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**The Resilience of Gender Segregation
in the UK General Print Sector**

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Introduction

Against a background of technological change, national bargaining and union merger, this paper considers the nature of changing equality practices at the workplace level in the printing industry in the UK. Cockburn's (1983) seminal study on the printing industry pointed to the historical basis of gender segregation and its associated gendered demarcation of work. Underpinning this analysis was what Phillips and Taylor (1980) have characterised as an ongoing sexual division of labour and skills. In the context of changing forms of work resulting from technological developments, it is timely to revisit occupational segregation in print manufacturing. Arguably a number of initiatives in print are providing a more enabling climate to challenge traditional forms of gender segregation. Yet, despite undoubted change, it is the case that job segregation, through a resilient gendered division of labour, remains a characteristic of the industry. This paper aims to provide insights into this resilience by drawing on national level collective agreements and union strategies and exploring their impact at the local level.

The paper highlights the importance of industrial relations history in understanding the contemporary printing industry in the UK. Industrial relations were characterised by strong, closed unions with a high degree of autonomy over the management of labour. Whilst there have been major changes in the industry in the last two decades, a strong trade union presence and above average pay has remained intact (see Newsome 2000). Gendered segregation in the industry is embedded in the traditions and history of the main printing union, the GPMU (Graphical, Paper and Media Union). 17 per cent of the GPMU membership are women, a figure that has remained constant since 1994 (Colgan and Ledwith 2002: 181). Whilst the long defined culture of the print industry both positive (strong union, pay etc) and negative (gendered division of labour) has remained relatively intact, and been protected to a greater or lesser degree by product and labour market conditions, labour process characteristics and the resilience of union organisation, these conditions are now in a state of flux.

Trade unions in Britain have taken important steps to raise equality awareness, examine equality practices within their own organisations and within the industries they represent; see for example, Bradley et

al (2002), Colgan and Ledwith (2002) and Healy and Kirton (2000). Bradley et al's (2002) study on minority women and trade unions demonstrates the gap between important policy and structural initiatives on gender and race and the experience of disadvantage reported by black women. In line with policy and structural developments in the wider UK union movement, the GPMU has taken important steps to confront inequality and discrimination in the Union. They have an equality policy adviser, have provided resources to enable representatives to challenge unfair practices and have structures to enhance the representation of women in the Union's decision-making process (GPMU 2000, Colgan and Ledwith 2002). These initiatives were not introduced, nor continue, without opposition; Colgan and Ledwith suggest that 'that this success may be fragile is constantly with the GPMU women activists' (2002:182). To understand the structures that underpin gender segregation, the paper firstly considers the historical background that shapes contemporary customs, before turning to an analysis of national equality policies and their effect on workplace practices.

Historical Background

The gendered segregation in the industry is embedded in the traditions and history of the GPMU. The GPMU is the result of a merger, often described as a marriage of convenience, in 1991 between two unions that represented workers in the paper, packaging and printing sectors, the National Graphical Association 1982 (NGA) and the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades 1982 (SOGAT '82). Ostensibly, the NGA represented the craft workers in the industry while SOGAT represented the semi-skilled and un-skilled workers, although there was some blurring around the edges. The NGA was a largely male dominated union while SOGAT catered for a high proportion of women members mostly employed in hand finishing work in binderies (Webster 1996).

Unusually in Britain, the National Agreement between the employers association, the British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF), and the GPMU remains important in the determination of pay and conditions¹. The National Agreement covers three grades of workers, Class I, II and III;² men dominate the higher paid areas (Class I and II) and women

¹ General print is one of the few remaining industries in the UK where terms and conditions are determined by national agreement. The Workplace Employment Relations Survey found that multi-employer bargaining fell from 41 per cent of private manufacturing workplaces in 1984 to just six per cent in 1998 (Cully et al. 1999)

² Examples of these grades of workers are:

the lowest paid (Class III). These distinctions are firmly rooted in the historical practices and culture of the printing industry where there emerged, over a period of time, clearly defined production units that employed highly skilled craftsmen who jealously maintained and guarded their craft. Webster reflects on the male domination of craft work: 'In craft work, men's jobs have come to be defined as 'skilled' because workers in these jobs have historically organised strongly in defence of their interests and have striven particularly hard to restrict entry (by young workers, or by women workers, or by those not following the apprenticeship route) to their line of work' (Webster 1996:48).

