Sexual Harassment in the Nineteenth Century English Cotton Industry

by Jan Lambertz

Feminist groups as well as feminists working within trade unions in Britain are taking up the issue of workplace sexual harassment with increasing urgency. From studies such as the recent NALGO survey in Liverpool, we are learning that this harassment constitutes a long-standing grievance for many women in this generation of workers. We are also discovering that many workers in previous generations faced it. While current attention to the problem springs from a feminist reassessment of sexuality and of women's position in the labour market, historical research on the northern cotton industry in England demonstrates that women—and even men—also collectively mobilized around this issue many decades before our own.

This article investigates several turn-of-the-century disputes in Lancashire and the West Riding, and will analyse what conditions made those protests possible, and how they might both replicate and diverge from modern instances of mobilisation against sexual harassment. 'Sexual harassment' was not the term used by my historical subjects. I use it here as shorthand to describe a range of unsolicited sexual pressuring and violation that was viewed as objectionable, while diverse. This seems legitimate because the disputes described here indicate that various forms of inappropriate sexual behaviour were seen as connected to each other and could be fought. Where possible, the paper proffers labels which contemporaries attached to this behaviour; but the full individual and collective meanings posited in these terms—their biting edges, their euphemistic subtleties, the naivety and hesitancy they suggest—must often elude us. Appeals to courts of law and particularly to trade unions forced out a temporary recognition for a sense of...
sexual violation. While this recognition proved a desirable goal for many women workers, male trade union officials could prove problematic allies to women in battles against sexual harassment. Political opportunism, a reluctant dissolution of male bonding, and paternalistic interest in controlling female sexuality also figured in the intervention of officials.

Any female wage worker in this period might face some form of sexual harassment or assault by men at work, and we can find many examples for different occupations in London and elsewhere. However, I will focus on the cotton industry, which employed exclusively male managers, but was structured so that women worked closely with many other women and had access to local trade unions in struggles to alter working conditions. Inevitably, the forms harassment took were specific to workplace structure and female workers' power relative to men in that particular structure. Furthermore, like other expressions of male domination, workplace sexual harassment is located in dynamic rather than static social systems. Consequently, the subjective experience of it, the wider social perception of its causes, and even the forms it took varied to some degree over time. Using three case studies, I will examine whether short-term political interventions against it could, hypothetically, undermine it in a long-term way.

**JOBS FOR WOMEN**

The most usual wage work experience for the Lancashire woman in the Victorian and Edwardian period was a job in the cotton textiles industry. Elsewhere in England, the highest percentage of young working-class women went into domestic service. In towns and cities, some workshops and also factories producing a variety of consumer goods hired many women and girls. Many women also found work in the clothing trades, with milliners and dressmakers, in shops, and increasingly, in offices requiring clerical workers, this was also true for Manchester. Married women with children often took in washing and outwork, hawked goods, or became charwomen on a casual basis. In the countryside, some women found agricultural work, and sometimes combined this work in a local cottage industry. Women cotton operatives enjoyed more advantages than domestic servants or other female manual workers in Britain. These cotton workers made up a disproportionate number of all unionized female workers in England, representing between 75 and 80 per cent from the 1870s to 1906.

An increasing proportion of women employed within the industry apparently joined unions as well, particularly in the late 19th century and thereafter. One consequence of this high level of female trade union membership was that women in certain divisions of the industry, notably power loom weavers, probably received the highest wages of any women manual workers in the country. In weaving, women perhaps came closest to obtaining the elusive goal of 'equal pay for equal work' with men.

In contrast to women in other sections of the country, both unmarried and married women commonly went out to work, suggesting that labour opportunities abounded in Lancashire, that married women had some limited access to independent wages and that women in general experienced little stigma and prohibition on working outside the home. These textile workers also worked shorter hours at their jobs, and in less isolation than their contemporaries in service and women in many sweated trades. Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, in their important study of this region, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage*
Movement, found some geographical variations in wage levels, job opportunities, and labour force participation among women. However, they underline that these workers generally enjoyed a high status ‘... which working women elsewhere could not match’. But these comparisons between women workers provide only a partial index of Lancashire women’s social power. We also need to explore their social power relative to men in their class and in different spheres of activity: here, we look at wage work.

The cotton industry expanded in the period from 1896 up to 1914. While output per worker both in spinning and weaving increased, with work becoming somewhat more arduous, workers were arguably paid for their added exertion. Employment opportunities appear to have remained plentiful in the region, presumably both for male and female workers. However, sectional differences, particularly the sexual division of labour in the industry, remained tenacious and sharp, with males claiming more highly skilled jobs and commanding higher wages, especially where they represented a high proportion of the total workers in a particular branch of the industry or in a town.

DIRTY TRICKS AND KNOBSTICKS
In Oldham, a town lying seven miles northeast of Manchester and specializing in coarse spinning, 68 female and male operatives of the Henshaw-street Spinning Company’s card and blowing room ‘turned-out’ in January 1887. The operatives refused to continue working until an investigation was conducted by their employers into the behaviour of a male head carder, Robert Yates. This man allegedly used his position for ‘improper purpose’, that is, for sexually pressuring and even assaulting the young women under his authority, 12 ‘little tenters’.

Since spring of the previous year complaints had drifted to George Silk, General Secretary of the Oldham Provincial Card and Blowing Room and Ring Frame Operatives' Association, and they became more and more pressing. The man’s indecencies escalated. Apparently, parents of the younger workers transmitted many of the complaints to Silk. The union numbered several thousand in the district as a whole, and contained predominantly female members. Negotiations between Silk and the manager got off to a bad start over the question of one woman’s dismissal, with the manager only adding ‘insult to injury by applying a very opprobrious epithet to a hard-working and respectable woman’, who had worked for the company more than seven years. Subsequent negotiations over this head carder between Silk and the company’s board of directors broke down as well, and the directors’ uncooperative attitude must be set partly in the context of general hostility towards the union’s growing strength in this particular mill and elsewhere. Union-busting was on their agenda. ‘Three times during the last 12 months they have attempted to reduce the number of Grinders from nine to eight, and have been defeated. Twice has notice of reduction in Tenters’ wages been attempted, but without effect’. In addition, a group of about 12 tenters, mostly married women, came complaining to the union office about the carder. Consequently, the operatives jointly decided to strike. The employers fired the strikers and hired ‘knobsticks’ (scabs) to replace them. As this became known, a crowd gathered to hoot at the newly-recruited operatives and at the carder in the centre of this controversy. Upon leaving work, Yates found himself assailed with shouts of ‘Bury Bob’ and was forced to seek refuge in a nearby pub, ‘The Odd House’; several women then went inside to have a look at the man.
The complaints against Yates, aged 49, involved his behaviour both inside and outside the mill towards the women employed under him. The father of one victim followed up the union's efforts by taking Yates to court on criminal charges. The carder's actions were detailed in February 1887, when an Oldham Police Court summoned him for committing indecent assault on at least three workers, aged 15 or 16. Two of the charges stemmed from an incident during the previous summer, when Yates had asked two of the complainants into his house while they were passing by. There he sexually attacked them, alternately, while sending the other out to fetch beer for him. They both struggled with him, while remaining wary of screaming, lest he should bag (sack) them the next morning. In court, one claimed to have rebuked him, telling him that he was an 'old man and ought to be ashamed of himself'. She claimed that she did not know before this incident that he had 'any badness in him'.19 When she threatened that she would 'tell', Yates assured her it would be 'the worse for her' if she did.20

When they managed to get out of the house together, they told one another what he had done, and told a workmate the next morning that 'Bob had been "agate" of them'. A rumour about what happened eventually spread through the mill, and the reputations of both Yates and the girls evidently suffered.21 The incident prompting these rumours demonstrates that structures of power and authority at work could also pursue girls and women out of the factory door, while the reverse process was not so true. Several weeks later, one victim did tell her father of the carder's 'dirty tricks' and also told the manager of the mill. The support of parents and familial authority was not a clear asset in struggles to resolve workplace troubles, for the young women feared that this evident call for intervention would cause the man to 'bag' them.22 We will return to this question of the bridges between familial and workplace authority later.

In the court examination other accounts of indecent assaults surfaced. One complainant remembered an occasion on which her clothes got caught in some wheels on a machine at work and he '... put his hands up my clothes while I was trying to get loose', she testified.23 After this incident, she told a young male co-worker, who advised her to tell her mother. However, she failed to do this because she was afraid of getting 'bagged'. On another occasion Yates unbuttoned the front of his trousers before this woman, in the mill. He also bothered her to meet him socially after work (he was married) at the same pub, 'The Odd House', where, ironically, he later became a spectacle during a gathering of strikers.24 She refused. Other complaints against the defendant included his use of dirty or brazen talk, and propositioning at work. One of the women assaulted at his home was asked by him to go into the storeroom for what she concluded was an 'improper purpose'. The other woman assaulted at his home testified that,

On the 18th December he got me in the store room, and asked me to sew a button on his trousers. (Laughter) He asked me to go in, and I went in, and whilst I was threading the needle he began to use dirty language, and also behaved indecently.25

She told him to go to his wife and hurried away. As previously suggested, anger that Yates kept discharging hands or tenters for 'no reason' also lay behind the strike, and these arbitrary dismissals seemed implicitly linked to women refusing
the man's advances. Indeed, the union for some time previous had seemed almost resigned to the impossibility of stopping the carder:

. . . He knew that it was absolutely impossible for him to be caught and stopped in his actions if he pursued a similar method from then till doomsday . . . it has not been possible in any way to bring the man to book, his method in all cases being to make improper overtures, and on refusal to pick a quarrel, which is always easy, and then to either discharge them at once or with a week's notice . . .

Newspaper accounts indicate that some of his behaviour was apparently common knowledge at the mill, and he even boasted to men under him and to Silk of his power over his subordinates. But the whole mechanism of discussing this man's acts and condemning them had to move quite far for some victims to offer testimony, the strike itself was necessary to encourage still other women to volunteer accounts of their experiences with Yates. In fact, Silk writes that through Yates' drunken boasting, ' . . . the knowledge of the late transactions of this man has not been given by the girls themselves but has principally been told by the man himself'.

Yates' defence counsel perceived the importance of playing down the power differential between his clients and the girls, if the man had any hope of being cleared. The defence discredited the female complainants by calling them sexually precocious, and insisting they acted as willing partners. Possibly cardroom women made easy targets for these suggestions, for they had a tough reputation and were less 'respectable' than many other women cotton workers, such as weavers.

Still, this argument underplayed their highly vulnerable status as young female workers by suggesting that they were completely free to 'consent' in this situation. As support, the defence cited the long time lapse between the alleged incidents and the recent charges of indecent assault, and the victims' initial reluctance to complain to anyone. He further attempted to neutralize the carder's behaviour by insisting that the man had used vulgar rather than indecent language, and was guilty not of 'improprieties', but simply of 'marlocking', which implied flirting, teasing, or an innocent playfulness.

Anticipating the charge that the girls went into Yates' house mainly because he held enormous coercive powers over them as their boss, the counsel asked the bench to consider that his client was 'in the position of an employer against his hands' (implying that purely vindictive intent lay beneath the charges). He also attacked the union: '. . . Because [Yates] did his duty to his employer in the way that they thought . . . the society had interfered to destroy him'.

