

Chapter 6

The gendered nature of clerical work

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the gendered nature of clerical work and how it is perceived not only by the respondents in this study but within the organisations in which they are employed. This chapter will build upon some of the concepts introduced in chapter one and two. In particular it will focus on the nature of clerical work and how perceptions of skill are linked to stereotypical notions of clerical work being a feminised occupation. The research evidence suggests that some organisations fail to recognise the skill level involved in clerical work. By undertaking an assessment of the skills involved in this type of work we can discern whether they are being adequately remunerated.

It is the contention of this thesis that women's attachment to the labour market is more than the exercise of agency. The choice to either work full-time in a continuous career, to combine part-time work with family or to be home-centred is also shaped by a range of factors beyond the control of women. In order to fully understand the context in which women make their choices we need to know what happens to them while they are in the labour market. As explained in chapters one and two, structural constraints imposed by the workplace, organisational culture, and gender ideology all play an integral role in determining the suitability of particular jobs for men and women, as well as the availability and quality of the work undertaken by women.

Although the concept of organisational culture is a broad term it does encapsulate the way in which discourses of masculinity and femininity are defined and maintained in the workplace. It can also explain the persistence of occupational segregation, the lack of skill recognition given to women in jobs

such as clerical work and why men continue to have control over women in the workplace (Acker, 1989). Further, the impact of organisational culture can help determine why women clerical workers are overlooked for promotion and training opportunities, why there is a perception that they are less committed to their jobs than men, why there is a reluctance on the part of some workplaces to embrace flexible work arrangements and why the transition between full-time and part-time work can be fraught.

The findings in the previous chapter indicate that the type of paid work undertaken by respondents in this study was chosen on the basis of it fitting in with their family circumstances. In this chapter I want to ascertain whether a respondent's family circumstances has any effect on the content and quality of their jobs. Secondly, I want to detail the constituent elements of respondents' jobs in order to determine how they are likely to fare under enterprise bargaining.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section details the sorts of tasks the women who were interviewed undertook in their jobs. The second section looks at how their skill level was viewed by the organisation in which they were employed and the third section discusses how respondents perceived their own level of skill.

Tacit skills

Clerical work is made up of two distinct kinds of work. One is the more overt and obvious type of work which can be readily seen by customers, managers and work colleagues. These include typing, shorthand, use of office equipment such as fax, photocopier, telephone and computer. Yet these skills are still undervalued and misunderstood in terms of the level of skill required to perform them efficiently. Another aspect of clerical work relates to those skills which are not readily tangible. Tacit skills include: having good interpersonal communication with customers, colleagues and management, being a team player, protecting confidentiality, record keeping, good language skills, doing

many tasks at once with constant interruptions, multiple role demands which entail satisfying the needs of several people at once and responding to complaints from the public.

The notion of comparable worth which aims to amend the relative value of women's work in comparison to men's work by challenging assumptions that men are more skilled than women and are therefore worth more was the basis of a study conducted by Acker (1989: 95). She found that that there was a widely held assumption among male managers and blue-collar men that there was no great skill involved in managing office conflicts, placating several managers at once or ensuring the smooth flow of information from one department to another. They believed that administrative staff and secretaries had to be "nice and polite for longer periods" (p.95). Further, there was a widely held view that clerical workers should not be rewarded for their tacit skills because it did not conform to the "basic purpose of the jobs". Tully (1992) argues that tacit skills promote healthy and productive workplaces where the flow of information is more likely to be efficient. The ability to care, nurture, mediate, organise and facilitate are seen by many male workers as natural attributes rather than skills. Ironically, although tacit skills are often denied by unions and management as something clerical workers do as part of their jobs, they are increasingly recognised as critical management skills within organisations which should be employed when managing staff (Tully, 1992).

The sort of duties undertaken by the respondents in this study are presented in table form in Appendix seven. Many of the tasks illustrated in this table can be described as having a high level of tacit skill. Tasks such as answering phones, reception work, providing referrals, protecting confidentiality, liaising with staff and clients, minuting meetings and organising functions all require a high degree of tacit skills. Even the respondents themselves did not give due recognition to the level of skill required in their jobs. Many cursorily glossed over the tasks and duties they performed. In some cases their tasks may have been too numerous and/or deemed not important enough to mention.

Job readiness and training

Among the respondents interviewed for this study there was an expectation among their bosses that they should be job-ready at the time of commencing a new job. Many of them had either undergone some form of clerical training at a college of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or equivalent or had acquired years of experience via on-the-job training. Respondents were expected to be well versed in various computer applications prior to starting a job. Very little on-the-job training was provided to respondents other than some specialised computer training or where the company had changed or upgraded computer systems. Other on-the-job training related to systems specific to the organisation in which the respondent was employed or to various types of personal development courses like the “exceptional assistant” or conflict resolution. These findings are consistent with other research that found that women typically have less on-the-job training than men (England 1992: 14). Two respondents (Mary and Sarah) had entered their place of employment as trainees and were provided with on-the-job training in addition to completing an accredited TAFE course.

Much of the training for clerical work is based on skills rather than credentials. In general, greater status and competence is usually ascribed to credentials or qualifications gained from a reputable institution (Byrne, 1985: 117-18). In the case of clerical work credentials are not widely recognised or valued by employers, but rather skills which have been learnt on-the-job are given greater importance. There is an expectation among employers that clerical workers should be highly proficient in the relevant computer applications as well as the ability to use a keyboard and a telephone when applying for a job. The more technical aspects of clerical work such as speed typing, bookkeeping, accounting, and computer programs may or may not have been learnt either at secondary school or at a college of TAFE.

As noted in chapter five, the qualifications of respondents in this study varied enormously. Formal training did not automatically equate to a higher paid senior clerical position. Even those who had completed or were undertaking a

degree were not guaranteed a senior clerical position. The amount of formal training undertaken by respondents had little impact upon their level of responsibility, pay, seniority within the clerical structure of the organisation or types of work performed. In fact, those who had acquired their skills via on-the-job experience were more likely to be in senior clerical positions than those with tertiary qualifications. For example, of the nine respondents who worked as office managers, senior executive assistants or personal assistants, eight (Barbara, Fay, Winona, Gina, Fiona, Cheryl, Melissa, Vera) had limited formal education other than on-the-job training, and only Meredith had tertiary qualifications. The number of respondents who were self-taught and who used their accumulated knowledge acquired from one job to the next demonstrates how adaptable and flexible clerical workers need to be in the workplace.

Misleading job titles

The findings in this study indicate that job titles are fluid and do not necessarily accurately reflect the functions performed by respondents nor their status within the organisation in which they are employed. Most (28) of the respondents interviewed in this study could be classed as Advanced Clerical and Service Workers (see Appendix one for definitions), while eleven could be classified as Intermediate Clerical Sales and Service Workers and one, Ingrid (a teleworker) fell into the Elementary category.

The respondents in this research had a broad range of job titles which were as diverse as receptionist, administrative officer, secretary, executive assistant and accounts receivable (see Appendix six). There was no parity among the list of duties which corresponded to a particular job title (see Appendix seven for the duties each respondent undertook in their job). Findings such as this reinforce the notion that clerical work is ubiquitous and difficult to classify. There are probably more similarities than differences between one job and another. For example, there were some core tasks within clerical work that most respondents performed in their job. These included answering phones,

typing, filing, photocopying, preparing reports, liaising with clients and customers, and liaising with management and staff.

The way to differentiate between senior clerical workers and lower level clerical workers is not to focus on their specific tasks, but rather on who they are accountable to. Senior clerical workers like personal and executive assistants are accountable to management. Their tasks may differ slightly from lower level clerical staff because they manage diaries, compile agendas and minutes for meetings and are involved in the daily organisation of their boss. These clerical workers are more likely to work independently in roles where they are given a reasonable amount of responsibility and autonomy. In contrast, general clerical and administrative staff work as part of a team and are more involved in running the whole office. They tend to report to a supervisor or office manager. Further, they are more likely to be responsible for petty cash, ordering stationery, and inward and outward correspondence. These latter jobs lend themselves to part-time work more than personal and executive assistants who are expected to work the same long hours as their bosses.

Variations can occur between jobs with the same title. This was highlighted by the experience of two respondents who, on the face of it, had very similar jobs as both were secretaries to the Managing Director. Melissa had an autonomous job which provided her with a great deal of discretion to get things done. Her primary role was to manage her boss's time to ensure that he attended his appointments and met his obligations. She described her duties as follows:

"I actually manage his time, his schedules, his appointments, I virtually organise him. I make sure he is on time to meetings, tell him exactly where he needs to go. I organise his travel. I suppose in a nutshell I just organise his time. I also attend to the chairman and directors at times." (Melissa).

