

Abstract

Title of Thesis: WOMEN AS PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS IN 1950s
 AMERICA: AN ANALYSIS OF SPATIAL HYSTERESIS

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Bourdieu employs the concept of hysteresis to describe a temporal lag or mismatch between habitus and field. I expand on this concept to develop a theory of spatial hysteresis, in which multiple fields are included in the analysis. Spatial hysteresis may occur when one field undergoes change at a faster rate than another field, producing changes in capital holdings and habitus that affect the second field. Twelve in-depth interviews provide limited evidence of spatial hysteresis in women's positions in consumer society and the labor force in the postwar United States. Rapid changes in consumer society may have increased women's capital holdings and altered their habitus, paving the way for the changes that subsequently occurred in the labor force.

WOMEN AS PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS IN 1950s AMERICA:
AN ANALYSIS OF SPATIAL HYSTERESIS

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2006

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Introduction

The concept of *hysteresis* – a temporal lag between cause and effect - has long been overlooked and under-theorized in sociology. I draw on the brief discussions of hysteresis in Pierre Bourdieu's work and develop a more fleshed out theory of *spatial hysteresis*. Spatial hysteresis has a temporal component, but also emphasizes differences between social spaces, or fields. An instance of spatial hysteresis occurs when the pace of change in one field exceeds the pace of change in another, and members of both fields find the positions they hold in the two fields to be in conflict. Both types of hysteresis are usually resolved through further social change.

I suggest that a case of spatial hysteresis may have existed for women in the fields of consumption and the labor force during the decades following World War II. To examine this hypothesis, I interviewed twelve women who were young adults during that period about their experiences in the labor force (as producers) and in the field of consumption (as consumers). While my data is inconclusive, it provides some support for my hypothesis.

I begin this thesis with a discussion of the theory of hysteresis in general and spatial hysteresis in particular. I review the literature for data on the positions that women held in these two fields during the postwar era, with a focus on how the changes in one field might have been felt in another. Finally, I present the results of my interviews.

Chapter 1 – A Theory of Spatial Hysteresis

Pierre Bourdieu considered himself an empirical sociologist rather than a theorist, but during the course of his empirical work, he developed a rich set of theoretical tools. His concepts of *habitus*, *field*, *capital*, and *practice* have been used and debated by many sociologists, yet his theory is often criticized for providing a much better explanation of social reproduction than social change. In this chapter, I develop one of his lesser known concepts, *hysteresis*, as a way to understand social change in industrialized, highly differentiated societies.

Pierre Bourdieu's Theoretical Concepts

While other scholars have used the Latin term “*habitus*,” in sociology it is most commonly associated with Bourdieu’s work. In his words, habitus are

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (Bourdieu 1990: 53).

Bourdieu’s conception of habitus developed during his early anthropological work. As a young structuralist, he studied social rules, but found that those rules were rarely followed to the letter. Rather, members of a society shared a sense for how things are likely to go, and improvised accordingly. The habitus is the set of predispositions – the set of tastes and preferences – through which each individual interprets his or her society and that shapes his or her actions and interactions.

The agent's habitus is the product of his or her experiences. The habitus is "embodied history, internalized as second nature and forgotten as history - ... the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (Bourdieu 1990: 56). The habitus is enduring (preferences do not fluctuate randomly), and early experiences are disproportionately important, but it is also a work in progress. Each new experience the agent encounters is interpreted through the filter of the habitus, but that new experience also has an influence on the habitus and the way future experiences are perceived. If those new experiences are similar to previous experiences, the adjustment will be minimal, but the habitus may change more dramatically when the individual is exposed to very new experiences.

Habitus is also a structuring structure. It is not just a system of perception, but also "a system of schemes of production of practices" (Bourdieu 1989: 19). Habitus is a feel for the game, a sense for how things are likely to go. The agent's behavior is shaped by the habitus. When widely shared, this feel for the game organizes practices and creates institutions. The concept of the habitus is a complex interaction between the agent and society. Society shapes the habitus, but habitus, in turn, shapes society.

Habitus is often used in conjunction with another of Bourdieu's concepts, *field*. Bourdieu conceives of social space as constituted by fields. A field is defined as a network, or a configuration of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 97).

Each field is a site of struggle, where agents contend for advantageous positions and the accompanying rewards. Agents' positions within the various fields are determined by the volume and composition of capital each agent has. The essence of the field is the relationship between the positions that agents hold. "To think in terms of field is to think relationally" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 96).

Traditional cultures are fairly undifferentiated; that is, all social action occurs in one or a very few fields. For Bourdieu, the important feature that distinguishes industrialized societies from traditional cultures is the level of differentiation. Highly differentiated societies have a wide range of fields, each with its own specific and irreducible logic and capital. The fields differ in their degree of autonomy from other fields, but all are at least somewhat autonomous.

The concepts of habitus and field are most useful in combination. Understanding one will tell you much about the other. Agents with similar positions in the field will have similar experiences, and therefore have similar habitus. However, it is important to remember that habitus is not reducible to the agent's current position in the field. History – the agent's trajectory through the field – is also important. For example, someone with substantial mobility within a field will have a different habitus than someone with a more stable trajectory, even if their current positions are similar.

Capital, which determines current position in the field, takes several fundamental forms – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic – as well as field-specific varieties. Economic capital is simply access to financial resources. Cultural capital is more vague. It refers to fluency in a society's culture, partially in terms of art and other forms of cultural production, but also more broadly, in terms of language use and manners

(Jenkins 1992). One's social network makes up one's social capital. "Symbolic capital is the form that one or another of these species takes when it is grasped through categories of perception that recognize its specific logic or, if you prefer, misrecognize the arbitrariness of its possession and accumulation" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 119). That is, symbolic capital is that which allows one agent or group to establish accepted categories of perception. The different types of capital are more valuable in some fields than others. In one field, economic capital may dominate, while cultural capital is more influential in another. Finally, the composition of capital – the balance between the different varieties – is just as important as the overall volume.

Habitus and field are both intrinsic to Bourdieu's ideas about *practice*. The theory of practice is central to Bourdieu's attempts to bridge the divide between objectivism and subjectivism. Practice is intended to escape "both the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction 'without an agent' and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 121). Habitus does not determine action, but provides a feel for the game, a sense of the likelihood of various outcomes, that assists the agent in his or her interactions in the field. "Within certain objective limits (the field), habitus engenders a potentially infinite number of patterns of behavior, thought and expression that are both 'relatively unpredictable' but also 'limited in their diversity'" (McNay 2000: 38). These actions, interactions, and behaviors all make up one's practice.

Social Change and Bourdieu's Critics

These theoretical tools – habitus, field, capital, practice – provide a sound explanation for social reproduction. The agent, with a habitus adjusted to the objective conditions of the field, tends to act in ways that reproduce the field. Indeed, it is this relationship between habitus and field that “makes it possible to inhabit institutions, to appropriate them practically, and so to keep them in activity” (Bourdieu 1990: 57). Explaining the tendency of actors to reproduce social systems in which they may be disadvantaged is probably more important and more theoretically challenging than explaining social change. However, Bourdieu’s theories are regularly criticized for failing to provide a theory of social change.

Craig Calhoun (1993) is satisfied with Bourdieu’s account of social change at a micro level. Agents’ pursuit of advantage within fields implies that there will be some movement within those fields. However, his concern is that Bourdieu’s “sociology does not offer much purchase on the transformation of social systems” (Calhoun 1993: 70). Unlike Marx’s theories of internal contradictions within capitalism, there is no sense in Bourdieu’s work that social systems do not reproduce endlessly.

For Richard Jenkins (1992) and Anthony King (2000), the “external determinations” necessary for social change in Bourdieu’s theory are problematic. Their interpretation of Bourdieu’s theory is along these lines: social structure (field) shapes the habitus, which in turn produces practice, which then (re)produces the field. Bourdieu, of course, rejects such a simplistic interpretation of his theory (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 79). Neither critic finds motivation for change within the actor or the field. If social change does occur, they believe it must be because some outside influence is present. This raises the question of the source of the outside influence. After all, if each

field constantly reproduces itself, then there is no reason why anyone or anything should become that outside source of influence. In Jenkins and King's reading of Bourdieu's theory, there is never any reason to expect to find an original, social source of change, either within any given field or from outside the field.¹

King (2000), among others, points to Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis as an attempt by Bourdieu to theorize social change. The term "hysteresis" originated in the physical sciences. It is a phenomenon in which changes in an effect of some sort lags behind changes in its cause. Such an effect is observed in the magnetization of iron. Applying an electrical field to a bar of iron produces a magnetic field in the iron, but not instantly. The lag between the time the electrical field is applied and the time the magnetic field reaches its expected strength is an example of hysteresis. Hysteresis describes a temporal lag between cause and effect. In a hysteretic relationship, the effect is expected to catch up with the cause at some point, so it is generally a temporary condition.

Other social scientists occasionally use the concept, but hysteresis has rarely been used in sociology. Pierre Bourdieu uses it to describe a type of relationship between habitus and field. The functioning of the habitus is evident in the way in which social interactions seem to anticipate their consequences. It is not that every move is planned and scripted, but that the people most likely to be interacting with one another share an expectation for how things will go; in other words, they have similar habitus. The habitus incorporates the objective chances of various outcomes and structures behaviors

¹ What Jenkins and King neglect to consider is the wide variety of ways that non-social events can affect society. A natural disaster could easily wipe out a type of capital, restructuring a field. A child who becomes orphaned could suddenly be repositioned in the field. Perhaps the best example is the plague that swept Europe in the fourteenth century. This non-social event sparked an enormous amount of change to Europe's economic and social structures.

accordingly. The near ubiquity of the congruence of expectations and outcomes is best understood by looking at the rare occurrences where that congruence breaks down. This happens in cases of hysteresis, when the field has changed faster than the agent's habitus. The individual's dispositions are then out of phase with the field; they are unsuited to the environment in which they are found because they were shaped under different (previous) conditions.

In the original physical definition, hysteresis is a temporal lag between an application of an electrical field to a piece of iron and the maximization of the resulting magnetic field. Bourdieu's application of the term is actually quite close to this definition and emphasizes the temporal nature of the hysteretic relationship. Habitus is shaped by the social structure, but is also enduring. Changes in the social structure over time will produce changes in habitus, but not quickly. This lag – the time it takes for habitus to “catch up” to social structure – is hysteresis; the experience of mismatch between habitus and social structure during this time is a hysteresis effect. The temporal nature of this effect is explicit in Bourdieu's writing. “Hysteresis of habitus ... causes previously appropriate categories of perception to be applied to a new state of the ... market” (Bourdieu 1984: 142).

The primary example of hysteresis offered by Bourdieu, in *Distinction* (1984) and elsewhere, involves the devaluing of educational credentials. The field of education underwent substantial changes with the expansion of higher levels of education to greater proportions of the population. This led to a decline in the prestige associated with each degree, as well as changes in the types of work available to the degree holder. People's habitus do not necessarily change at the same rate as the field. Those who previously

completed their education with the expectation that prestige and career options would remain the same increasingly encounter a gap between expected and actual prestige levels and opportunities as credentials are devalued. Hysteresis is this mismatch between habitus (expected levels) and field position (actual levels) that occurs because the field has changed more rapidly than habitus. The experience of hysteresis is apparently unpleasant for the subject. Bourdieu describes the victims of educational credential devaluing as having their “social identity and self-image ... undermined” (Bourdieu 1984: 144).