Cardroom workers waged an intense struggle to establish an effective union in Oldham in the latter half of the 1880s, so this evocation of potentially vindictive hostility made the girls' testimony even less plausible. New machinery, speed-ups and 'excessive' wage reductions faced members, and pulling in women members posed special problems. As the trial had revealed, Silk found it difficult to convince many Oldham people that the girls involved were blameless. Nevertheless, the Henshaw-street dispute possibly provided a chance for the union to gain a moral footing in the locality — or else represented an initial willingness to entangle
itself in any work dispute that drifted its way, thereby appealing to potential members on multiple fronts.\textsuperscript{33}

Silk almost disguised the two-pronged opportunity presented to the union in writing of,

\begin{quote}
. . . our duty to come forward and say that this is no ordinary case, it has no connection with ordinary strikes, and we ought not to stand by and see them suffer so much pecuniarily for their noble effort in a direction which cannot but render the situations of our wives, our sisters, and our daughters ten times more secure than they hitherto have been.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Questions both of the moral obligations of masculinity and of workplace power relations were at stake here, and they are not easily separable. If in some cotton communities rough manners of men such as tacklers were often tolerated as a mark of manliness,\textsuperscript{35} here a carder’s drunken boastfulness of absolute power in fact posed a challenge to patriarchal and brotherly prerogatives of female protection (in the literal familial sense); and this boasting likewise merged with (male) union officials’ demands for checks on what a wage contract and enforcement of workplace hierarchy should entail. The carder’s boasts afforded many men, partly because Yates further boasted ‘. . . that he would have none working under him but what would comply with his wishes whatever they were’.\textsuperscript{36} And if employers colluded with such authoritarian behaviour (by also black-listing complainants), this would ‘have the effect of totally preventing any others from again striking in defence of their children and the purity of the home’.\textsuperscript{37}

But the decision to fight against workplace authoritarianism and immorality involved great risks, for in Oldham at this time ‘if a girl had lost her situation she would not have gotten another’. Fear of unemployment lay in women’s long indecisiveness about how to protect themselves and in their reluctance to report assaults. Resisting, complaining, and striking could all misfire.

What was the outcome of this battle? The court fined Yates £5 and court costs. By late February, probably as a result of the court proceedings, the company apparently discharged the carder after seven years of employment with them. However, the other original workers from his division were not rehired. Instead, they faced black-listing, both from employers anxious to avoid union trouble-makers and, allegedly, from carders who would ‘be very shy at engaging [the women]’.\textsuperscript{38}

STRIKING NELSON

A similar dispute surfaced in Nelson, a weaving town 20 miles north of Manchester. There, the conduct of a tackler or overlooker at Evans and Berry’s Walverden Weaving Shed, Brook Street, resulted in a strike that ran for several months in 1891 and 1892. More conventional labour issues sprang up in this strike as well, and were of fundamental importance to it. These included demands to abolish the ‘slate and board’ system which contributed to driving of workers, and demands for union ‘list’ prices on work.\textsuperscript{39} Union members appear to have welded these on to the seemingly central demand for the removal of an offensive tackler, Houghton Greenwood.\textsuperscript{40}

As in the earlier Oldham case, fairly convincing accusations against this overlooker emerged. Claims arose that he used unfit language to women workers
while at his post and made immoral propositions to a married woman. The Weavers' Association in Nelson played a crucial role in pressing these charges, linked to its interest in removing the slate and board system, although the cause of their initial involvement remains unclear. Replacements for the striking workers were hired in this case as well.

The strike in Nelson was more sustained and vigorous than the Oldham action, with much of its impetus springing from the union's rank and file. Demonstrations against Greenwood and the scabs involved as many as 500 people. The union officials lost some control of the strike action to the rank and file, and were evidently unable to limit the number of pickets at the shed. The scabs were apparently not from the immediate community. In one scene described by the Colne and Nelson Times several of the 'blacklegs' needed constables to escort them to the railway station as they left their new jobs, for protection.

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Probably much of the weaving shed and at least three other tacklers joined the strike. Furthermore, still other overlookers became defensive as a response to the accusations levelled against Greenwood. The president of the Nelson and District Powerloom Overlookers' Society felt compelled to tell the press that:

In his experience he had found large numbers of operatives of good morals and others the reverse, and a great deal depended on the self-control of the overlooker or other persons in authority. It could not be denied that overlookers had a great deal of temptation put in their way by those under their charge, but he was proud to say that few of them yielded to such temptations, excepting, perhaps some of who were young and 'wild'.

The Society also expelled one of its members, John Hartley, for continuing to send his children to work at Evans and Berry's shed during the strike. Members themselves responded in various ways. Some tacklers stayed out; others continued to go to the shed, but refused to take on the absent weavers' work. In more peaceful working times, weavers scrutinized overlookers for their fairness in allocating beams and servicing looms; during disputes these men walked a tightrope between the neutrality weavers expected of them, and the allegiance demanded by employers.

The Nelson Weavers' Association Committee demanded unconditional discharge of Greenwood, but the employers refused such an incursion on their choice of supervisors. (The larger union membership pushed for more demands.) The NWA opted for arbitration at a relatively early stage in the dispute, and ultimately, three clergymen were asked to act as arbitrators in the case. The clergy found the tackler guilty of the charges. Greenwood was dismissed, and in contrast to the Oldham strikers' fate, the Nelson shed's employers rehired many of the striking operatives.

The chances of waging a successful strike may have generally been greater in Nelson than in the Oldham situation. At one level, more flexible job opportunities
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probably existed in Nelson, with a lesser unemployment problem. Other factors also may have accounted for differences in the towns’ trade union development.\textsuperscript{49} Nelson showed a great population and trade growth from 1880 onwards.\textsuperscript{50} Possibly in Nelson, men coercing women workers into sexual favours could rely less readily on the threat of firing them to secure their co-operation. Alternative jobs may have existed, while Oldham women decidedly lacked such back-ups, making protest and even union involvement an even greater ‘risk’. Alternatively, the Nelson Weavers’ Association may have felt confident about staging a strike for other reasons, believing that union commitment in the community would be high enough to sustain a strike, imported labour would prove impractical, and they could win their employers or arbitrators over on an issue apparently revolving around workplace morality.\textsuperscript{51}

While the Oldham dispute did receive a brief mention in an official government factory inspectorate report of 1893, the impact of the Nelson strike possibly had wider repercussions among workers in like situations, both within Nelson and in adjoining weaving communities.\textsuperscript{52} The length of the strike, the involvement of two established unions, the heated community reaction against the tackler and outside scabs, and some police involvement together operated to publicize the dispute. As we saw, the accusations compelled workers throughout the weaving shed hierarchy to respond, and this forced tacklers to evaluate their own positions from a number of vantage points. The struggle over management or supervisory rights, and the position taken by overlookers in disputes was only one surface problem here. Perhaps sensing and also sharing this community disapproval of the situation, tackler solidarity with Greenwood in public proved very weak, even non-existent. We can assume these men either feared that his defence was weak and they would be implicated along with him for such behaviour, or saw tacklers such as Greenwood as menaces to their own female kin and friends employed in the industry. The strike also posed more far-reaching questions about behaviour standards in weaving sheds. The arbitration decision, at once calling Greenwood’s offences ‘not uncommon among men who have the oversight of . . . female operatives’ and condemning those offences, was printed and distributed to the weavers of Nelson.\textsuperscript{53} A correspondent for the Oldham Evening Chronicle believe that this . . . created a marked improvement, not only in the behaviour of overlookers, but in the attitude of employers upon this question. Shortly after its publication, a ‘cut looker’ was discharged by another firm for making immoral proposals to a weaver who brought her piece to him for inspection.\textsuperscript{54}

Female workers in Oldham presumably did not have these moral injunctions to support them as they sought local employment.

WEEDS AND GARDENS IN TODMORDEN

Two decades later, in 1913, a similar scandal broke out in Todmorden, another small weaving town northeast of Manchester, on the border of the West Riding of Yorkshire.\textsuperscript{55} At a union meeting, at least one woman made remarks referring to the ill-treatment of children at a large local mill, and asserted that overlookers beat the young workers.\textsuperscript{56} These remarks moved W. J. Tout, the 44-year-old male secretary of the Weavers’ and Winders’ Association, to investigate.\textsuperscript{57} Accompanied by a committee man, he collected evidence from the mill’s women workers.
Subsequently, some 31 women testified at the Weavers' Offices, giving evidence about overlookers' behaviour in this mill. Riding on the tails of an evidently more legitimate issue – assault on children – complaints also emerged over acts ranging from the men's offensive language to some acts deemed 'unprintable' and directed towards older female workers. The press also decided the mill's name was unprintable; union minutes disclose that it was the Hoyles' Derdale Mill, one of probably several owned by the family. (It is unclear for whose benefit this confidentiality was kept.)

A number of women working as winders complained of being molested in an artificially-lit passage at the mill:

So common had it become . . . that they have waited for one another in the morning rather than walk along the passage alone. Lately the light in the passage has developed a habit of going out when a young woman has been walking alone. Women who have had that experience state that, in the dark, an arm has been placed round their waist, and worse things have followed.

Despite collective knowledge among the mill's female workers about the dangerous passage leading to the winding-room, many still found themselves victimized. Six or seven young women complained of being molested in the two months previous to the investigation, late 1912; one woman who had only worked at the mill for a few days had also been attacked. Others questioned at the Weavers' office 'gave the impression that they had been subjected to indignities, but were too ashamed to admit it openly'. Still, Tout asserted, '[Women] have given us information they would not give anyone else'. These indignities soon out-weighted concern over the reported thrashing of boys in weaving departments. (Obviously no quantitative comparison between these distinct forms of abuse is possible, but the weavers' shift in focus is suggestive about the comparative metaphonic weight of sexual abuse as workers' oppression.)

The revelations about the mill appeared in a period when Todmorden was seen as 'not organised as it should be', and Tout was surely involved in the drive to increase union membership. The revelations about the mill appeared in a period when Todmorden was seen as 'not organised as it should be', and Tout was surely involved in the drive to increase union membership. In the preceding 15 months, these efforts brought the Weavers' and Winders' Association membership to 4,200, up from 2,600 – an increase of 61%. The Todmorden and District Weavers' and Winders' Association's quarterly report for late 1912 insisted, 'We intend to vigorously prosecute our campaign of organisation until, like many other districts,
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every eligible person is a member of our Association', and the campaign continued throughout 1913. By late March, 1913, the union had 4,600 members – a 2,000-member increase in 18 months; by late June it had 5,000 members.65 In the period of the investigations, Tout received largely 'friendly' press reports on his specific efforts and he managed to organize the women involved rapidly. In addition, he and other union activists induced the employers to promise an investigation into the charges, while also proposing a new list (standard wage) for the winders. Union involvement was double-edged, both aiding a wider workers' movement, and providing advocacy for women who were victimized on several counts. Therefore, we cannot dismiss the union's work in this case as purely self-serving, for settling old scores or strengthening its standing both in the workplace and in the wider community.66

An expanding union such as this one may have exploited and publicized the issue to appeal to potential members, and so we might speculate that trade unions with a stronger foothold in a region's industry might have displayed far less interest in challenging workplace sexual harassment, particularly where accusations could be so easily inverted and strikes could result. Instead, more entrenched unions could have denied the issue's importance, and belittled it as a 'personal' problem. (This also seems applicable to Oldham.)

