do not take into account casual work such as taking in laundry.⁵¹ Wage work by women from the lower classes was neither questioned nor encouraged in public debates. Interwar Polish socialism, focused on denouncing capitalist exploitation, the need to improve work conditions and social policies such as maternity leave and provision of preschool, was rather ambiguous about women's employment, and socialist activists did not believe paid work for married women was desirable. The socialist periodical *Women's Voice* insisted on the importance of women's domestic role and criticized the fact many women were being drawn away from the home. This opinion only started to lose ground in the late 1930s.⁵²

These views changed little in the postwar period, despite greater educational opportunities for working-class women and a smaller pay gap between male and female blue-collar workers.⁵³ Although Stalinism created new training opportunities for working-class women, it also generated a number of negative effects. Many women workers experienced shortcomings in the welfare system and coercion to endure difficult working conditions and long, unsociable hours; these experiences may have strengthened the notion that working in a factory was not suitable for a woman, and perhaps even exploitative.⁵⁴ Furthermore, women's work in industry, encouraged during the Stalinist period, played a declining role after 1956, as state discourses and policies emphasized the need to expand women's work in "suitable" professions such as health care, education, and trade. These policies reinforced perceptions of blue-collar work

as unsuitable for women and led to the neglect of professional training in these areas. Roles for women in industry lacked prestige and—in contrast to white-collar jobs requiring secondary education—professional fulfillment: according to research conducted in the 1960s, women preferred non-industrial and non-physical jobs.⁵⁵ In such a context, prewar perceptions of women's work continued.

Strategies Employed by Men to Maintain the Breadwinner Model

Low salaries, both before and after the war, often made the male breadwinner model difficult to put into practice. The memoirs provide an insight into the strategies employed by men to address this situation, but the impossibility of realizing the desired family model for many, plus unfulfilled expectations generated by the Thaw and public debates on women's work, led some authors to express frustration. An economist born in 1910 and married in 1945, declared it "a scandal that twenty years after the end of war the head of the family could not earn enough to support the family."⁵⁶ For this author, the postwar period was a time for returning to "normalcy," rather than the advent of a new, revolutionary, and transforming era, as heralded by communist leaders. Poverty was seen as a consequence of the prewar economic crisis and the war itself, thus as socialist welfare expanded authors expected that women would eventually be freed from the need to work.

The memoirs also reveal tensions between consumption and maintaining the male breadwinner model. Women's work could cover additional expenses and goods, but some authors preferred to restrict the household budget and depend on their wives to run the home economically. Such attitudes were expressed by both older authors and younger working-class men. In the late 1980s, a study found, there was "no interrelation between the family's income and the attitudes of men towards the paid employment of the wives."⁵⁷

A lawyer born in 1929 and married to a woman with a secondary education in 1960, explained that his wife had given up her job for three years to avoid sending their child to a nursery. The "price of resigning from many pleasures" was worth paying as nothing could replace "a deep maternal love." This memoir shows how consumption beyond (subjective) basic needs could be rejected for the assumed benefit of the family.⁵⁸ Some younger authors, particularly those from the working class, also preferred to avoid buying consumer goods if this could facilitate their desired family model. A skilled worker, born in 1945 and married in 1969, explained that his wife did not work because there was no nursery nearby. Although the couple had limited spending power, this was "not the most important thing," and the author was happy that his wife carried out her domestic duties "perfectly."⁵⁹ The memoirs reveal a conflict between values: the male breadwinner family model and the economic advantages that women's work could provide.⁶⁰ This conflict explains the ambiguous results of sociological studies addressing attitudes to women's employment.

Another strategy to maintain the model was for husbands to take on additional work. The wife of a male author born in 1938, worked in a factory at the beginning of their marriage, but later "stayed at home, because it's better like this, and I take some

additional jobs in order to earn some extra money. The standard we achieved is thanks to me, because I earn well, and her, because she administrates (*gospodaruje*) well.”⁶¹ As this and other examples show, men felt responsibility for supporting their families and taking on extra work could prove their resourcefulness. Women’s responsibility was considered to be skillfully managing limited family budgets.