Given the temporal nature of hysteresis, there is the expectation that the lag will eventually be resolved and habitus and field will once again be in synch with one another. Bourdieu hints at this, suggesting that the effects of hysteresis “can be the source of misadaptation as well as adaptation, revolt as well as resignation” (Bourdieu 1990: 62). In cases of hysteresis, the agent’s habitus does not mesh well with the agent’s position in the field. This mismatch can be resolved by the agent’s habitus adjusting to the new position in the field, but it can also spur the agent to revolt and to work to change the objective structures of the field.

Bourdieu’s discussion of hysteresis does engage the question of social change, but King remains unconvinced, saying, “the hysteresis effect does not resolve the problem of social change for the habitus but merely sidesteps it” (King 2000: 428). Hysteresis may provoke social change, but it is also the result of social change. That is, hysteresis occurs when the field has already undergone some change. Social change must occur in order for the field to change in a manner that is inconsistent with the habitus of its members.

So, if hysteresis produces social change, it only does so after being produced by social change.

In situations of hysteresis, a dissonance exists between the objective structures of the field and the habitus. Other authors have used the idea of a lack of fit between habitus and field to theorize social change, particularly with reference to gendered behavior. Lois McNay (2000) looks at movement across fields in a highly differentiated society to explain the decline of traditional gender norms. The existence of multiple fields is key, as each individual necessarily belongs to many fields, each with its own structure and rules. To take one example, the movement of women, with their feminine habitus, into traditionally masculine fields, such as the labor force, was not a smooth transition between fields, as the feminine habitus may not have been well suited to the demands of the work place. “At the same time, this dissonance may lead to a greater awareness – what Bourdieu calls the ‘lucidity of the excluded’ – of the shortcomings of a system of employment based on gender discrimination. ... The questioning of conventional notions of femininity does not arise just from exposure to and identification with a greater array of alternative images of femininity, but from tensions inherent in the concrete negotiation of increasingly conflictual female roles” (McNay 2000: 69). Movement of the gendered habitus across fields in a differentiated society promotes reflexivity about gender and leads to the decline of traditionally gendered behavior.

Lisa Adkins (2005) draws on McNay’s argument, but is less confident that the changes in gender are as extensive as McNay suggests. Rather than reflexively leading to a reduction of gendered behavior, she suggests that people reflexively change their gendered behavior to fit different situations. In her view, movement across fields gives

people a reflective understanding of gender, but rather than reducing the importance and content of gender, it recasts gender in each field. For example, a woman may exhibit different, but still gendered, behavior in the workplace, on a date, or at the auto repair shop.

McNay and Adkins both describe a “lack of fit” between habitus and field, but they do not identify hysteresis as the cause. In their arguments, the lack of fit is the result of movement between fields, not because of change in any one field. However, as with cases of hysteresis, the lack of fit is something that must be resolved by changes in habitus, field, or both.

McNay and Adkins criticize Bourdieu for not paying sufficient attention to the effects of the many fields of a differentiated society when writing about gender, but they do not offer a fully fleshed out theory, either. Some questions are left unanswered. Why did women move into these traditionally masculine fields? What was happening at the same time in other fields, especially those that were historically feminine? And how are the various fields related?

A Theory of Spatial Hysteresis

I suggest that we can draw on Bourdieu’s concept of hysteresis to develop a better understanding of how a “lack of fit” between habitus and field develops when multiple fields are involved in a highly differentiated society. Bourdieu maintains that there are no “transhistoric laws of the relations between fields” (Bourdieu & Wacquant: 1992: 109) and recommends examining each case individually. Still, there must be some patterns that can be examined.

First of all, position in any given field is determined by the agent's volume and composition of capital. Some capital is field-specific, but more general forms of capital – economic, cultural, social, and symbolic - are relevant in many fields. The relative value of these forms of capital varies from field to field, and even within the same field over time, but are usually relevant to some degree. While these fundamental forms of capital do not determine position in any field, they are influential in all fields. Changes in an agent's volume or composition of capital may be the result of the agent's activity in one field, but the consequences of the changes will be felt in many fields.

Let us take an example. Someone who spends four years earning a liberal arts bachelor's degree acquires both field-specific capital – in English literature, for example – as well as more broadly applicable cultural capital. While future employers are unlikely to find the ability to analyze the works of Shakespeare very valuable, the accrued cultural capital will have more meaning, so the graduate will have a more advantageous position upon entering the labor market than someone who did not attend college. The cultural capital acquired in one field, education, affects the agent's position in a second field, the labor force. Other fields will also be affected, such as the marriage market, cultural consumption, etc.

Relatedly, the habitus is constant across fields. “The generative schemes of the habitus are applied, by simple transfer, to the most dissimilar areas of practice” (Bourdieu 1984: 175). The habitus is a system of perception; it structures dispositions. These systems of perception function similarly across fields.

To return to the example of the recent college graduate with a degree in English literature, four years in college shape the habitus in certain ways. The graduate may have

acquired tastes for working independently and writing. She may be used to thinking critically. When this habitus is transferred to the labor market, the graduate is likely to find white collar jobs more appealing than blue collar jobs. Because the habitus and field position are so closely linked, saying that the fundamental species of capital apply across fields, and that habitus is transferable from one situation to another, are really two ways of saying the same thing.

Habitus and field are usually in synch with one another. That is, the agent's habitus is usually suited to the position the agent occupies in the field. As Bourdieu points out, this synchronicity is most obvious when it breaks down. This happens in the instances of single-field hysteresis that Bourdieu describes, but it also occurs when the habitus does not easily transfer between fields. Difficulty in transferring the habitus from one field to another is likely to occur in a constantly changing, highly differentiated society. Although critics such as King and Jenkins are uneasy about finding the original source of change, change is apparently a constant fact of contemporary societies. Starting with the assumption of some change occurring somewhere in society, it remains to be determined how that change affects the rest of society.

Each semi-autonomous field in a differentiated society has its own logic. In each, a field-specific variety of capital is important. Social change – the evolution of the objective structures of the field – is a given in today's world. Yet, because the fields are semi-autonomous, they do not all change at the same rate, or even necessarily in the same direction. This uneven change across fields has important, but under-theorized, consequences for the habitus.

Let's examine two hypothetical fields, Field A and Field B. The two fields change at different rates, and the pace of change of Field A is more rapid than that of Field B. As the objective structures of Field A change, the relative positions of the agents within that field change. Some agents in Field A acquire more capital, and that new capital consists of both field-specific and fundamental species of capital. As the agents' volumes and compositions of capital and their positions in the field change, their habitus slowly adjust to the new conditions. Habitus, although enduring, is not fixed. It is embodied history, a work forever in progress as the agent has new experiences.

The agents who have experienced the changes in Field A, who have acquired new levels of capital and altered habitus, should be able to carry some of these changes into Field B. What fundamental species of capital they have accumulated should be applicable in Field B, and their dispositions and practices in Field B should reflect the changes to their habitus. However, the slower pace of change in Field B may not allow this to happen. The objective structures of Field B may be such that mobility is difficult. These barriers to mobility may be institutional or they may be the result of discrimination. These barriers will not be field-specific capital, as only fundamental species of capital are expected to be transportable from one field to another. Differences in position due to holdings of field-specific capital will not cause a lack of fit between habitus and field.

In such cases where Field B does have barriers to mobility, there will exist for some participants in the field a lack of fit between habitus and field, similar to the hysteresis effect Bourdieu describes or the lack of fit theorized by McNay and Adkins. In Bourdieu's single-field hysteresis, the lack of fit occurred because the field evolved faster

than the habitus. In this case, multiple fields are involved. As Field A evolves, so do the habitus of its participants, creating a gap between those habitus and the structures of Field B. All hysteresis has a temporal aspect. To emphasize the importance of social space, I call those instances of hysteresis that involve multiple fields “spatial hysteresis.”

Spatial hysteresis, like its single-field counterpart, has the potential to lead to social change, although that will not necessarily be the case. Individuals who have gained capital through the changes in Field A may use some of that capital to alter the structures of Field B to create a better fit between habitus and field. Alternately, actors in Field B may use some of the capital they have retained in the field to achieve a more favorable position in Field A, alleviating some of the new competition they face in Field B. It is also possible that neither type of social change will take place, at least in the short term. In those cases, the tension between habitus and field that results from hysteresis is likely to persist. Finally, there exists the possibility that agents will become resigned to the structure of the field, despite their gains in other fields. This is most likely to happen when the more powerful actors in Field B use some of their symbolic capital to recast the categories of perception in that field.

A possible example of spatial hysteresis and its eventual resolution can be found in the United States during the post-World War II period. The two fields in question are those of consumption and the labor force. The conversion of factories from war to peacetime production and the booming economy meant that for the first time, a broad segment of society was able to purchase a wide variety of mass-produced consumer goods. Consumption, as any field, has a unique logic. The sign value of various brands, styles, and products cannot be reduced to pure economics. However, the fundamental forms of

capital, especially economic and cultural, play important roles in structuring the field. Economic capital determines the level at which one can purchase, and cultural capital informs taste. Social capital is also important, in that one's peer group often influences consumption decisions, and, conversely, consumption decision may also shape one's social group.

The labor force, the field of occupations, has its own unique logic, as well as field-specific capital of credentials and experience. But, as in the field of consumption, economic, cultural, and social capital are important. These types of capital are in many ways the rewards of successful participation in the field, but they also have a significant effect on the types of training to which people have access, the job-seeking opportunities available, and the types of jobs that are deemed desirable, and so forth.

As the economy expanded in the late 1940s and 1950s, women took advantage of the new opportunities available in the field of consumption. Certain consumption practices enabled them to accumulate economic, cultural, and social capital. The changes in consumption and the associated accumulated capital influenced the habitus. However, this new capital did not translate easily to positions in the labor force. During the post-war period, women were largely confined to low-paying, low-status jobs because of assumptions that women's primary interests were in caring for home and family, because women often had limited formal education and work experience, and because women were often discriminated against. For many women, the jobs that were open to them were not consistent with their increasing levels of capital and their evolving habitus. They developed a lack of fit between habitus and field in the labor force.

The effects of spatial hysteresis were to some extent resolved during the subsequent decades as women advocated for better work opportunities, for an end to work-place discrimination, for greater access to education and training, and for more child care, among other things. The removal or reduction of many of these barriers meant that women have increasingly attained advantaged positions in the labor force. These positions are more in synch with their positions in the field of consumption. For its part, the field of consumption has rapidly adapted to the emerging norm of the dual-career family with a surfeit of time saving products and services.

So far I have presented spatial hysteresis as the result of interaction between two fields. However, the same logic could be applied to a larger group of fields. The fundamental species of capital are in play in most fields, and habitus is transportable from one field to another. Changes in one field should have effects of varying magnitude on any other field with which it shares participants. In a highly differentiated society, in which many different fields are constantly changing in many different ways, simultaneous ripples of effect can be envisioned as moving in many directions at once.