The composing and printing rooms continued to be male dominated 'craft' areas. Women began to show a presence in the industry from around 1850 but were confined to the bookbinding area. Cockburn records that their numbers in this area rose from 3,500 in 1851 to 14,200 in 1891 and that "they often did skilled work, but their skill did not win them the earnings that a craftsman could command." Cockburn (1983) goes on to register the appalling pay and conditions that the women suffered and that their tasks of folding finished sheets and collating were referred to as 'women's work' and that it was only when automation came into the binderies to cope with mass production that rows over demarcation arose. Child (1967) records a dispute in Dublin in 1883 that arose because 'women were being put on men's work' (p 147). In contrast, Cockburn claims that in "printing proper" (referring to composing and machine minding), "no more than one in a hundred was a woman" (1983: p 23). Cockburn (1983) points to the example of women being drafted into the ranks of the 'craftsman' during the World Wars but in printing efforts were undermined by the men bringing their ailing and retired colleagues back to the trade. This despite a dilutee agreement that ensured women were the first to be dismissed on the premise that " 'jobs for our boys and women to keep home for them' ensured that few females remained to work at craft jobs after the end of hostilities" (Cockburn 1983:37).

Gennard and Bain described work in class III departments, "a large proportion of this work was done by hand by semi-skilled or un-

PRE-PRESS: *CRAFT/CLASS 1* - Scanner Operator, Planner-platemaker, Apple Mac Operator, Proofing, *CLASS II* - Platemaker, Film Stripper
PRESS ROOM: *CRAFT/CLASS 1* - No.1 Machine Minder, No.2 Machine Minder, Machine Minder, *CLASS II* - Small Offset Machine Minder, Machine Assistant
POST PRESS: *CLASS I* - bookbinders, machine rulers, experienced cutters, envelope machine adjusters, *CLASS II* - persons engaged in the following operations: casemaking, quarter binding, indexing, laying on gold, person in charge of automatic fed sewing machine, *CLASS III* - other operations including: baling waste, banding, book canceling, book packing, creasing, dyeletting, inspection and checking, jacketing, sewing machine assistant, lithographic preparers.

skilled workers, most of whom were women” (1995:5). This assessment of skill level was despite finishing and despatch departments requiring workers with experience in the tasks of folding printed sheets, counting, collating, gathering, stitching, binding, trimming, packing and despatch; in other words, a breadth of skills. However, if the jobs were analysed and evaluated for sex discrimination, the rationale for such distinctions is likely to be found wanting. The complexity and breadth of the class III occupations indicates that the work is rewarded according to a gendered analysis of skill (see Phillips 1980).

Alongside their under-representation in the industry, women ‘were under-represented at all levels of union organisation’ (Colgan and Ledwith 2002, Roe 1999 p.4). The GPMU is well aware of its image of being a white, male dominated union (studies have pointed to the importance of women union officers in encouraging women’s union participation, e.g. Kirton and Healy 1999). The cliché, ‘male, pale and stale’ has been used to demonstrate this perception. Indeed, a study commissioned by the Department of Trade Industry, match-funded by participants in the print industry, recorded that one of the weaknesses of the industry was that there was an unrepresentative workforce that was ‘predominately white and male whereas there are growing numbers of women and minorities amongst customers and potential skilled recruits’ (BPIF 2001b:11). The Union has appointed an equality advisor. In order to address an imbalance in the representativeness of the membership the Union has introduced positive action to its electoral system for the executive council leaving reserved seats for women. This facility has also been extended to branch committees. A women’s committee has been formed and the Union has raised its profile on the issues of age, gender, gay and lesbian rights, and black and ethnic minority discrimination.