Compare Melissa's experience with Fay, who was dissatisfied in her job and felt she was mostly under utilised and did not have enough work to do:

“Typing, bit of accounts work, bit of reception, filing, presentations, that’s about it.” (Fay).

Job titles can either be more grandiose than the actual job, or conversely downplay the role of the incumbent. For example, Barbara managed a small office and stepped into the role of senior manager when the small business owners were away or out of the office, yet her title is Administrator. Compare this with Cindy whose job title in the first interview was receptionist/clerical assistant. During the second interview her duties were essentially the same, but her job title had been changed to Office Co-ordinator. Her duties, although integral to the functioning of the organisation where she was employed, did not entail any supervision of staff or management duties. They were confined to lower level clerical duties.

Above and beyond the call of duty – The accuracy of job descriptions

Job descriptions are meant to detail and provide an accurate reflection of what a person does in their job. Job descriptions assist organisations to classify employees and therefore ascertain levels of pay. They assess an individual’s performance based upon key performance indicators and are often used as the foundation of individual employment contracts. Evidence from this study suggests that job descriptions among the clerical workers who were interviewed were either grossly inaccurate, out-of-date, conveyed in verbal rather than written form or, worse still, non-existent.

Crompton and Jones (1984:40) argue that it is essential to look beyond the content of job descriptions and occupation titles and look specifically at the labour process itself. They believe that job titles can disguise the real nature of the work performed by undervaluing tasks and overlooking critical competencies. Without exploring where a specific job fits into the organisation as a whole we cannot understand how its status and level of skill have been determined. Further, Acker (1989) found in her study that the grade of a

particular position could mask the content and skill associated with a particular job. She found that some of the men in her study could not distinguish between the level of skill required to undertake the filing clerk's job and the secretary's job. To them, both jobs were the same.

Penny provided a good example of a clerical worker whose job has changed, but whose job description has not kept pace with her status within the organisation she was employed. This is her response when asked if she had a job description:

"Yes and no. Yes there is one, but when you read it, it doesn't have a lot to do with what I actually do during the day. Like there are bits of it that are sort of familiar, but because it is a new job it is one of those things they thought well this is what you will be doing but when the practicalities of it came into place it doesn't really work out exactly that way. It is being addressed at the moment but the person that is doing it is now on leave. Hopefully, there will be something a bit more accurate in place shortly." (Penny).

A number of respondents had to write their own job descriptions and as a result were confident that it was accurate and up-to-date. Anita, like the other temporary clerical workers, did not have a written job description, it was given to her verbally by the employment agency prior to commencing a job:

"Only a verbal one from the personnel consultant that tells you what the job entails and asks you whether you are capable of doing it. Depending upon your reply, is dependent upon whether you go out to that job." (Anita).

Cindy and Barbara said they did not have a job description per se but they did have employment contracts. These employment contracts did not detail their duties in-depth but rather, focused on their conditions of employment which are two entirely different issues.

The reasons why eighteen of the respondents did not have an up-to-date job description included the inability of the organisation in which they worked to write a job description. Some organisations simply did not as a matter of practice have job descriptions. In some instances company restructuring had rendered job descriptions out-of-date and the provision of up-to-date job descriptions was given a low priority by some organisations.

Miriam had only been employed in her job for three weeks when I interviewed her for the first time. She was unaware that she even needed a job description:

“I don't know, I am just three weeks in and I haven't asked them for one. Should I have one?” (Miriam).

Clare had not had an up-to-date job description for several months, but after much lobbying one was finally produced. She was concerned that she would be underpaid unless her duties were accurately outlined:

“I had a job description until about a month or two ago but it hasn't been rewritten. Judging on past performance, two months is not too long to have waited. There was a real thing, when I was being shifted around everywhere and doing bits and pieces of five different sorts of jobs. I started making big noises about needing a job description. I think we eventually got one four or five months later. It was one of those situations where they basically wanted me to do all this extra work but they weren't prepared to pay me.” (Clare).

Clare's experience provides a good example of how organisations can renege on paying employees for additional work through not acknowledging extra duties. Without tangible documentation in the form of a job description it is difficult for many workers to mount a case for increased pay.

Fay, Sally and Lucy worked in organisations where job descriptions were given either low priority or no priority at all:

“In the area I work which is IT consulting, there is only a team of six. It is quite unstructured. Well that is my belief anyway. I don't think the manager knows what job descriptions are.” (Sally).

When respondents were asked how their job descriptions compared with what they actually did, many respondents said it was inaccurate and out-of-date and noted their concern for the vague term “any other duties as required”. Pam and Winona believed that this clause provided a legitimate avenue for their employers to ask them to do tasks not detailed in their job description. Most respondents said they tended to do more tasks than what were listed in their job description, including helping out in another section or department. In some cases tasks were completely omitted from the job description, while others tasks changed so quickly that their job descriptions did not keep pace.

Gina, Isobel, Vera and Fiona stated that their job descriptions had not kept pace with the changing nature of their jobs and that they did more than what was stated. In a sense many clerical workers evolve with their jobs; the longer they are working in an organisation, the more knowledge and skills they acquire and the more likely they are to be involved in a greater diversity of tasks. In terms of accountability, job descriptions did not accurately describe who the respondent worked for and to whom they had to report. A number of senior clerical workers were expected to work extra hours outside standard working hours to organise functions. These duties were not listed in their formal job description.

Isobel described the additional work she did on top of her own duties:

“It has the majority of the tasks that I do, but I also complete other work for people who aren't in the recruitment area such as overheads or putting together talks on the computer that they don't have the skills to do themselves. I maintain our office equipment, making sure it is up and running. I assist other people in the office with their computer work.” (Isobel)

Gina pointed out that her job description was couched in general terms and did not highlight specific tasks or accountabilities:

“Job descriptions don't put in the fiddly little bits they just outline things. In my job description it doesn't say that I am going to have to type for six other people, it doesn't say that I am going to be typing tenders and contracts. It is missing those sort of extra responsibilities that I have gained since the change in management structure.” (Gina).

Fiona's job description had not kept pace with the changing structure of the department in which she worked:

“I think it needs updating, I think there have been a lot of changes because the department has restructured. I am doing a lot of different things from my original job description.” (Fiona).

By detailing the duties performed an accurate assessment of skill can be gauged. However, as seen from the responses above, job descriptions are fraught with difficulties and inaccuracies; those with the most accurate job descriptions had written their own. One could argue that since the role of a clerical worker is to perform administrative duties without bothering the boss, writing a job description may be deemed too unimportant to concern management. Conversely, and the more likely scenario, is that management may not have an accurate idea of what the clerical worker does in her job and would prefer the role of rubber stamp rather than admit that they have a limited knowledge of the duties performed.

Organisational culture plays an integral role in defining who does what job as well the rules and procedures around formal job definitions and functional roles. Skill and merit are based on subjective judgements and are often linked with stereotypical notions of gender. There is a tendency to confuse the content of the job with stereotypic notions of the job holder. Job descriptions tend to detail the tangible skills required to do a job like typing, shorthand,

computing, and telephone answering but overlook the tacit skills required to perform jobs. As noted above, tacit skills are probably the most difficult to quantify and detail and are more likely to be regarded as natural female talents rather than skills.

The absence of accurate job descriptions enables organisations and management to continue to ignore the totality of skills clerical workers bring to their job, as well as legitimising their low levels of pay and lack of a career path.

The diminutive discourse

The clerical workers in this study undertook a diverse range of duties and roles, yet they actively undermined their own self-worth and their importance within the organisation more generally. The diminutive discourse helps us understand why clerical workers tend to be dismissive and almost flippant about what they do. They do not provide a total picture of their role, but rather it is an incomplete or an abridged snapshot of what their job entails. This was evident at two levels. Firstly, respondents often undervalued their skills and role by using terms such as “a bit” or “basically”. Secondly, most respondents only listed their main tasks which tended to be those that were tangible like typing, computer work and filing without exploring the tacit skills in their work.

Rachel worked autonomously and had a very busy job, dealing with people all day and ensuring the smooth flow of information between the relevant parties. Yet she downplayed the skills involved in her job with the final remark “that would be it”:

“A typical day would involve a lot of time spent on the phone, on e-mail, on fax, answering queries about particular workshops that are coming up, so there is a fair component of dissemination of information. I would confirm registrants, so that there would be some mail merge activity involved to get that information out to them. I would be speaking to

some external conference venues, organising our requirements in terms of residential program, who is coming in at what time, dietary requirements, food rules and booze rules. May be there is a meeting or two thrown in there. That would be it.” (Rachel).