Tout had hooked into an issue that provoked much community discussion. His efforts to expose the workers' situation even evoked a response from the district-wide overlookers' organization, similar to Nelson during the much earlier dispute. The secretary of the United Association of Power-Loom Overlookers (Rochdale) felt compelled to defend his own members and insisted that his union did exercise some internal checks on members who were reported at any time for similar behaviour.67 However, these measures appear implicitly as afterthoughts and, despite claims of dealing with offenders 'severely', they possibly involved quite discreet rebukes.

The accusations also moved several other women to contribute testimony, even those peripherally connected to the situation. Women who had left the mill years earlier came forward with statements similar to those made by women workers of 1912 and 1913.68 In fact, Tout admitted, 'One thing that has surprised me... is the number of people who knew or had heard about these things. It must have been a public scandal'. (Perhaps here he overstated the women's passive acceptance of the situation, in order to paint the union and himself as a redemptive moral force.) With the union's prompting, however, both press and pulpit homed in on the situation with keen interest.

We cannot gauge the issue's community impact very precisely. Ironically, because the mill was not named, Todmorden as a whole stood indicted and allegedly became 'a by-word in the mouth of all Lancashire and Yorkshire'.70 But the virtues of union intervention hardly monopolized public attention; rather, mill life and public morality became the focus of debate. Correspondents writing to local newspapers (indeed, also one paper serving the town, The Todmorden Advertiser and Hebden Bridge Newsletter) bitterly denounced the 'sensational press' for circulating 'foul aspersions in regard to the mill life and morals in our district'. But others found the controversy an opportunity to advocate teaching of 'sexual science' to dispel 'shadiness' around immorality, or to increase purity education and suggest establishment of large 'purity committees'. Some insisted,
A dirty garden of weeds is a domestic matter, but it is also of concern to the neighbouring gardeners. Publicity, however painful, is needful and wholesome.\textsuperscript{71}

The consequences of these public discussions, then, inevitably worked to suggest that mill immorality was actually a widespread, general problem, even the defensive denials gave weight to this impression. In contrast, Tout had taken pains to insist that the scandal only concerned one mill in the borough.\textsuperscript{72} While he doubtlessly dismissed these less informed opinions about the extent of the problem, he surely must have imagined that other 'Derdale Mills' were possible. But finding the Derdale inquiry 'unsavoury and delicate to all concerned', a union effort to flush out similar scandals seemed undesirable.

Employers at the mill ended up promising careful inquiry into the charges, but the outcome of their promises remains ambiguous. Press accounts hint that these efforts were either inconclusive or not acted on at all, and continued to veil identities of those involved. It is unclear whether union vigilance over the situation continued, and whether the pressures of exposure had mended the offenders' ways.

TAKING ISSUE

In the preceding disputes, male trade union officials demonstrated a willingness to take up the issue of workplace sexual harassment affecting their women and girl constituents and to recognize it as an oppressive working condition. However, one suspects that on the balance sheet of trade union concerns over these decades, the attention these men gave the issue was exceptional. We need to explore their motives further; some sprang from a masculine moral perspective, while others apparently sprang from the publicity-conscious calculations of trade unionists. We also need to explore whether victimized women themselves saw union involvement as a desirable solution. Close scrutiny of any lingering 'paternalistic' prescription of workplace morals by employers seems less appropriate in describing these cases; such involvement appears to be largely absent. Nevertheless, employers may have maintained a significant presence in community moral regulation through institutions outside factories – and of course historically, they shaped workplace relations as well.

Ironically, the very cases we have just examined suggest that officials were rarely moved to take up sexual harassment as a union issue. Norms of female propriety and anxiety put up the first obstacles to this possibility, and male assailants may well have counted on such containment. In both the Oldham and Todmorden cases, there were long delays between the actual offences and reports being made of them; at times the gap extended to years. Generally, women were no doubt still reluctant to deal with these problems publicly, fearing further victimization from employers or even suggestions of complicity. Suspicions of collusion or spite made complaining a risky business. Paradoxically, the idea of complicity both kept women from quickly and readily complaining to other people and undermined their credibility if they finally did object. A charge of complicity became even more believable if complaints were only made after much time lapsed; assaults came to look less objectionable, or the complaints could be construed as grudges, settling other old scores by slander.\textsuperscript{73} Again, many women waited for other women's complaints to be accepted as 'real' before reporting
their own experiences and fighting for each other more publicly. Indeed, it is slightly surprising that women who had left the Todmorden mill again became involved. While they did not risk losing jobs by speaking out, they also could have chosen to remain silent very easily. Over time, many victims must have relied entirely on more private, interim solutions instead of complaining, such as quitting jobs or, as in Todmorden, depending on women co-workers for strategies of defence. With apparent hesitation, a few women involved in these situations did alert union officials. However, we see that in at least two of these three disputes, initiation of mass, public mobilization depended heavily on the actions and interest of male officials rather than on female victims or their parents. Making this insulated trauma a public issue required male orchestration in these instances.

The motives lying behind union officials’ involvement appeared to vary in these cases. First, it displayed genuine sympathy for the female victims and hostility towards the males who sought evidently individual gratification by exerting sexual pressure on workers under them. The union men did not publicly identify themselves with the assailants or try to rationalize away their actions as norms of male behaviour. Such sexual access to women and girls was illegitimate because it was not based on mutual consent, but firmly lodged in situations of entrapment and economic coercion. Second, behaviour identified as sexual impropriety also challenged some union men’s role as the protectors of the purity of kin and home; to be respectable working-class organizers perhaps relied on a component of sexual respectability.

While not a conventional workplace power issue in the officials’ estimation, job control questions were implicitly at stake — whether they recognized this or not. Third, what the officials did apparently recognize was the value of fighting workplace immorality as a propagandistic vehicle for boosting membership and for raising other complaints. Under the surface, sexual harassment was bound intimately to a range of union battle fronts. The demand for sexual favours, or an overlooker merely ‘playing favourites’ could be coupled with the basic threat of losing a needed job and decent earnings. Indeed, here officials did link sexual pressuring to the issue of unfair dismissals. An unacknowledged dimension to workplace sexual harassment was that sexual favours could hypothetically influence an overlooker’s choice over the order in which he serviced women’s looms, so potentially reduce individual earnings. Also in the realm of possibilities was that sexual threats and touching might themselves be used as a component of overlookers’ intimidation, ‘terrorism’, and even the objectionable practice of ‘driving’ — workplace control that could force higher production levels. Such threats could keep women in line and accommodate driving of workers, which would also boost these men’s wages (or on yet another level, prove functional for increasing capitalist profits). A suggested link between driving and sexual pressuring did not emerge in these cases, however, and such an alleged relationship has a severe limitation; surely production levels and work quality could have as easily fallen as risen in a sexually-tense environment, or one overlaid with fear.

As both Patrick Joyce and Dermot Healey suggest, supervisory workers such as overlookers played a complicated role in the workplace and in the community. The genesis and role of these men’s behaviour, particularly some of their rough manners in weaving sheds and their potential for marking certain weavers as ‘favourites’, is difficult to assess. Overlookers’ behaviour partly reflected the demands made upon them to represent authority in factories for employers, whilst
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not bending completely to them. This balancing act could work both to build up respect with weavers and fellow overlookers, and to mark themselves out as an independent status group in striving for overlooker bargaining power. 78 As the overlooker’s role evolved in Lancashire in the period just preceding this one, Joyce concludes,

The coercive nature of the overlooker’s authority should not be minimised, though it was in the small weaving establishments of north-east Lancashire that ‘driving’ was most severe. This was in general directed far more against women than men. 79

While stereotypes ascribing laziness, roughness, and stupidity to overlookers abounded, Joyce nevertheless concludes that overlooker-worker relations probably were not mainly based on coercion. These men also had an appearance to keep up and a role to maintain in the community; outside the workplace, for instance,

The overlooker was a man of parts... a man who sat on committees, Co-op and chapel. Leadership and influence were of the same coin as authority and coercion. The overlooker was popularly regarded as a skilled man, and above all as someone ‘respectable’. 80

Healey also emphasizes overlookers’ roles as men of influence in cotton communities, particularly if they avoided being seen as employers’ stooges. 81 He concludes that weavers would tolerate rough manners and bad language in an overlooker if he observed fairness and justice in maintaining weavers’ looms, demonstrated technical competence, and did not blatantly stoop to employers. Weavers’ association officials often may have publicly emphasized the former problem of roughness and bullying — but Healey implies this operated as a propagandistic vehicle for eliciting sympathy for weavers, who were stereotyped into the complementary role of being ‘delicate creatures’. 82 Despite this observation, he does not speculate on gender differences in weavers’ actual vulnerability to rough treatment (and the resulting perception of it).

Bullying lay to one side of weavers’ standards of ‘fairness’, and favouritism lay on the other. We must place sexual harassment against the backdrop of these complaints, for it may have been continuous with either of them — although quantitatively a lesser problem. Favouritism played a role in the recruitment of weavers, and subsequently in the workplace:

The logic of the industry required the overlooker to have ‘favourites’: to allocate the best beams to the most productive weavers, to ensure that their looms were kept running irrespective of what was happening to the looms of others. 83

Hypothetically, these men would elevate weavers demonstrating high productivity levels and work quality to positions of favour (where collective weaver pressure did not undermine such a path) — for overlookers’ income reflected output. Overlookers’ favouritism was hardly arbitrary then, and perhaps this system even placed checks on an overlooker tempted to play the game of favouritism only with women who first granted him ‘sexual’ rewards, who flattered him and put up with
'improprieties' However, we cannot conclude that rational economic motives were always present, or always provided an absolute check on the overlooker capable of creating 'favourites'. The same must hold true for bullying; roughness involving physical threats, discipline, and punishment was not always consonant with 'rational', income-based motives.

As the disputes unfolded, we see that officials did not apparently blame these female workers for their difficulties, nor did their communities. Brutal physical expression of power differentials could at times be doubted. However, official union commitment, later fed by rank and file agitation, saved the victims from any convincing assertion of their complicity in encouraging these propositions and attacks. Union solidarity demanded the sacrifice of hypothetical 'male solidarity' between officials and a few male overlookers. For by sending deputations and officials to pressure employers, and by organizing strikes, the unions framed these problems as workplace issues, and implicitly, these women were not just females or sexual beings – they were exploited workers, subjected to unreasonable workplace behaviour. As workers under overlookers or under a head carder, their interests were not identical with those of the men, although piecework rates in some sense bound them together. However, although women's special vulnerability in the workplace was recognized, this paper will argue that, in the long run, the recognition was superficial and fragile.

A WOMAN WORKER IS A WORKER
What other factors helped the victimized women to escape the charge of complicity? In many parts of England, women harassed and assaulted by men at work or on the street may have been told (and even have told themselves) that they invited these attacks, and should withdraw from arenas where they found themselves vulnerable. Otherwise, they were surely not 'respectable', and by extension, were likely candidates for prostitution. Possibly women cotton workers sometimes did compartmentalize victims of sex harassment as particular 'types' of females, different from themselves, rather than readily identifying with them. Women and girls obviously held different kinds of positions in the industry according to age and with respect to men and work process – although typically in a 'female' sector. And both men and women saw some women workers as rougher than others. Still, the disputes came to expose the specific victim 'type' as a myth, if only because so many females came forward as victims – even married women. The near absence of charges of complicity as the disputes progressed also demonstrates the extent to which these factory workers were not perceived as categorically immoral, loose or brazen; the working class in Lancashire and the West Riding did not concur with such persisting middle-class perceptions of females in mills or weaving sheds. Instead, they were legitimate wage workers. Feminists now suggest that workplace sexual harassment functions to make women see themselves primarily as sex objects or passive sexual beings and consequently, it forces them to take themselves less seriously as workers. This treatment further reinforces the feeling that they are fundamentally out of place in the wage-labour force; they should be at home – and, in a model situation, protected by males. However, if harassment or even the spectre of workplace sexual misconduct and pressuring were sometimes invoked to push women into the home – there is little evidence for this in these communities.

