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The study of single women in early modern Europe (1500-1800) has become a focus of scholarly examination during the past ten years. Historians have recognized that female singleness was often detested as it rejected the societal expectations of women that included domesticity and submission. But what they have yet to identify are the valuable economic contributions single women as a whole provided to society. In order to offer further research to this study, I examined 1795 census records from the Archives départementals de la Côte d'Or in Dijon, France that I translated from French to English. The census I examined covered one section of the city and included 2,605 entries. With the records I created an Excel database that included each citizen's first and last name, age, occupation, the street they lived on, how long they lived in Dijon, and additional comments concerning other children that were too young to be included in the census or the present state of affairs of the individual or family. My data reveals important characteristics specific to single women's living arrangements and labor. First, single women comprised an important part of Dijon's population. Second, they relied on female peers more frequently than men for survival. Female clustering, or two or more single women living in the same household, is seen repeatedly in these records and provides further detail into the ways in which single women survived without a husband or family. Finally, the occupations of single women compared to male and married women's occupations, met an economic need that was crucial for the development of Dijon's economy. Their manual labor provided the basic materials and services needed for the success of Dijon's leading industries.

Breaking Social Confinement: An Analysis of Eighteenth-Century Women in the French Economy

By Meghan Turok

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Jeanne Vedrot lived during a period of history where single women had little or no voice in society. She spent forty-six years in Dijon, France on Sachot Road. In a small building numbered 1357, she and her three roommates lived among fifteen other families, who all lived and worked just to meet their basic human needs. The sixty-six- year old widow to a Mr. Pichon, worked every day as a *fileuse*, or spinner, probably of wool or cotton. Her roommates Lazarette Soulier, Jeanne Chambrette, and a woman named only Francoise, also did menial work such as knitting, day laboring, and hair dressing just to make enough money to survive. That is all we know of these four women. Their names, ages, and occupations are all that is left of the lives that they had. Those details are contained on four small lines in a census record taken in Dijon in 1795.[1] To some, these individual women's lives may seem insignificant because they made no large impact on history in the way that a revolutionary leader did. But single women as a group made a significant difference to the wealth and prosperity of the French economy and therefore the well-being of their society.

The philosophical and political movements of the eighteenth-century narrowly defined the place of women in French society. According to Deborah Simonton, the Enlightenment philosophers forged an identity for women that confined their responsibility to their family and community. Due to a weaker nature, philosophers believed that the best place for her was in the private sphere, or the household.[2] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, was influential in establishing this idea that a woman's place should be in the home. Daryl Hafter explained Rousseau's reasoning being that each sex had different skills that deemed them different roles in

[1] Archives départementales de la Côte d'Or (Dijon, France), L514 (1795), Section "Crébillion","Rue du Sachot."
[2] Deborah Simonton, *A History of European Women's Work: 1700 to the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 13.

life. A woman tended to be more nurturing compared to a man's supposed assertiveness. He therefore should interact in the public sphere and she should be maintained in the private.[3] The French Revolution of 1789 complied with Rousseau's beliefs as the roles of women were even more closely defined. Candice Proctor proved that revolutionaries assumed a woman had two primary tasks in life; those of a mother and wife. There was no need for women to work outside of the home because their natural skills offered little contribution to furthering the economy. [4]

Despite this ideal, families that could not solely rely on the wages of the men depended on women's work for survival. But this did not mean that they could ignore their household duties either. Nancy Locklin has pointed out that "women's work had to be adaptable to her childcare responsibilities."[5] They often had to work in the home where it was more flexible and accommodating to their family and household needs. Amy Froide has shown how the textile industries both in England as well as France employed more women because the tasks were home based and easy to put aside.[6] Textile jobs including knitting, spinning, and lace-making required skills that women held naturally according to Enlightenment philosophers. As long as women were in the household and under the jurisdiction of men, society could proceed smoothly. But what about single women who had no family or husband to rely upon for wealth? What place could they hold in society?