Clare, Sally and Cindy used the adjective “basically” to describe what they did in their jobs. It could be argued that the tacit skills involved in Cindy’s job as the first point of contact for her company were far from basic:

“It ranges from a lot of things, from flower arranging and food preparation. Basically it is answering the phones, receiving people when they come into the office. I do payroll and I do the contracts here, I do typing, I keep track of how many temps we have working here and basically keep communication going throughout the office, like incoming communication, outgoing communication. Basically monitoring everything that is going on, even stationery and things like that and making sure there is enough of everything. Basically, I am here so that other people don't have to think about these things.” (Cindy).

Meredith, Vera, Gina, and Dawn tended to skim over the tasks involved in their jobs. When asked what they did they noted the bare essentials without detailing any of the tacit skills. Meredith had a responsible position as the secretary to the Head of Department. She was expected to use a great deal of initiative and intelligence to carry out her job, yet this is not evident in the following quote where she details what she does in her job:

“I act as secretary to the Head of Department, that is probably more the main role. The other things I do, I take minutes at executive meetings. I do the admin work for all personnel in the department, I do a range of other things like collecting publications and putting them on the database, I am just trying to think what else I do. I look after the post grad students and the administrative things that need to be done for them.” (Meredith).

Vera provided an abbreviated list of her tasks and responsibilities without giving away too much detail in terms of the specific duties involved in “any secretarial stuff”:

“I take care of all the boss’s appointments, do minutes, organise venues for rallies and stuff like that, big demonstrations. What else do I do? Any secretarial stuff associated with the executive of the union, so quite a broad range.” (Vera).

Sarah and Fiona said they did so many things that they were too numerous to mention:

“I organise travel both domestic and international. I organise meetings both external and internal. I follow up different things. What do I follow up? I follow up if my boss doesn't want to deal with certain things during that day I will bring forward and say when do you want to deal with it. He'll say give me a week to think about it and I'll bring it forward. I sort of organise the structure of everyday tasks, keep the diary, make sure he gets to meetings on time, make sure he has agendas to take with to meetings. If he is holding a meeting, I make sure I construct the agendas and do minutes afterwards. Oh tons of things.” (Fiona).

Eleanor and Heather, two intermediate level clerical workers, were proud of their work achievements. Eleanor, a word processing operator in a community centre, believed her job was really very sophisticated even though she had only six main duties:

“Word processing, photocopying, sorting mail, arranging interviews for people for the new positions, ordering stationery, I am responsible for booking buses and vans. Actually we only have one bus and one van they are available for external groups. This is about it. When you list them there are only about five or six duties but you know they are very complex.” (Eleanor).

Heather, a receptionist in a busy hairdressing salon, performed a time management juggling act every time she went to work to ensure the clients' needs were properly met in a timely fashion:

"The main thing is taking appointments for the clients, greeting them when they come in, taking their money of course, we have a gown that you put on, taking them to the operator, letting the operator know that their client is ready. But I think the most difficult thing is co-ordinating. If someone wants a hair cut and colour with say a hair cut with Stephen and a colour with Jenny. We have six colourists and twelve haircutters, you have to co-ordinate times of when each cutter can see their colourist without waiting. So it is quite a hard job, juggling appointments." (Heather).

Interpersonal work - the hub of consensus and diplomacy

Clerical work is much more involved than being well presented and having good technical skills such as computing and typing. Working as a co-operative team member within the constraints of organisational policy and procedure and being able to gauge the ebb and flow of internal and external politics of an organisation in such a way as not to threaten or tread on anyone's toes requires skills in negotiation, consensus and diplomacy (Women's Advisers Unit, 1993: 22, 25). Interpersonal work is critical to the effective undertaking of clerical occupations and should therefore be regarded as a skill. Interpersonal work has three facets. Firstly, emotional labour which requires the use of diplomacy, negotiation and managing feelings at the workplace. Secondly, providing service to not only customers but to those who work inside the workplace and thirdly, caring, which entails taking responsibility for maintaining good social relationships within the organisation (Webster, 1996: 129-130).

Many of the women interviewed enjoyed the social experience of dealing with either work colleagues or customers. It was one of the major aspects of the job they liked and a primary reason for them going to work:

“I love working with people and mainly because I like being with people and working with people.” (Sarah).

“A big aspect of working is the socialising, just looking at getting in contact with other people.” (Clare).

“There is a lot of camaraderie you know, I have got good friends within the organisation. Some of us even mix outside you know, outside work and stuff which I enjoy. I enjoy their company... This organisation has a very nice little heartbeat, we worry about each other and that.” (Pam).

“I work in the employment and industrial section and I really enjoy dealing with clients, and hearing about the particular sorts of work that other people do. When people have been treated badly by employers, sometimes co-workers, and then they get settlement or they're successful in their claims. That's always rewarding.” (Lucy).

Maintaining harmonious work relationships takes a great deal of skill and involves working as a productive team member to get the job done. Nearly all the respondents (37) who were interviewed said they worked as part of a team. Some respondents (Paula, Rachel, Catherine) had formalised teamwork arrangements which were incorporated into their organisational goals and achievements. Not only were they assessed on their individual performance, but they were evaluated on their ability to work within a specified team of people. The outcomes of this teamwork were also appraised. Most respondents did not have any formal rules governing teamwork but rather were expected to work co-operatively with other staff members in a less structured way to complete tasks.

Gina demonstrated that she was able to aptly read the political climate within the organisation in which she was employed:

“I like to think we work as a team. But sometimes there are occasions where there is politics and some people just don't agree. Some people work better alone, sort of thing, they are not very good when you put them in a group. Those people tend to not sort of turn up anyway. They get an invitation but you know they won't turn up.” (Gina)

A number of the women spoke about having to deal with very difficult bosses and work colleagues and how they negotiated this minefield on a daily basis. Elaine spoke about her boss and how she had to tolerate and negotiate his different style of working:

“My boss has a power problem, a control problem. I think that's because he is a male and he is younger than me. He is only 36. At the risk of sounding racist he is Asian, he is Chinese Malay which I don't have a problem dealing with because we lived in Asia for two years. I know enough and have dealt with enough Asian men to know that they like to hold the position of superiority. He has a problem with the fact that I am older and I don't want to have anything to do with that hierarchy. I have stepped over what he perceives to be the boundaries a number of times which really unsettles him. He doesn't feel at all comfortable with an equal gender relationship. I don't feel at all comfortable with what he expects from me. So I have moments when I can't stand him because he drives me insane and other weeks I feel very sorry for him.” (Elaine)

Isobel outlines her frustrations at the lack of responsibility taken by more senior people in the organisation in relation to housekeeping duties. Her experience illustrates how clerical workers are expected to anticipate any shortfall to ensure the smooth running of the office. Such activities are rarely given a second thought or acknowledged by senior staff:

“It is hard to communicate with some of the people in my department. Sometimes it is difficult to get messages or information across. When working with other departments in the organisation, sometimes it is

difficult to carry it out because their goal is not the same as yours, or their interest isn't the same. People don't always care or don't want to take the responsibility. That is the most difficult thing I have learnt working in a large organisation, there is no one around who will take responsibility for the smaller things. They will look for the closest admin person they can find to do that. So the smaller housekeeping things.” (Isobel).

Paula details how she finds it difficult to deal with other departments within her organisation within the constraints placed on her by a plethora of rules and regulations. She has to use tact and diplomacy in order to deal with irate people. As Paula found, it is easier to metaphorically “shoot the messenger” rather than take issue with management:

“Dealing with difficult people within the organisation is probably the worse thing. Particularly in this sort of environment, people in other departments think financial accounts is so bureaucratic and we have all these terrible rules. So you get a lot of flack from other departments. It is hard to try and make people understand that we don't make the rules. The things we are carrying out are either from the tax side of things or certain declarations we have to have filled out and people get angry about it.” (Paula).

Finally, Penny and Isobel provide good examples of the tacit skills needed to maintain interpersonal relationships within their jobs. These include juggling more than one task at once, good interpersonal skills, a good knowledge of the internal workings of the organisation in which they are employed, initiative, conflict resolution and time management.

Penny described how she had to manage the logistics of collecting corporate accounts, she also noted that she was the nominated person to deal with the most difficult clients:

“One of my main roles at the moment is with corporate accounts collecting the outstanding money on some of the bigger businesses. It is also co-ordinating the work so that at the start of the month there is going to be 3,000 accounts who is going to be doing it, who is going to be here and who's going to be away and dividing it up. Another thing I do, if somebody has got a customer screaming at them and they demand to speak to a supervisor, well I am the bunny who gets it.” (Penny).