To expand on the case of women in the post-war United States, it seems likely that changes that originated in the field of consumption first made an impact on the labor force, but subsequently, many other fields also underwent change. Women worked to improve their positions in health care, not only in terms of reproductive rights, but also to involve women in clinical trials and to increase research on diseases that primarily affect women. Women sought greater control of their own finances. They fought for greater access to participation in athletics at all levels. And women have worked for more rights to leisure activities, such as the more desirable tee times at private golf courses. In each

of these fields, barriers to women have been lowered or dismantled, reducing the tension between habitus and field that was the result of spatial hysteresis. Other fields have been more resistant to change, and tensions linger. One such field is the Catholic church, staunch in its opposition to allowing women to enter the priesthood or fill other roles. While it is outside the scope of this paper to assess the instigations to change in each of these fields, it seems likely that that there were multiple directions of influence moving between the fields.

Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of hysteresis in discussing both the cause and effects of social change. The sense of a mismatch between habitus and field has been developed by scholars such as Lois McNay and Lisa Adkins, who use this lack of fit to explain changes in gender over the past few decades. They find the source of this lack of fit in women's movement into the traditionally masculine labor force. But women have always participated in the labor force, albeit to a lesser extent, and McNay and Adkins make no attempt to explain why women participated in the labor force in ever greater numbers.

In this chapter, I have developed the concept of hysteresis to include space as well as time. Changes in one field have ramifications in other fields as an agent's volume and composition of capital and their related habitus change. In the case of women and the labor force, I suggest we look to another rapidly changing field – the field of consumption – for an explanation of the poor fit between habitus and field that women increasingly felt in the labor force, and to explain why women quickly moved into more committed roles in the labor force at that time. Spatial hysteresis is not limited to two fields, but may have effects in many fields. Finally, it may inspire social change, but

there is no guarantee that it will do so. In the next chapter, I conduct a review of the literature on women as consumers and participants in the labor force during the decades following World War II in order to flesh out the two fields in question and to provide a better sense for how activity in one field may be related to activity in the other.

Chapter 2 - Women's Roles in the Labor Force and as Consumers in the Postwar Era

During the second half of the 20th century, women's labor force participation rates rose, their participation in the labor force became more continuous, and they began entering historically male professions in ever greater numbers. While a number of factors have been suggested to explain these changes, none of them tell the whole story. I suggest that we look to an under-analyzed arena – consumption – for another piece to the puzzle.

In this chapter, I describe the labor force position of women during the 1950s as well as outlining the changes that took place in the labor force over the course of the subsequent decades. I discuss factors that other researchers have pointed to as important for explaining those changes in women's labor force participation. As an alternative to those factors, I describe the expansion of consumer society in the post-World War II period and hypothesize that the rapid pace of change in consumption contrasted with the more slowly changing labor force to create a situation of spatial hysteresis for women in the 1950s and 1960s.

Women's Labor Force Participation

According to U.S. Census data, 29.5% of American women aged 15 and older participated in the labor force in 1950 (Goldin 1990). These rates varied considerably by race and marital status. Only 20.7% of white married women worked for pay, but 51.8% of their single counterparts were in the labor force. Among nonwhite women, the

difference by marital status is smaller, but still significant; 31.8% of married women and 40.0% of single women were in the labor force.

There was some variation in labor force participation by age group, and relatedly, parental status. Among white and nonwhite married women, those aged 35-44, whose children were likely to be of school age, were most likely to work, with labor force participation rates of 25.3% and 38.7%, respectively (Goldin 1990). Among married white women, the age group least likely to work for pay was the 25-34 year olds, at 21.0%. Among married nonwhite women, the youngest women – those aged 15-24 – were the least likely to work, at 23.7%. “The low postwar labor-force participation rate for women reflected a straightforward career pattern: work for pay (if you work at all) before marriage and children, then stop. ... Women showed little tendency to return to work after their children were grown” (Levy 1998: 103-104).

Women who worked in 1950 were concentrated in a few generally low-status occupations. As of the 1950 Census, 32.0% of employed white women were in administrative support, 20.8% were machine operators, 10.7% were service workers (other than household and protective service), 10.1% were in sales-related occupations, and 6.4% were elementary and secondary school teachers. Only 4.1% of employed white women were managers or administrators, but white women made up 13% of the total population employed in those categories. Black women had even fewer options available to them than white women, as 41.2% were household service workers, 18.6% were in other service work, 15.8% were machine operators, and 8.1% were farm workers. 1.3% of employed black women were managers or administrators (Levy 1998).

Women were very unlikely to be employed in the professions in 1950. Furthermore, they were only a small portion of people training for professions. As of 1955-1956, 1.1% of dental school graduates, 5.1% of medical school graduates, and 3.5% of law school graduates were women (Snyder 2003).

In 1950, women, especially white women, were likely to work only until they had children. When they did work, they were limited to a fairly small range of occupations, and were largely excluded from the most prestigious professional careers. However, this began to change, slowly during the 1950s, but more rapidly during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.

Women's labor force participation rates rose from 29.5% in 1950 to 35.1% in 1960, 41.6% in 1970, and 51.1% in 1980 (Goldin 1990). These increases did not occur evenly across age groups (see Table 1). For both white and nonwhite married women, the largest increases in employment came among women age 45-54. During the 1960s, it was younger married women – those aged 25-34 – who showed the biggest increases in labor force participation rates. This pattern was repeated during the 1970s, with even larger increases.

Table 1. Labor Force Participation Rates for Married Women, by Age Group and Race.

Age Group	White			Nonwhite		
	25-34	35-44	45-54	25-34	35-44	45-54
1950	21.0	25.3	22.2	34.8	38.7	32.9
1960	26.7	35.4	38.6	40.7	48.9	47.3
1970	36.2	44.4	46.7	54.8	57.5	54.5
1980	56.0	59.1	53.4	71.4	72.0	61.3
Change 1950-1960	5.7	10.1	16.4	5.9	10.2	14.4
Change 1960-1970	9.5	9.0	8.1	14.1	8.6	7.2
Change 1970-1980	19.8	14.7	6.7	16.6	14.5	6.8

Source: Goldin 1990

The increase of labor force participation rates among younger married women reflects the dramatic increase in the likelihood of women with young children to work outside of the home. “Among those with children less than six years old, only 19 percent worked outside the home in 1960, compared to 61 percent in 1999” (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2002: 87). Because women are now more likely to work when they have small children, they are able to maintain a higher level of attachment to the labor force. One measure of labor force attachment is the percent of women workers who are employed full time, year round. As of 1963, only 37% of employed women fell into this category, but 58% did in 1999 (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2002). As women participate more continuously in the labor force throughout the year and over their life courses, their increased attachment to the labor force means that they are able to maintain careers rather

than holding a succession of jobs. The “career” versus “job” distinction is an important one, because the highest status managerial and professional positions are achievable only over a career.

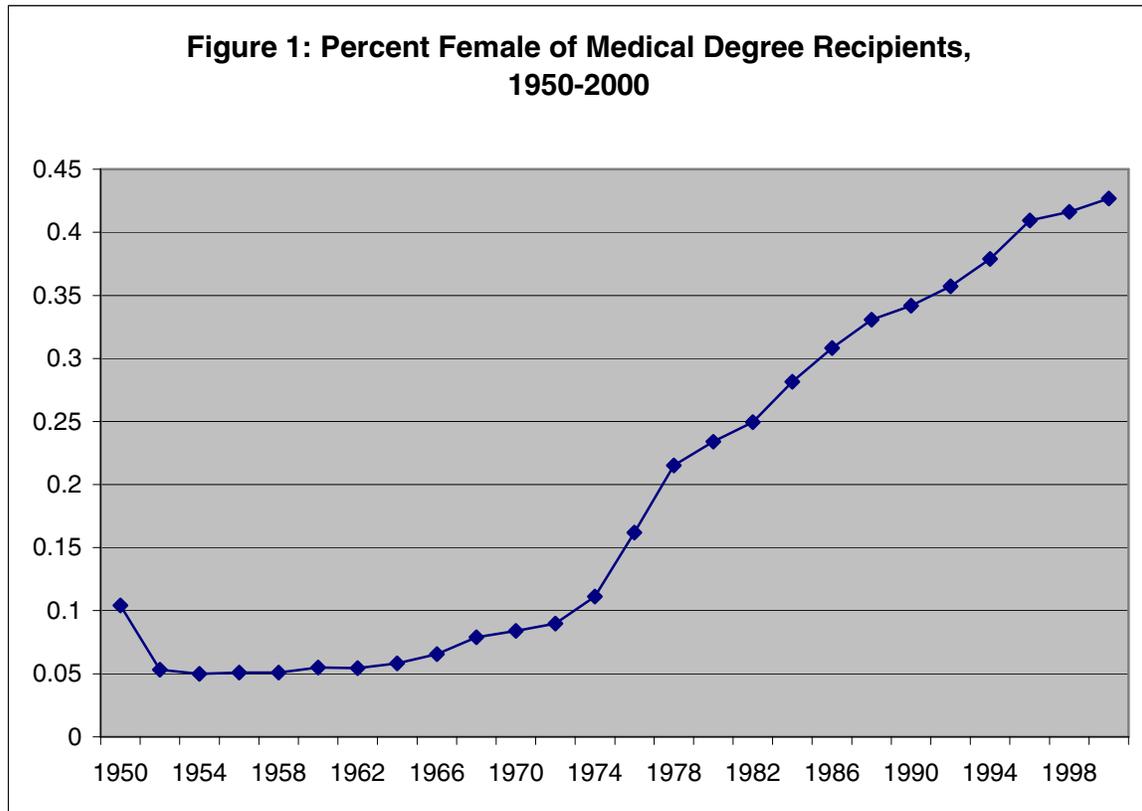
In fact, women made real progress in attaining higher status jobs during the 1960s and 70s. There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of employed women within the broad group of professional and technical occupations, a category which includes some jobs typically held by women, such as teaching and nursing. 14.6% of employed European American women were in this occupational category in 1960, and 21.4% were professionals by 1990 (Amott & Matthaei 1996: 342). Chicana, African American, and Puerto Rican women displayed a similar pattern of increasing prevalence in the professions (Amott & Matthaei 1996). This increase in the proportion of women in professional positions has occurred as the total number of women in the labor force has grown substantially.

Because the broad occupational group of professional positions includes some traditionally feminine jobs, the increase in the proportion of women in this category is not necessarily indicative that women have increasingly held higher status positions in the labor force. Looking at the narrower occupational group of executives, administrators (non-clerical), and managers, we see an increase from 4.1% of employed white women and 1.3% of employed black women in 1949 (Levy 1998) to 4.6% of all employed women in this category in 1972, with a further increase to 14.2% of all employed women in 1999 (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2002: 135). Not only are more women working, but they increasingly hold positions of responsibility.

It is important to compare the positions women hold to those men occupy in order to really assess the status of women in the workforce. The changing nature of the economy, from a manufacturing base to a post-industrial service based economy means that men's jobs have been changing, too. But, women do seem to be gaining ground relative to men. Levy (1998) found that white women made up 13% of the total population employed as executives, administrators (non-clerical), and managers in 1949. By 1970, 18% of all managers were women. Thirty percent were women by 1980, and 40% were women by 1990 (Reskin and Padavic 1994). According to Reskin and Padavic (1994), "[t]hese figures indisputably show that thousands of women are gaining access to jobs that usually confer organizational power" (82).

The specific timing of the women's movement towards career-style employment can be further examined by looking at the entrance of women into one particular profession. Figure 1 shows the percentage of medical degree recipients who are female over time. This percentage – barely half a percent in the early 1950s - began to increase in the late 1960s, meaning that the percentage of medical students who were female began to go up during the early 1960s. However, the percentage remained fairly low until 1972, when Title IX was passed, prohibiting sex discrimination in admissions to educational institutions. The percentage of new physicians who were women increased rapidly afterwards, and women now make up almost half of all medical school graduates (Snyder 2003). (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Percent Female of Medical Degree Recipients, 1950-2000



Source: Snyder 2003.