Beyond Men’s Resistance: Women’s Work, Consumption, and Emancipation

The main shift revealed by the memoirs in men’s attitude to the employment of married women is a transformation in the hierarchy of values and expectations. The male breadwinner ideal was less important to many in the generation of authors born in the late 1930s and 1940s, and socialized after World War II. Educated men were most likely to accept—and benefit from—women’s emancipation in terms of the independent choice to work and have a career, especially if their wives were also educated. As Susan Zimmermann has observed in the case of Hungary, men’s attitudes “differed according to social status and class,” and husbands of women who were employed in prestigious jobs were more likely to accept this employment.⁶²

In the memoirs, talking about a wife’s work was often related to a narrative about how the couple achieved their material position and bought consumer goods. In post-war Poland, as Barbara Klich-Kluczevska has noted, consumption was increasingly becoming one of the most significant functions of the family, and consumer goods a measure of the household’s progress.⁶³ Marriage was believed to help spouses achieve a desired level of living (*dorobić się*). A male author born in 1937 had expected his marriage to improve his material conditions, as well as provide stability and two children.⁶⁴ The author went on to explain in detail how the couple—who did have two children—went on vacation, bought furniture, spent their free time going to the theater and cinema, and planned to buy a television. Satisfaction with material status relating to a dual income also featured in a memoir by an engineer born in 1938, who married a woman with similar education in 1956. They worked in the same factory: she as an engineer earning 2,800 złoty monthly, he as a technician earning 3,000 złoty. They had saved 25,000 złoty and were planning a holiday in Yugoslavia.⁶⁵

Both the narratives above were produced by well-educated men born during the late 1930s who started their own family in the post-Stalinist period. These authors did not share blue-collar workers’ often-expressed expectations of greater incentives for women to “return home.” Rather, they envisioned advancement through private consumption, in line with policies implemented by the post-Stalinist regime in Poland. Moderate consumption had become an important source of legitimization for the regime, but also substantially shaped gender relations; in practice, it could not be achieved with one salary alone. During the 1970s, the official rhetoric of consumption was further reinforced and bound to the family household as the site for the realization of material aspirations.⁶⁶ Contradictory policies of the state, which at the same time encouraged consumption and women’s employment, and created possibilities for married women with children to “stay at home,” point to contradictory social and economic aims, but might be also seen as an attempt to target different social groups.

In these examples, women's education and professional work were normalized as positive phenomena. Educated and white-collar men, unlike those authors quoted in the previous section, did not aspire to be the sole breadwinners. Rather, they attempted to organize work and the household in the most effective way, making strategic use of education and paid employment. Authors often presented the standard of living they had achieved as reliant on successful management and a dual-income family. It is clear from these narratives that the family's welfare was now believed to relate to the economic contributions of both spouses. Women's work was no longer a threat to children's well-being, and men placed less emphasis on organizing the household. As a number of scholars have observed, women's income was intended to help in the effort to afford consumer goods such as furniture, televisions, and household appliances.⁶⁷ However, the memoirs show that women's extra-domestic work was not only understood in terms of extra goods, but also the family's general standard of living. According to studies on family budgeting, women's work had a significant impact on the structure of family expenses.⁶⁸

In contrast to the narratives quoted in the previous sections, for the younger and better educated generation, a woman's exclusive dedication to the household and childcare could have negative effects. A male academic born in 1938, experienced pressure to fulfill the role of breadwinner when the couple could not find a babysitter. This situation was difficult for both him and his wife:

When she was left alone with children, kitchen and herself, she became very touchy and more demanding than before. . . . Other unknown problems emerged as well. Lack of space in the flat, the necessity to save money, the complex of being poorer than the others (because we live from one salary only). It would be ideal, my wife thinks, if I earned twice as much as I do, and take care of the children when I am back from work. Of course, I do what I can. I am trying to earn more, but this requires time, time that is taken away from my children.⁶⁹

The author's wife expected him to fulfill the role of breadwinner and assure a good standard of living. However, the couple were still "poorer than the others" and the children did not get proper care, which—as the author stressed—should be provided by both parents. This author viewed women's withdrawal from employment as disruptive for family life, while the older generation and younger working-class men had the opposite opinion.