Europe's patriarchal societies refused to accept singleness as a normal way of life for women. In fact Olwen Hufton has shown how spinsters were "despised, pitied, and avoided"

[3] Daryl M. Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 208.
[4] Candice E. Proctor, *Women, Equality, and the French Revolution* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990), 67.
[5] Nancy Locklin, *Women's Work and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Brittany* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 48.
[6] Amy M. Froide, *Never Married Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 91.

when they refused to participate in the institution of marriage.[7] The wedding ceremony was significant to patriarchal ideals because it was a public demonstration symbolizing a woman's transfer from the guardianship of her father to her husband. Therefore, according to Froide, single women posed a threat to that patriarchal system by living without the authority of men. The only way for a woman to be accepted as single was to possess one of two attributes. She either had to be beyond the age of menopause or lose the title of daughter with the death of a surviving parent.[8] Although these women may have been grudgingly accepted, survival was nevertheless much more difficult. Work was still limited to the household and often unskilled.

Census records taken from Dijon, France in 1795 clearly demonstrate that these women comprised an important part of Dijon's population. They survived through their reliance on female peers more frequently than men. Female clustering, or two or more single women living in the same household, is seen repeatedly in these records and provides further detail into the ways in which single women survived without a husband or nuclear family. My research also shows how women's work was widespread but specifically dominant in the service and textile industries. Although the work may be viewed as menial, it met an economic need that was critical for preparing France for an industrious revolution.

"The Presence of Single Women in Dijon, France"

Dijon, France in the eighteenth-century was known as a cultural crossroads where tourists heading south to Italy or north to Paris would meet, shop, and visit with one another. The 1795 Dijon census records I examined are held in the Archives départementals de la Côte d'Or and are just a sample of the population that resided in the southwest corner of the city. There are 2,650

[7] Olwen Hufton, "Women Without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* 9:4 (1984),: 356.
[8] Froide, 22-23.

total entries with 1,568 women and 1,039 men registered (Table 1). The other forty-three entries are incomplete and include only a last name or occupation. The records list the first and last name of the individual, their age, occupation, the street they lived on, how long they lived in Dijon, children twelve years or younger who were too young to be included in the census, and any additional information concerning the family or person. Even though we gain a limited view into the lives Dijon's residents, when examined as an entire group, our window into their lives becomes more vivid.

Table 1. The Population of Dijon, France, 1795

Marital Status	Male		Female		Unknown		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N
Married	615	59%	604	39%	19	44%	1238
Single	422	41%	957	61%	21	49%	1400
Unknown	2	.2%	7	.4%	3	7%	12
Total	1039	100.2%	1568	100.4%	43	100%	2650

(Totals may be over 100% as percentages were rounded up)

Single people in Dijon, France comprised a significant portion of the population. They included widows as well as individuals, both male and female, who lived independently in their own households, or with another family. Of the 2,650 total people registered in the census, 1,400 or fifty-three percent were listed as single. 422 or thirty-percent of that single population were

male and 957 or sixty-eight percent were female. There are twenty-one individuals who are included in this grouping but do not specify a gender (Table 1). Widows comprised seventeen-percent of the single population that included six males and 229 females. There are five widows whose gender is unknown. What this data confirms are two important facts. First, Dijon held more single individuals than married individuals. And second, single women comprised the largest portion of the population overall. This shows that single women would have been recognized as a distinct group and could have been more influential in the community.