However, our research (Healy et al 2001) has already pointed to an interesting contradiction regarding union organisation at workplace level. Whilst it is true that the national agreement continues to fulfil an important function, workplace union organisation is essentially passive. This, as we shall see, has important implications for the application of legislation, union policy or national agreement elements concerned with discrimination and equal opportunities.

Research Methods

The paper draws on research undertaken in two phases in a region close to London, a regional labour market characterised by low unemployment and skill shortages. Firstly, a postal survey was

undertaken in late 1998 of 118 chapels³. This resulted in a return of 63 questionnaires which represented 42 organisations⁴ (a response rate of 53 per cent). The survey data are indicative of policies and practices in this South-East region but no claim is made for their wider representativeness. The postal survey provided data about pay and conditions, union organisation, new technology and flexibility at work, equality and management style. This paper focuses on those aspects of the data that relate to equality.

The size of the firms in the survey reflected the dominance of small firms in the sector (see table one).

Table 1
Size of Firms (No of Employees)

Size Band*	No. of firms in survey
0 – 9	8
10 – 19	12
20 - 49	17
50 - 99	3
100+	1
Total	42+

* 8 chapels did not identify number of employees in the company.

+ this figure does not account for the multiple trading names of companies operating in the sector nor multiple chapels. The survey does account for multiple chapels hence the total return of 63 questionnaires.

Secondly, the survey was followed up with a semi-structured interview programme during 1999/2000 with FOCs (Fathers of the Chapel) and one MOC (Mother of the Chapel) (workplace union representatives) from sixteen companies. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, was recorded and transcribed. The purpose of the interviews

³ In the UK, printing has traditionally adopted a different nomenclature to the rest of the trade union movement. In printing, a branch is synonymous with a geographical region, a chapel is comparable to a workplace branch. A branch secretary is a full-time paid regional official of the union and a shop steward is referred to as a father or mother of the chapel (FOC or MOC).

⁴ An organisation may operate under a single trading name or comprise two or more trading names. Equally, one organisation may house one or more chapel.

was to explore the postal survey issues more deeply. Findings from the qualitative part of the study are gendered in that they are drawn primarily from male interviewees and this will undoubtedly colour the interpretations but are indicative of what the BPIF (2001b) have identified as the 'unrepresentative workforce' that is 'predominantly white and male' (p.11). For the purposes of anonymity, the firms to which we refer are given pseudonyms derived from one of their main production purposes. Further interviews were undertaken with branch officials. In addition, documentary sources from the BPIF and GPMU were analysed to identify formal rules and processes.

Findings

The findings are organised by an initial consideration of the Union Policy equality policies at national level followed by an analysis of local practice with regard to policy, treatment, segregation, pay disparity and flexible working practices.

National Equality Policies. This section draws primarily on documentary data. In the printing industry, there is a national commitment to equality of opportunity by employers and unions. This is set out in the National Agreement which contains a clause on equal opportunities under the heading Dignity at Work (BPIF1999:2). This clause states that the parties are 'committed to the development of positive policies to promote equal opportunities in employment regardless of workers' age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, creed, colour, race or ethnic origins'. The document advises that the parties have drawn up guidelines to deal with all forms of discrimination and that these guidelines will be brought to the attention of all employers and employees. The provision of the agreement is well intentioned but is generally driven towards compliance with the existing legislation and does not offer a groundbreaking approach to the issue. Employees who experience harassment in one form or another are invited to progress their complaint through the existing grievance procedure, if informal approaches fail to resolve the issue. Jointly agreed guidelines have yet to be produced.