Causes of the Growth in Women's Labor Force Participation

Women, then, increasingly moved into the labor force, and improved their position in it, during the decades following World War II. They held positions of increasingly high status in the workplace, especially from 1970 on, and they have become ever more attached to the labor market. A number of factors have been suggested to explain these changes, particularly women's initial move into the labor force. These factors fall into three broad categories: economic, educational, and social changes. Each of these factors is examined below.

When looking for the causes of women's movement into the labor force, scholars frequently point to the heightened demand for female workers created by the changing economy (Ritzer & Walczak 1986; Amott & Matthaei 1996; Blau, Ferber, Winkler 2002). As the clerical occupations and service sector of the economy grew, there was a steadily increasing number of jobs available in occupations that were historically held by women. As demand went up, so did wages, drawing more and more women into the labor force. Economic necessity may have been another source of motivation for women to move into the labor force, especially during the 1970s and 80s (Ritzer & Walczak 1986; Blau, Ferber, Winkler 2002). Inflation was high during this time period, but at the same time, men's real wages were stagnating or declining. As a result, a growing percentage of families needed two paychecks to maintain their standard of living.

Another factor may have been the improved educational levels attained by women. For example, in 1951, only about 12% of white women born in 1930 had graduated from college, but by 1971, more than 25% of young white women were college graduates (Goldin 1990). Education may have served to move women into the labor force in two ways. First of all, well-educated women may have found the traditional role of housewife more tedious than less educated women, particularly in comparison to the employment experiences they had before marriage or motherhood. This could have led women to seek a more fulfilling role in the paid labor force (Amott & Matthaei 1996). Higher levels of education would have also served to increase potential salaries and to qualify women for more interesting forms of paid employment, which would have served to draw them into the labor force in greater numbers (Ritzer & Walczak 1986; Blau, Ferber, Winkler 2002).

Other more social factors are also cited as playing a role in women's increased involvement in the labor force. As the divorce rate climbed during the 1960s and 70s, women became increasingly aware of the perils of assuming a lifetime of financial support from their spouses and therefore maintained their ties to the labor force to ensure their future security (Goldin 1990; Blau, Ferber, Winkler 2002). Fertility, which was unusually high in the post-World War II era, began declining in the early 1960s, dipping below replacement level in the late 1970s. Fewer children at home meant that women had more time to spend in paid employment (Goldin 1990; Blau, Ferber, Winkler 2002). FDA approval of oral contraceptives in 1960 allowed women to have much more control over their fertility, which may have made them more willing to cultivate a career without the worry that it would be unexpectedly interrupted (Blau, Ferber, Winkler 2002). The opportunities that were opened to women in the labor force – and civil society more generally – during World War II are popularly thought to have paved the way for women to enter the labor force in greater numbers in later years.

While each of these factors may have played a part in the expansion of women's roles in the labor force, none is entirely persuasive on its own, and few do an adequate job of accounting for the historic specificity of the timing of these changes. Increased demand in female-typed jobs was seen at the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution, as the first industries produced textiles, but this did not lead to a permanent, dominant role for women in the labor force. Similarly, the 1970s was not the first period of economic recession, but women's employment patterns changed dramatically during that period. Further, it is now women with the least economic need (highly educated married women) who are most likely to be in the labor force. Causality is a real problem with the

social factors listed above: women may be more likely to divorce, have fewer children, and demand effective contraception if they are actively involved in the labor market. That is, those social changes may have been the result of women moving into the labor force as much as the cause of that move. As for Rosie the Riveter, “[w]hile there is considerable disagreement over the war’s liberating effect on women in the postwar world, it is generally conceded that various forces worked against the retention of most progressive changes adopted to encourage women’s entry into nontraditional fields” (Honey 1984: 2).

These economic, educational, and social factors may have all played some role in motivating women to spend more time in the labor force, but the picture is not complete. In order to fully understand the changes that occurred in this arena after World War II, we need to look to another facet of society. Below, I examine the changes that were taking place in consumption during the late 1940s and 1950s and suggest that these changes contributed to women’s increasing involvement in the labor force.

Women in Consumer Society

A. W. Zelomek (1959) offers a sense of the zeitgeist of the 1950s in the opening paragraph of *A Changing America: At Work and Play*, a book that summarized the main trends of the decade:

America in mid-century is truly a land of plenty. We measure our car ownership and our home ownership in millions, our population in hundred millions, our income and expenditures in billions. We travel fast and far, at home and abroad. We think of ourselves in superlative terms as the richest, the most highly industrialized, with the highest standard of living, the most powerful. Or, at least, we did. The postwar period, which brought such real prosperity for so many of our citizens, also saw some stones thrown in the pool of our complacency. The ripples are spreading, perhaps slowly, because the complacency is pretty thick and will not move easily.

Mass production and consumption, as hinted above, were defining features of the postwar period. With the end of World War II, manufacturers reconverted their operations from military supplies to consumer goods. The economy, primed by years of spending for the war effort, was booming. At the same time, there was an enormous pent up demand for consumer goods, brought about by years of stagnant demand for, and production of, consumer-oriented goods during the depression and war.

The late 1940s and the 1950s were decades of growth in income and consumption. Median family income rose from \$19,500 in 1947 to \$26,000 in 1959, in constant 1997 dollars. Income continued to rise in the 1960s, reaching a median of \$37,800 by 1969 (Levy 1998). Consumption grew rapidly as well. During the five years following the end of World War II, expenditures on household furnishings and appliances climbed by 240% (Nickles 2002). To take another example, the number of cars on the roads grew by only three million during the 1930s, but increased by 12 million from 1946 to 1950, and another 21 million during the 1950s (Levy 1998). Other types of consumption also increased rapidly during the 1950s: the ranks of homeowners almost doubled, the proportions of homes with radios, televisions, vacuum cleaners, and washing machines all increased, increases and changes in food consumption improved nutrition, and consumption of services, like medical care, recreation, telephones, and personal care, all increased (Levy 1998).

These increases in consumption were by no means limited to the middle and upper classes. In fact, family income inequality declined through the late 1960s (Levy 1998). Between 1940 and 1958, real wages in manufacturing grew by 60% (Rainwater

1959). Those wages were put to use; Sears, a company that catered to the working class, saw its revenues grow from \$700 million to \$3 billion over the same timeframe (Rainwater 1959).

A contributing factor to the expansion of consumer society in the post-war period was the rapid innovation in the means of consumption - “the settings or structures that enable us to consume all sorts of things” (Ritzer 2005: 6). Shopping malls, theme parks, and fast food restaurants are all examples of means of consumption. In the United States, during the 20 years after the end of World War II, a number of new means of consumption were introduced: the Flamingo Casino, the first modern Las Vegas casino resort (1946); Northgate, the first outdoor shopping mall (1947); Disneyland, perhaps the ultimate consumer destination (1955); the first of the McDonald’s chain restaurants (1955); Southdale, the first indoor mall (1956); the ancestor of Toys R Us and other superstores (1957); Wal-Mart and Target (1962); and the maiden voyage of the first modern cruise ship (1966). These developments in the means of consumption in the post-war period not only allowed and encouraged more consumption, but they also homogenized the ways in which people consumed, as well as the goods and services they consumed. Many of the new means of consumption were chains or franchises. Increasingly, people in different parts of the country shopped in the same stores, bought the same brands, and ate at the same restaurants.

Lizabeth Cohen (2003) calls the postwar period the era of the Consumers’ Republic, in which government and business rhetoric assured people that good citizens were good consumers. The ideology of the Consumers’ Republic promised the opportunity for class mobility through mass consumption. Government, business, and

labor all preached that broad access to mass-produced consumer goods would create a nation of the middle class.

Housing is a central aspect of the history of the postwar period. Homeownership grew from 43.6% in 1940 (the low point of the century) to 61.9% in 1960 (U.S. Census Bureau). Much of this rise in homeownership was fueled by a rapid move to the suburbs. The population of the suburbs grew much more rapidly than the rest of the country, increasing by 43% between 1947 and 1953, compared to an 11% increase overall (Cohen 2003: 195). “[T]he suburban home itself became the Consumers’ Republic’s quintessential mass consumer commodity, capable of fueling the fires of the postwar economy while also improving the standard of living of the mass of Americans” (Cohen 2003: 195).

Women were well-positioned to take advantage of the changes that took place in consumption, as consuming has long been considered a feminine activity. Most scholars date the origins of consumption as women’s responsibility to the Industrial Revolution (Lubar 1998, Williams 1982, Twitchell 2000). Prior to the Industrial Revolution, most production and consumption took place within the home, and men and women were equally involved in both, although the particular tasks usually varied by sex. The doctrine of separate spheres, which was widely accepted at the time of industrialization, dictated that men were responsible for the public world and women the domestic realm. Women made up a substantial portion of the early labor force because industrialization began with the textile industry, an area of production that had traditionally been women’s work. However, as production moved increasingly out of the home and into the public sphere, men came to dominate the labor force. Women’s responsibilities for all things

domestic gradually came to include responsibility for the bulk of the family's consumption. Production became increasingly associated with masculinity and the public sphere and consumption became increasingly associated with femininity and the domestic sphere (Lubar 1998).

Women's Accumulation of Capital as Consumers

My review of the literature suggests that women, as the predominant consumers in American society, were able to take advantage of the expansion of consumer society in three particular arenas: through homeownership, through furnishing those homes, and through changes in the geographical location of shopping that accompanied suburbanization. Strategic consumption in these areas, among others, increased the women's cultural, social, and even economic capital.

Homeownership, particularly ownership of a suburban home, was a tangible sign of material and social success during the postwar period. According to Cohen (2003), the suburban home, the ultimate consumer good in an era of rapid suburbanization among the middle and working classes, was widely perceived as middle class. The working class women Rainwater, et al (1959), studied felt that suburban homes "provide[d] the best possible proof of social and economic affiliation with the secure, middle majority of American women" (p. 189). Although Herbert Gans, in his 1967 study of Levittown, found that suburbanites were not overtly competitive in their consumption, it is clear that their suburban homes were felt to be marks of status. Social control, usually applied through humor, but also by occasional direct criticism, ensured that standards were met to maintain the neighborhood's appearance. The widespread desire to look like a middle

class neighborhood is evident in the passage of a Levittown ordinance prohibiting parking work trucks on residential streets (176-177).

In addition to the general prestige of owning a home, homeownership granted women increased access to two specific types of capital. Women's economic capital received a boost because owning a home is generally a better investment than renting. Also, the greater geographic stability that comes with owning a home would have enabled women to build social capital through relationships with neighbors and local institutions. Men would certainly have benefited from homeownership in many of the same ways, especially as it was usually their financial resources that made the home purchase possible (in part because creditors were unwilling to make loans based on women's salaries). However, while both men and women stood to gain in these ways from homeownership, women may have seen more of a gain, especially in social capital, due to their greater involvement in home life.