Despite the difficulties and frustrations faced by these clerical workers they managed to maintain congenial and harmonious work relationships with colleagues and management.

Loyalty, confidentiality and conflict – how clerical workers interact with “the boss”

Senior clerical workers in particular must not only be able to think and act for themselves but for their bosses as well. This requires the worker to have well-developed contacts throughout the organisation as well as an extensive knowledge of the organisation's activities and sometimes its secrets (Webster, 1990:66). Loyalty and confidentiality are essential features of the boss/clerical worker relationship because they not only enhance reciprocity and co-operation but ensure that the organisation's secrets are not divulged. (Downing, 1981: 96) The boss/worker relationship is based on a personal rapport, day-to-day familiarity and commitment (Pringle, 1988:88). Although social interactions and hierarchical relationships are built into the labour process, the power differential between clerical worker and boss can be equated with the master/slave dialectic.

Nearly all the respondents had daily contact with their boss, one respondent saw her boss every two or three days and another on a weekly basis. Interaction with the boss was dependent upon the requirements of the job, different working styles and personalities. Some respondents had constant contact throughout the day while others had to schedule a meeting time to

catch up with their boss. Most felt that they had enough contact with their boss, four said they would like more contact and three said they would like less. The respondents working in more senior clerical positions for senior management tended to have less contact with their bosses because their absences from the office precluded a great deal of contact. Temporary office workers had very little contact with management. Once they had been briefed by their supervisor they were left to get on with their allocated tasks.

Regular interaction with bosses also ensured that the respondents had enough work to keep them busy. Although there were certain duties which the respondent did regularly, other tasks were dependent upon their boss generating the work and handing it over.

Gina was dependent upon her boss to give her work. In order to keep busy, she resorted to some desperate measures so that she was not idle:

“Sometimes it is too little contact. There are always people in his office. When I run out of work and I need something to do I lock him in his office and take away the key. I don't let him out and I don't let anybody in. In an hours time we can get a fair bit of work done and that gives me something to do. I don't like sitting around, the day goes too slowly.” (Gina).

Fay was constantly frustrated by not having enough work and the lack of formality in work procedures and this is reflected in the contact she had with her boss:

“I don't feel there is enough contact. The contact we have is more on an informal level. We don't really meet and discuss work at all. I would like to meet everyday to discuss work and what is going on and what he has got on that day and stuff like that.” (Fay).

Elaine notes that staff would have preferred to speak with her rather than her boss as she was more approachable. Unfortunately, in some instances she was not experienced enough to answer their queries:

“I find people are coming through me to ask those questions in the hope that they don't have to go through my manager. They will say, "Oh bummer it means I have got to talk to him". So the interpersonal side of things makes a difference. They obviously feel that I am more approachable, if I can answer their questions they can get an answer quickly and get on with it. But if they have to go through him, he doesn't answer anything quickly. Unfortunately because many of their questions are outside of my experience, I often have to pass them onto him.” (Elaine).

Half the respondents said they had to cover up for their boss. Reasons cited included covering up the boss's mistakes, covering up when the boss was absent, screening phone calls, handling things in the boss's absence, covering up when things had not been completed, and when he or she was late for an appointment . Dominique noted that she had to cover up for her boss's activities which could be deemed illegal. This instance exemplifies how strong the confidentiality and loyalty bond can be:

“You always have to in some way or another cover for your boss. There were times when he did things that were not really legal.” (Dominique).

Those respondents who did not have to cover up for their boss said that they tended to admit their own mistakes or were honest and direct with people if they were too busy to see them.

In the absence of the boss a number of respondents had to step into the fold and take over some of their responsibilities. Rachel dealt with many of the queries while her boss was away on business:

“I have to cover for my boss when she is absent. I deal with her phone calls that probably should have been directed to me in the first place. Coverage is not quite the right word. But certainly I can handle things in her absence.” (Rachel).

Both Catherine and Isobel note that they had to cover up their bosses' inefficiencies because they had let things slide or had left them to the last minute:

“I have to cover up all the time. Well if he is not there, I have to do it and because we work so closely together and he is a bit disorganised it usually falls back on me to do the things that need to be done.” (Catherine).

Contact with the boss is integral to keeping the continuity and flow of work through the organisation. Absent bosses were more likely to hold up the generation of work for many clerical workers. In some instances clerical workers acted as intermediaries by screening telephone calls and visitors. Some of the more senior clerical workers actually undertook some of their bosses' tasks in their absence. These clerical workers were also more likely to work long hours to ensure coverage of their bosses needs. These tasks were additional to what they were expected to perform, yet they were not given any recompense. This additional responsibility can be explained by an obligation and loyalty to the boss and a high commitment to their job.

Routinisation of clerical work: boredom and the under-utilisation of skill

One of the most common complaints made by respondents was the huge volume of work that many were required to plough through in order to complete their work. This included respondents who worked both part-time and full-time. They were forced to work longer hours which they found to be both stressful and highly pressured. Many of the senior clerical workers in this study complained about having to do boring routine duties like photocopying and thought it appropriate to employ a junior so that they could attend to more

pressing and demanding matters requiring experience and expertise. Boredom, having inadequately defined work priorities, poor work conditions and bad management were also cited as major problems.

Amy and Gina, two senior personal assistants, would have liked a junior to assist them with their large workloads:

“I do a lot of menial tasks, there are no juniors and there are no other clerical staff and as a secretary you are expected to do everything and you are doing a lot of stuff for other people, for other younger people like training graduates. I am doing all the running around for them. A lot of photocopying and things like that.” (Amy).

Both Meredith and Bronwyn were frustrated by having to chase up people in order to meet deadlines even though they had huge volumes of work:

“I think the worse thing is just chasing people up for things rather than them doing their own work and bringing it back to me. I seem to be always hassling people to get work back to me on time. That's something I find frustrating.” (Meredith).

Lucy, Vera, Rachel, Fiona and Belinda who all worked full-time found the longer hours and large workloads in their jobs quite stressful. The organisations in which these respondents worked expected staff to put in long hours to demonstrate their commitment to the job. This was often at the expense of their own personal lives:

“The hours, the pressure, the stress, I feel and it's more a personal feeling. The biggest criticism would be the stress.” (Lucy).

“The bad thing is, there is never enough hours in the day. Everything is a bit too fast pace, you can't just sit there and relax and sort of dream out the window, you just have to keep going.” (Fiona).

"There aren't enough hours in the day, there is just too much to do and too little time. That is truly it in a nutshell. We work a 40 hour week as a matter of standard. I find that I consistently work 45-47 hours per week. That is almost another working day that one is adding to one's week." (Rachel).

Paula represented the opposite extreme where her workload was so light that her job could have been condensed to two days per week. She was of the opinion that the organisation she worked for did not want to put people under pressure and allowed them time to produce a high quality end product:

"Currently, I could quite easily do my job in 3 days and have 2 days off. It has got very quiet at the moment. We tend to work so that people are not under pressure. People have plenty of time to get their work done which is good. I have never worked in a place like this before, that you are not rushed off your feet. What it does is produce a much higher quality of work and a lot less error because you are not rushing things through, you have got the time to be more meticulous about things." (Paula).

Elaine, Clare, Brenda and Sally were bored with the routine and repetition of much of the work they did. All of these respondents did not feel that they were being utilised to their full potential. Brenda had run a very successful small business prior to taking up an administrative position at a university where she had been in an office management position but had been demoted to a lower level clerical position amid an internal political tussle. She found no new challenges in her new position and spent much of her day going for short walks away from her desk to break the boredom.

Elaine, a trained teacher, believed her job was the most boring job she had ever done:

"The day is so long. There is a fair degree of monotony in what I have to do. I am starting to see that a lot of it is shuffling paper around and

keeping track of where that paper is and who wrote it and who has to receive incoming correspondence and things like that. There is probably more monotony in this job than there has been in any other job I have done before.” (Elaine).

Clare felt that she was starting to become “brain dead” because the work she was performing was no longer challenging or stimulating:

“There have been some mornings when I have thought all I am really doing is sweeping up after other people. Unless I learn some new stuff or just extend the stuff I already know my brain will be dead.” (Clare).

Sally said the worst thing about her job was the boredom and repetition involved:

“The bad thing about my job is that it can be very boring and very repetitive. You just have to accept that, it is just how it is in secretarial type work.”(Sally).

Many of the respondents accepted that repetitive and boring work was part of their jobs. With the exception of one respondent (Fay) all were happy to stay in their current jobs. One could argue that clerical workers tolerate the work content of their jobs because they acquire satisfaction from the social aspect of work. Another reason why these women were able to tolerate their jobs was because work was not the primary focus of their lives.