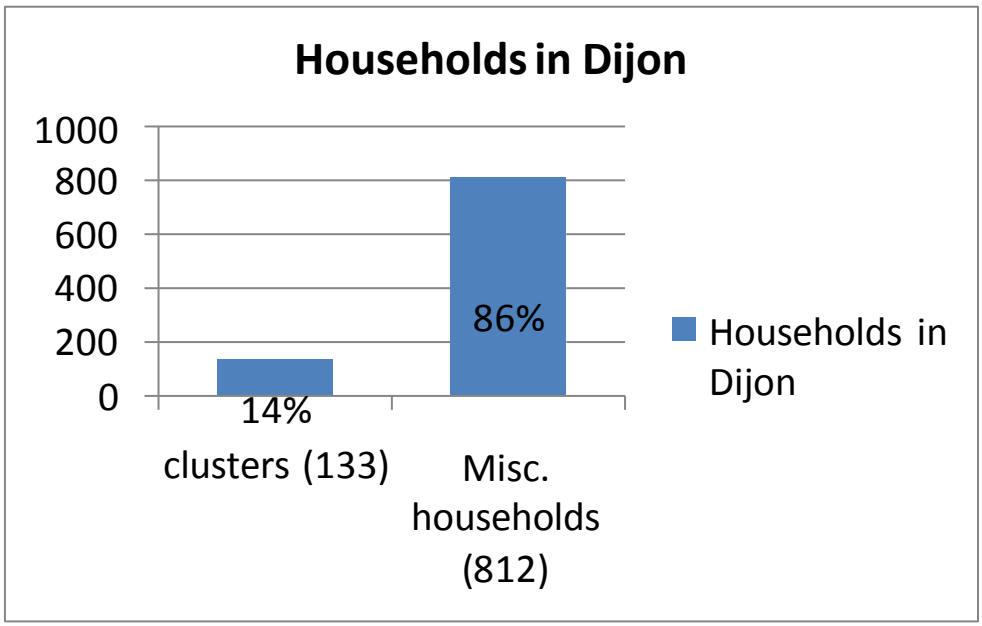
Single women's existence defied traditional cultural customs associated with marriage and family. The Northwestern European Marriage Pattern indicates that young people married later, in their mid-twenties, and were closer in age. Once they were wed, their resources were combined to create a nuclear household with no extended family living with them.[9] The home became a private economy where fathers served as heads of the household with the primary responsibilities to regulate and discipline while being the main economic provider. Mothers had less control over the decision making but were in charge of organizing the household needs.[10] In Dijon, 550, or fifty-eight percent of the total number of households, fit this marriage pattern. Single women defied this customary pattern by avoiding marriage and living without male oversight. They did not participate in the traditional family/household economy and therefore had to find alternative ways to survive.

Single women survived by establishing households that were dependent on the support of female friends and family. Female heads of household in Dijon comprised 249 or twenty-six

[9] Mary S. Hartman, *The Household and the Making of History: A Subversive View of the Western Past* (Cambridge: United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.
[10] James R. Farr, *Artisans in Europe, 1300-1914* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 33.

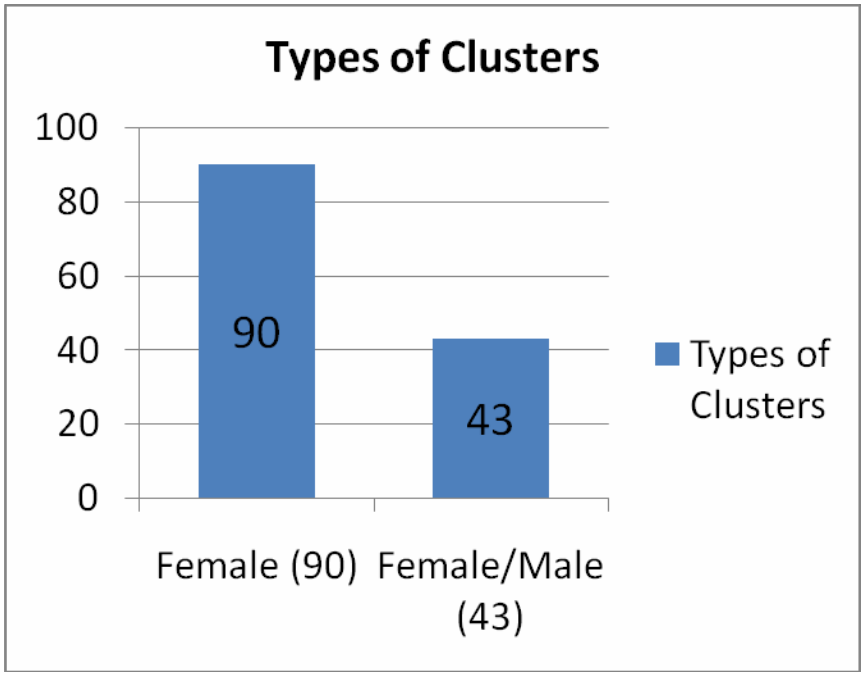
percent of the total number of households. Female clustering, also known as "spinster clustering," according to Hufton, involved two or more women residing in the same household who shared the living expenses such as rent, heating, lighting, and many more.[11] 133 clusters appeared on the census record and most commonly included an older widow living with younger single women (Table 2). Ninety-three clusters house all females, while forty additional clusters house two or more females and a younger male (Table 3). Many of the records also show an older single woman living with a niece, nephew, or other sibling. Single women could have passed their entire lives with relatives starting with parents, to siblings, and to possibly housing kin themselves.[12] Female clustering provided a support network for single women who had no husband or family to rely upon. These households could offer comfort and guidance for behavior, but most importantly they supplied economic support.[13]

Table 2. Female clusters in Dijon, France 1795.