The second factor that had an impact on men's perceptions of women working relates to women's emancipation. This author observed his wife's dissatisfaction with being a full-time housewife. Younger authors tended not to view their wives' employment as merely an economic necessity, recognizing that it could have independent value through professional fulfillment, social position and self-esteem. At the same time, the traditional role of housewife was no longer widely extolled. The engineer quoted in the previous section had made his wife resign from work when their children were born, but accepted her decision to return to work after a couple of years as she had become dissatisfied with staying at home. In the author's view, the stability

of the family depended on his wife's well-being. Although she "proved to be a good mother," with time her "other aspirations returned," causing regret that her education had been wasted. The author began to reflect on whether his "ideas about the responsibilities and rights of the husband and father" were correct. Ultimately, he could not permit the "stability of the family" to suffer and allowed his wife to return to work.⁷⁰

The wife of an author born in 1934 and married in 1963, had worked as a teacher in a rural area, but could not find work when the couple moved to Warsaw. The author, an engineer, took on "the whole burden of earning a living," finding extra jobs when his wife became pregnant. The wife had recently decided she wanted to return to work and the author had not questioned her decision. Neither did he consider a nursery inappropriate for his child.⁷¹

Women with university education were the most professionally active group, with over 90 percent working outside the home. Men's perception of highly skilled female workers was more favorable than of female blue-collar, often unskilled workers. A mid-1960s sociological study on women in managerial positions in selected branches of industry, based on over 150 interviews, found husbands expressed satisfaction and pride in their wives.⁷² While women's work in low-paid and low-skilled jobs was still considered an economic necessity in the post-Stalinist period, professional work based on education gained autonomy and value beyond material effects.

The memoirs of both men and women provide examples of how women struggled with men's resistance and negotiated their professional opportunities, often opposing their husband's will. Men's resistance diminished as women's rights to make their own decisions began to be recognized. Clearly, the shift in husbands' attitudes to their wives working would have been impossible without the party-state's positive approach to women's educational advancement and professional careers.⁷³ Women's agency, so visibly portrayed by the film character Irena in the mid-1950s, not only transpired in the cinema: in many memoirs, it was women who expected increased partnership in marriage as well as a reshaping of gender roles in relation to both unpaid and paid labor. Changes in socialist masculinities were not only shaped by party-state policies and official discourses, but also by everyday negotiations taking place within the family. Last but not least, women's professional work and employment were officially promoted in the period under study, despite particular employment policies that strengthened the maternal role.

Memoirs by men in the younger generation of authors, particularly those with education, reveal that the breadwinner model was no longer the ideal in Poland. The new approach to women's work was based on consumer aspiration and a recognition of women's autonomy, and was facilitated through spousal negotiation of gender roles. These developments relate to state policies and official discourses that, despite becoming increasingly family-oriented, constantly promoted women's emancipation through education and professional work. New modern patterns of consumption could be achieved by families through investing in education and the work of both spouses. Additionally, we can see these changes as part of a longer process of Polish elites increasingly recognizing the value of women working, initiated in the interwar period. Between 1918 and 1939, women's educational levels and participation in em-

ployment considerably increased, as did an acceptance of women's need for professional fulfillment among the urban intelligentsia.⁷⁴

Conclusions

Through analysis of personal narratives and sociological studies, this study has revealed a diversity of gendered experiences under Polish state socialism. Perceptions of married women working outside the home varied significantly according to gender, class, and generation. Further intersectionality, taking such categories as region and social background into account, would provide a still more nuanced account.

Narratives by men born between the late nineteenth century and the early 1950s reflect the persistence of negative perceptions of wives working outside the home and the desired ideal of a family based on male breadwinning. In this context, a working wife was viewed as a threat to the family, the household, and the husband's identity. Men's opposition to the employment of women decreased considerably by the 1980s, but never completely disappeared.

Men's resistance, as this study has shown, should be understood not only through the category of gender, but also generation and class. Husbands' perceptions of their wives' employment, as well as ideas about masculinity, changed as the generation born in the 1930s and 1940s started to perceive women's work in relation to emancipation and increased consumption. This shift is evident in men's personal narratives as recognition of the benefits women's work could provide increased. Younger and better educated men not only tended to view the education and professional work of both spouses as a way to achieve a better standard of living, they also recognized the fulfillment their wives gained from working outside the home.