The consumer goods necessary to furnish those homes were important as well. The women Brett Harvey (1993) interviewed for her book, *The Fifties: A Women's Oral History*, described in great detail what went into furnishing their postwar homes. One describes "a nice house, with an automatic washer and dryer and an Iron-Rite mangle – that was a real mark of status. We even had a car... [E]veryone was trying to achieve middle class status" (116-117). Another woman reports, "I had tears in my eyes as I watched all this stuff being delivered to my house – tables and chairs and beds and lamps" (124). A third describes her house: "I loved my little house, loved decorating it, choosing the drapes and slipcovers. We were the first on our block to have kitchen

appliances that weren't white, and that matched: we had an avocado-colored General Electric refrigerator and range. Very nifty" (125).

Class-based differences in taste in home furnishings and appliances were prevalent during the 1950s, despite decreasing differences in income and housing. However, Rainwater, et al (1959), and Nickles (2002) suggest that this class distinction was temporary. Rainwater, et al, state that the "general indication is that the working class housewife's taste levels are still in the process of change" (202). They found that working class women increasingly favored the clean and simple lines of the modern, middle class aesthetic, and they attributed much of that change to the influence of national advertising. Nickels, on the other hand, describes how the buying power of working class families prompted producers to develop more mass market goods using elements of the "more is better" aesthetic, an aesthetic that favored decorative elements. In this way, working class tastes became increasingly mainstream. Nickles concludes by saying, "Shiny appliances and living room furnishings added up to a new suburban culture where women were reformulating class relations as they shopped, work, and raised families, forging new commonalities and distinctions" (607). The development of mass-consumer culture allowed working class women, in particular, to acquire cultural capital, as the consumer goods they purchased were increasingly in line with middle class tastes and the styles they preferred became increasingly mainstream.

Jennifer Scanlon's (1995) book, *Inarticulate Longings*, describes how early 20th century women's magazines and books promoted scientific housekeeping, in which the work of maintaining a home was analyzed as running a business, with the housewife as business manager. Scientific housekeeping emphasized efficiency in all tasks, and for

many of those tasks, it was more efficient for a woman to purchase goods than to make them herself. The proper consumption of goods and services was seen as efficient, scientific, and business-like, and therefore more respectable and prestigious than what was seen as the drudgery of non-scientific housekeeping. Betty Friedan (1963) analyzed marketing strategies aimed at women in the 1950s and found that this image of the scientific, professional housewife was alive and well. Women were urged to buy products for the care of home and family that allowed them to exercise their creativity and display their expertise in home maintenance.

The consumption of household furnishings and appliances certainly displayed women's levels of cultural and economic capital, but it also helped them build cultural capital. Women shopped carefully to learn what styles and products were in good taste, a process facilitated by national brand names, advertising, and mass-produced items. Careful consumption also allowed women to establish themselves as "professional" housekeepers, not just performers of menial tasks. The new capital to be gained in the consumption of household goods and furnishings would have worked almost exclusively to the advantage of women, as they did most of the shopping and performed most of the housework.

Lizabeth Cohen (2000) argues that the new suburban shopping centers of the postwar period provided women with a unique social geographical opportunity. While acknowledging that earlier department stores created feminized spaces in urban areas, she points out that they were mixed in with male-oriented sites of consumption and the generally masculine character of the business district. Suburban shopping centers, on the other hand, were almost exclusively modeled around women's needs and desires, not just

for shopping, but for socialization and, to some extent, employment. “The shopping center thus posed a contradiction for women in the 1950s and 1960s: it empowered them in their families through creating a new community setting catering to female needs and desires, yet it contained them in the larger society as consumers and part-time workers” (2000: 258).

Victor Gruen, widely considered to be the inventor of the suburban shopping mall, intended for those shopping centers to house much more than stores. In his vision, shopping centers would also provide space for civic engagements as well as social activities and recreation (Leong 2001). And in fact, many malls did (and still do) offer such things as fashion shows, concerts, dining, and recreation options from ice skating to movies.

Suburban malls offered women opportunities to increase their social capital through their greater integration into public space. Even more important is the cultural capital to be gained by spending time at the shopping center. Browsing itself allowed women to learn what was currently fashionable, thereby accruing cultural capital. The other activities offered at the mall also enhanced women’s cultural capital. As women spent much more time than men at malls, they would have gained more than men from these opportunities to build social and cultural capital.

Conclusion

Women stood to gain social, cultural, and economic capital through the changes in consumption that occurred during the decades after World War II. These species of capital are all important in the labor force as well. The dramatic transformation of

consumer society began immediately after the end of World War II and the accompanying changes in women's capital accumulation would be expected to have made themselves felt in the labor force at that time. But, the large increases in women's employment, particularly in professional and managerial jobs, did not occur until 15 or 20 years later. In the terminology developed in the previous chapter, I hypothesize that this created a situation of spatial hysteresis for women.

According to Bourdieu, hysteresis can result in "misadaptation as well as adaptation, revolt as well as resignation" (Bourdieu 1990: 62). In this case, it led to revolt. The women's rights movement, which gathered steam during the 1960s, had an early focus on ensuring women's ability to participate in the labor force. The successes of this movement permitted women to participate in the labor force more continuously and at higher levels, helping to resolve the tensions created by hysteresis.

In the next section, I will examine my hypothesis that an instance of spatial hysteresis occurred in the postwar period between the fields of consumption and the labor force by analyzing data from a series of interviews with women who were young adults during this period.

Chapter 3 – Results from Interviews

In previous chapters, I have developed the concept of *spatial hysteresis* and speculated that the relative positions of women in the labor force and the field of consumption during the 1950s and early 1960s formed a case spatial hysteresis. In order to get a sense for how women actually experienced those fields, as well as the relationship between the fields, I conducted in-depth interviews with 12 women born between 1924 and 1934. These conversations provide some insight into women's roles as members of the labor force and as consumers, as well as the meanings they attributed to those experiences and opportunities.

Data and Methods

The women I spoke did not constitute a nationally representative sample, but there was enough variation within the group to show a range of experiences and perspectives. (See Table 2.) All 12 women were white, but not because of study design. They were born between 1924 and 1934, which means they ranged in age from 16 to 36 during the 1950s. This age range means that they are all old enough to remember the Depression and war years, but young enough that they were still beginning their adult lives during the 50s. Three of the women grew up in urban areas while the rest were raised in small towns or farming communities. Three are from mid-Atlantic states, eight are from the Midwest, and one grew up in the West. Currently, they all live in suburban areas, with five in the Midwest and seven in the mid-Atlantic region.

Table 2: Characteristics of Respondents

Name*	Year of Birth	Hometown	Current Residence	Race	Class	Education	Marital Status	# Kids	Work After Kids?
Arlene	1932	Small town Midwest	Midwestern suburbs	White	Lower Middle Class	Some college	Married	2	Yes - administrative
Betty	1924	Rural Midwest	Midwestern suburbs	White	Middle Class	Some college	Married	3	Yes - administrative
Doris	1928	Rural Midwest	Midwestern suburbs	White	Middle Class	Graduate degree	Divorced, Remarried, Widowed	0	
Helen	1933	Mid-Atlantic city	Mid-Atlantic suburbs	White	Upper Middle Class	Some college	Married	4	No.
Lillian	1934	Small town West	Mid-Atlantic suburbs	White	Middle Class	Graduate degree	Widowed (twice)	1	Yes - secretarial
Lucille	1933	Mid-Atlantic city/Central America	Mid-Atlantic suburbs	White	Working Class	High School	Divorced	4	Yes – hospital dietary
Mable	1931	Small town Midwest	Midwestern suburbs	White	Lower Middle Class	Some college	Widowed	4	Self-employed, sold crafts
Margaret	1926	Small town Midwest	Mid-Atlantic suburbs	White	Upper Middle Class	College degree	Widowed	4	Yes - retail sales
Roberta	1925	Midwestern city	Mid-Atlantic suburbs	White	Upper Middle Class	Graduate degree	Widowed	3	Yes - taught college, social work
Shirley	1925	Mid-Atlantic small town	Mid-Atlantic suburbs	White	Upper Middle Class	Graduate degree	Married	3	Yes - taught college
Vera	1932	Small town Midwest	Mid-Atlantic suburbs	White	Middle Class	College degree	Never Married	0	
Virginia	1927	Rural Midwest	Midwestern suburbs	White	Working Class	High School	Widowed	4	Yes - clerical

*All names are pseudonyms.

The 12 women hail from a range of class and educational backgrounds. Currently, two of them are working class, two are lower middle class, four are middle class, and four are upper middle class. All graduated from high school. Four had some college, two have college degrees, and four have graduate degrees.

Only one of the 12 women never married. Of the others, four are still married, one is divorced, and six are widowed (one of these was divorced, remarried, and then widowed). Two of the women remained childless, including the woman who never married. The rest had between one and four children. All of the women who had children took a considerable amount of time out of the labor force. Two never returned to the wage labor force, although one ran a small business from her home.

The interviews generally lasted about an hour and were recorded and transcribed. Interviews were open-ended and took a variety of directions, but in each, I asked questions about experiences in the labor force and as a consumer, and about the meanings and values associated with those positions. I also asked about attitudes towards the women's rights movement and the changes in women's roles that emerged from that movement.

I will first provide an overview the consumer practices of these women, including the meanings they attributed to consumption. I will pay special attention to the three aspects of consumption that my literature review highlighted – suburban houses, home furnishings and appliances, and suburban shopping malls – discussing the opportunities for accumulating capital that the women encountered in each area. Next, I will discuss women's experiences in, and attitudes towards, the labor force. I identify a large difference between the amount of cultural capital held and that required for the position

in the labor force as being the primary factor in some women's dissatisfaction with working for pay. Finally, I will discuss the implications my findings have for my hypothesis, as well as the importance of two other factors – husband's work and volunteer work.

Attitudes about Consumption

My review of the literature suggested that the field of consumption changed substantially in the years following World War II, providing new ways for women to accrue cultural, economic and social capital. In particular, it seemed that suburban homes, the appliances and furnishings for those homes, and new styles of shopping were all important features in the field of consumption and of great benefit to women.

Eleven of my 12 respondents bought a house in the suburbs during the 1950s or 60s, and many of them bought in newly developed areas. For the most part, husbands' salaries paid for these homes, although one woman was a recipient of GI Bill benefits and another was a co-signer on the mortgage, after assuring the lender that she would not have children and leave the labor force. These homes were a real source of pleasure and pride, especially among those women who grew up in small towns or rural areas. Doris and her first husband lived in a small town after they married. She says this of their first residence: "Our first apartment was in a house that had been converted into four apartments. Housing was very short because, you see, at that time all the servicemen were coming back and going to school. ... Our apartment was a bedroom [with a] closet that had been converted to a kitchenette!" Several years later, they moved to the suburbs of a Midwestern city and bought a new house of modern design. "There wasn't anything

in the back yard but thistles. We were excited because, you know, this was the first house. We had rented other houses ..., but we never thought about owning a house until we got here. We were really pleased with the fact that we had a house of our own.”

Mabel expressed similar feelings about moving into the first house that she and her husband bought, a three bedroom, one bathroom brick house. When asked about how she felt when moving into that house, she said, “Excited. Really excited. I planted a yellow rose in the front yard, and years later, when we went through [that area on vacation], I said, ‘Can we please drive by our house to see if my yellow rose is still blooming?’ ... We thought it was really nice when we bought it, but by the time we saw it later, it didn’t look that appealing.”