[11] Hufton, 361.
[12] Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide, "A Singular Past," in *Singlewomen in the European Past: 1250-1800*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 23.
[13] Locklin, 114.

Table 3. Types of Female Clusters in Dijon, France 1795



The French economy in the eighteenth-century was a period of expansion for both industry and agriculture. Before the French Revolution of 1789, eighty-percent of the population lived in areas with less than 2,000 inhabitants. Agriculture was the largest employer, providing the most wealth for France. [14] Industry started to develop throughout the eighteenth-century through an increase in foreign trade thus creating a wider economic market. Foreign trade stimulated more industries such as textiles causing growth in the luxury goods.[15] Guilds often controlled specific markets and regulated competition within the city. There are only a few represented in the Dijon census records due to revolutionaries who put more emphasis on the individual instead of a group or guild.[16] Guilds were run by individual families combining work, family, and the household all into one. Subcontracting, or hiring work outside of the guild or

[14] Philip Benedict, "French Cities from the Sixteenth Century to the Revolution: An Overview," in *Cities and Social Chane in Early Modern France*, ed. Philip Benedict (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989), 7.
[15] Ibid., 40-41.
[16] Hafter, 209.

artisanal business, was very common in early modern Europe.[17] Women were likely employed through subcontracting as their work provided the basic materials for the production of larger goods.

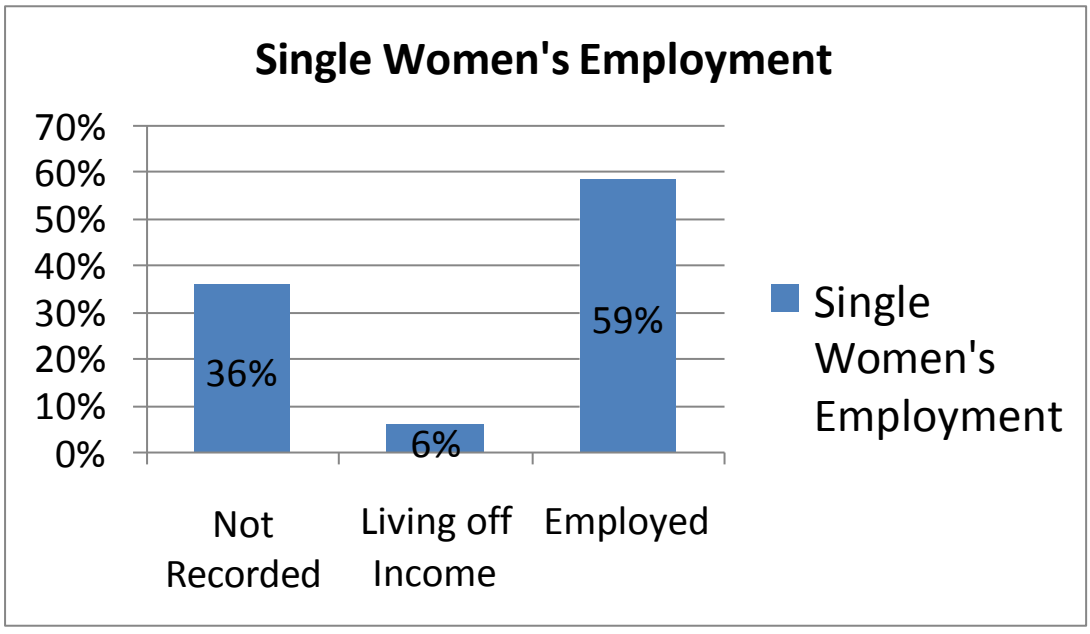
By the nineteenth-century, Dijon was known as an administrative and commercial center that specialized in the working trades such as luxury goods, metals, and textiles. The wealthiest artisans lived in the center of town and were often butchers, tanners, goldsmiths, and pastry cooks. The poorest artisans worked in the textile industries because they required the least amount of skill. Women often worked in these industries carding and shearing wool, spinning cotton, or sewing garments. Wage work offered single women more independence because they could rely on their own labor for economic support. Consequently, this also forced upon them a low labor status with little control over the production and distribution of the goods they created.[18]