The GPMU have unilaterally produced an *Equality Handbook* (2000). The Handbook is aimed at workplace representatives and provides an overview of the diversity of equality issues and relevant legislative principles. It also sets out the relationship between equality and the grievance procedure to inform representatives in their representative role and provides advice on how members might seek redress in the case of discrimination or unfair treatment. Importantly, the book provides an educative role in helping members understand the nature

of discriminatory practice and rights in organisations and focuses on pay, family responsibilities and health and safety. The book concludes in an organising vein encouraging women to get involved in the Union by providing information on equality networks and union involvement.

The Handbook provides a model equal opportunities clause (Appendix One) and is a vehicle through which the national union seeks to engage local branches in the adoption of equality policies and principles. In other words, this is an enabling vehicle that branches may use to negotiate equality principles into local agreements. It contains the following clause:

‘The management undertake to draw opportunities for training and promotion to the attention of all eligible employees, and to inform all employees of this agreement on equal opportunity’

The advice to branches is that

‘all companies should be asked to commit themselves to this principled statement. However, this on its own is not enough. Chapters should ensure that they have a copy of the GPMU’s Equal Opportunities Policy ‘Challenging Inequality’ (available from your branch) which suggests action should be taken in a number of areas to tackle any disadvantages suffered by a particular group of workers’ (p.7).

These initiatives are important and certainly provide resources for chapel representatives to get equality on the negotiating agenda and to recognise and handle equality grievances. How this translates to practice is of course inevitably problematic (see for example Dickens 2000, Kirton and Green 2000). We now turn to equality policies at the local level,

Local Equality Policies: We investigated the policy commitment to equal opportunities by firstly exploring the incidence of equal opportunity policies. We then compared this with the UK national Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) data, which indicated that 64 per cent of all workplaces had an equal opportunities policy (Cully et al 1999:27). Cully et al. report that both the operation of an equal opportunities policy and the monitoring of employment were associated with lower proportions of workplaces with a relatively low female presence (1999:26) and size of firm (p.264). Given the preponderance of small firms in print and the low female presence, the incidence of equal opportunity policies in Table

Two may be viewed as unexpectedly high. However, discussions with Union branch secretaries, suggest that policies may be confused with statements, which as Dickens (2000) points out, not all organisations recognise the difference (p.139).

Table Two

The proportion of chapels who had equal opportunities policies and training as compared to health and safety policies and training

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total N=
	%	%	%	
Equal Opportunities Policy	54	33	13	54
Health and Safety Policy	58	42		59
Health and Safety representative	52	48		62
Equal Opportunity training	5	95	0	59

We also made an organisational comparison with the incidence of health and safety policies (Table Two). We did this in order to disentangle, commitment to equal opportunities from a broader commitment to wider social legislation. Further we were comparing a best practice principle (equal opportunity policies) with a statutory requirement (health and safety policy⁵). This was illuminating in that there was little difference between the existence of either type of policy. This is worrying from the trade union perspective since half of the representatives had received health and safety training, and one of the easier things to push for is policy adoption (implementation is more problematic). With equal opportunities, there was no such training underpinning, indicating that there is neither management nor union commitment at the workplace level. Where there was training, it was more likely to be provided by the GPMU. Inevitably, the lack of training will result in the level of awareness on equal opportunities being very low. There is much work to be done by the Union in this area to ensure that firms have policies and to raise awareness among officials.

⁵ See Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Unequal Treatment: Following on from the above findings, Table Three will come as no surprise. It would appear that equality issues are not of considerable significance in the daily life of the chapel. It is possible that the findings indicate that recognition of equality issues may be the product of little awareness and insight into equality problems and may be the result of underreporting. It may also be the outcome of low awareness leading to a reluctance to take seriously equality issues. Nevertheless, in the climate of low awareness, the importance of equal pay stands out.