Perhaps this push remained an insignificant factor because of the special
character of the cotton district as a whole, with its very long tradition of women's work and as the first industry to be mechanized on such a large scale; arguably many historical links existed between factory and the protective, scrutinizing eye of family members. At this time female wage work in factories certainly continued as the norm, and a crucial source of income for many cotton district households. The woman cotton worker faced with sexual harassment may have found conflicting pressures on her, but the prevailing social solution was not for her to withdraw from the wage-labour force or factory employment.

Cotton union officials appear to have recognized women's special workplace problems selectively, rather than as a matter of course. Union officials' attention to workplace moral issues could be used quite instrumentally. They could obviously have an ulterior motive when they suddenly investigated problems specific to their female constituents. In Nelson, wage demands were pushed forward alongside this dispute over the moral character of a tackler, and facilitated elimination of the 'slate and board' system at a comparatively early date in the industry. In Oldham, the cardroom union was struggling to gain a secure footing in the middle 1880s onwards with workers, employers, and other unions — and perhaps it found 'moral appeal' quite useful. The situation of extensive harassment in a Todmorden mill, which involved a comparatively large number of women, pointed up the need for women to organize (or get organized by men) for their interests. This in turn must have boosted the image and appeal of trade unionism in that community. Possibly the Weavers' Association secretary used these circumstances in a very calculated fashion for further promoting his union's membership drive. Other possibilities also existed.

SPINNING MORALS

Unfortunately, unions or unionized male workers themselves were not immune to creating an artificial 'female morals' issue, or raising the spectre of sexual pressures to facilitate their battles for job control and male retention of skilled, higher-status 'mens' jobs. The most explicit example emerging from Lancashire within this period involved a thinly-disguised attempt by male trade unionists to maintain the sexual divisions of labour in Bolton-area spinning mills. In essence, this attempt was designed to uphold skilled males' wages and control over technological transformations, and to do this during a long depression in the spinning trade.

In late 1886, 170 male hands, members of the Operative Cotton Spinners' Association, struck at a Thomas and Joseph Heaton mill at Lostock Junction near Bolton, which lies northwest of Manchester. These men claimed they objected to the presence of three women recently hired as spinners or self-actor minders (formerly employed as piecers, work which was sometimes available to women) — on the grounds of morality and decency. The question of scanty clothes in the hot, humid atmosphere of mule spinning rooms and also the bodily postures required by the work figured prominently in the debate that followed. The Cotton Factory Times, which supported the male spinners' claims, evoked the dangers of the Henshaw-street situation. The claims made by the unionized mule spinners that female spinners — or, more probably females working as 'piecers', who assist mule spinners — would be exposed to morally dangerous conditions appear to have been a calculated device to rid the spinners of present and perhaps future competition. In turn, the firm denied the spinners' claims and threatened to sack strikers' female relatives working at the mill.
In this Bolton dispute, the spinners' officials may well have created their appeal for decency as a tactic for mobilizing support against employers. They could use such a morals issue to stir up hostility against employers (even self-consciousness among employers) who would appear ready to tolerate sexual impropriety in their factories. Of course, by creating such indictments, they might also remove some attention from their own workmates' potential for sexual misconduct or arousal. Alternatively, the spinning room stories may have reflected mores embedded in, or emerging from the class stratum of the spinners. On some level the spinners, as a 'respectable' and skilled part of the labour force, may have even accepted the suggestion that certain work settings were unfit for female workers. Their codes or rhetoric about sexual respectability could resemble those of middle-class alarmist writers. They could assert that proper females should not enter these public domains of industrial work, for if they did, they implicitly became fair game for male sexual advances following from 'intrusions' of the male eye and imagination; such females unavoidably became sexually available to the male work force. Even where the picture painted was grossly and intentionally exaggerated, it could begin to give credence to suspicions and tap latent anxieties. Whether this Bolton drive to preserve workplace segregation by gender was merely a defensive mechanism against the threat of cheap female labour intrusion into their all-male work domains, or, in fact, an effort to assert the respectability of their own lifestyles and households, in which wives and female kin might ideally stay at home, remains an open question. Such segregation could do both.

UNION MEN AND UNION MAIDS

Despite women's high proportional representation as members in many cotton unions, their active role in union affairs remained extremely small. This begins to explain why sexual abuse rarely raged as a union issue in the period. Union activism often sprang from the different motives and opportunities available to men and women.

While male textile workers displayed some apathy towards union affairs, they were without question disproportionately active compared to women. Males may have viewed organizational work as more important, seeing themselves bound to employment in the industry on a more permanent basis than women, without the interruption of child-bearing and child-rearing. Men could also be motivated by a desire to maintain the sex-exclusivity of a branch of their trade, fearing the drag of standard female wage rates. In essence, the industry's hierarchy based on wage rates and workplace status was reproduced within its unions, and an unsurprising outcome of this was that sharp occupational segregation by sex remained intact. Managerial positions also remained reserved for men, although in certain processes older women had child assistants working under them. Differential status for male and female workers in the industry, then, may have had implications for sources of some grievances such as bullying or sexual harassment; it unquestionably had implications for why men dominated trade union positions and for how females expressed grievances over working conditions.

Many factors kept women throughout the various cotton-related occupations across the district from attending meetings and holding local posts on committees, or as union dues 'collectors'. They usually had domestic responsibilities or were even proverbially 'houseproud', making them unwilling or unable to go out at night to meetings, after an exhausting day at work. Some parents were reluctant
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to let daughters go out at night, to meetings or to classes to learn skills which officials required to calculate wage rates. Where factors such as the sexual division of labour in household work and family care did not place absolute, external constraints on women’s participation, ideology about Victorian women’s social role certainly suggested that they had no place in political processes and activities; their lack of basic political rights, such as the suffrage, reinforced this belief. Finally, the formal structure of union meetings could also intimidate women, but this factor has received little attention from writers who try to explain women’s low participation rates in officialdom.

Some exceptions to women’s lack of participation in cotton union affairs existed, and union structure was itself variable. Jill Liddington and Jill Norris admit that women needed great determination to become activists, but that one main reason why a vigorous and extensive working-class women’s suffrage campaign could emerge in Lancashire in this period was that many women there could call on a well-developed tradition of radicalism. They were more likely to have had exposure to useful organizational techniques than many other British women, gained, for instance, through socialist groups or political discussions in Women’s Co-operative Guild branches. Trade union involvement also gave impetus to the suffrage campaign, with some women learning formal procedures for running meetings in their local weavers’ union branches. However, in general and despite incremental changes seen in the sex composition of some local associations during the 1910s, men still ran the unions and apparently did not recruit women activists into their ranks.

How did this affect grievance procedures for workplace complaints specific to women workers? In some districts, women are appointed as “collectors”, and assist in organizing work, but even such minor posts were reserved until recently for men, Barbara Drake wrote in 1920. House-to-house collectors took members’ weekly dues, pushed workers to join the union, and also served as an informal channel for conveying workplace grievances to the union. This job could prove undesirable. Fear of victimization lay behind some people’s hesitancy to become a collector or union committee member and also contributed to anxiety over making grievances of any kind. Workers with complaints had alternatives to approaching collectors, however. Several unions reported to labour investigator Barbara Hutchins that while women took little interest in general union work, they might appear at meetings if they had special grievances. Nevertheless, we can conclude that union structures remained largely male-dominated, women did not appear to channel their opinions either very directly or routinely into them, and many unions mainly struggled against unfair promotions, encroachments on standard wage rates (where established), bad work materials, and other explicitly economic issues. Consequently, it seems unlikely that complaints over sexual harassment ever received much attention.

More typical strategies for combatting unwanted advances surely existed. In her examination of a range of American women’s job experiences in approximately the same period, Mary Bularzik suggested a number of responses women used. Group responses including organizing or pressuring unions, turning to protective associations or settlement house organizations, and even resorting to legal action. These solutions probably remained rather marginal to Lancashire and West Riding women, nor could they place much faith in the intervention of outside regulatory agencies, such as the factory inspectorate. Yet similar individual
strategies to deal with these advances appeared possible. These strategies included leaving and looking for new jobs, warning other women about 'fresh' bosses, sharing information with other women about how to protect themselves from these men - even by writing to newspapers, avoiding empty rooms at work, and giving in so as to keep the job.\textsuperscript{123}

FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND FACTORY
In Lancashire and West Riding factories, which were relatively 'public' job settings where large numbers of men and particularly women were massed together, solidarity and friendship sprang up among women workers. Neighbours and kin often recruited girls into jobs in the local textile establishments, and women found, 'There was a sense of community in those early factories . . . and the weaving-shed was, as often as not, a real community of neighbours, friends and even close relatives'.\textsuperscript{124} Consequently, victims or potential victims of abuse probably often turned to fellow workers for aid or else found themselves looking for other jobs. Relatives also often intervened. In one case in the World War I period, a half-timer in northeast Lancashire named Margaret McCarthy found herself working as a 'reacher' under a 'drawer-in' at a local cotton factory.

I sat each day, during the long hours, crouching under a kind of tent of extended cotton threads, striving as hard as I could to keep pace with the rapidly-thrusting hook of the male 'drawer-in' with whom I was partnered. We had to work in complete harmony and with the greatest speed and we sat day closely huddled, knee to knee. Often it happened that the two stools seemed to me to be unnecessarily close, and my legs would be clutched between two quivering knees, to my astonishment and terror.\textsuperscript{125}

She also witnessed fairly open sexual play between nearby workmates. To shield her from this situation, her weaver mother took her out of this section of the mill and gave Margaret work with her in the weaving-shed as a learner.

As McCarthy's account suggests, where a cotton worker's individual pluck failed, familial protection systems continued to carry weight and complement other individual and occasionally collective resistance to unacceptable working conditions. Books listing complaints to cotton unions survive for some weaving communities from this period, and they reveal much about the extent to which kin networks spilled over into factories and actually superseded dependence upon union negotiation over workplace authority structures, conditions and disputes. The cases coming before the officials of the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers' Association from the years 1904 to 1909 reveal fairly typical circumstances facing many Lancashire women weavers. Kin could locate jobs for kin, but in the mills and weaving sheds of Preston, relatives clearly continued to shape features of worklife beyond the point of entry.\textsuperscript{126}

First, problems at home, quite apart from workers' own illnesses, caused absenteeism, and workers frequently relied upon other family members to explain days off work or lateness to tacklers and to plead for leniency. Friends also served this function occasionally. One husband bargained time off for his wife by going to her tackler's home.\textsuperscript{127} But perhaps more typically, relations went to a woman's factory to explain, and at times these go-betweens apparently failed in their missions, fearing that they might be late for work themselves, or finding tacklers

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uncooperative. Often the illnesses of women weavers' children or a collapse in childcare arrangements forced women weavers to stay out entirely for a few days – making them subject to fines, wage stoppages, or a temporary complete loss of their looms. Finally, domestic chaos could leave women fighting not simply for re-employment, but also for wages still owed them. One married weaver, employed at the Alliance Mill, complained to the union in 1908 that:

On Thursday morning June 4th I went to the mill at breakfast time and saw the tackler. I told him the nurse who had my baby had given it up and I could not leave it, and asked him to put a fresh weaver on the looms. When I went for my money I was told it was stopped 17/6.