Single women's work varied based on their place in life. Life-cycle single women, or those who would eventually marry, worked in order to earn a dowry that was essential for securing marriage. [19] Life-long single women had no husband to depend on for economic support. Therefore, they had to work their entire lives to sustain their independent lifestyle. All single women could work several jobs with a minimal amount of skill because they were expected to eventually marry and then work for their husband.[20] Common jobs for women include servants, laundresses, resellers of goods, and porters.[21] In Dijon, there were 573 single

[17] Farr, *Artisans in Europe*, 53.
[18] James R. Farr, "Consumers, Commerce, and the Craftsmen of Dijon: The Changing Social and Economic Structure of a Provincial Capital, 1450-1750," in *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France*, ed. Philip Benedict (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989), 154-60.
[19] Bennett and Froide, 2.
[20] Hafter, 67.
[21] Locklin, 70.

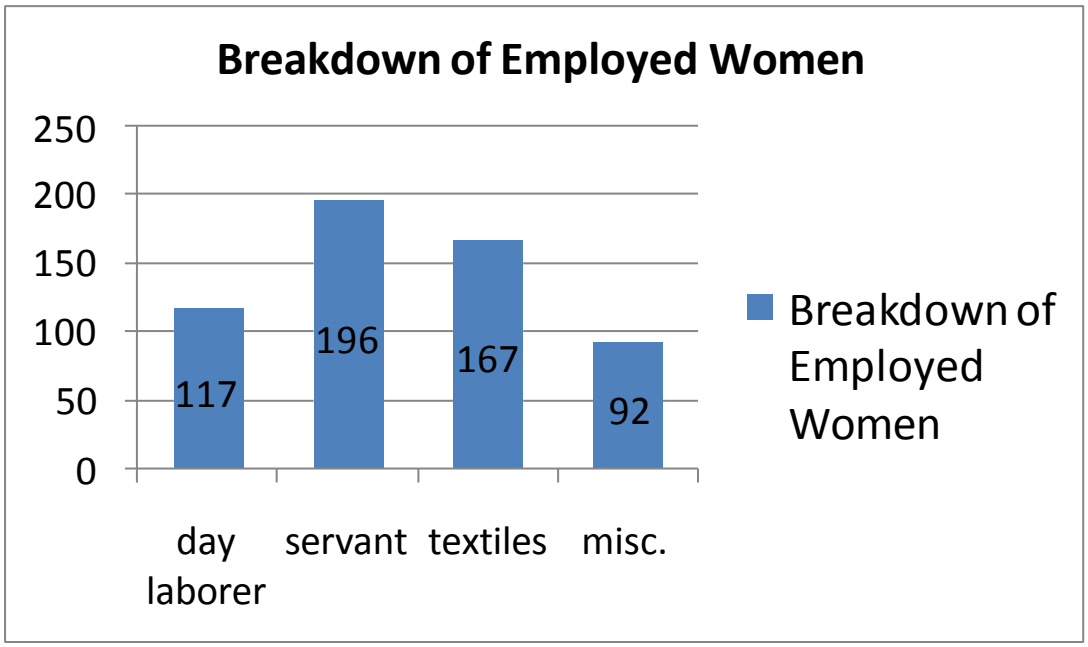
women who listed over twenty-five different occupations (Table 4). Common jobs included servants, bleachers, and spinners. Single women in the census often had no single title of employment but instead had to create a title that described what they did. One example is twenty-six year old Marie Burbant who is listed as an *ouvriere en bas* or washer of stockings.[22] Twenty-percent of the employed single women chose not to create their own title and instead just listed themselves as an *ouvriere* or worker (Table 5). One possible reason for this could be that their jobs were temporary and changed often. The wide variety of jobs available for single women was due to the easy mobility they had compared to men who were often committed to a specific guild.[23] The census records show that fifty-two percent of all single women had moved to Dijon versus living there their entire lives. Single women's mobility was much more flexible as they were not held back by apprenticeships or formal schooling.

Table 4. Employed and Unemployed Single Women in Dijon, France 1795



[22] L514, "Cour des Poisson."
[23] Mary Jo Maynes, "Gender, Labor, and Globalization in Historical Perspective: European Spinsters in the International Textile Industry 1750-1900," *Journal of Women's History* 15.4 (2004), 53.