For many women, houses that were purchased during the 1950s were long-term investments – half of the women I interviewed are still living in homes they have owned for close to 50 years. This has meant making regular upgrades and changes over the years, as children and parents move in and out and as things become outmoded or worn down. Betty showed me some of the remodeling projects that she and her husband have done over the years, including the addition of a bedroom and bathroom, saying, “We’ve knocked out walls and added things, and it just works. We’re still doing Christmas day, and Christmas dinners. And it’s such an open house, it goes all the way around.” Other women also told me with pride about how their houses have served their changing needs well over the decades.

It wasn’t just the physical houses that the women I spoke with appreciated, but the neighborhoods they were in. Many compared the opportunities their children had to just go out and play favorably to what they see among their grandchildren. Arlene says this

of her neighborhood, “We always had the neighborhood kids around a lot. ... [O]ur backyard was always the gathering place of most of the kids, mainly because ... we always had a sandbox and we always had a slide and a jungle gym and whatever.” Relationships among children were not the only neighborhood relationships of importance. Many formed friendships with other mothers. Mabel talks about the neighborhood coffee klatches, “There were no fences, you know, so everybody ... [was] watching the kids in the backyard playing, and they would just, ‘Come over here and let’s have coffee.’ And that’s what we did a lot of. It was a very nice neighborhood.”

As the literature suggested, for most of the women I spoke with, their suburban homes were quite meaningful to them. They valued having something to call their own and having more space than they had before. They liked living in neighborhoods with many young children around as playmates for their own children, and they enjoyed the relationships they developed with their neighbors.

While the women I interviewed spoke quite fondly of their houses, there was a little less enthusiasm in their discussions of furnishing those homes. Helen, who still lives in the home she bought in 1955, says this of moving into her new house: “It was absolutely wonderful! Except for the lack of furniture, it was absolutely wonderful!” When asked what she did to furnish it, she said they “beg, borrowed, and stole” what they could from relatives and through her husband’s employer. This was a common response. Women told me that they used many hand-me-downs, bought used things at auctions and garage sales, made do with sheets as curtains, and so on. But, once they acquired items, they tended to hang on to them. Many of my respondents pointed out to me things that they had purchased during the 1950s as they were setting up house.

Still, there were some purchases that seemed important, often cars or electronics. When asked if there was anything she was particularly excited about buying, Virginia had this to say: “Well, we bought a new car. Mercury, white car, with an orange stripe around the back. We were really proud of that. Other than that, I can’t ... just run of the mill stuff. But every once in a while we’d get a new car.” For Mabel, it was a television: “[M]y husband liked to have, he was always interested in electronics and stuff, and we had a TV pretty early on, and it was a luxury, but we had one. Things like that, we pretty well, we would get them.”

For the most part, the women I spoke with did not have the enthusiasm for consumer goods that one might expect from reading the literature on consumer society during the postwar era. However, there was one form of consumption that many did speak about with interest – travel. There were enormous class difference in the types of family vacations these women took, ranging from campouts in state parks to international travel, but they discussed all how important those trips were to them. Betty talked of traveling “this country from one end to the other. We did the campers, of course – that was much less expensive than staying in hotels or going overseas. We never went out of the country when they were growing up, but oh, we went everywhere.” She attributes some of the closeness among her adult children to the experiences they had on family vacations. Margaret, who lived overseas on and off for several decades because of her husband’s career, told me that she really relished the opportunities that she had to travel with her family. And Roberta covered all ends of the spectrum, taking her children on road trips within the United States, on a vacation in Europe, and finally for a series of summers at the family’s second home in the Northeast. The appreciation for travel may

stem from the realization that it was much more of a possibility in the 1950s and 60s than it was earlier. Doris explains, “Growing up as a child in the 30s and 40s, my family took one trip to the [mountains], and that was the highlight of their lives, was to be able to take a trip like that. They never would have imagined ordinary people like myself traveling like I have done.”

Part of the reason that consumer goods may have been less salient to women in the 1950s than the literature would lead us to believe is that women broadly felt that they lived frugally and that their consumption practices were in line with those of their peers. When asked about “keeping up with the Joneses,” my respondents largely told me that they did not witness much competitive consumption. There were a few exceptions, including a funny story from Lillian, whose neighbor’s visit from the termite exterminator set off a rash of exterminations in their neighborhood. But most responses were that “we were all in the same boat.” Consumer goods that were thought of as run of the mill may not be particularly memorable, even if those products that are considered run of the mill were rare only a few years earlier.

The other area within consumption that my literature review suggested would be important for women during the postwar era is the change in the “means of consumption.” As people moved out to the suburbs, so did stores. Shopping was increasingly done in chain stores and shopping malls. However, these changes did not seem to be as meaningful to the women I talked to as might be expected. Certainly, they all had recollections of new shopping centers changing the landscape, and a couple of them told me that they thought that the new malls were “very elegant and nice.” But,

there seemed to be more nostalgia for old ways of shopping than enthusiasm for the new ways.

A couple of women told me that going to the mall paled in comparison to the excitement of going downtown. Helen, who grew up in the city, told me about shopping downtown:

It was wonderful! When you were 10 or 11, you could go down on the bus and arrive right down at [the department store] by yourself. And there were three movie theaters on [the main shopping street.] And you could go in any one of them and you could eat lunch at [the department store]. They had a children's lunch with four little sandwiches, and you could order at the end a scoop of ice cream with the cone on top and the face made up like a clown. It was wonderful! Wonderful. And the big florist here in the city... One of the windows had a great big huge fishpond in it – all decorated with flowers around it and these big goldfish. Wonderful You wouldn't believe the number – it was a little town – but the number of department stores down there. There must have been six, eight, something like that.

Helen's opinion about the regional mall nearest her house is less glowing: "Things have changed enormously. You wouldn't recognize [the] Mall anymore, it's really quite nice. But it's gotten so big, I get lost in it."

Shirley also expressed nostalgia for how shopping used to be.

One of the things that I've noticed that's changed a lot, and I don't know just when it was, it used to be in [the suburbs] and over in the [city] to some extent, ladies' dress shops. Just small shops with women's clothes, and they called them ladies' dress shops. And it was a very nice way to shop because they would pull things out and help you. And that's changed of course, almost completely.

Women like Helen and Shirley expressed preferences for the smaller scale and individualized service of the stores they knew when they were young. They also thought that malls contrasted poorly to the excitement of downtown shopping districts.

At least part of the detraction of the new suburban shopping may have been lack of access. Although these malls were designed to be very convenient for drivers, with

ample parking space, not all women had regular use of a car, and many may not have enjoyed driving so far for shopping. Mabel relates the following story about trying to do some clothes shopping for her four young children:

At one point, I wasn't driving, and my husband, we only had one car at that time, and he took me to the shopping center. He'd drive and watch the kids in the car while I went in to do some shopping like over at [the mall]. He said, 'That's terrible, Mabel! You've got to learn to drive and get a car! I cannot do this. There's four kids in the car waiting for you!'

Mabel's ability to take advantage of social space tailored to women's needs and desires (Cohen 2000) was limited because she did not drive. Even women who did drive and had the regular use of a car may have been put off by the travel time necessary to get to a large mall. Helen, for example, mentioned repeatedly how the mid-Atlantic city she lives in used to be "such a small town" with everything just a short distance away. In her opinion, suburbanization changed that, making shopping a bigger hassle.

My interviews provided mixed support for the three consumption areas that my literature review suggested would be important to women during the 1950s and 1960s. Suburban homes were clearly important to the women I talked to. The eleven of them that had homes in the suburbs were proud of their houses. They were proud of the success that purchasing a house symbolized, they enjoyed the social networks they – and their children – formed in their neighborhoods, and several of the women in the mid-Atlantic city mentioned their happy surprise about the return on their investment in their houses. Many of these women clearly gained social and economic capital from their homes. My findings are less conclusive when it comes to consumer goods. While there were a few purchases that the women I talked to remembered with pride and pleasure, such as cars or televisions, for the most part, I got a sense that most consumer goods were

considered run of the mill and not very interesting or important. Several of my respondents apologized for not having more to say about consumer society, saying, “I’m just not much of a shopper.” I am inclined to believe that women did build some cultural capital through their interactions with consumer society, but perhaps not in very overt ways. Finally, my discussions with women about the growth of suburban malls and other changes in shopping did not provide much evidence that women took advantage of those spaces to cultivate social or cultural capital.

Attitudes About the Labor Force

The women I spoke with had a wide variety of experiences in the labor force; two had very little involvement in the labor force, three were long-term, full time workers, and the rest were somewhere in between. The most common experience was for women to work until their first child was born, to withdraw from the labor force until all children were in school, and then to return to the labor force on a part time basis. Many had very positive experiences in the labor force. In addition to providing income, employment gave women something to do, a sense of accomplishment, and camaraderie with their co-workers. However, some women had more ambivalent or even negative attitudes about the labor force. The factor that separated these two groups was not class position, political attitudes, formal education, or type of job held. Each group of women, those who had good experiences in the labor force and those who were more frustrated in the labor force, contained a variety of class and educational backgrounds. When I asked women how they felt about the changes in women’s positions in the labor force over the years, their opinions were remarkably consistent and nuanced. They all said that they

understood why women would want to work, even when they had small children, but they were concerned that those children suffered and that women themselves are stressed by so many responsibilities. Some women were very happy with their blue collar or clerical jobs, while others were unhappy with very similar positions. The source of distinction between these two groups seems to be the correlation between the amount of cultural capital held and the amount necessary for the job they held. In order to demonstrate this, I will provide a more detailed look at the experiences of several women in each group.

After graduating from high school in her rural hometown, Virginia moved to the city and worked for a few years in a clerical position with a financial company. She left her job after marrying and becoming pregnant with her first child. She stayed out of the labor force while her four children were young, but was active in a church group, helped out with her children's scouting activities, and took up bowling. She was suddenly faced with the need for employment when her husband became terminally ill in 1963. She worked for a while as a sales clerk, but then got a 30 hour per week job in the cafeteria of a major manufacturing company. Virginia says of this job, "I enjoyed working in the cafeteria. It was hard work, but everybody I worked with was nice, we had a lot of fun." She eventually transferred to a part-time clerical position, and then to a full-time clerical position in manufacturing, which she held for about 20 years, because "I needed an eight hour day job, plus benefits and all that." She said she enjoyed her job, and it was clear that she was proud of the work she did. She described her responsibilities in great detail, told me of her accomplishments in learning new technologies, and compared her work performance favorably to her boss's. She was also proud of her family's ability to cope

with the changes that took place as she dedicated more of her time to the labor force. Her children accepted a decline in their standard of living without complaint, and the older children were very helpful with the younger kids. Virginia attributes her ability to recover from the loss of her husband to the demands of a full-time job. “Actually, going to work and having kids was what pushed me along. I think I recovered a lot faster than a lot of the women do when their husbands die later in life and they don’t have that. Because I had something to occupy my mind, besides me.”

Arlene grew up in a small Midwestern town and attended one year of college before marrying. She held clerical, sales, and childcare jobs for the next four years until her first child was born and then left the labor force until her youngest was in school full time. While she was out of the labor force, Arlene became involved with her children’s activities and her church. She also did regular volunteer work with handicapped children, which she said was very rewarding. However, she said that she always missed working. In the early 1970s, she took a part-time job with the headquarters of one of the organizations her daughter participated in. Although she described her wages as “very low,” she enjoyed the camaraderie with her co-workers and with volunteers. She felt that she made an important contribution to an organization she cared about through her job:

I went there from being a group leader and on the board, and that’s how they asked me if I was interested, and you know, it’s just like, you got to have an awful lot of contact with an awful lot of people, and of course, most of the contact with people was with people who were involved ... with the youth, and that sort of thing. ... [W]hen you were out of the main office, when you called for anything, why, they knew you were calling for some reason. It was quite interesting.