State socialism did not significantly affect working-class Polish men's understandings of married women's work and attachment to the traditional family model. The male breadwinner model persisted as an important element of working-class masculine identity. This study shows the persistence of this cultural pattern into late state socialism, despite an intense promotion of women's employment after 1945. These views can be interpreted as a point of continuity from the interwar period in Poland, but also as a consequence of ambiguous state policies, which, after a short Stalinist period when women's work in industry was promoted and celebrated as emancipatory and meaningful, reinforced negative stereotypes of female industrial workers. Małgorzata Fidelis has termed the post-1956 period in Polish state employment policies as "conservative modernity," an approach that perpetuated women's lower status in industrial work.⁷⁵ The post-Stalinist regime appears to have generated expectations among working-class men that women would no longer threaten their hegemonic position on the shopfloor as they would largely be employed in non-industrial posts. However, male workers also expected that state socialism would enable their families to live on one salary and therefore (re)establish the breadwinner family model. Family-oriented policies of the 1970s and 1980s, which reinforced the maternal role, were a partial response to these expectations. While the regime was motivated by demographic concerns and did not openly challenge women's employment, the conservative turn

contributed to the persistence of the male breadwinner family model among the working class. The Solidarity movement, which demanded long, paid maternity leave and shared the family-oriented rhetoric of the state, further reinforced working-class attachment to this model.⁷⁶

As recent sociological research on women, men, and the family in Poland has revealed, the overwhelming majority of married people still believed that men had a greater responsibility for providing financial support for the family a decade after the fall of communism, despite a considerable increase in acceptance of partnership within marriage.⁷⁷ By showing the persistence of the male breadwinner tradition in postwar Poland, this study contributes to the argument that significant continuities traversed the prewar period, socialism, and post-socialism, and that the reasoning behind the post-1989 backlash in gender equality was also present in the state-socialist period.⁷⁸

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◆ Notes

1. *Irena, Go Home*, directed by Jan Fethke, written by Joanna Wilińska and Anatol Potemkowski, Poland, 1955, <https://filmpolski.pl>.
2. Mark Pittaway, "The Reproduction of Hierarchy: Skill, Working-Class Culture, and the State in Early Socialist Hungary," *The Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 4 (December 2002), 737–769, <https://doi.org/10.1086/376211>; Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism, and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Ivan Simic, *Soviet Influences on Postwar Yugoslav Gender Policies* (London: Palgrave, 2018), chapter 4; Natalia Jarska, *Kobiety z marmuru: Robotnice w Polsce 1945–1960* [Women of marble: Female blue-collar workers in Poland in the years 1945–1960] (Warsaw: IPN, 2015), chapter 2.
3. Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 43–44.
4. Simic, *Soviet Influences*, 102; Susan Zimmermann, "Gender Regime and Gender Struggle in Hungarian State Socialism," *Aspasia* 4 (2010), 1–24, here 12, <https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2010.040102>.
5. Mark Pittaway, "Retreat from Collective Protest: Household, Gender, Work and Popular Opposition in Stalinist Hungary," in *From the Vanguard to the Margins: Workers in Hungary, 1939 to the Present, Selected Essays by Mark Pittaway*, ed. Adam Fabry (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 121–155, here 125.
6. Peter Hallama, "Struggling for a Socialist Fatherhood: 'Re-educating' Men in East Germany, 1960–1989," *East European Politics and Societies* 34, issue 4 (2020): 817–836, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325419891200>; Jill Massino, "Something Old, Something New: Marital Roles

and Relations in State Socialist Romania," *Journal of Women's History* 22, no. 1 (2010): 34–60, <http://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.0.0132>.

7. While the period 1956–1980 can be further divided into two periods due to the maternalist turn of the 1970s, it is my opinion that the most important shift in relation to women's employment took place in 1956. Pro-natalist measures introduced in the 1970s did not challenge the general policy of employing married women, but rather encouraged mothers to temporarily retreat from working outside the home.