Levels of responsibility

Interviewees were asked whether they wanted more or less responsibility or if they had enough responsibility in their job. Nineteen respondents said that they had enough responsibility, five said they had too much responsibility and fourteen said they did not have enough responsibility. Among respondents in this study, responsibility had a number of interpretations. Many of them had difficulty distinguishing between responsibility in relation to the complexity of

work tasks and level of autonomy given to them as distinct from large workloads. There was also a view that large workloads would preclude them from taking on more complex tasks and thus greater responsibility. Women in family mode, pre-retirees and drifters were more likely to say they had enough responsibility while respondents in the pre-reproductive category were most likely to say they did not have enough responsibility. Findings such as this may support the contention that higher levels of job satisfaction are found among women who combine work and family even where there may be lower levels of responsibility in terms of job content and autonomy when compared to other jobs (Hakim, 2000, Wolcott and Glezer, 1995). Respondents in this study found that working autonomously gave them the greatest sense of achievement and satisfaction.

There was no discernible pattern between those who felt they had enough responsibility and those who felt they needed more responsibility in their jobs. Some respondents worked in intermediate positions while others worked in advanced clerical positions. Those respondents who wanted more responsibility said that they wanted to be involved in decision making processes and the generation of work. Fay described responsibility in terms of having enough work to complete from one day to the next. Fiona described how happy she was that she had finally found an optimal level of responsibility. She was grateful that her boss had delegated certain tasks which provided her with the opportunity to use her own resources and initiative to achieve what he had requested:

“I think I have finally got enough responsibility. I mean before I would always complain I didn't have enough responsibility because I wasn't being utilised to my full potential. It depends on the type of boss you have got and whether they recognise that or not. Like my boss will say to me I have got to see Dr such and such now that is all he says. He knows that I am going to go off and organise the meeting, organise an airfare, give him cab charges so he can get taxis to where he needs to go and work out a draft itinerary. Now all he has to say is I need to see such and such. To me that is responsibility.” (Fiona).

As noted above, Elaine was bored with her job but she felt that it offered her enough responsibility particularly as she wanted to maintain a balance between work and family:

“No, I have got enough responsibility. It suits me, it keeps me there long hours. I am at a stage in my life that I am not looking to go as far as I can, I am just looking for something that suits me and allows me to maintain a comfortable balance between my family life, my leisure and some intellectual stimulation and income.” (Elaine).

Brenda was also bored with her administrative role in a university because she felt that her skills were being underutilised. Given her past experience she felt she could make a greater contribution to the department in which she worked if she had been given the opportunity to take on a more responsible role:

“I would like to be in an organisational type role as a supervisor or office manager. I have got an extremely good memory and having run a business I have got good organisational skills. In my last job there was an enormous amount of information that I needed to know. I found out all the answers and eventually compiled a manual on everything that went on in the place.” (Brenda).

The clerical workers who were most satisfied with their jobs had a good balance of responsibility and manageable workloads. However, in the absence of responsibility or challenging tasks, most would have preferred to be very busy with routine tasks rather than not having enough work to keep them busy all day.

The concepts of boredom and busyness are indicative of a dialectical relationship between organisational culture and clerical workers' struggle to control their workloads. The lack of work as has been noted by some respondents is a direct reflection upon the inefficiency of management. There also appears to be a reluctance on the part of many organisations to utilise the

skills and competencies many clerical workers can bring to the workplace. For example, both Barbara and Bronwyn previously ran successful small businesses yet their skills were not fully utilised by the organisations in which they were now employed. Among those who were tertiary educated, the skills acquired during the course of their degrees were not used to their full potential.

The challenge for those respondents wanting greater responsibility was to demonstrate to management that they were capable of doing more by breaking down misconceptions about clerical work. The likelihood of this happening was remote. The passivity of the clerical workers in this study and their willingness to accept less than satisfactory jobs was a recurrent theme in the research findings. For many the only solution to gaining a more challenging job was to find employment elsewhere. As we saw in the previous chapter, this course of action was not necessarily straightforward. In addition, gaining a promotion either in the same workplace or elsewhere was quite difficult to achieve. Outcomes such as this further support the notion that many of the clerical workers in this study were working in white-collar ghettos.

Indispensable or replaceable: the organisational importance of clerical workers

Respondents were asked to assess how important their job was within the organisation in which they were employed. The premise of this question was to test respondents' self worth. If they perceived that they had an important role within the organisation, this would place them in a better position to negotiate a good enterprise agreement or workplace contract. Most respondents (23) felt that their job was either very important or extremely important within the organisation in which they worked, while twelve said that their job was quite important and five said their job was not important.

A number of respondents felt that their jobs were very important because they were integral to the financial hub of the organisation. Without their efforts to generate and chase up accounts the organisation would grind to a halt.

Tamara and Cindy believed that their work was very important as they provided the first point of contact and the public face of the organisations in which they worked:

“My job is vital. When I take on a receptionist position it is because someone is off sick or on holiday. It is a vital link to the whole organisation. The job has to be filled and they can't do without that person, that is why they hire a temp.” (Tamara).

“I think it is important because I am the first person people see or talk to on the phone. If they don't like me they may not persist in using us for their needs.” (Cindy).

Meryl and Sally did not believe that their jobs were important to the organisation as a whole, but saw it as important within the sections in which they were employed:

Within the organisation I don't think there is a lot of importance placed on my job. Within the Department itself it would be integral. They need somebody there to do the work.” (Meryl).

“It is quite important because I type resumes and answer phones, in that aspect they are reliant upon a fast typist. I type about 120 words per minute. I have been doing it for a long time. I suppose in the overall organisation, probably not that important because I could be replaced easily.” (Sally).

Fay and Brenda were probably the two respondents most under-utilised by their employers and were of the opinion that their jobs were unimportant:

“Very unimportant. Universities are undergoing big changes at the moment because of the cut back in funding. It is very much like shuffling the deck chairs on the Titanic and it's very traumatic. I had a really traumatic experience last year where I was ousted as office

manager and I have ended up in a new department due to appalling management.” (Brenda).

“Zero, if I left tomorrow it wouldn’t make a difference.” (Fay).

Respondents were asked to assess how well they did their jobs. Eighteen said they did their job either extremely well or very well, eight thought they did a good job, nine thought they did the job okay or quite well, one not well and four to the best of their ability.

Based upon performance appraisals Fiona, Penny and Rachel felt that they did their jobs well:

“In my opinion well I have never really got any negative feedback from my boss in appraisals or not to the point where it has made me reconsider my position there. So I think I do it well.” (Fiona).

“I think reasonably well. I have actually just had appraisals and I got a big tick from the boss, so that is a reasonable indication.” (Penny).

“I think I do my job very well indeed. To give you some sort of indication, we have what we call personal effectiveness reviews which are conducted annually. I just had mine with my manager. Although I am on contract, she wanted to do one. They have several different rating scales, unsatisfactory, development required, good, fully competent and outstanding. As my manager explained to me, hardly anyone ever gets outstanding, it means that something is going dreadfully wrong or they have got the wrong person in the job. Anyway, my rating was fully competent. That is very acceptable to come in at fully competent.” (Rachel).

Meryl, Lucy and Heather believed that they could have done a better job if their workloads were not as stressful and heavy:

"I think I do it satisfactorily. In all honesty I know that I am not at a standard that I would like, but that is because of the amount of work there is. I just have to bury my head and go ahhh, I can't do it." (Meryl).

"I would say I try my best, I probably could do better, but it is quite a strenuous job, I would do 80 per cent quite well, another 20 per cent I could pick up on." (Heather).

"I think I do it very well. I think I could probably do it better, if I had more time to sort of deal with things, if the workload wasn't as high. But I think I do a good job." (Lucy).

Generally, speaking most respondents felt that they did their jobs well. On occasion a number identified that they could improve their performance, but on the whole most were conscientious and performed to the best of their ability.

Respondents were asked how easy it would be to find someone else to do their job. Although most respondents thought they did their job well, there was a belief by 33 respondents that it would be either quite easy or very easy to find someone else to do their job. Seven said it would not be easy to find someone. There appeared to be no link between how well they did their job and how they perceived their work performance within the organisation in which they were employed. Many of them thought that no one was indispensable and that they could be replaced at any time with a suitable candidate.

What is striking about the responses to this question is the acknowledgement of the tacit skills (although they are not named as such) required to undertake a number of respondents' jobs. However, respondents tended to place very little value on these skills and their importance within the job.