Table Three
The range of equality issues dealt with by the chapel

Issue	Yes N= (%)	No N= (%)	Total N=
Sexual harrassment	1 (2)	98 (57)	58
Racial harassment	0 (0)	58 (100)	58
Equal pay	8 (16)	51 (84)	59
Bullying	3 (6)	54 (94)	57
Other equality issues	1 (2)	56 (98)	57

The qualitative data underpin the conjecture that lack of awareness may account for the results in table three. Note the following comment on the discriminatory allocation of overtime:

Yeah I think, I'm talking about women's bench work again now, I mean we might have had a few casuals here or something, in this department but that's only for loaders and stuff . . . etc, we haven't got enough but they always ask the lads if they want to do overtime first, that's the first rule. *BookCo*

The underpinning for this rational was evident in DiaryCo where two thirds of employees were women, we were told

'yeah sometimes (the proportion of women) makes our jobs a little bit harder . . . nothing against women'.

Despite being the dominant group in this firm (unusually in print) women were seen by the union representative as a problem, boding ill for effective recruitment and representative functions. This was particularly evident in LabelCo, where the proportion of casual or part-time employment was high and where the representative did not really seem to know his members or potential members:

That's often baffled me, who's who because I can never keep up with them. You see, some of the faces come in, they're here every day' *LabelCo*.

The consequence of this lack of awareness is found in an equality grievance over discriminatory holiday entitlement. Nevertheless, this was successfully pursued by the Union leading to an increase in women's holiday from 20 days to 26 days. Unequal treatment is underpinned and institutionalised by gender segregation.

Gendered Segregation: The existence of a gendered hierarchical structure in the industry was evident in our visits to printing firms and is reflected in the interviews. From the transcripts it is clear that the so-called 'craft' or skilled tasks are dominated by men and that women are mainly concentrated in the clerical and finishing areas. Only in two firms were women involved in skilled work: typesetting in one and a woman was being trained in skilled tasks in the bindery in another. There were no women in any of the machine rooms we visited. Post press was almost a totally female domain but men undertake the higher paid jobs, attributed as 'skilled'. This was clearly demonstrated in the direct mail company where all the 'skilled' tasks were undertaken by men and the 'bench' work allocated to women, many of whom were employed on a part time basis and complimented by casuals on an 'as and when' basis. The following quotations are typical of the entrenched segregation:

There's definitely a lot more men than women, there's say about six women in the company, a secretary, a couple in the offices and some in bindery doing finishing work'.
CatalogueCo

All the women are employed in the finishing and in the office . . . *StationeryCo*.

There's one . . . well she's a militant but she's dark and she works in the accounts office. *TicketCo*

Attempts to combat this job segregation have been recurrent in the Union. Since the merger of the unions (NGA and SOGAT '82) there have been recurrent demands at the Union's biennial conferences demanding the abolition Class III from the national agreement. Such abolition could make significant inroads into gendered segregation. Gennard (1990) claims that during the 1980s, before the unions were merged, SOGAT's attempt to abolish Class III failed to attract the support of the NGA who felt that this move might "impact on established differentials in the industry" (p417). At the 1993 conference a motion was put to abolish Class III on the basis that its existence was a barrier to achieving equality in the industry. Unfortunately, the motion was remitted due to the current, and timely, dispute over the continuation of the national agreement (GPMU 1993:120-121). In 1997 a motion called for greater urgency in the 'monitoring of equal opportunities in the printing industry' (GPMU 1997). The mover claimed that despite 20 years of equal pay legislation women in the industry were still being treated 'like second-class citizens'. This was in the main due to women being denied access to training, and with it the opportunity to upgrade to higher paid jobs. Answering on behalf of the Executive Council, the national officer put the responsibility for any failure back to the branches who, he claimed, had not followed practical advice and guidance provided by the national union (GPMU 1997: 76).

This is a crucial point. Despite union density remaining relatively high at workplace level, organisation is essentially passive (see Healy et al 2001). In some workplaces union organisation remains, *de facto*, divided on SOGAT – NGA , and therefore largely gender, terms. More generally there is little weight behind moves to translate national policy or initiatives into workplace realities. We will return to this point later.

The consequence of job segregation is directly linked to pay disparity.