8. Natalia Jarska, "Men as Husbands and Fathers in Postwar Poland (1956–1975): Towards New Masculine Identities?" *Men and Masculinities* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X20910492>.

9. Christine von Oertzen and Almut Rietzschel, "Comparing the Post-War Germanies: Breadwinner Ideology and Women's Employment in the Divided Nation, 1948–1970," *International Review of Social History* 42, no. 5 (1997), 175–196, here 176, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002085900011483X>.

10. Holger Brandes, "Hegemonic Masculinities in East and West Germany (German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany)," *Men and Masculinities* 10, no. 2 (2007), 178–196, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X05284223>.

11. Dariusz Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm* [Poles and Stalinism] (Warsaw: DiG, 2000), 88–89.

12. Fidelis, *Women, Communism and Industrialization*.

13. Natalia Jarska, "Female Breadwinners in State Socialism: The Value of Women's Work for Wages in Post-Stalinist Poland," *Contemporary European History* 28, no. 4 (2019): 469–483, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777319000201>.

14. Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Sytuacja społeczno-zawodowa kobiet w 1983 r.* [Social and professional situation of women in 1983] (Warsaw: Zarząd Wydawnictw Statystycznych i Drukarni, 1984).

15. Zimmermann, "Gender Regime and Gender Struggle," 4.

16. Piotr Perkowski, "Wedded to Welfare? Working Mothers and the Welfare State in Communist Poland," *Slavic Review* 76, no. 2 (2017), 455–480; Katarzyna Stańczak-Wislicz, Piotr Perkowski, Małgorzata Fidelis, Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, eds., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989: Nowoczesność, równouprawnienie, komunizm* [Women in Poland 1945–1989: Modernization, equality, communism] (Cracow: Universitas, 2020).

17. Perkowski, "Wedded to Welfare?" 470.

18. For the discussion, see Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, *Rodzina, tabu i komunizm w Polsce 1956–1989* [Women, taboo and communism in Poland 1956–1989] (Cracow: Libron, 2015); and Małgorzata Mazurek, "Between Sociology and Ideology: Perception of Work and Sociologist Advisors in Communist Poland, 1956–1970," *Revue d'histoire en sciences humaines* [Human Sciences History Review] (Dossier: Quelle sociologie derrière le "rideau de fer"?), 16, no. 1 (2007), 11–32.

19. Franciszek Jakubczak, ed., *Konkursy na pamiętniki w Polsce 1921–1966* [Contest memoirs in Poland 1921–1966], introduction Józef Chałasiński (Warsaw: Komitet Badań nad Kulturą Współczesną, 1966).

20. Małgorzata Szpakowska, *Chcieć i mieć: samowiedza obyczajowa w Polsce czasu przemian* [To be and to have: Self-knowledge in Poland in the time of change] (Warsaw: W.A.B., 2003), 23–24.

21. Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw], Towarzystwo Pamiętnikarstwa Polskiego [Society for Polish Memoir] (hereafter TPP), materials from contests: Jaka jesteś, rodzino [What are you like, family?] 1962, Młodzi po ślubie [Young marriage] 1964, Mąż i żona [Husband and wife] 1965, and Moje małżeństwo [My marriage] 1974; Alicja Musiałowa, Mirosława Parzyńska, Zuzanna Celmer, eds., *Współczesny mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec* [Contemporary man as husband and father] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1976).