Arlene’s job was well-suited to her background and interests.

Lillian was the first person in her family to graduate from college. After graduation, she joined a government agency in a secretarial role. This work provided her with some interesting travel opportunities and the ability to contribute to public affairs in ways that she felt were important. She married later than many members of her cohort, at the age of 31, and her first and only child was born when she was 34. She told me that she missed working when staying home with her daughter:

I found it very difficult to watch her every minute. ... It was wonderful having her, and I loved it, but I was sort of wishing that I was still working. I really missed working. ... I found myself relying on my husband to bring home tidbits of information and things that happened at his office and living through him vicariously. Isn't that silly?

When her daughter entered school, she went back to school for a Master's in education, at the suggestion of her daughter's principal. While she enjoyed the school work, she was not certain that teaching was the right career for her. At any rate, the baby bust made finding a teaching job difficult when she graduated, so she took a position as a legal secretary with a large law firm. She enjoyed her job, which she held for many years, not because of the money she earned, but because it allowed her to get out of the house and to become involved in the professional world.

Doris grew up in a farming community and put herself through college over the course of 10 years to earn a teaching degree. She married, but remained childless, so her career teaching elementary school – mostly the higher grades– lasted many years. Although she says she “kind of fell into teaching,” she really enjoyed her career. She went on to earn a Master's degree in education and did more post-graduate work after that. She clearly regarded herself as a professional, continuing her education and attending conventions. For Doris, teaching was not just about the three Rs, but getting

her students involved in the world around them. She described a favorite assignment of hers, in which she had students catch a spider at home and bring it to class, learning in the process that the subjects of many phobias are really quite shy creatures. She added the following about science class: “The last few years, of course, we were environmentally conscious, and trying to conserve and get them interested in science.” Her commitment to teaching is mirrored in her many other activities, which have included involvement in a variety of social justice organizations and advocacy groups, as well as a gardening club.

Virginia, Arlene, Lillian, and Doris have very different backgrounds and they have held very different jobs, but they were all largely satisfied with the work they did. They each found jobs that suited their backgrounds and meshed well with their other interests. Virginia had the added satisfaction of supporting a large family with the paychecks she earned. For each, there was a good match between the type of job and the amount of cultural capital held by the woman. However, others in the group of women I talked to were not so fortunate.

Mabel grew up in a small town in the Midwest during the Depression. She describes her childhood as “very, very poor” but “very happy.” She attended one year of college as an art major, but left school when she married. Part of her motivation to leave school and marry was a concern that her family spend what resources they had on her younger brother’s education. She worked briefly in a clerical position to help her husband complete his engineering degree before her four children were born. As many of the other women did, she became involved with her children’s schooling and activities. She also volunteered at a local hospital. When the children were all in school, she

decided to look for a job that would allow her to earn a little money during the day. She took a position in the school's kitchen. Mabel describes her first (and only) day of work:

I went to work, and I was the last one there, so I got the dirtiest jobs. And it was scouring these big pans that they cooked in, and it was really hard, hot work. And I had to take my watch off and put it in my apron pocket, and then somehow I bumped up against something and broke my watch while I was there. I came home and was so tired that I couldn't get dinner, so we had to eat out. And I told [my husband], "I can't do this! I absolutely can't do this!" So, I worked one day for the school system. I thought it would be more of a lark than work. But it wasn't. Those ladies worked hard, I found out.

Mabel's requirements for a job were not particularly high – she thought she would have enjoyed a clerical job or perhaps a sales job in the sort of stores she enjoyed patronizing. However, finding such a position that allowed her to be home when her children were out of school was difficult. Although Mabel's one experience with the labor force was so disheartening, she did find a good solution. She had always been interested in arts and crafts, and began devoting more and more of her time to her hobby. Eventually, she began selling her products, and said she did well financially. Running her own crafts business, which required artistic ability, self-direction, and an entrepreneurial spirit, was much more in keeping with her levels of cultural capital than working in the school cafeteria.

Betty also grew up in a small town, but left home to join the military towards the end of World War II. At the close of the war, she went to a state university in the Midwest, met her husband, and got married. She did not complete her degree, but left school when her first child was born. Like many other women, she stayed out of the labor force while she had pre-school aged children as her husband was able to support the family with his salary as an engineer. But, she got involved in many of the children's

activities, such as scouts, and also taught Sunday school. She is also an avid reader, and their family took many long vacations together. Like Mabel, Betty took a job at the school cafeteria when her children were in school full time. She eventually moved to a clerical position at the school, and when her children were older, she took a full-time clerical job with a manufacturer. Unlike Virginia, Betty described her responsibilities quite briefly, as “purchase order and all that kind of stuff.” When asked how she liked her job, she said, “Oh, it’s always one you had to do. It was fine. Not terribly challenging, but at that time I didn’t need a challenge – I had enough of that at home with teenagers!” While she was not especially unhappy in the labor force, she said she “would have preferred to have the degree, and to do something a little more like a career.” The volunteer work she has done since retirement with two prominent cultural institutions in her city are much more meaningful to her than any of the paid positions she has had. Her position in the labor force was not congruent with her cultural capital holdings.

Betty attributed her lack of prospects in the labor force to the fact that she did not have a college degree, but Vera’s story shows that a degree did not necessarily pave the way to a career. Vera earned a bachelor’s degree from a well-regarded, small liberal arts college in the Midwest. After graduation, she began looking for a job, but found it slow going. “I tried to get a job. That was an era that they didn’t care what experience you had, or what education you had. ‘What’s your typing speed?’ They only thought of women as typists.” After a lot of typing practice, she eventually got a job with a government agency. She remained frustrated with the emphasis on clerical skills, but gradually worked her way into a position she enjoyed because she was able to use her knowledge of history and political science. However, further career advancement was

blocked to her, as only men received officer training. Her employer eventually began opening career track positions to women, but only for women under the age of 35, and she was already 36. Her frustrations in the labor force are perhaps exacerbated by her decision not to marry because she wanted to maintain a career. Vera's college degree and ambition were not rewarded as she hoped.

Roberta was the most disgruntled with the labor force. She grew up in a wealthy family and attended an elite university, graduating with a foreign language degree. She married a physician shortly after graduation, and worked as a civil servant for a year or two before her first child was born. She hired a babysitter and worked as a volunteer for one of her husband's friends once a week and found her work examining charts and doing a little analysis to be quite interesting. But, when her family moved to another city, she became a full-time mother. She really relished this role, in part because she felt that her mother had been too involved in the family business, but also because the social-psychological literature of the 1950s placed so much importance on women's domestic roles. However, after a family vacation in Europe when her children were all school-aged, she decided she needed more education and went back to school, eventually earning a Ph.D. in a liberal arts field in the early 1970s. She faced real difficulty finding an academic job, because her husband's career meant that she had no geographic mobility. She also found it difficult to publish her work. She described how her plans changed as it became clear that she was not going to find the sort of position she wanted:

I didn't get a job, and I was angry. ... But, I wanted to salvage something, at that point I was out in the real world – my kids were grown up, so I went back to school again, ... and I got a social work degree. It only took me about a year, and I knew a lot of this stuff. So I worked for five years as a psychiatric social worker. ... I quit because I realized that the only way I could survive in that job was to pretend like I was stupid, and I wasn't about to pretend like I was stupid.

Roberta had an enormous amount of cultural capital – too much for the type of position she was able to find. After resigning from that job, she spent many years as a volunteer docent at a major museum, which she found much more satisfying than any of the other work she had done.

Mabel, Betty, Vera, and Roberta were all discontented with their experiences in the labor force because the positions open to them were not good matches with the levels of cultural capital they possessed. This held true across a range of jobs and levels of cultural capital. These women attributed this mismatch between cultural capital and available jobs to a variety of structural factors, such as a lack of formal education, a lack of jobs during school hours, or a lack of geographic mobility. Vera was one of very few respondents who mentioned sexism in the labor force; most women assumed that any troubles they encountered in the labor force were the result of decisions they had made.

Discussion

I hypothesized that, during the postwar period, the changes in consumer society would allow women to accumulate cultural, economic, and social capital in ways that were not previously open to them. This capital would then have an impact on fields outside of consumption. The resistance to change within the labor force would create a situation of *spatial hysteresis* that was ultimately resolved by the changes in women's labor force participation in the direction of more full-time, career-track employment. The interviews I have conducted with 12 women who were young adults during the postwar period have provided partial support for my hypothesis.

The women I spoke to did indicate that some aspects of consumption during the postwar era were important to them. It seems like that suburban homes, and to a lesser extent, the furnishings for those homes, did provide women with new access to cultural, economic, and social capital. The new means of consumption, typified by the regional suburban shopping mall, seemed to have very little of an effect, however. About half of the women I spoke to were fairly discontented with the options available to them in the labor force, and all of the women I spoke to were sympathetic to younger women who wanted to have careers. The factor that connected the women who were disappointed in their positions in the labor force seemed to be that they had more cultural capital than was necessary for the jobs they held. These findings are fairly consistent with my hypothesis. However, while it seems that consumption did affect capital holdings, and capital holdings did affect attitudes towards the labor force, the connection between the two fields is not certain.

Asking women about their experiences and opinions about consumption and the labor force was fairly straight forward. Although many women were a little hesitant to talk about consumption, by asking a variety of questions in a variety of ways I generally got the sort of information I needed. My best guess is that reluctance to discuss consumption stems from a few factors: consumption, and attention to material goods more generally, may be felt to be unimportant, materialistic, or vain; the mundane details of everyday shopping may be a little hazy after the passage of 40 or 50 years; or the consumption that my respondents participated in during the 1950s and 60s may pale in comparison to that of their children and grandchildren. Indeed, many of the women I spoke with mentioned the excess consumption they see today, especially of electronics

and toys and goods for children. Labor force questions were easier. My respondents all seemed to have distinct memories of positions they had held 50 or more years previously, and their attitudes about work were firm.

However, it proved very difficult to ask about the relationship between the field of consumption and the labor force. When asked about such a connection, I was occasionally told about abstract relationships. For example, Roberta suggested that her son and daughter-in-law's high levels of consumption of time-saving products and services are motivated by the time pressures they face as a dual-career family. But, no one told me that she felt that she was in a better position as a consumer than as a producer, or vice versa. There are three possibilities as to why this is: I did not ask the right questions, there was no relationship between those two fields to speak of, or the relationship between the fields was not understood by the women participating in them. The third is a distinct possibility. The very definition of a field is that it is semi autonomous, with its own internal logics. If the connections and relationships between any two fields were too overt, then they could be considered a single field. The difficulty in drawing the connections between two fields may be the weakness of an empirical analysis of a theory of spatial hysteresis.

I have presented evidence that some women were discontented with their positions in the labor force because their cultural capital holdings were incongruent with the types of positions available to them in the labor force. While the precise origins of this extra capital remain unclear, it is possible that changes in consumer society contributed to this accumulation of capital. Whatever the origins, the conversations I had with these women suggested two ways that this capital was used outside of the labor

force – as volunteers and in support of their husbands’ careers. Both of these activities may have helped to mitigate the effects of hysteresis.