My husband had been thrashing me and the nurse said she wanted no bother she would not have the child any longer. I said I had better go to the mill – and let know I went as above.

Several months later the case went before the county court, but the firm won rights to its 'losses'. Wage-earning mothers most typically found themselves in this double bind, in which they hurt families if they did not stay home caring for the sick or injured – and also hurt households by staying home and thereby losing earnings and even jobs. Many Preston sheds in this period evidently found replacement weavers quickly. This paradox in familial obligations also befell some working daughters.

Second, workplace disputes often came into the hands of union officials only several steps after negotiation between managers or tacklers or cutlookers and their workers, the latter also having mobilized kin around them to join in the fray. The case of a four-loom weaver in 1907, Agnes G----, of the Ashton Shed, probably represented an exceptional case of fierce, open argument, possibly because she had lost hope of being kept on. The union recorded.

She got a beam on Saturday week. 34 inch cloth in 36 inch loom, she couldn't gait her beam through being too broad; neither could the tackler, she made a fresh start & cut nearly an inch of the side out, she was sent for in the warehouse [where cloth was inspected] for being narrow; & fined 4d. on Monday last, she went back to her work & worked until breakfast time today; the tackler sent for her out just before 8 o'clock & said the manager said she had to finish; whilst she was straightening up, the weavers gathered round her loom when the manager came & asked what was to do; weavers went away, her sister got hold of him & slapped his face.

Some disputes recorded involved similar disagreements over badly adjusted looms and accidental damage to cloth; others involved lateness, absenteeism, cleaning machinery during breaks, bad material, wages owed to weavers, weavers quarreling with other weavers and even with the manager, and often, cursing and uncooperative tacklers. One woman's complaint in 1906 appeared as: 'This tackler is peevish with the weaver on every possible occasion, and swears heavily, throws picking bands at her instead of giving them to her in a proper manner, pushes her wilfully when passing her'. In some communities around Preston, some weavers and warpers went to managers' or 'winding masters' homes after hours to plead for their jobs, sometimes accompanied by family members. One young worker's
mother refused to allow her to return to work (after an argument with a tackler) until they had consulted her father. Another woman complained to the union that despite repeated requests, she had not been put with her sister at the mill. Managers and tacklers themselves also entangled family members in disciplinary actions taken against weavers; a tenter lost her job in 1906 when her weaver sister was forced off her looms, and a manager told a husband to tell his wife to go home after the company had fined her.

Unions were not necessarily peripheral to many disputes in mills and weaving sheds during this period, although these complaints books give little indication about how successful they were in negotiating satisfactory settlements in disputes. More strikingly, these books demonstrate that kin were often actively involved as well; a lost wage damaged a household, and thus, family members often literally negotiated and argued as a unit with tacklers or managers. Finally, these complaint books also confirm that many disputes centred on various behaviour of overlookers seen as objectionable. Rather than exposing them as vulnerable, embattled figures, this indicates the centrality and weight of their power in the workplace. Overlookers did not simply reproduce or amplify legitimate male-female power relations acceptable in working-class Lancashire homes.

**CHANGES IN UNIONS' COMMITMENT TO WOMEN**

Returning to an analysis of the disputes at Oldham, Nelson, and Todmorden, in which both sexual harassment and union intervention figured prominently, we can reach several tentative conclusions about the meaning of union intervention into certain 'women's problems'. It is clear that female workers' testimony in those cases dramatically undermined any assumption that mills or weaving sheds were 'gender-free zones', with sexuality left at the gate or on the doorstep. Sexual information could be shared there between workmates, and consensual sexual play between workers could also exist, as in Margaret McCarthy's factory. But at times sexual bargaining and interchanges had to be seen in sharp relief against the power men held over women in those workplaces. Yet what legacy remained in these disputes? What do they tell us about cotton unions' commitment to their women and girl members?

We lack much conclusive information about women's subsequent participation in those trade unions, and how long these incidents remained in the communities' collective memory or served as a reference point for other cotton towns' factory workers. Even more subtle information about how sexuality and gender divisions were constructed and contested outside the workplace in these towns, both for females and males, also eludes this study. Housework and child-care remained the province of women. These tasks and also more explicit regulation of daughters' movements by parents continued, as did some kin intervention into workplace disputes in the pre-World War I period (the war depressing the cotton industry and sending some women to work in munitions factories). While these strikes represent only static 'snapshots' of cotton communities and their negotiation of workplace authority structures, they none the less serve as clear examples of one style used by nascent unions to pull women workers into their ranks.

Unions could use their energies to exclude women from labour sectors, as in Bolton, and this kind of activity may have been the prevailing response of unions to women seeking wage work in the past. But where female labour was entrenched or seemed an imminent probability in an industry, unions could incorporate women...
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in a gender-specific way. In concrete terms, this meant pulling them in through lower contributions or dues (linked to lower wage rates), but nevertheless making little effort to involve them as active participants in setting union policy. For women, entering some of these unions earned a mixed message. Nascent unions could seize upon gender as it operated in the labour process both to expose and even exaggerate female workers' weak position – as revealed in sexual vulnerability. Unions could argue that they offered a protection (through complaint procedures) that was more rationalized and routinized than protection offered by kin and informal workplace groupings. They could underscore physical vulnerability and offer sexual guardianship, as a supplement to their offerings of improved wages and general solidarity. We could push this analysis further and say that male union officials, through hypothetical protection against sexual coercion, simply substituted one form of controlling women for another. However, this would invalidate women's own initiatives against 'dirty tricks', and also ignore the fact that these union interventions focused on constraining male overlookers. Unions did not, of course, displace kin interests in protecting women; their other benefits could bolster household income, and add members to the ranks of kin's own unions.

Likewise, the value of belonging to a union for women was not confined to this potential channel for fighting sexual harassment. A broadly-organized labour force could more effectively bargain around issues applying to all workers, female and male – wages, hours, work facilities, work load and breaks, materials, and equipment. Many benefits accrued to women through such membership. This only abstractly held true for Oldham, because the strikers lost their jobs. (And women rank and file trade unionists did not always share the priorities of male officials.)

When Todmorden union officials used the sexual harassment issue with somewhat 'opportunistic' motives, to increase union membership – inclusion of previously unorganized women into the union promised substantial basic advances at work. In all three of these towns, some women subsequently may have defined more of their grievances as union issues, and communicated those grievances more readily to their officials; unions could handle many complaints more effectively than family members and workmates.

However, giving a woman her union identity through sexual harassment disputes (men challenging men) may have further suppressed her willingness to become involved in union affairs; the disputes reinforced the 'paternalistic' character of union officials, men occasionally pushed to protect the purity of their homes. And even here, opportunism based on sexual harassment had a limited life and sobering history. Some officials' very modes of dealing with these cases suggest they could not end sexual harassment in ordinary ways. In Oldham, apparently only a court case moved the employers to sack the offending male employee. In the Nelson case, too, resolution of the dispute depended partly on two extreme forms of negotiation; union members would accept nothing short of sacking the offender, and employer intransigence resulted in a strike. In Todmorden only a traumatic and controversial investigation could bring details to light, one that few participants probably would have cared to repeat. While such confrontations could perhaps expand membership and boost a union's image, officials learned that negotiating over these complaints could spark off costly, major battles. Scandal proved convenient in some ways, but also caused pain and shame.
THE LIMITS OF UNION LIMITATION ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT
To wage an effective open struggle against unwanted sexual pressuring, women evidently did need male unionists and at times, additional community help to alter workplace relations.\textsuperscript{140} But even setting precedent policies against such harassment could not alone establish a bar on it. Sexual harassment bears a relation to the sexual division of labour, sexual division of union work and participation, and systems of production and reproduction under capitalism which, through a variety of factors (including, for instance, household structure and family ideology, definitions of skill in wage work), have grown up interlocked with the subordination of women. Under these conditions, the requisites of capitalist production can boost men's violence against women workers (as a means of 'policing' some of them), or put checks on it (by creating conflicting priorities and making the disablement of women counter-productive); and violence perhaps also compensates some men for these requisites' strains — although we certainly should not generate such a monocausal explanation for all male-perpetrated violence. Union officials did not treat these three disputes as a fundamental challenge to their assumptions about the sexual structuring of the industry. It remains difficult to judge whether they — or even the affected women — viewed sexual harassment as a temporary perversion or as a pervasive, ongoing problem that needed to be dealt with wherever men had control over women and girls in jobs. On one hand, in Nelson they circulated the decision made in their favour, which could suggest they did see the problem as one running through the entire local weaving structure. On the other hand, this seems largely an attempt to demonstrate the union's virtue in securing a satisfactory settlement on any issue. Other kinds of publicity around the strike presented the problem more as the individual pathology of Houghton Greenwood, than as one embedded in the prevailing sexual division of labour.

This Nelson case must remain ambiguous. It would be very heavy-handed to suggest the strikers should have attacked the sexual division of labour itself in these workplaces, and that \textit{this} would have represented the genuine acid test of whether they saw sexual harassment as a problem of pervasive male domination, as a male monopoly on supervisory positions. In Victorian and Edwardian England, this formulation remained highly unlikely, despite female 'protection' campaigns in various arenas Predictably, in this situation no one suggested that women become overseers or tacklers to redress the situation.\textsuperscript{141} Overlookers were, after all not just men, but men with 'brawn'.\textsuperscript{142} (Nor were these demands put forward in Oldham or Todmorden.) Another obvious complication with looking for such an absurd 'test' of their consciousness would be that overlookers were organized into unions themselves, and would certainly have refused females entry into their occupational ranks — which, common wisdom held, would have undercut their wages. Furthermore, such suggestions would inevitably have produced sufficient antagonism to undermine possibly crucial cooperation from the Overlookers' Society in this strike. (Becoming an overlooker also initially involved attending evening mechanics' classes.)

The women involved also must have realized that this solution could never materialize. Rather, like Mary McCarthy, the full extent of their ambitions may have been to work 'under a "good tackler", one who neither abused nor exploited his power over the women'.\textsuperscript{143} Chances were, they could find themselves dependent on an even worse man.\textsuperscript{144} While the situations were never explicitly presented as the problem that \textit{we today} might view as a system of male domination pervading
the industry, we cannot dismiss the possibility that some participants in these struggles saw it that way. Victimized women and their male comrades may have held disparate views on the subject. While women, along with men, directed their venom against individuals in the disputes (the scabs only by-products of the surface conflict), perhaps these women actually came to see Greenwood in Nelson, or Yates in Oldham as convenient ‘examples’ – symbols to focus their resentment on and warning flags they could raise to other men around them.\textsuperscript{145} They may have evaluated every overlooker they encountered on his potential to wrong them physically and sexually.\textsuperscript{146}

In contrast, the men in these workplaces had a vested interest in denying that the problem afflicted larger categories of women workers, or, in Todmorden, more than one mill; they made several public statements to this effect. The most deep-striking solution would have demanded implicating themselves as potential assailants, and would have thrown them into conflict with another male union whose existence demanded the continuation of a rigid sexual division of labour in cotton. Men have often controlled mixed-sex unions in part to enforce a sexual division of labour, to ensure its continuance. Male trade unionists were helping women in these disputes, on male terms. Public action against harassment was set in motion from above, but this was not pure and disinterested paternalism. Intervention by ‘scapegoating’ an individual offender could also constitute a controlled means of evasion, an evasion of acknowledging that certain work structures provide ample room for sex-specific exploitation, that is, around sexuality.