Table 5. A Breakdown of Single Women's Employment in Dijon, France 1795



Service was a leading employer for both life-cycle and life-long single women. In Dijon, the largest number of women, 196 or thirty-four percent, were listed as *salariée*'s or servants (Table 5). Most were young single females in their mid-teens and twenties, from a rural origin, and dependent on another family for housing and employment.[24] Their ages in Dijon ranged from twelve to eighty years old but most were between the ages of twenty-two and thirty. Duties of a servant could be very specific or widespread. They included housework such as cleaning rooms, cooking, washing, and ironing but also working as a nanny or lady's maid.[25] A few women in Dijon specified that they also were a servant for a specific person, such as Claudine Covart who served Mr. Jarsuel.[26] Most did not state the actual work they did but added that they

[24] Simonton, 99.
[25] Deborah Simonton, "Bringing Up Girls: Work in Preindustrial Europe," in *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills. Placing Girls In European History 1750-1960*, ed. Mary Jo Maynes, Brigitte Soland, and Christina Benninghaus (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 30.
[26] L514, "Vera le timetiere de l'hopital."

performed a specific task such as cleaning or gardening. Service could also be performed in a shop or a workshop, assisting a mistress where the work was more industrial than domestic.[27]

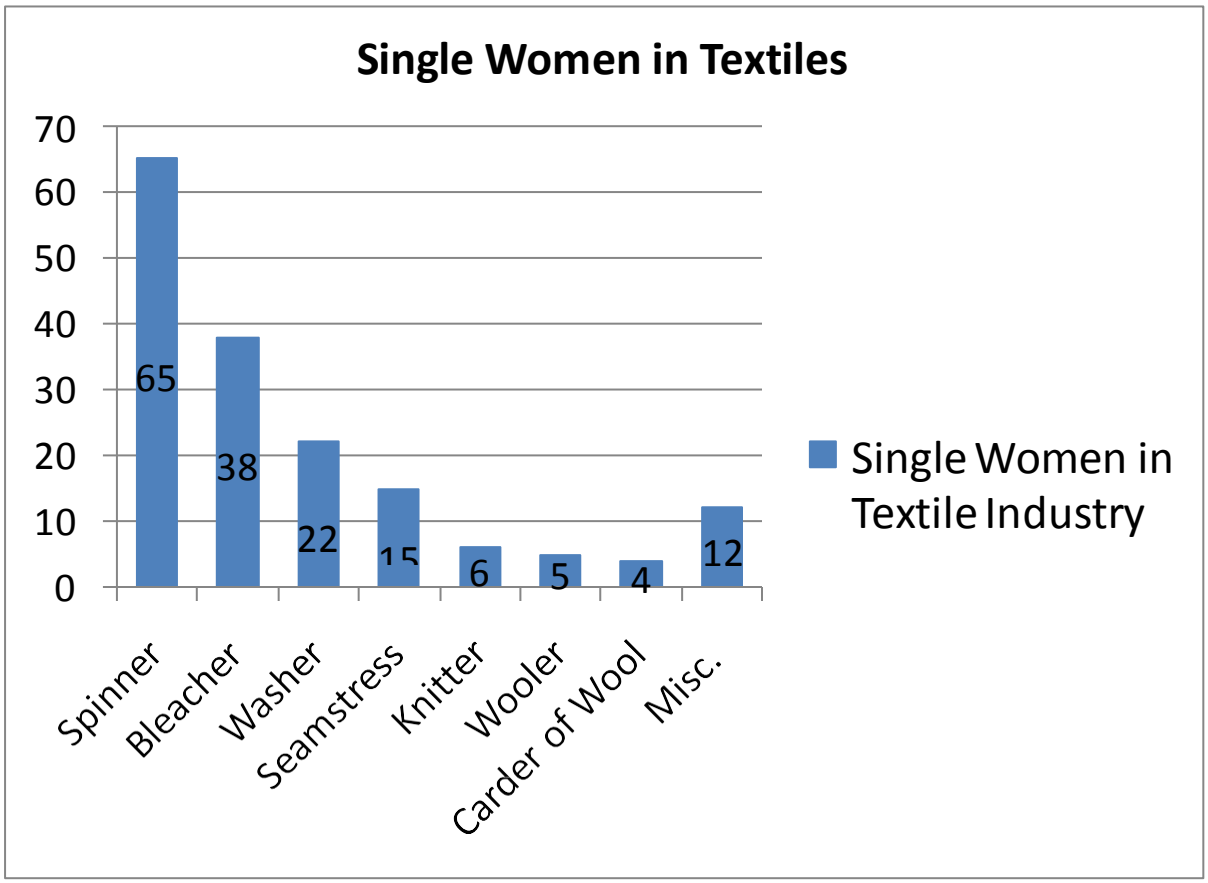
Reasons for entering service varied based on a specific economic need. Some women left to accumulate wealth for their impoverished families. Others who were either abandoned or illegitimate had no other choice than to enter service in hopes to obtain a marriage dowry.[28] Many single women just needed work to meet their basic economic needs as well as a place to live. Service provided connections and opportunities of advancement.[29] The flexible mobility of single women allowed them to seek out more prosperous employment. In fact, 151 or seventy-eight percent of female servants in Dijon moved there from another city. Only thirty-seven women or nineteen-percent were born in Dijon. The need for work and the easy mobility encouraged more women to become servants. But, more importantly, according to Simonton, women were accepted into service because their work did not interfere with the female ideology that kept them under male authority.[30]