Many of the women I spoke to had very active lives as volunteers with a wide variety of organizations. Most were involved with organizations related to their children, such as scouts, PTA, or sports, but many were also involved in cultural or charitable groups. Helen shed some light on my surprise about the level of involvement, saying about her volunteer work with her church:

But you know, so many people work today, women work, that they’ll give you a day, a Saturday, and take it off from whatever they have to do, or half a Saturday to work on a bazaar or something, but they don’t have the time to give to the planning, which doesn’t take an enormous amount of time, but it takes some meetings and stuff like that, and they’re too busy. And this is one of the problems, the major problem, with women working, is that you don’t have these women to do this sort of thing.

For some of the women I interviewed, their volunteer jobs were more important than those they did for pay. This was in part because they cared about the organizations they volunteered for, but was probably also because of the type of work they did. A woman whose options in the labor force topped out at clerical work could take on more “middle-class” roles as a volunteer, planning an event, managing the delegation (and completion) of tasks, or creating a curriculum for Sunday school.

Although I rarely asked questions about husbands’ work, other than to get a general sense of the sort of financial support husbands provided, many women told me about their husbands’ careers. Several women dropped out of college in order to work to support their husbands while they finished school. Others told me that their husbands’ careers were a higher priority than their own, and many seemed to be quite knowledgeable about their husbands’ lines of work. Involvement in husbands’ careers

was especially true for women whose husbands held high level positions. For example, Margaret, whose husband was a high level executive with a career that required regular moves and some time living overseas, was not only proud of her husband's accomplishments, but also felt that she made a real, formal contribution to them.

At the time, we wives felt that we were making a contribution to our husbands' careers and worked very hard to have a nice home and well-behaved children. And then near the end of our career, the [organization] suddenly changed its mind and decided that wives were no longer pertinent. It was rather a shock, you know, to be told, "Sorry, what you've been doing is really not so important." It sent out a directive. You know, they changed the whole system of doing performance ratings, and wives just weren't to be mentioned.

Margaret's role, which became officially devalued towards the end of what she refers to as "their" career, was not just to take care of home and family, but to be actively involved in entertaining, supporting the morale of other families associated with the organization, and doing charitable work to promote the organization's public image. She valued the work that she did, and it was probably more rewarding than the type of work she could have done for pay, given the family's frequent moves.

Some women who had limited options in the labor force and an abundance of cultural capital may have turned to volunteer work or involvement in their husbands' careers to find an appropriate use for their capital, rather than focusing their efforts on a labor force with a number of structural barriers to their advancement. These outlets may have served to mitigate the effects of spatial hysteresis, especially for those women who did not have a great deal of need for their own income.

Conclusion

Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical toolbox includes the concept of *hysteresis*, a situation that occurs when the habitus of an agent or agents lags behind the pace of change of a field in which they participate, creating a mismatch between habitus and field. The experience of hysteresis is uncomfortable for the agent, for their sense of the game is no longer very accurate and their predispositions are out of synch with the objective reality they face. Hysteresis is usually resolved in some way – the agent's habitus may adjust to fit the new conditions of the field, or the agent may actively work to change the rules of the field to better suit his or her habitus. Hysteresis is a distinctly temporal effect; the mismatch between habitus and field occurs when change over time occurs more quickly in the field than the habitus, and the mismatch is resolved by further changes over time in either the field or the habitus.

In this thesis, I have expanded on Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis to include a spatial dimension, in which multiple spaces, or fields, are included in the analysis. *Spatial hysteresis* is similar to the original, temporal definition of hysteresis, but occurs because change in one field is faster than change in another. As change occurs in the first field, some agents acquire new volumes and compositions of capital, some of which is in the fundamental species of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic). These fundamental species of capital are relevant, to a greater or lesser extent, in all fields. Therefore, the changes that take place to the agent's capital holdings, and relatedly his or her habitus, in one field, should have consequences in other fields as well. When agents are unable to use the capital they have gained in one field to take a new position in another field, a situation of spatial hysteresis occurs. Of course, the agent's position will

not be identical in each field. Each field values the various fundamental species of capital differently, as well as having its own, field-specific form of capital.

As with Bourdieu's conception of hysteresis, the idea of spatial hysteresis that I have put forth here has a distinctly temporal aspect. Change that occurs over time in one field has effects that are felt in another field. As with Bourdieu's hysteresis, the resolution of spatial hysteresis occurs over time, as further changes unfold in either field or within the agent's habitus. However, as its name implies, spatial hysteresis emphasizes the importance of analyzing multiple spaces over time. The relationship between two fields will not be understood by simply looking at a both at a single point in time, or by watching the evolution of just one or the other. Instead, we get the most nuanced understanding of social change in a differentiated society when we take a close look at multiple social spaces, and the ways in which they affect one another, over time.

In this paper, I hypothesized that an example of spatial hysteresis was to be found in the roles of women in the fields of consumption and the labor force in the decades following World War II. As mass consumer culture began to thrive in the late 1940s and 1950s, women had new opportunities to gain economic, cultural, and social capital. These changes would have affected their habitus, and should also have affected the positions they held in other fields. However, women did not have much opportunity in the labor force during the same time period, but often exited the labor force for substantial portions of their lives and were restricted to fairly low-level jobs when they were employed.

I conducted a series of interviews with women who were young adults during these post-war years to get a sense for the positions they held as consumers and as

members of the labor force, as well as the relationship between those two fields.

Unfortunately, my data is less than conclusive. I found very little direct evidence to support my hypothesis, but some of what I found is suggestive. In particular, it seemed that the women who were most unhappy in the labor force had the greatest excess of cultural capital over what was required (or indeed desirable) for the types of occupations that were open to them. Some of this cultural capital could have come from their activities as consumers, but that is uncertain from my data.

There are a couple of things that could be done to expand on this study and perhaps garner a little more support for my hypothesis. First, interviewing a few younger women might provide a useful perspective. Women who were members of the baby boom generation would have grown up with mass consumer culture, and they would have habitus that firmly reflect that era. Also, women in this age group generally had more formal education and more work experience before marriage and motherhood. The women I interviewed felt strongly that their lack of formal education and work experience hampered them in the labor force; comparing them to a slightly younger generation with more human capital might illuminate how important that lack of education and experience was.

Another possibility would be to examine longitudinal data, if such a dataset exists. Finding the expected relationship between consumption practices and labor force attainment – that certain types and levels of consumption precede certain efforts in the labor force – would provide additional support for my hypothesis.

However, I suspect that finding direct evidence of spatial hysteresis may be difficult, even under ideal circumstances. As the various fields are all semi-autonomous,

it may be difficult to recognize when changes in one field are influencing another field. An agent may become increasingly uncomfortable with the position held in a field without being able to name the source of that discomfort.

So, where do women stand today in the fields of consumption and the labor force? Women still spend more time in consumer activities than do men (based on my analyses of American Time Use Survey data), while men still have more money to spend on consumption. However, more than ever before, women have their own money to spend as consumers and men are being targeted as consumers of products they rarely bought in the past, particularly by fashion and related industries. The sexes do not hold exactly the same position in consumption, but the differences are increasingly minimal.

Women still face a glass ceiling in the labor force (Cotter, et al, 2001), and are much more likely than men to withdraw from the labor force or reduce their contribution in order to meet family responsibilities (Mennino and Brayfield, 2002). There is still a fairly high gender wage gap in the United States, as well as a high degree of occupational segregation (Goldin 1990). However, women have greatly improved their position in the labor force since the mid-20th century.

I would argue that women still hold a more advantageous position as consumers than as members of the labor force, but there does not seem to be a current situation of spatial hysteresis between those two fields. Any differences between the fields may be due to the different weights they put on different fundamental forms of capital or on field-specific types of capital. On the other hand, the changes that took place in the labor force over the past few decades may have resulted in a relationship of spatial hysteresis between the labor force and the family.

The changes in the labor force have brought more and more women into the labor force, with greater levels of attachment to the labor force. But, women still spend more time than men in housework and care of family members (Bianchi 2000). They are much more likely than men to reduce their commitment to the labor force to meet family needs (Mennino and Brayfield 2002). Arlie Hochschild (1989) calls the family's situation a "stalled revolution" in which women's increased participation in the labor force has not been matched by a similar increase in men's involvement in domestic life. This has created a real tension between work and family, particularly for women.

A number of ways to resolve this situation of spatial hysteresis have been suggested, some focusing on the family, but most focusing on the labor force. Some suggest a return to a more traditional gender division of labor (Popenoe 1999). Others would like to see men take on a greater role in the family, perhaps using public policy to motivate that change (Bernard and Knitzer 1999). Finally, many work-family scholars suggest changes within the labor force that allow both men and women the flexibility to accommodate family needs, such as increased (and paid) parental leave, more part-time, but still career track jobs, and options like flextime (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Currently, it looks as though changes tend to be of the latter variety. For example, California has recently introduced paid parental and medical leave and companies are gradually adding family-friendly benefits to their compensation packages. Hopefully, some of these changes will begin to ameliorate the current situation of spatial hysteresis between the labor force and the family.

Appendix A - Interview Schedule

Personal Biography

I'd like to begin with some background information about you.

- Fill out life history chart – residence, marriage, children, education, work.

Experiences in Consumption

The post-war period in the US saw a rapid expansion of mass consumption. I'd like to begin by talking about your experiences buying things for yourself and your family in the 1950s.

- Tell me about some of the major purchases that you made during the decade – things like houses, cars, appliances, etc. How did you feel about those purchases?
- We often talk about “keeping up with the Joneses.” Did you ever notice this going on among your friends or neighbors?
- Did you ever feel like the things you purchased were signs that you were moving up in the world? When? Explain.
- Who made the decisions about what to buy in your family? Did this differ between big and small purchases? Who made the decisions about other things in your family, such as disciplining children?
- How did you pay for things, especially major purchases – cash, check, store credit, loans?

Experiences in the Labor Force

Next, I'd like to talk about paid employment, particularly during the 50s and 60s.

- During the 50s and 60s, would you like to have worked more or less?
- Would you have preferred a different sort of work?
- How much prestige was associated with your work?
- How did you feel about your salary? Was it too low, too high, or just right?
- How did you feel about working?

Family

Let's talk about your family life during the 1950s and 60s.

- Did any other (non-nuclear) family members live with you?
- What were your roles/responsibilities? What were your most important tasks?
- How satisfied were you as a wife/mother/homemaker?
- Did you experience conflicts between family and work? Did your family responsibilities limit your work aspirations? Or did your work responsibilities prevent you from spending as much time as you would have liked with your family? What sort of work/family trade-offs did you make?
- Conflicts between consumption and family?

Consumption/Labor Force Contrast

I'd like to compare your experiences as a consumer and as a worker, especially during the 1950s and 60s.

- Did other people admire you for the paid work you did?

- Did other people admire you for the things you bought?
- Was there any difference between these two areas? Were you aware of any mismatch?
- Did this change during the 70s, 80s, and 90s?

Feminism

Finally, I'm interested in your thoughts on feminism.

- Do you consider yourself a feminist?
- What did you think about the women's rights and women's liberation movements of the 60s and 70s?
- How do you feel about the changes in women's roles over the past 50 years, particularly in work and consumption?
- How do you feel about the changes in women's family responsibilities over the past years?

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