The social space in which sexual expression and male intimidation of females were negotiated changed temporarily in each of these communities. We have seen that while the union struggles granted women protection where other measures had essentially failed, this protection could have mixed connotations and promised to have a limited lifespan. How these struggles actually affected broad community regulation of sexuality afterwards is by no means clear. The revelations bore the potential for suggesting that females were sexually vulnerable in every social space. Consequently, they may have cultivated an increased paternalistic scrutiny of females’ sexual behaviour, and displaced some enforcement of sexual standards that might formerly have fallen more heavily on female peers.\textsuperscript{147} The disputes inevitably then touched on a number of relationships in these cotton towns.

The disputes forced male union officials to focus closely on women workers. Officials and the workers jointly waged these battles, and at times their partnership drew in wider communities, for strikes inevitably strained resources in households and tested working-class solidarity across gender lines. The union found itself not only pitted against individual men, overlookers and a head carder, but also against employers and ‘outsider’ scabs. For some, the disputes also posed questions about male-female relations more generally – in wage-labour settings, but possibly in other spheres as well. Finally, when the investigations exposed victimization of many peers, sometimes hidden abuse, women workers had to re-evaluate how they might best protect themselves and their workmates from that abuse, and perhaps question the desirability of eventually sending their own daughters into the mills.

\textbf{AFTERWORD} 
Workplace sexual harassment obviously has a history in the cotton industry, an industry where women made up a high percentage of all workers. It is one issue
that helps us to describe women’s work and unions containing many female members with greater precision. These disputes demonstrated that the high proportion of female union membership in cotton could be a very superficial, incomplete index for measuring those women’s workplace power. Nominally, organized women were better off than their unorganized sisters in other industries, but this difference disguises at least two major problems.

First, even organized women could be exploited by male bosses and co-workers in ways such as being sexually harassed, with those men knowing they would not be punished. Unions that collectively took on sexual harassment were anomalies, then, as they are now. Second, women’s status within their unions remained problematic and ambiguous at many levels, even when women constituted a majority of total membership. The disputes at Oldham, Nelson and Todmorden hint that the rank and file and their officials did not always see eye-to-eye. Furthermore, in most cotton unions women were not integrated into their official structures or in the work of running the union at all. Conflicting views and incomplete integration occur in any trade union, but for women, an added disjuncture existed. Conflicting views could stem from broader social perceptions based on gender, and from struggles based around male privilege and male aggression that inevitably also entered work space, and sprang from it in literal ways. And disputes such as these — in which power differentials based on gender were openly named, discussed, and condemned — did not promise to erase that gulf in perception. Union officials could close that gulf selectively and opportunistically. Male domination of union structures generally also precluded women’s ability to propose or even imagine changes in workplace conditions that might have better accommodated women’s ‘double burden’. However, apart from this, union membership always meant real benefits for women, coming in the form of higher wages, fewer fines, and a shorter day (or conversely, resistance to ‘short time’ when work availability was slack).

These disputes showed that men were really surprised by what women did face at work. But it is difficult to claim that the disputes alone could modify their view that employers and bosses exploited workers to include the insight that males took advantage of female workers in specific, pervasive ways. Even less can be concluded about whether women gained new expectations about union work and union participation.

This historical work surely raises some questions for women workers in the 1980s. We are still battling to demonstrate that sexual harassment is a collective problem of workplace exploitation, with women as its chief victims. Lancashire women often privatized their complaints, and many women wage workers today face a similar dilemma. We still individualize our complaints, and worry about how we individually look, dress, act, and ‘incite’ men to harass us. Only public exposure of sexual harassment as a major workforce problem created by men and feminist analysis of male privilege has reassured us that we can protest and expect to find support. But that support must offer us something far better than the dictum that we women should never leave our homes or low-status job sectors, or the idea that only a special type of man harasses women.

Strategies of protest against workplace sexual harassment are not obvious or simple. Cotton unions in the past gave legitimation to calling these pressures injustices, and unions will surely play a major role in shaping future policies against sexual harassment. Some of this involvement may prove to be problematic.
Sexual Harassment

We must also recognize that ideology around appropriate workplace relations and women's place in the work structure has shifted somewhat since the beginning of this century, and continues to shift under the impact of mass redundancies. Continuing analysis of how sexual harassment operates and how it has changed over time is important for both organized and as yet un-organized women workers. It can help women to demystify their sexual oppression and status as workers. Obviously, the issue also has implications for male workers.

In fighting workplace sexual harassment, we need to invite more than paternalistic sympathy from men who work alongside us (and more likely, above us). Men will continue to turn a blind eye to this discrimination and abuse, or continue to defend it as a male worker's 'perk' unless they learn several lessons. Women have a right to wage work and need their wages, most households are not maintained by a male wage alone, and women freed of this gender-specific harassment can better defend all other workers' rights. Women very often experience male sexual advances as violation, certainly not as flattery. Finally, analysis of sexual harassment shows us how workplace relations are connected to power structures in households and wider communities, and how deeply male-female power struggles run through all of them.

NOTES

List of abbreviations for newspapers, journals, and organizations

CFT Cotton Factory Times
CNT Colne and Nelson Times
HC Halifax Courier
MG Manchester Guardian
NRvw National Review
OC Oldham Chronicle
OEC Oldham Evening Chronicle
OPCBROA Oldham Provincial Card and Blowing Room Operatives Association
TAHBN Todmorden Advertiser and Hebden Bridge News
TDN Todmorden and District News
TDWWA Todmorden and District Weavers' and Winders' Association


2 Of women participating in this survey (distributed by shop stewards of the National Association of Local Government Officers throughout the city), 52% reported experiencing sexual harassment in jobs – of these, over half in their present jobs. This harassment involved a range of activity, including offensive remarks and also unwanted physical contact or touching. 'Women on the Offensive' (NALGO representatives in Liverpool) Liberty Hall Forum, Liverpool, 7.2 1982 See also NALGO's pamphlet, 'Sexual Harassment is a Trade Union Issue' 1981

3 Gordon 'The Politics' p. 8; Mary Bularzik 'Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Historical Notes' Radical America vol. 12, 1978, pp. 25-43.
In manuscript sources, petitions from domestic servants to the London Foundling Hospital provide many examples (held by London County Record Office and also the Thomas Coram Society), and branch reports to the National Vigilance Association's main office document some cases (for example, N V A Executive Minutes, Fawcett Library, London. entries from Manchester 31 1 1905, 20 2.1905, 25 2.1908.)

B. R. Mitchell and P. Deane Abstract of British Historical Statistics Cambridge 1962, p 188; Barbara Drake Women in Trade Unions 1920, Appendix, Table 1

Joseph White The Limits of Trade Union Militancy: The Lancashire Textile Workers, 1910-1914 Westport, Conn. 1978, p 41

Gerhart von Schulze-Gaevernitz The Cotton Trade in England and on the Continent 1895, pp 26-27 But even in weaving, alleged 'equal pay' became mythical in many instances.


For recent discussions about the connections between home and work, see Patrick Joyce Work, Society and Politics The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England Brighton 1980, especially pp 112-15; Liddington and Norris, One Hand Tied, and theoretical re-workings of this question in Cynthia Cockburn The Material of Male Power Feminist Review no 9, 1981, pp 41 ff; and Judy Lown 'Not so much a factory, more a form of patriarchy': Sexual divisions and domestic ideology in a nineteenth century Essex Silk Mill British Sociological Association paper, 1982

George Silk Report, for the Oldham Provincial Card and Blowing Room Operatives' Association, 19 2 1887, Oldham 1887, p 3

Further information about this strike is drawn from 'Turnout at the Henshaw-street Spinning Co ' The Oldham Chronicle 22 1 1887, p 8, 'Extraordinary Turnout at Oldham' CFT 28 1.1887, p. 4 and 4 2 1887, p 7; 'The Henshaw Street Spinning Company. The Late Strike' OC 19 2 1887, p 8, 'The Late Extraordinary Turn-Out at Oldham' CFT 25 2 1887, p 1; and Silk Report

Curiously the company quickly located replacements for the workers on strike, despite probable public knowledge about the carder still employed by the mill. CFT 25 2 1887, p 1; OC 22.1 1887, p. 8. While accounts do not spell out where the mill recruited replacements, surely these new workers would have learned soon enough that they were replacing workers on strike and what problem instigated the strike. But securing employment in Oldham at the time proved difficult, therefore, the squeeze of unemployment seems to be a reasonable explanation for this rapid, successful recruitment, rather than an indication that the emerging charges against Yates were false (OC 4 2.1887, p. 7).
Sexual Harassment

25 OC 5 2.1887, p. 3. Silk Report pp 6-7, implied that some of the charges not pursued were 'ten times worse', but they felt reluctant to persecute the man further.

26 Silk Report p. 3.

27 Silk Report p. 4.

28 See, for instance, Liddington and Norms One Hand Tied p 86. Examples also emerge from interviews conducted with cotton industry workers - for example, Manchester Studies Unit, Manchester Polytechnic, tapes 654 and 670.

29 The predominantly Yorkshire and Lancashire term 'to marlock' suggested to play a prank, to frolic, 'lark', or, 'to make marlocks at', for example, meant 'to make eyes at, to flirt', in parts of Yorkshire. See Joseph Wright (ed) The English Dialect Dictionary vol 4, 1903, p. 40.

30 CFT 4 2 1887, p. 7.

31 Despite Oldham cardroom workers' nascent efforts to build up an independent bargaining force against wage cuts, their fortunes remained closely connected to the spinners' position. While the organized spinners had survived a three-month lockout in the Oldham district in 1885, reports of the Oldham cotton spinners' association for the year 1887 complained of ruinous economic conditions, a prolonged trade depression, 15% wage reductions, an extra levy, and surplus labour. See the Oldham Operative Cotton Spinners and Provincial Association Monthly Reports 4 1 1887 to 7 8.1888. Like the spinners, the Oldham Provincial Card and Blowing Room Operatives' Association's position from 1885 to 1887 was defensive. Women members had shown fortitude in recent disputes, but the Association still found that women at various mills were easy targets for carders' 'terrorism' and 'bating' for alleged offences, and that female union contributions were too low to sustain the organization adequately. Oldham Provincial Card and Blowing Room Operatives Association Report of the Council and Balance Sheet, quarter ending 31 12.1885, and for the quarter ending 30 9 1887, OPCBROA Annual Report of Proceedings for Year Ending Dec 31, 1887. And economic fortunes of these two sectors also remained tied together at the level of the household economy (where household members worked in both sectors).

Silk Report, p. 7, he makes defensive comments about the girls.