Isobel noted that a high level of customer service was required to do her job but believed it would be easy to find someone to do this:

"I would be very easy to replace. The task aren't difficult. It is not a thinking persons job, it doesn't need to be. It is the volume of work you are dealing with, that is the difficult part. You need someone who is very organised. There are a lot of organised administrators out there. You have to provide a high level of customer service continuously, but a lot of people can do that, it is not difficult to fulfill that role in that way". (Isobel).

Penny and Belinda believe that someone would need to acquire organisational knowledge and experience to adequately do their jobs:

"It is the sort of job that requires someone to have been there for perhaps six or eight months before they would have enough knowledge to do it. It is a point of contact for new reps who need to get their information, who do I go to, what does this mean on my system all that kind of thing. It is not a role that requires an awful lot of training or any thing like, but it does require some experience in the company, so that you know who to resource the information from." (Penny).

"It would be fairly easy to replace me, but it would be very time consuming. You would be looking at probably eight weeks of full-time training and then perhaps a minimum of six months before they can fully understand what they are doing." (Belinda).

Amy emphasised that if someone was to take over her job they would need to be job-ready:

"I don't think it would be that hard. It is a matter of finding someone who can do the variety of tasks in that position. Perhaps someone who has a reasonable sense of responsibility and doesn't need to be taught how to do anything. They pretty much expect you to know how to do it from scratch and not be trained in anything. (Amy).

Meredith, Paula and Rachel noted that with high levels of unemployment in the labour market it would be easy to find someone else to do their job and that no one is indispensable:

“I think in the current climate it would be quite easy. I know that when I applied for my job they had a lot of job applications, but I think there'd be a lot of people who would be interested in this position, even just university people who would want to go up.” (Meredith).

“Fairly easy. We had to employ another accounting officer in accounts payable and we had over 300 applicants.” (Paula).

“Reasonably easy. I don't do anything particularly unique, I don't bring unique skills to the job. There are plenty of people out there who have the organisational abilities and the communication abilities that this job requires. I also believe that nobody is indispensable.” (Rachel).

Melissa thought it would be quite difficult to replace her as executive assistant to the Managing Director because consideration needs to be given to the fact that she and her boss have compatible personalities:

“I know from past experience that it took a long time for the Managing Director to actually get someone to replace his previous assistant, so going on that I would say, it would probably take a while to find someone who was suitable to work with him.” (Melissa).

The findings in this section indicate that respondents in this study saw themselves as dispensable workers. This is not surprising given that prospective employers can draw upon a large pool of women who make up the clerical workforce. All of these potential workers have a basic range of skills which enables them to fill most clerical jobs. The ubiquitous nature of clerical work can be a virtue or a disadvantage. It can be a virtue because it means that clerical work is relatively easy to find (particularly in urban areas), it is available on a part-time basis, in a wide range of industries and sectors and

can accommodate women moving in and out of the labour market over the life cycle. In contrast, the dispensable nature of clerical work can severely disadvantage workers particularly in relation to their capacity to enterprise bargain and their long-term job security.

Could you imagine a man doing your job?

Positional power and symbolic power within organisations ensure that certain jobs are linked with one gender or another. According to Henson and Rogers, (2001:220) clerical work is almost always associated with women's work. Many of the tasks performed by clerical workers are an extension of the wifely or motherly duties they may perform at home. Jobs like making tea and coffee and arranging flowers are generally considered as inappropriate for men. In their study on temporary clerical work, Henson and Rogers (2001:220-225) found that this type of employment is largely shaped by gender, ethnicity, and class and is heterosexualised. Employment agency clients often specify that they want a feminine and sexy young woman to fill a particular temporary order. There is an expectation that as part of the job these women "perform emotional labour – to be deferential and nurturing toward managers, co-workers, clients and agency personnel" (p.225).

A majority of interviewees (31) in this study could not imagine a man doing their job. It could be argued that they are perpetuating the notion that there are acceptable jobs for men and women. There was an entrenched view that men are beyond routine and menial tasks and that women are better suited both in terms of skill and temperament for clerical work. These views were shared by both younger and older women alike. A number of respondents described how they worked in all female environments where men were actively excluded. Pam described what happened in her workplace when a male office worker did not fit in:

"We did have a male in there and it was the disaster of the century. I can't see a man doing it, I don't think they'd have the patience, I don't think they would have the steadfastness, to kind of handle all that's

going on, like we talk about everybody's problems and what's going right and what's going wrong." (Pam).

Vera, who worked in a male dominated union, had firm beliefs around acceptable roles for men and women:

"The men who are members of our union are quite narrow-minded and believe that a secretary assistant should be a female. I think that I can get more out of my boss being a female. It might sound really strange, but I think he's more attentive to females. I don't think a man could do it better than a woman anyway." (Vera).

Isobel, who worked in recruitment and training, described how each job required an "ideal" candidate:

"I could imagine a man doing my job, but I don't think it is the picture the team has. It wouldn't happen. When we talk about positions being filled, the recruitment team talk about a "fit". So the "fit" for a job might be a mature older woman or younger woman. So they have an idea who will fill the role, their "fit" for my position is a younger woman." (Isobel).

Miriam felt that women were more suited to clerical work because they had better skills dealing with people:

"Oh no, men could not do the job as effectively I don't think. I think women can relate to people that you are dealing with perhaps a little bit better. It just might not be stimulating enough for a man. I don't know that might be very sexist, I don't know I haven't given that a lot of thought. It just seems to me a role more suited to women." (Miriam).

Fay thought a man would be bored doing her job and felt it was not a role traditionally undertaken up by men:

“I couldn’t imagine a man doing my job because he would be bored shitless. He wouldn’t put up with it. It is not really a man’s job traditionally anyway.” (Fay).

Fiona believed that women have innate skills which enable them to be better secretaries than men. Fiona’s comments confirm the office wife role that women often play:

“I think you have to have a good memory and be well organised. Men don’t have good memories and are not as well organised. I suppose I shouldn’t be demeaning towards men but I really believe that women have got more natural organisational skills than what men have. I just don’t think men could cut it. I think that is why there is not a lot of male secretarial staff. Because I just think that they don’t have the skills that women seem to naturally have.” (Fiona).

Sally had only ever come across a few men in her whole career and she felt a man could do secretarial work if he was desperate for money:

“I shouldn’t laugh. If he was really desperate for money, yes. Only because I haven’t seen many, I have only seen one or two men in the whole of my career doing what I do.”

Bronwyn felt that a male in her office would be hard pressed to deal with the male bosses. The implication in her quote is that women are more compliant than men in relation to dealing with management. Further, her comments affirm the notion that women defer to the positional and symbolic power of men within organisations.

“I could imagine a man doing my job yes, but with my boss with the way, how pedantic and stuff he is that would be quite interesting. We used to have a couple of guys working in the accounts department just before I joined, but we haven’t got any males there now, the males are the bosses.” (Bronwyn).

Like nine other respondents Meredith felt that a male could do her job, but lamented the fact that very few men applied for positions such as hers:

“Although secretarial jobs never attract male applicants when they are advertised, I think it would be fine for them to do it.” (Meredith).

Conclusion

As discussed in chapter five, the job choices of respondents in this study were largely determined by their family circumstances. For women in family mode and pre-retirees, flexible hours and a job close to home were important. The content of the job in terms of the required tasks was a secondary concern for these respondents. In contrast, most of the pre-reproductive women worked full-time and did not mind travelling into the central business district for work. Job selection for a number of respondents tended to be ad hoc and often translated to being in the right place at the right time when an offer of employment came to the fore. The respondents in this study tended to accept a job as a total package in terms of pay, conditions of employment, hours and work content.

Where a distinction could be gleaned between the four sub-categories was in relation to levels of responsibility. Generally speaking, women in family mode, pre-retirees and drifters were happy with the amount of responsibility they had in their jobs. This supports Hakim's notion that women with family responsibilities prefer jobs which are undemanding because it enables them to achieve a work/family balance. Although boredom, monotony, routinisation and difficult bosses were major issues for many respondents they accepted these as part of their work. Most continued in the job because the positive aspects of their work such as the social contact and convenient hours tended to override the negative aspects.

This chapter has illustrated the nature of the paid work performed by the respondents in this study. When asked to list the types of duties they did over

the course of their jobs, many of the respondents detailed the tangible tasks such as typing, telephone work, photocopying, filing and computing, but tended to either ignore or barely mention the tacit skills involved in the job. Many respondents felt that they could be easily replaced by another person, but did highlight that it would take that person a considerable amount of time to develop networks and contacts both internally and externally to do the job properly. Tacit skills are essential to the harmonious functioning and smooth running of organisations. The ability to care, nurture, mediate, organise and facilitate harmonious relationships between workers, management and clients was largely overlooked when assessing the total level of skill and competencies the women clerical workers in this study brought to their jobs.