The textile industry in France was an additional leading employer of single women. Textile work allowed women to be employed in several occupations instead of being restricted to one like domestic service, allowing each job to add to the industry as a whole. Jobs included all levels of production including the construction of textiles and the finishing of specific products such as lace. In Dijon, twenty-nine percent or 166 out of 561 single women who listed a specific employment in the census worked in the textile industry (Table 5). There are eighteen different jobs listed with the most employed, fifty-three or thirty-two percent, as a *fileuse* or spinner

[27] Simonton, "A History", 59.
[28] Sara Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France: The Uses of Loyalty* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 32-33.
[29] Simonton, "Bringing", 28.
[30] Ibid., 29.

(Table 6). Other jobs ranged from a *couturier* or seamstress, *tricoteuse* or knitter, and *fileur de laine* or wooler. Most of these single women worked either at home or for a mistress at her shop from sun up to sundown.[31] The required long hours provided more employment opportunities for specific women. Life-long single women were seen as more reliable because they could devote more time to their work without any obligations to a family.[32]

Table 6. Single Women Employed in the Dijon Textile Industry, 1795



[31] Clare Crowston, *Fabricating Women. The Seamstresses of Old Regime France; 1675-1791* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 89-90.

[32] Mary Jo Maynes, "In Search of Arachne's Daughters: European Girls, Economic Development, and the Textile Trade, 1750-1880," in *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills. Placing Girls In European History, 1750-1960*, ed. Mary Jo Maynes, Brigitte Soland, and Christina Benninghaus (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 42.

"Women's Contribution to the Industrious Revolution"

The views of work in early modern Europe began to dramatically shift as industrialization started to expand. Once viewed as a necessity for promoting moral purposes and social stratification, starting in the mid nineteenth-century, labor was recognized as "productive energy in a market economy." [33] The purpose of work was now seen as essential for the advancement and development of the economy. Historians have identified several contributing factors that may have caused this shift in opinion throughout Europe. The traditional theory of industrialization credits capitalism as technological inventions, colonial exploitation, mechanization, and factory production supplied more funding to entrepreneurs. With that capital, they would invest and create wealth for the entire nation.[34] The relationship between these entrepreneurs and the government opened access to a global market where the possibilities for economic growth were endless. Households were not seen as significant contributors to industrialization, only products of it.

Recent historians have reevaluated the significance of the household and believe it was an important proponent to the success of industrialization. Jan DeVries has suggested that an industrious revolution may even have occurred before the industrial revolution itself came about.[35] This was a period where urban households worked with one another to advance their own economic growth. By redirecting their labored goods to a wider range of markets, they increased sales as well as consumption of finished products.[36] These households often relied on

[33] Ibid., 18.
[34] Farr, "Artisans in Europe," 291.
[35] Jan De Vries, "The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution," *Journal of Economic History* 54, no. 2 (1994): 252.
[36] Clare Crowston, "An Industrious Revolution in Late Seventeenth-Century Paris: New Vocational Training for Adolescent Girls and the Creation of Female Labor Markets," in *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills. Placing Girls In*

the labor of single women as their mobility and lower wages made them more desirable employees.