32 On cardroom organization development and women's participation in the Cardroom Amalgamation's hierarchy, see Turner Trade Union Growth pp. 145-47, 161, and 293.

33 Dermot Healey 'Overlookers' unpublished paper 1977, who cites comments in, for example, F. B. Smith Parsons and Weavers: A Study in Lancashire Clerical Work 1897, p 58.

34 Silk Report, p 11, emphasis added.

35 The slate and board system involved comparing weavers' earnings and production rates to pressure 'under-producers'; establishing list prices involved demanding standard wage rates on work.

36 Accounts of this strike appeared in The Colne and Nelson Times, from 4 12.1891, p 4, through 18 3.1892, p. 8. A notice of a meeting concerning the strike is preserved at the Lancashire Public Record Office, Preston, MS. DDX 1207/2/5. I am grateful to Alan Fowler for information from the Nelson Weavers' Association minute books. It remains open to debate whether the union actually used charges against the tackier solely to push forward the other labour issues, or did not intend to do this initially.

37 Nelson and District Powerloom Overlookers' Society collection, Nelson Library Archives: Minute book of weekly Committee meetings covering 1.11.1889 to 7.11.1895. Entries referring to John Hartley's case are 26 12.1891 and 19 1 1892. Entries referring to policies on the strike are 17 and 26.1, 16 and 20.2, and 13.1 1892.

47 Alan Fowler, personal communication
48 The Origin and Progress of the Nelson Weavers’ Association Burnley 1922, p. 18; CNT 11 3.1892, p 8
49 For instance, different forms of production unit ownership, worker mobility, religious backgrounds, and even ‘social punty’ consciousness may have been significant. These require further historical investigation
50 The town doubled its population between 1881 and 1891, and population growth in the next decade also remained large.
52 Award quoted in May E. Abraham’s report on the condition of work in the Lancashire and Cheshire cotton industry, Brit Part Papers XXXVII (Part I), 1893–94, p 116
54 Quote is from Oldham Evening Chronicle 7.11.1893 Cut lookers inspected weavers’ work. See also Joyce Work, Society and Politics p 101
55 Todmorden industry was heavily concentrated in cotton spinning and the manufacture of cotton goods and fustians at this time, but also included some foundries and machine works. Kelly’s Trades Directory of W Riding of Yorkshire 1917.
56 The presence of one or more women at this meeting does not indicate whether women generally attended this union’s meetings.
57 Tout was born in Exeter in 1869, started working in Burnley (three miles south of Nelson) as a half-timer in a mill at the age of ten. He was evidently an able publicist, deeply committed to the plight of cotton operatives and the severe problems of the industry after World War I. He became the Secretary of the Todmorden Association in 1911, and from 1922 to 1923 served as the first Labour M.P. from the district. (Todmorden Weavers’ Association Jubilee, 1880–1930 Fifty Years Progress Todmorden 1930, p 23) In 1929 he was also returned as M.P. for Sowerby.
58 Accounts about the strike are drawn from The Manchester Guardian 10 1 1913; The Todmorden Advertiser and Hebden Bridge Newsletter 24 1 1913, The Halifax Courier 11 1 1913, Todmorden and District News 17 and 18 1 1913, CFT 17 and 24 1 1913. On child abuse in English history, see Margaret May ‘Violence in the Family: An Historical Perspective’ in J.P. Martin (ed) Violence and the Family Chichester 1978, and Manchester Studies Unit, tapes 640, 660, 672, 709, and especially the account of a ring spinner from Bolton, tape 630, on a physically abusive overlooker whom parents confronted.
59 CFT 17 1 1913, p 4 On winders’ work, see Liddington and Norris One Hand Tied pp. 91 ff
60 HC 11.1 1913, p 2, emphasis added
61 CFT 17 1 1913, p 4
62 CFT 17 1 1913
63 Typical agitation and negotiation by the Association in this period revolved around issues such as inferior working materials, prices on work, ‘bad trade hours’, lack of notice given, a ‘bad tackler’ in another mill (unspecified problem), and battles against fining and artificial humidification. See Calderdale Metro. Borough Archives Dept TU 36/445, quarterly reports and balance sheets of the Todmorden and District Weavers’ and Winders’ Association for 1912 and 1913, and TU 36/38, Minute Book of the Committee of the TDWWA covering 3.11.1911 to 16.5 1914? References to this particular dispute appear in resolutions for 24 12 1912, 3 1 1913, and 24.1.1913.
64 CFT 17 1 1913, p 4
65 Todmorden and District Weavers’ and Winders’ Association Report and Balance Sheet for Quarter ending 28 12.1912, p 4 See also Reports for 29 3 1913, 28 6.1913 and 28.9 1913 (Calderdale Metro. Borough Archives Dept TU 25/445) Busbey, ‘The Women’s’ gives 1908 membership figures for the TDWWA as 1,756 men and 1,630 women (total, 3,386). Todmorden Weavers’ Association Jubilee p. 12, gives membership figures of 3,245 in 1906, 4,187 in 1912 and almost 5,000 in 1913. This latter publication makes no mention of this particular investigation. Did the publicity become too negative?
66 No evidence exists showing this work to be an outgrowth of any contemporary women’s rights advocacy in the town, despite hints that various bodies discussed suffrage for women and women’s trade unionism. (Perhaps issues around sexuality were not so strongly tied to other ‘women’s welfare issues’ among working-class feminists, in contrast to
a number of middle-class suffrage activists' concerns). Local papers reported large gatherings of the Todmorden Women's Co-operative Guild, which held both lectures and socials (TDN 18 10 1912, p 3); they also featured discussions of women gaining seats on the Todmorden Board of Guardians ('Way for the Girls' TDN 16 5 1913), and women's suffrage (TDN 29 11 1912, 'The Franchise Bill and Women's Suffrage' and 'The Terrors of the Anti-Suffragist Prospects of Amendments' TAHBN 24 1 1913). The Todmorden Textile Trades Federation and the Todmorden Trades Council discussed suffrage for women in late 1912 (Calderdale Met. Bor. Archives TU 36/722, 30.9 1912, TU 38 Minute Book 11.1912). The TDWFA also made a grant of 10/- to the Women's Trade Union League in October of 1912 (TU 36/38 Minute Book of the Committee of the TDWFA, 4.10.1912).

67 Letter to the Editor TDN 17 1 1913, p. 2.
68 CFT 17 1 1913, p. 4.
69 CFT 24 1 1913, p. 5; and 'A Bee Line or Two' TAHBN 14.2 1913, p. 6, 'The Church and Public Morals' TAHBN 24.1.1913; Letters to the Editor TAHBN 7.2.1913, p. 7, 'Relation of Physical Culture to Morals' TAHBN 31 1.1913, 'Todmorden Mills and Morals' TDN 28 2 1913, p. 6.
70 'The Church and Public Morals' TAHBN 24.1.1913; and Letters to the Editor TAHBN 7.2.1913, p. 7.
71 'Todmorden Mills and Morals' TDN 28 2 1913, p. 6.
72 HC 11 1 1913, p. 2.
73 The Oldham assault cases can serve as examples of this.
74 This occurred at Todmorden and Oldham, although we cannot presume that these women told no one. This hesitancy could have indicated not only caution, fear of victimization or fear of being blamed for inviting attacks, but also a shift in their consciousness about what is 'appropriate' workplace behaviour for men.
75 See Judith Walkowitz 'Male Vice and Feminist Virtue. Feminism and the Politics of Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain' History Workshop Journal no 13, 1982, p. 87, for a discussion of working men and social purity. Her suggestions seem only partly applicable to cotton district men.
76 Also see Dixon 'Work and Morals' p. 92 (on Yorkshire mills), and an exchange of letters in the CFT 17 7 1885, p 7; 4 9.1885, p. 7; and 11 9.1885, p. 7; and as a supplement to these, 19 6 1885, p. 7.
77 Bularzik 'Sexual Harassment' p 30.
78 See Healey 'Overlookers', also Joyce Work, Society and Politics pp. 100-01.
79 Joyce Work, Society and Politics pp. 100-01.
81 Healey 'Overlookers' pp. 13 ff.
82 Healey 'Overlookers' p. 10, referring to the 1880s and 1890s. For a later period and arguments made by Tout about weavers committing suicide over fines, see 'Do Factory Fines Cause Suicides? Women Workers Who Suffer' Liverpool Weekly Post 30 7 1927, p. 7.
83 Healey 'Overlookers' pp. 11-12, and also p. 5.
84 For a comparison over the operation of favouritism and women workers, see the somewhat ambiguous account of Ada Nield Chew in Dons Nield Chew The Life and Wranglings of Ada Nield Chew 1982, pp. 86 ff., 93 ff., 101, 108, and 115, regarding a Crewe clothing factory in the 1890s.
85 Joyce Work, Society and Politics p. 102, writes, 'A powerful weaving trade unionism always saw it as its interests to support the organisation of the overlookers, and many overlookers would have had unrealised weaving relations. Overlookers often kept on their union cards on promotion to overlooking', (from weaving).
86 On the politics of female vulnerability in the late nineteenth century, see Walkowitz, 'Male Vice'. On 'street politics' in a later period, see J. Lock The British Policewoman Her Story 1979, The Shield vol. 6, no. 3, 1930, pp. 134-35; and The Woman's Leader and the Common Cause 1930, p. 77.
87 Liddington and Norris One Hand Tied pp. 84 ff.; Drake Women in Trade Unions p. 118.
88 See above, footnote 28.
89 Obviously, women's definitions of what was inappropriate behaviour or language varied enormously. Alice Foley A Bolton Childhood Manchester 1973, p. 58, found that 'In the preparation department . . . by temperament I was rarely shocked by natural or rude
vulgarity, but had a strong innate objection to being expected to snigger at dirty tales or sly innuendoes and work-mates learned to embrace me as a "bit of an oddity".

90 Some of this rhetoric about women in factories fixed on the loose, coarse-mannered factory girl stereotype, and some stemmed from discussions over infant mortality, its links to wage-earning mothers, and these women's alleged general inability to fill domestic and maternal duties. See, for instance, Margaret Hewitt, *Wives and Mothers in Victorian Industries* Westport, Conn. 1975; C. Allen Clarke, *The Effects of the Factory System* ed. 2 1899, pp 84-86; E. S. Chesser, 'The Lancashire Operative Women's Work in the Factory and Home' *National Review* vol. 54 1909, pp 684-92, and a reply to Chesser from Lancashire, Helen Gordon Clark, 'The Lancashire Operative' *NRw* vol 54 1910, pp. 1058-60, and the Gertrude Tuckwell clippings collection, T U C Library.