The findings from this research indicate that there was no distinction between those respondents with formal and informal training. There would appear to be an expectation among employers that clerical workers should need very little in the way of training prior to starting a new job. As long as the worker could demonstrate they were job-ready, and had the necessary skills to do the job, no extra weighting was given to formal qualifications. This may be explained by the historical development of clerical work where no formal qualifications were needed. Standard competencies such as typing, computing, telephony and photocopying provide an entry point into a clerical position anywhere. Without denigrating the importance and value of on-the-job experience, clerical workers with tertiary qualifications may bring different qualities to a job, for example analytical and research skills and the ability to work independently. However, if those tertiary educated respondents were given the opportunity to use the skills acquired as part of their degrees this could potentially open a “pandoras box”. It may mean having to pay them more, provide them with the opportunity for promotion or worse still it may threaten the skill base of management.

The lack of on-the-job training and the expectation of being job-ready also means that clerical workers need to reassess their skill levels to ensure their future employability. Maintaining their level of skills and ensuring that their human capital remains high can be problematic for women taking extended

breaks out of the labour market to have a family. Very long periods out of the labour market (more than ten years) may mean that some clerical workers may be penalised on re-entry and may be forced to take lower level positions.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings in this study confirm the main argument in this thesis that job choice is based on a combination of agency and structural factors. Firstly, evidence from this research supports Hakim's view that women clerical workers, particularly those in family mode, pre-retirees and drifters are more likely to accept jobs that are less demanding in terms of responsibility because work is not the primary focus of their lives. Paid employment enabled them to earn an income as secondary earners and provided them with the opportunity for social contact. Further, convenience factors such as flexible hours and the proximity of the workplace to home seemed to outweigh the importance of job content.

From a structural perspective, definitions of what clerical workers can and cannot do in relation to skills and competencies is firmly ensconced within organisational culture. The hegemonic influence of positional power, symbolic power and technical power (see chapter one for definitions) means that men are automatically ascribed with the technical expertise, leadership and management roles and they are the ones who are given the authority to delegate and define specific roles within the organisation. Occupational segregation relies on drawing a distinction between men's and women's work. Overt and subliminal processes such as recruitment practices, access to training, performance appraisals and the everyday experience of women clerical workers while they are on the job serve to discriminate and marginalise their position. No matter how much an individual may demonstrate competency, skill and technical knowledge on the job, the work performed by clerical workers is generally not highly regarded. It could be argued that keeping women in occupational ghettos like clerical work ensures the maintenance of positional, technical and symbolic power within individual workplaces and the labour market as a whole.

The women in this study tended to reinforce the hegemonic influence associated with symbolic power and were complicit in undervaluing the work they performed. Many of them openly spoke about acceptable roles for men and women in the workplace. Most of them thought that clerical work was women's work and that men simply did not have the temperament nor the capacity to attend to the finer details involved in the work. Further, many women saw themselves as having a marginal role in their workplace. They accepted that their jobs were important within the areas in which they were employed but doubted whether it had any significant impact on the organisation as a whole.

In terms of commitment and performance on the job, it can be argued that most of the women in this study were highly committed and performed their jobs to the best of their ability. The respondents in this study demonstrated a commitment and loyalty to their job and their boss. A number of them covered up for their boss and were available to work extra hours if required. Even when they worked under the most difficult circumstances with difficult bosses, they said they were able to put their personal differences aside and work harmoniously.

The findings in this chapter reinforce the notion that the ubiquitous nature of clerical work provides women at whatever stage of their life cycle with the opportunity to earn an income as a secondary income earner, it is available on a part-time basis, it is a clean and respectable job to undertake prior to marriage and a family and it tolerates interrupted careers. As a feminised occupation clerical work is an attractive job for adaptive women. On the downside however, the skills needed to perform the tasks go largely unrecognised by management. The lack of job descriptions validates employers' stance that they do not need to acknowledge the skills involved in a particular job. If the tacit or intangible skills are not detailed then they do not have to pay the worker for using them. The undervaluing of women's skill has been deliberately used by employers to avoid paying them what they are really worth. To recognise that most clerical workers are already multi-skilled would mean that they would have to receive higher levels of remuneration. It is the

contention of this thesis that the accurate documentation of skills is one of the key aspects to maximising outcomes of enterprise bargaining for women workers.

Organisational culture and occupational segregation mitigates against giving clerical workers due recognition for the work they perform. In addition, there is a widely held view within some organisations that women clerical workers are less committed to their jobs because they have a preference for a marriage career over an employment career. Views such as this may impede optimal outcomes for women clerical workers within the enterprise bargaining arena. The next chapter will discuss how women achieve their conditions of employment and how organisational culture and other structural constraints impact upon women clerical workers achieving the best possible outcomes in terms of being paid what they are worth. It will also discuss how women reconcile their conditions of employment with their family responsibilities.

Chapter 7

Clerical worker's experience negotiating their pay and conditions of employment

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed how the package of skills offered by respondents in this study were not fully recognised by their employers. It also looked at how some respondents, particularly those in family mode, pre-retirees and drifters, were essentially satisfied with the content of their jobs. Even though some of their work was monotonous, boring and routine, these respondents were willing to trade off convenience factors such as flexible hours and work location for job content. Building upon the findings in chapter six, this chapter looks at how respondents' pay and conditions of employment have been determined in relation to their level of skill and the types of experience they bring to their job. The primary focus of this chapter will be on the way in which pay and conditions were determined prior to starting a job, how subsequent pay rises were achieved and whether respondents were able to negotiate flexible employment arrangements. A discussion will ensue around whether the respondents felt they were getting a fair go from their employers and if they were being adequately remunerated for the work performed in their jobs.

The impact of organisational culture (as discussed in chapter one) and how it influences the choices of women clerical workers has been a constant theme throughout this thesis. This chapter will argue that the influence of organisational culture was instrumental in determining the pay and conditions of employment for clerical workers. By dissecting the effect of organisational culture we can also glean how it determines the promotional opportunities of clerical workers; how it validates men having power over women; how it supports the male breadwinner ethos, and more broadly, how it defines

suitable roles and jobs for men and women in the context of gender ideology. The contribution women clerical workers make to the organisations in which they are employment is shaped by a belief system that argues that women are less skilled than men and that women are less committed to the workplace because they are more interested in a marriage career.

The findings detailed in this chapter and the preceding two chapters will enable me to re-evaluate Hakim's preference theory. Where Hakim's argument is confined to the notion of agency and the choice between work and family, this thesis builds upon this theme and explores how structural constraints manifest in the workplace impact upon not only the labour market experience of clerical workers but also the decision to undertake paid employment in the light of current or impending family responsibilities.

Determination of pay and conditions of employment

The power differential between employee and employer or management and subordinate means that there is an unequal process of negotiating pay and conditions in feminised occupations such as clerical work, where there is a common skill base and a plentiful supply of labour. Trust is an integral part of determining pay and conditions and requires a high degree of reciprocity between workers and management. There is a presumption that workers should be adequately remunerated (in monetary and non-monetary ways): the idea of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. Implicit in the notion of trust is shared values and rules. Ideally, the rules of negotiation should be seen as being fair, where workers and their boss 'bargain in good faith'. A sense of fair play by all parties is an essential element of trust (Cox, 2000: 105). This section will discuss how pay and conditions of employment were determined between respondents and their employers.

Most respondents were able to detail how their conditions of employment were determined without any hesitation. Sixteen respondents had their pay and conditions of employment determined by either a state or federal award, nine were on an Enterprise Based Agreement (EBA), twelve had an individual

contract (see Appendix six for more details on each respondent). Three respondents (Dawn, Samantha and Mary) could not say for certain how their conditions of employment were determined. Dawn had been with her employer for more than fifteen years. Over that time she had lost track of whether she was on an award or an individual contract. Mary was working on a casual basis for a government department and her conditions of employment were unstructured and untenured. She had not signed any contract or received anything in writing about her employment status. She noted in her interview that her employment could be terminated with one hours notice. Similarly, Samantha had received no written documentation in relation to her conditions of employment. For the purposes of this study these three respondents will be analysed as if they were individual contracts because their conditions of employment appear to be an arrangement between themselves and the employer.

Respondents were covered by a broad range of awards. Nine out of sixteen respondents could not name the award they were on. For those who could, Christine was on a public service award, Sally and Monica the *Federated Clerk's Award*, Winona, Eleanor and Clare, *Health and Allied Services Award*, Heather the *Hair and Beauty Association Award*, Bronwyn the *Local Government Interim Award* and Lucy the *Legal and Professional Employees Award*. The others simply did not know the name of their award let alone if it was a state or federal award. The fact that these respondents were on a number of different awards with different pay and conditions made any comparison difficult.