22. The Personal Narratives Group, ed., *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 5.
23. Erica L. Fraser, "Masculinity in the Personal Narratives of Soviet Nuclear Physicists," *Aspasia* 8 (2014), 45–63, <https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2014.080104>.
24. Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 130.
25. TPP, *Moje małżeństwo*, 9938.
26. Zygmunt Drozdek and Anna Preiss-Zajdowa, *Stosunek kobiet do pracy zawodowej* [Women's attitude toward professional work] (Warsaw: OBOP, 1962).
27. TPP, *Mąż i żona*, 1965, 10381.
28. TPP, *Młodzi po ślubie*, 1964, 10606.
29. TPP, *Młodzi po ślubie*, 1964, 10612.
30. TPP, *Młodzi po ślubie*, 1964, 10606.
31. TPP, *Mąż i żona*, 1965, 10381.
32. "Za wcześnie na satysfakcję" [Too early to be satisfied], in Musiałowa et al., *Współczesny mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec*, 148.
33. *Ibid.*, 148.
34. TPP, *Jaka jesteś, rodzino*, 9874.
35. *Sytuacja społeczno-zawodowa kobiet w 1983 r.*
36. Halina Najduchowska, *Pozycja społeczna starych robotników przemysłu metalowego (fragmenty opracowanych badań)* [Social position of old metal workers] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1965), 67.
37. Similar opinions were expressed by workers at an ironworks. Franciszek Adamski, "Z badań nad psychospołecznymi warunkami pracy hutnika oraz składem i typem rodziny hutniczej" [From research on the psychosocial working conditions of a steelworker and the composition and type of steelworker's family], in *Socjologia zawodów* [Sociology of professions], ed. Adam Sarapata (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1965), here 397.
38. Jarska, *Kobiety z marmuru*.
39. "Przeszedłem prawdziwą szkołę życia" [I went through a real school of life], in Musiałowa et al., *Współczesny mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec*, 313.
40. TPP, *Jaka jesteś, rodzino*, 9872.
41. Drozdek and Preiss-Zajdowa, *Stosunek kobiet do pracy zawodowej*.
42. Najduchowska, *Pozycja społeczna starych robotników*, 65. For similar observations, see Jerzy Piotrowski, ed., *Struktura robotniczej załogi w jednej z fabryk warszawskich* [Structure of workers' staff in one of Warsaw plants] (Warsaw: Centralny Instytut Ochrony Pracy, 1961), 147.
43. Antonina Kłoskowska, "Wzory i modele w socjologicznych badaniach rodziny" [Patterns and models in sociological research on the family], *Studia Socjologiczne* [Sociological studies] 2 (1962), 35–55.
44. Renata Siemieńska, *Nowe życie w nowym mieście* [New life in a new city] (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1969), 155–157.
45. According to a study from the mid-1980s, in peasant-workers families, men resisted women's employment to a lesser extent (7.8 percent) than in urban workers' families (11.8 percent). Danuta Graniewska, *Aktywność zawodowa kobiet a warunki ich życia* [Women's professional activity and their living conditions] (Warsaw: Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych, 1987). About gender relations in rural settings, see Ewelina Szpak, *Mentalność ludności wiejskiej w PRL: studium zmian* [Mentalities of rural population in People's Republic of Poland: A study of changes] (Warsaw: Scholar, 2013).
46. TPP, *Mąż i żona*, 1964, 10604.

47. Tadeusz Jakubczak, "Badanie postaw wobec pracy kobiet w środowisku warszawskich metalowców" [A survey on attitudes to women's work among Warsaw metal workers], *Przegląd Socjologiczny* [Sociological review] 1 (1960), 124–129.

48. TPP, Mąż i żona, 1965, 10395.

49. Anna Żarnowska, "Women in Working Class Families in the Congress Kingdom (the Russian Zone of Poland) at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century," in *Workers, Women, and Social Change in Poland, 1870–1939* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 163–175, here 164, 174; Żarnowska, "Aspiracje oświatowe kobiet w rodzinach robotniczych w Królestwie Polskim na przełomie XIX i XX wieku" [Educational aspirations of women in working class families in the Kingdom of Poland at the turn of nineteenth and twentieth centuries], in *Kobieta i edukacja na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX w.* [Woman and education on Polish lands in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries], ed. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz (Warsaw: DiG, 1992), 91–115.

50. Anna Żarnowska, "Changes in the Occupation and Social Status of Women in Poland since the Industrial Revolution till 1939," in *Workers, Women, and Social Change*, 123–131, here 127–128.

51. Wacław Mierzecki, "Praca zarobkowa kobiet w środowisku robotniczym w Polsce międzywojennej" [Women's wage work in the working class in interwar Poland], in *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse: Kobiety w Polsce międzywojennej* [Equal rights and unequal opportunities: Women in interwar Poland], ed. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz (Warsaw: DiG, 2000), 109–134, here 113.