Pay Disparity: In industries covered by the GPMU, women earn on average between 58.6 per cent and 65.4 per of men's weekly pay; hourly earnings are little better with women earning anything between 62.6 per cent and 72.7 per cent of men's hourly pay (GPMU 1999). This gendered pay gap is far wider than the average pay gap in Britain which currently stands at about 80 per cent although this is wider for part-timer workers. Most part-timers are women. The following table (Four) on the link between part-time and full-timers' pay confirms the earlier speculation about equality awareness. Nearly two thirds of responses indicated uncertainty as to whether or not part-timers and full-timers received the same basic pay or same extras. Further, where

respondents were aware, they were more likely to report that they did not get the same pay or extras. Notwithstanding the small numbers, these findings do give cause for concern. Unions are making strenuous efforts in their publicity to demonstrate that they can protect the conditions of work of part-timers and women, it is clear that more needs to be done at the workplace.

Table Four
The relationship between part-time and full-timers' pay

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
	N= (%)	N= (%)	N= (%)	N=
Do part-timers get the same pay as full-timers?	7 (17)	10 (24)	24 (59)	41
Do part-timers get the same extras as full-timers?	7 (18)	8 (21)	24 (62)	39

The interviews revealed that deliberate strategies were adopted to avoid paying women the rate for a 'man's job'. Note the following example:

There was a dispute over wages in the bindery department. A woman has moved from a hand machine job to a binding machine . . . she is being paid her old wages and been given an extra £10. She has said she wants equal pay. Wages are being reviewed and I will speak to the Managing Director on the subject when the new wage structure is in place. If its not favourable I will speak to him again. *StationeryCo*

This example is particularly illuminating. As stated earlier, the National Agreement rates jobs quite clearly according to three classifications. Yet when a woman is moved to a higher rated job, she is not given the grade, but retained on her old grade with a £10 supplement (or sweetener). For this to be changed, the woman herself needed to challenge the practice. The FOC acknowledged that it could be an equal pay issue but again, the woman had to raise the issue despite the gendered visibility of pay demarcation structures by occupation. Discriminatory procrastination pending a new wage

structure was also used to delay, and no doubt demotivate, the aggrieved woman.

Flexible Work Practices. The flexibility clause in National Agreement promised some opportunity for flexibility between jobs, which as is clear from the earlier discussion, could lead to some disintegration of gender segregation. Table Five considers how flexibility is working in practice.

Table Five
Respondents' Perceptions of Flexible Working Practices

Flexibility	Yes N= (%)	No N= (%)	Total N=
Is your firm helpful over family problems?	46 (84)	9 (16)	55
Are GPMU members required to work flexibly	53 (86)	9 (15)	62
Are GPMU members willing to work flexibly	57 (97)	2 (3)	59
Are GPMU members required to work flexibly:			
a) within departments	47 (90)	5 (10)	52
b) between departments	35 (66)	18 (34)	53

A ray of light on the gloomy picture so far emerges from the investigation of family friendly practices. When asked if firms were helpful when family problems arose (e.g. childcare, family sickness) 84 per cent gave a positive answer. It might be expected that small firms might be less likely to be helpful on family issues, the survey suggests that the opposite is the case. This finding is consistent with Scheibl and Dex's (2001) study on flexible and family-friendly working arrangements in SMEs (small and medium enterprises).

In printing, shift patterns are common and with the increased investment in new technology their use is being increased. Machinery is expensive and many firms want to ensure that they are used for 24 hours over a six or seven day period. This has important implications for women's opportunities given the gender order. In print this is

intensified since the higher paid class of work tends to be associated with a variety of shift patterns. Class III work is more likely to be organised on a day shift basis and to accommodate a range of hours including part-time and casual work. From our case studies, the following is the only firm where women were employed on Class I work and gives some insight into their hours of work:

They both work shift work, one . . . almost completely works night work and the other one's on continental shift, one's continental shift night work and the other one's day work, continental shift. *CatalogueCo*

At this company, continental shifts means covering six days over 24 hours either permanently on days or nights. Each shift lasts 12 hours. In this case, the shifts provide mixed benefits. There is little flexibility in the length of shifts, but at the same time these patterns offer longer periods of free time than normal full time work.