91 Bularzik 'Sexual Harassment' pp 26, 28; Gordon 'The Politics' p. 9
92 See Bularzik 'Sexual Harassment', Gordon 'The Politics'; and on the contradictory element in the underlying ideology, see A A S C. 'Organizing' pp 18-19
93 These problems could be quite conveniently ignored, for instance, if a male trade unionist within the same union was hypothetically guilty of harassing a co-worker. It is unclear what alternative mechanisms of censure existed. (For an incident concerning card room workers, see *CFT* 11 11 1887.) On the problems of unions and sexual harassment from co-workers, see Bularzik 'Sexual Harassment' pp 36-38, and A A S C 'Organizing' pp. 27-29, which discusses the bind unions find themselves in. 'Which workers' rights are to be protected and which are to be sacrificed? The rights of women workers are not generally seen as a priority'.
94 It is somewhat unclear whether the union officials or the rank and file essentially formulated and pressed these forward
95 On Oldham in this period, see Turner, *Trade Union Growth*.
96 It seems only too obvious that women workers were unlikely ever to have employed such tactics, for instance, to oust men from jobs in order to secure better positions for women. And what better positions were open to women?
97 I am grateful to Bill Lazonick for this reference, and to Zoe Mumby for additional detailed information
98 The Operative Cotton Spinners' Provincial Association, Bolton and District, *Minute Book*, 1884-1888; see entries for Council Meetings 5 and 19 10 1886, and Committee Meetings 9 and 16 11.1886, 14.12.1886. The conflict involved both women spinners and female piecers, and was also brewing in the Association's Atherton Branch in 2 1887. Inconclusive negotiations with employers were recorded in *Correspondence with Employers*, Master Cotton Spinners Association, Box for 1886-1887, 13 10 1886 letter from Thos and Jos Heaton. While bad trade marked the period, Lancashire spinners managed to avert another 5% wage reduction the previous winter. Despite the year's unprofitable trade, 'Most mills have during the year kept their machinery fairly well employed' Amal. Assoc of Operative Cotton Spinners, *Annual Report*, 1886, n s no. 6, U. of Manchester Library Archive Dept. holds these surviving Bolton Cotton Spinners records
99 Piecers were assistants (one little, one big) to a spinner on a pair of mules, and were typically male. See *CFT* 31.12.1886, p. 1
101 *CFT* 28 1 1887, p. 1.
102 The possibility also exists that sexual harassment was used by male workers to drive or keep females out of a work sector, in the interests of male exclusivity. The various ways sexual divisions of labour were negotiated in this industrial period need further study. In addition to the mule spinner dispute, these years saw much male-female antagonism in
trades such as printing, metal work – particularly nail- and chain-making, cigar-making, various divisions in tailoring, brass-work, the felt hatters’ trade, bookbinding, and the flat-pressing branch of the pottery trade.

103 See, for example, the suggestion made in the CFT editorial comment, 31.12 1886, p. 1. ‘Those of the female sex who follow such employment are generally the daughters of careless and indifferent men, who have no thought or consideration for the future welfare of their offspring’ (Here the distinction was made between women as minders in spinning and as weavers/winders/reelers.) The extent to which these sentiments represented full-fledged mores is debatable. See also, for instance, White The Limits pp 35–37.

104 Bularzik ‘Sexual Harassment’ pp 26, 28

105 It was subject to some regional variation, and Joseph White observes a very marginal upswing of women’s roles in cotton union governance during the first decades of the twentieth century. White The Limits pp 53–56. The explanation for this change seems unclear.

106 Labour investigators such as Barbara Hutchins claimed that women were indif- ferent because they were always on the move, either changing jobs or occupation. Webb Collection, London School of Economics, Section 4 Vol XLVII Folios 49–59.

107 The Northern Counties Amalgamated Weavers Association, the regional amalgamation of local unions, ‘acquiesced in and possibly even connived at preserving the best paying jobs for men only.’ White The Limits p 50. See also ‘Women’s Wages: Shackleton Satisfied’ Women’s Labour News no 2, 1907, p 2 (publication of the Manchester and Salford Women’s Trades and Labour Council).

108 Typically, for instance, as weavers with girl tenters under them.

109 Alice Foley A Bolton Childhood p 77, while working as a union collector, felt guilty about reporting married women workers whom she found doing housework when they had claimed they were incapacitated. Margaret McCarthy Generation in Revolt 1953, remembers her mother working as a weaver from 6 a.m. until 5.30 p.m., and then coming home and working as a (self-employed) milliner until 11 p.m. – when she was first widowed, just before W.W.I. See also Ada Nield Chew’s 1912 story, ‘All in the Day’s Work. Mrs. Bolt’, in D. N. Chew The Life pp 161–66, and accounts of high standards of house-keeping in cotton towns in C. Stella Davies North Country Bred A Working Class Family Chronicle 1963, pp 162–63, and Walter Greenwood Lancashire 1951, p 15.

109 Officials were, at some levels, ‘mathematical functionaries’ Manchester Studies Collection, Tape 673, gives an example of a father who would not let his weaver daughter go out evenings except to night school, and 672, a man who went to a union school ‘to learn to reckon up calculations’, and became part of the weavers’ committee in Colne.

110 Late Victorian middle-class women’s participation in campaigns centred on ‘moral’ issues – temperance, the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, and sometimes social purity – represented only a partial and very specific challenge to this assumption, a challenge not altogether inconsistent with the role, which made women ‘incorruptible’ guardians of the home sphere and morals more generally. For a discussion of this ideology, see Anne Summers ‘A Home from Home – Women’s Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century’ in S. Burman (ed) Fit Work for Women 1979, for instance pp. 45, 56 ff.

111 Alice Foley described her union organization as a ‘virile “shop committee” ’, and gives some explanations for women’s hesitancy in officially voicing discontent (not only fear of victimization, but also, in the case of shop meetings, the desire to get home to ‘possible irate husbands awaiting their delayed evening meal’). Cited in Liddington and Norris One Hand Tied p. 97. The account of another Bolton woman from this period, who piped up at a union meeting, sounds as though she (aged about fourteen) did this somewhat naively – Manchester Local Studies Unit, Tape 640.

112 Independent Labour Party branch activities, Labour churches and their Socialist Sunday School offspring for teaching socialist principles to children, Clarion Clubs and other socialist groups which combined political fellowship through meetings and leisure activities may have provided some opportunities. However, the W.C.G. may have provided a better political education for women. See Liddington and Norris One Hand Tied; Karen Hunt ‘Women and the Social Democratic Federation: Some Notes on Lancashire’ North West Labour History Society Bulletin vol. 7, 1980–81 pp. 49–64, accounts in M. L. Davis (ed) Life as We Have Known It pp. 73–108 on the Women’s Co-operative Guild; and Chew The Life pp. 25 and 46.

See B. L. Hutchins, Women in Modern Industry 1915, pp. 104 ff, and Hutchins’ correspondence in the Webb Collection, London School of Economics archive. On women union presidents in the 1890s, see Liddington and Norris One Hand Tied pp. 97-98

Drake Women in Trade Unions p 121

Liddington and Norris One Hand Tied p 96.

See B. L. Hutchins, Women in Modern Industry 1915, pp. 104 ff, and Hutchins’ correspondence in the Webb Collection, London School of Economics archive. On women union presidents in the 1890s, see Liddington and Norris One Hand Tied pp. 97-98

Drake Women in Trade Unions p 121

One Hand Tied pp. 97-98

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Liddington and Norris One Hand Tied p 96.

B. L. Hutchins, Women in Modern Industry 1915, pp. 104 ff, and Hutchins’ correspondence in the Webb Collection, London School of Economics archive. On women union presidents in the 1890s, see Liddington and Norris One Hand Tied pp. 97-98

Sixteen women are described as collectors in the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers’ Association Cases and Complaints Book 1 1904–1909, held by the Lancashire Public Record Office DDX 1089/9/8/1. The study includes 134 complaints, 126 of which are from Preston and the remaining eight from Chorley, Blackburn, and Accrington. The cases are generally short, with few details provided, and do not include any analysis of the underlying issues. The women’s complaints are often related to the working conditions and treatment they received in the mills, including issues of safety, pay, and wages. Some cases also include incidents of sexual harassment and physical brutality. The women’s experiences are often characterized by a lack of support from male colleagues or managers, who are described as being unwilling or unable to address their concerns.

The following cases are from the Preston and District Power-Loom Weavers, Winders and Warpers’ Association Cases and Complaints Book 1 1904–1909, held by the Lancashire Public Record Office DDX 1089/9/8/1.

Complaints Book p 218

Complaints Book pp. 203, 204, 208, and 248.

Complaints Book pp. 220, 228.

Complaints Book p 241

Complaints Book p 2.

Complaints Book p 205.

Complaints Book p 86.

Complaints Book pp. 230, 244.
Sexual Harassment

135 Complaints Book p. 214
136 Complaints Book p 100
137 Complaints Book pp. 83 and 256
138 This seemed to be the case in the Leeds' clothing industry, for instance Diane Gold, personal communication.
139 See above, footnote 37.
140 No evidence exists that some form of 'rough music' was used to pressure the offenders outside of work, even where such rituals of popular justice survived into this period. But, obviously, forms of ostracism for different types of offenders could exist, and less ritualized forms of confrontation with them.
141 This kind of solution was actually proposed in F T Ring 'Forewomen' Women's Industrial News n.s. 56, 1 1912, p 22. See also J Ramsay McDonald (ed) Women in the Printing Trades p 66, who suggested that in some trades, employers and (girl) workers would scorn the idea of forewomen. Amy Harrison Women's Industries p 39, found that employers in some industries in Liverpool had difficulty in trying to place women as forewomen, either because they did not stay in jobs long enough or because they did not want the responsibility (although, in one example, this would have meant 28s wages per week rather than 14s.). Drake Women in Trade Unions p 121, in speaking of the cotton industry, concluded that women weavers were not encouraged to tune their own machines or in any way qualify for the post of overlooker, whose duties included the lifting of the heavy 'beam' - '... and women could not in any case be employed unless the factory was equipped with up-to-date lifting apparatus and trucks'. However, she asserted that some women did tune their machines, instead of waiting for overlookers.
142 Manchester Studies Unit tape 113. Healey 'Overlookers' See Cockburn 'The Material' pp 43-44.
143 McCarthy Generation p 18. Also see discussions in the story of 'S B.' in Margaret Pollack (ed) Working Days Being the Personal Records of Sixteen Men and Women Written by Themselves 1926 pp 227-38; Squire Thirty Years p. 137; Joyce Work, Society and Politics p 101; and for a boy's hostility towards 'Minders [who] were brutes to us Learners and Little Piececs', Rowland Kenney Westering An Autobiography 1939, pp. 21-22.
144 Manchester Studies Unit tape 113
145 To compare, see the discussion in Judith Walkowitz, 'Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence' Feminist Studies vol 8, 1982, pp. 564 ff
146 McCarthy Generation pp. 17-18, implies that this warrness reached the proportions of a mythology: 'The method of calculating the wages of the tacklers on those of the weavers led to a system of humiliation and terrorism by these men upon the cotton weavers, especially directed against the young girls. In some instances, it led to outright tragedies...Conscious of the fear in which the weavers held him, particularly the younger, inexperienced or less efficient women, these tacklers, brutalised and power-loving men, quite frequently abused their position...and every weaver of yesterday knows how the tacklers used to lie in wait in the dark lobbies near the factory entrances, or behind the bales of cotton, to seize the unwary girl'.
147 Foley, A Bolton Childhood p 58, wrote: 'We held to a fairly conventional, if unexplored, moral code [at my factory] and if anyone in the group was suspected of "going out" with a married man she was usually due for a telling-off by her companions; those few culprits known to be living "tally" were accepted, but such behaviour was generally frowned upon'.
148 For some recent analyses of women, the labour market, and trade unions, see Angela Weir and Mary McIntosh 'Towards a Wages Strategy for Women' Feminist Review no 10, 1982, pp. 5-20; Beatrix Campbell Wigan Pier Revisited Poverty and Politics in the 80s 1984.