52. Anna Landau-Czajka, "Socializm od kuchni: Socjalistyczny 'Głos Kobiet' o roli kobiety w gospodarstwie domowym" [Socialism seen from the kitchen: Socialist 'Women's Voice' about women's role in the household], in *Kobieta w gospodarstwie domowym: Ziemie polskie na tle porównawczym* [A woman in a household: Polish lands against a comparative background], ed. Katarzyna Sierakowska and Grażyna Wyder (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2012), 295–313, here 299.

53. Jarska, *Kobiety z marmuru*, 71.

54. Jarska, *Kobiety z marmuru*, 163–182.

55. Jarska, *Kobiety z marmuru*, 244–246.

56. TPP, Mąż i żona, 1965, 10387.

57. Graniewska, *Aktywność zawodowa kobiet*.

58. TPP, Młodzi po ślubie, 1964, 10604.

59. "Wyniosłem wiele ze swojej rodziny" [I learned a lot from my family], in Musiałowa et al., *Współczesny mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec*, 288.

60. Jarska, "Female Breadwinners."

61. Musiałowa et al., *Współczesny mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec*.

62. "Of those men whose wives were employed in management positions and in intellectual professions, or who were working in lower-level management positions, eighty-four and seventy-eight percent respectively fully approved of their wives' employment." Zimmermann, "Gender Regime and Gender Struggle," 12.

63. Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, "Kobieta wobec rodziny" [Woman and the family], in Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989*, 219–336, here 313.

64. "Ojciec winien dawać opiekę i miłość" [Father should give care and love], in Musiałowa et al., *Współczesny mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec*, 260–261.

65. TPP, Młodzi po ślubie, 1964, 10604.

66. Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989*.

67. Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

68. Danuta Graniewska, *Sytuacja materialna rodzin pracowniczych a zatrudnienie kobiet* [Material situation of workers' families and women's employment] (Warsaw: Komitet Pracy i Płac, 1971).
69. "Szczęśliwe, choć trudne" [Happy but difficult], in Musiałowa et al., *Współczesny mężczyzna jako mąż i ojciec*, 328–329.
70. "Za wcześnie na satysfakcję," 148.
71. TPP, *Młodzi po ślubie*, 1964, 10608.
72. Stefania Dziecielska-Machnikowska, Jolanta Kulpińska, *Awans kobiety* [Woman's advancement] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1966), 114–115.
73. On women's education, see Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, "... być dziewczyną. Wychowanie, dorastanie i edukacja dziewcząt," [To be a girl ... Upbringing, growing up, and education] in Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989*, 217–289, here 257.
74. Janusz Żarnowski, "Kobiety w strukturze zawodowej Polski międzywojennej," in *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse*, 100. Katarzyna Sierakowska, *Rodzice, dzieci, dziadkowie ... Wielkomiejska rodzina inteligencka 1918–1939* [Parents, children, grandparents ... Great-city intelligentsia family 1918–1939] (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2003).
75. Małgorzata Fidelis, "Równouprawnienie czy konserwatywna nowoczesność? Kobiety pracujące" [Equality or conservative modernity? Working women], in Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989*, 103–164, here 107.
76. Fidelis, "Gender, historia i komunizm" [Gender, history and communism], in Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989*, 25–44, here 43.
77. Danuta Duch-Krzysztosek, *Kto rządzi w rodzinie? Socjologiczna analiza relacji w małżeństwie* [Who rules in the family? Sociological analysis of marital relations] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2007), 61; Krzysztof Arcimowicz, "Przemiany męskości w kulturze współczesnej" [Changing masculinities in contemporary culture], in *Nowi mężczyźni?: zmieniające się modele męskości we współczesnej Polsce* [New men? Changing models of masculinity in contemporary Poland], ed. Małgorzata Fuszara (Warsaw: Trio, 2008), 37.
78. Stańczak-Wiślicz et al., *Kobiety w Polsce 1945–1989*, 460. The authors of the book emphasize continuities with the interwar period. See also Jill Massino, *Ambiguous Transformations. Gender, the State, and Everyday Life in Socialist and Postsocialist Romania* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019).