Tight local labour market conditions allied to endemic skill shortages might have produced a stimulus for the appointment of people from non-traditional sources (ie not white males), but there was little evidence that this was the case. Caucasian workers dominate the industry; the only person from a minority ethnic group in the survey firms was an agency temporary worker. Skill shortages are exacerbated by little evidence of training and there were few apprentices and no female apprentices. There is little or no promotion/career development on offer. A BPIF training survey report for the sector reveals that "machine printers are most likely to receiving training through their employment" albeit that that training will tend to be provided on a "relatively informal 'learning through doing' manner" (BPIFb 2001:102). This kind of training will be partial and inherently gendered in its distribution. The lack of vision within the industry regarding training that tends to compound a corresponding lack of flexibility is succinctly captured in the following quotation from the report: 'that's the nature of the game – tend to pigeon hole people in terms of training needed rather than train to be an all-rounder...it would be beneficial to the individual to have a greater appreciation of the whole process (BPIF 2001:93) .

Taken together the survey and the interviews present contradictory findings. Table Five indicates a high level of requirement for flexible working (86 per cent) and a commensurately high degree of willingness to work flexibly (97 per cent). The survey findings also indicate that this willingness, although less pronounced, operated across departmental barriers (66 per cent). However, interviewees revealed that functional flexibility, where it was practised, tended to

be limited to within departments and in some cases constrained to particular jobs within departments. Experience suggests that constrained flexibility more accurately reflects practice. Part of the reason lies with the approach of management who we have characterised as 'reluctant flexibilisers' (Healy et al 2001). It was also clear that 'downward flexibility' was the order of the day rather than full flexibility which would enhance printers' skills and marketability. Union representatives indicated dissatisfaction with the operation of flexibility in that their members were being denied potential development. This was intensified by the employers' reluctance to provide training. At the same time, it was clear that there was evidence that local union activities were maintaining some control over the extent of flexible work practices. The picture on flexibility also results in the sustaining of traditional hierarchical and gendered segregation. The patterns emerging from this study will provide no comfort for those who see flexibility as means of improving equality.

Conclusions

Despite commitment (at least rhetorical) to the concept of equal opportunity, there appears to be no evidence that the traditional highly gendered division of labour has broken down in the remotest sense. A joint collective approach to challenging inequality is slow in its emergence. Unilateral developments by the printing union, the GPMU, have made further inroads in providing resources, advice and guidance to local chapels. The transmission of national advice to local implementation is more problematic.

The survey findings indicate that whilst over half of representatives reported that their firms had equality policies, awareness of equality was low. The interviews revealed an entrenched acceptance of the gendered *status quo*. However there was some evidence of challenging gender pay disparities but overall the picture was low awareness and a low prioritisation of equality. There is little or no promotion/career development on offer, few apprentices and no female apprentices. It should be remembered that the interviewees were union representatives who should be at the forefront of promoting social justice by challenging inequalities. If unions are unable to raise the consciousness of their representatives and involve more women, their equality initiatives will fail. There is a consciousness of this within the GPMU (more recently spurred by an unfavourable equal pay case) so that new initiatives requiring branch secretaries to receive equality training are being introduced in 2002. However in the meantime passive workplace union organisation means traditional structures remain generally unchallenged. Furthermore as recruitment is now largely undertaken through standard word of mouth or advert

channels, rather than through the Union, a further possible avenue of intervention has been closed down (Healy et al 2001)

Technological developments provide potential for change in the gender order in print with the breaking down of clear demarcation lines. This challenge to demarcation was formalised in the industry's National Agreement with an acceptance of 'full flexibility of working between all occupations and elimination of demarcation lines' (BPIFa 2001:4). It is clear that such an agreement has the potential to challenge gendered segregation.