Single women were significant in initiating this economic modernization for France. Leading up to industrialization, small household markets attempted to resist the influence of large-scale manufacturers in order to retain profits and independence.[37] The crucial factor that maintained this resistance was the employment of single women. Male artisans who had difficulty competing with large manufacturers depended on the wages of their single daughters in order to maintain the household economy. The men themselves could not find additional employment outside their own shops as it would demonstrate their own "social and economic defeat."[38] But single daughters could freely find other employment without harming their economic status or credibility. Also their flexible mobility to find work in nearby towns with no childcare or marital obligations would guarantee little to no interference in their commitment to their work.[39]

Large-scale manufacturers also embraced more single women entering the workforce. As the census records have shown, single women comprised the largest population in Dijon, thus establishing a large ready labor force for industries to employ. Industries also opted for female employees as their wages were significantly lower than that of men. Single women would not resist new forms of technology or mechanization unlike men who could find resentment to

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European History, 1750-1960, ed. Mary Jo Maynes, Brigitte Soland, and Christina Benninghaus (Bloomington and Indiaapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 71.

[37] Tessie P. Liu, *The Weaver's Knot: The Contradictions of Class Struggle and Family Solidarity in Western France, 1750-1914* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 31.

[38] Ibid., 42.

[39] Maynes, "In Search of", 39.

change that challenged their traditions of work.[40] As a result, single women could find more economic freedom because their work became more important and influential than their gender. What their fathers in the small-scale workshops did not realize when sending their daughters out to seek other employment was that they were providing their competitor with a large, available workforce, thus the end to their long-time established businesses.[41]

At the forefront of industrialization was the growth of the textile industry. The high number of single women employed in a variety of textile occupations shows that they supplied an economic need to France. James Farr points out that, "A viable textile sector was deemed essential to a state's economic health…."[42] In fact, as the aristocracy fled during the French Revolution, France worried that the luxury trade would collapse as the elite often employed the highest number of women in the textile industry.[43] But as the Dijon census records show, the textile industry is the second highest employer of single women with twenty-nine percent employed in various textile occupations. Not only was the contribution of single women's work in textiles crucial for the well-being of the state, but its continued success was also vital for the French economy as a way to stay competitive in foreign trade.[44] Each aspect of the economy whether it was at the city, state, or global level, put value on the labor of single women as they provided the materials necessary for France to progress as a nation.

Dijon held specific characteristics of an economy that was headed for an industrious revolution. First, single women made up the largest population in Dijon thus supplying a substantial labor force for large-manufacturers. Second, they survived through the reliance on

[40] Maxine Berg, "What Difference Did Women's Work Make to the Industrial Revolution?" *History Workshop Journal* 35 (1993), 30-35.
[41] Liu, 42.
[42] Farr, "Artisans In Europe", 79.
[43] Proctor, 78-79.
[44] Maynes, "Gender", 47.

female peers thus disregarding the gender expectations that prohibited their free flexibility of work. Finally, a large population of women were working and contributing to the economy, specifically in the textile industry. Their contributions to the economy prepared France for the modernization of the clothing trades or an industrial revolution. Without the work of single women, France may not have been able to remain competitive in the global market. Single women's work which was once considered tedious and insignificant to the overall French economy can now find substantial value as it was crucial for the modernization of France.

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Meghan Turok is a senior undergraduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato majoring in History with a minor in English. Meghan chose to pursue a historical focus of Early Modern Europe and Women's History after taking an undergraduate course titled *History of Women in Preindustrial Europe*. She became fascinated by the lack of historical research on these women, especially those who were single and was inspired to examine the perspective of women in her other history classes. During the course, she was offered the opportunity to do an independent study, translating 1795 French census records from Dijon, France. After translating these records, Meghan examined the single women specifically in them and their participation in the economy. In 2007, she received two grants, a URC Research Summer Grant and The Commission on the Status of Women grant, to further this research. After graduating in fall 2009, Meghan plans on taking a year off of school and eventually pursuing a Master's Degree in Women's history.

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Christopher Corley is currently an Associate Professor of History at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He received a B.A. in History and Philosophy from Bloomsburg University in 1993 and both a M.A., in 1995, and a Ph.D., in 2001 from Purdue University. He teaches courses in early modern social and cultural history, and conducts research on the history of the family, women, and childhood in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Dijon, France.