Whilst the survey results appeared to indicate that flexibility was wide; on closer investigation, the qualitative study demonstrated that this was deeply constrained and again gendered. There may be tacit collusion between management and unions (see Healy et al 2001), which although differently motivated, limits the impact of national policy initiatives. It is also the case that the continued sectionalism in the Union, demonstrated by the existence of separate chapels reflecting the formerly separate SOGAT and NGA membership, accounts for resistance to (gendered) flexibility between departments at the organisational level. It was clear that 'downward flexibility' was the order of the day rather than full flexibility, which would enhance printers' skills and marketability (Healy et al. 2001). Thus, the shift to flexibility is only partial and results in the sustaining of traditional hierarchical and gendered segregation.

The paper has presented a picture of deeply entrenched segregation, and gendered disadvantage in this industry. Although the research focuses on one region, it is likely that many of the findings may be replicated elsewhere. The steps used to challenge the evident gendered resilience have been shaped by a prescriptive best practice approach. Dickens (2000) argues that part of the explanation for the inadequate translation of equal opportunities prescription into practice is the distribution of power within organisations (p.157). Uneven distribution of power resources is a critical factor in an assessment of moves to more equal opportunities and the reproduction of gendered segregation (see Bradley (1999) and Healy and Kirton (2000) for a deeper discussion of gendered power resources in the workplace and trade unions). For Dickens, equal opportunities is not necessarily the win-win game portrayed in the prescriptive literature (p.159). She states that 'Work is a place where identities are shaped and lived out. For men, work can be an affirmation of their masculinity: equal opportunities, the entry of women into that work, or paying women equivalent wages, can seem like an attack on that identity' (Dickens 2000:160). This social conditioning is central to attitudes in printing and is at the heart of the indifference to equality that has emerged in

this paper. The incentive for print managers to take on board equality initiatives is little. Our experience suggests this is not on their agenda. This study suggests that firms in printing are negative to equality with practices that fit what Collinson et al (1990) have characterised as vicious circles of job segregation. GPMU initiatives to provide mandatory training to branch secretaries to a step towards breaking these vicious circles. It will not however be sufficient and needs to be extended to include FOCs and MOCs in this process. Of course, what is needed is a radical transformation of organisational culture to effect change. Given the number of small firms in the industry, the tardiness of the BPIF in providing guidance to member firms, the task is daunting.

In conclusion, it is the case that the National Agreement advocates equality, the Union at the national level provides support for equality initiatives and developments in terms of technology and flexibility promise more opportunities for women. However, at the workplace level this is not manifested in practice; equality issues are rarely on the agenda, skill shortages do not provide opportunities for women and the pay gap is resilient and demarcation has only loosened around 'men's work'. We would argue that until the gendered nature of representation is challenged, gendered segregation will remain an ensuring characteristic of the industry. Thus, historical practices, gendered notions of skill and micro-political processes with regard to union structure provide a fertile ground for the reproduction of gendered segregation.

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Appendix One

Model Equal Opportunities Clause

The parties to this agreement are committed to the development of positive policies to promote equal opportunity in employment regardless of workers' sex, marital status, sexuality, creed, colour, race, ethnic origins or disability. This principle will apply in respect of all conditions of work, including pay, hours of work, holiday entitlement, overtime and shift work, work allocation, guaranteed earnings, sick pay, pensions, recruitment, training, promotion and redundancy. The management undertake to draw opportunities for training and promotion to the attention of all eligible employees, and to inform all employees of this agreement on equal opportunity.

The parties agree that they will revise from time to time, through their joint machinery, the operation of this equal opportunity policy. If any employee considers that he or she is suffering unequal treatment on the grounds of sex, marital status, sexuality, creed, colour, race, ethnic origins or disability, he or she may make a complaint which will be dealt with through the agreed procedures for dealing with grievances'.