A number of respondents in the study worked in the same organisation, but had their conditions of employment determined differently. Evidence such as this is consistent with the ever changing industrial landscape at the time of the first interviews, where the transition from one system to the other meant one worker's pay and conditions were determined in a different way to another's. For example, Meredith and Selina worked at the same university. Meredith was on an EBA and Selina was still working under an award. Fiona and Meryl worked for a large multinational pharmaceutical company. Fiona had been in

their employ for nine years and was still on an award, while Meryl who was more recently employed, having been with the company for five months, was employed on an individual contract.

Respondents working in small to medium sized businesses were more likely to be on individual contracts or awards, while those working in large organisations employing more than 100 people were more likely to work under an EBA. Highly unionised organisations such as universities, public utilities, airlines, telecommunications companies, unions and local government were also more likely to have staff working under either an award or an EBA. Those organisations with a non-unionised workforce tended to have staff working under either an individual contract or an award.

Not all respondents working on EBAs were involved in setting them up. Some respondents had commenced jobs after the EBA was put in place. They had accepted the terms of the EBA when they started their job. The temporary office workers (Tracey, Anita and Tamara) in this study worked under individual contracts which loosely bound them to an employment agency for the duration of an assignment.

Work intensification and the culture of long hours

Early twenty-first century workplaces place a high value upon employees who work longer and longer hours without breaks. If staff work through their lunch break or after the official clock-off time there is a perception that they are more committed to their jobs. Downsizing within many organisations has meant that they are understaffed or short staffed, and as a result, employees have to deal with ever increasing workloads and deadlines which make taking a break more difficult. Work intensification and the culture of long hours was an entrenched feature of many respondents' workplaces.

As discussed in chapter six, the clerical workers in this study claimed to be committed to their jobs. They said they performed their work to the best of

their abilities and were conscientious about undertaking their duties at an acceptable standard. In some instances the workloads of respondents meant that they had to get their work done as quickly as possible rather than focussing on the finer details which would have produced a higher quality product. Other respondents covered up for their boss when required and were prepared to work longer hours if necessary. It could be argued that the requirement to work longer hours without recompense represents an erosion of entitlements and conditions of employment. This section will look at how respondents conformed to the longer hours culture and work intensification by forfeiting entitlements such as paid overtime and meal breaks, working on weekends and public holidays and starting work earlier and finishing later in order to complete their large workloads.

Half the respondents said that their hours of work varied either on a daily or weekly basis. More than half (22) said that they could not choose the hours they worked. The variation in hours was usually due to having to start earlier or finish later to complete workloads. Ten pre-reproductive women worked very long hours of between 45 to 60 hours per week. Three of these respondents worked as personal or executive assistants to senior management, while the others worked in general administrative positions. Catherine, who consistently worked a 55 hour week, described how her hours could vary from day to day:

“Most nights I work until 7.30. On a good day I try to leave on time at around 5.30 or 6 o’clock. But it would depend on what was happening. Usually things are left to the last minute.” (Catherine).

Rachel described how workers were perceived within the organisation she was employed if they did not put in the required hours:

“The company I work for have the attitude that as long as the work gets done they are not fussed by how many hours you work. But I really don't think that washes in reality. They really do have a preference for

you to be there at the recognised starting time of 8.00am and indeed for you to work through to 4.45pm or longer.” (Rachel).

In stark contrast to the pre-reproductive respondents, the drifters all worked 20 hours per week or less. Clare, Monica, Mary and Tamara would have preferred extra hours of work, indicating that underemployment was an issue for them. Tamara described how her workload was extremely variable. One week she might work 16 hours and the next she may get nothing.

All but one of the pre-retirees worked either a standard working week (38 hours) if they were full-time or had set part-time hours. The exception was Cheryl, who worked 60 hours as a personal assistant to a senior manager.

What is interesting is that there was no consistent pattern in relation to the number of hours worked by women in family mode. Barbara, Dawn, and Sally all worked over 45 hours per week. As discussed in chapter five, these women worked as a matter of financial necessity. Elaine, who was a secondary income earner, worked on a part-time basis over four days but still managed to put in 40 hours per week at work. Even though Elaine was able to negotiate a start time of 9.00am she consistently worked until after 6.30pm each night. She conceded that she essentially had a full-time job with part-time wages. The other six women in family mode worked less than 38 hours per week.

Meal breaks

Despite their long working hours, respondents in this study often worked through the day without taking adequate breaks.

Tea breaks were once commonplace in the workplace but are now almost defunct. Implicit in organisational culture is the notion that tea breaks are tantamount to “slacking off”. This is reflected in the findings of this study. Cheryl sums up this sentiment perfectly:

“No they've gone out years ago. We have a break whenever we want. If I want to go down and get a cup of coffee or if I want to sit and talk to someone or what have you, you can do that” (Cheryl).

While official tea breaks had all but gone, most respondents were entitled to grab a cup of tea or coffee and take it to their desk whenever they liked. Elaine was envious of the smokers who could at least get away from the office environment and have a break. Those respondents working in large unionised organisations tended to have official tea breaks of ten to fifteen minutes in the morning or afternoon. Penny, who worked for a telecommunications company, Eleanor, who worked for a community service agency, Meryl, in a large multinational pharmaceutical company, Sarah, who worked for an airline and Pam, who worked for a union were entitled to and generally took a fifteen minute break in the morning and afternoon. Vera, who worked for a different union, was entitled to have a tea break but was reluctant to take it in case her boss needed her services:

“Technically yes we get a tea break, it is something we try to take, but it doesn't happen because the boss sometimes needs me while I am on a break. When he is in you have got to give him your 100 per cent attention because you are fitting in with his schedule.” (Vera).

Sarah was undertaking a traineeship and shifting between one department and another within which she was employed. She found the rules varied from one department to the next in relation to tea breaks. Bronwyn's workplace disapproved of workers stopping for a tea break:

“I think it's in our award, but they sort of frown upon you taking set tea breaks as such, normally what people do is kind of just make tea or coffee, come back and sit at their desk but they still expect you to be working.” (Bronwyn).

Tamara, a temporary office worker, said that some of her places of employment had tea breaks while others did not:

“Some places will tell you there is a tea break, other places will not offer a tea break. Mostly if you demand a tea break you will get one”. (Tamara).

Working through lunch to get jobs completed was quite common among a number of respondents. As stipulated in the minimum requirements for conditions of employment (see Appendix two), employees are entitled to a half an hour meal break after five hours of continuous work. Nearly all (37) the respondents were allocated a lunch break of between thirty minutes and one hour. For some respondents half an hour was all they were allowed, while for others they could choose how long they would take and this was largely dependent upon their workloads. Those who did not have a lunch break tended to be part-time workers or worked outside standard hours of employment. Dominique, who worked from 6.00am to 2.00pm, was entitled to a fifteen minute breakfast break and a fifteen minute lunch break. Monica, a part-time worker who worked four hours per day, did not have a lunch break. Heather simply did not have the time to have a break. She disliked the fact that her workplace was so hectic and would have liked the opportunity to take a break:

“I don't get a proper lunch break or a morning tea. It is full on work. From the time you get in there, it is just full on non-stop phones ringing and people coming in. I would like a little bit of time to myself to have a sit down and have a coffee would be great. But that doesn't happen a lot.” (Heather).

Some respondents used the flexibility of taking lunch breaks to attend to personal matters. Christine said she could take as long as she needed over lunch. On some days she only took a short break while other days she took longer to run errands. Cheryl, Amy and Barbara chose not to have a lunch break because of their large workloads and tended to work through rather than stop:

“Most of the time I don't have a break. I just eat at the desk or eat on the run. You are meant to have 45 minutes so I'll do that occasionally, but not very often.” (Barbara)

In contrast, Vera believed taking a lunch break was important because it made her more productive:

“We have an hour for lunch. I always make sure I take the lunch break, because you are less productive if you have been going without a break.” (Vera).

Time-in-lieu and overtime for working weekends and public holidays

The issue of work intensification and long hours is also exemplified by the fact that some respondents had to work overtime because they needed to complete urgent tasks or meet heavy workloads at busy times. Fourteen respondents had worked on weekends and seven had worked on public holidays. Working on public holidays, weekends and putting in overtime is another indication that respondents were highly conscientious and committed to their jobs.

In terms of recompense, nineteen respondents were able to take time-in-lieu, nine were paid overtime at either their normal hourly rate (this included the three temporary office workers who were paid their normal hourly rate whatever the number of hours they worked) or at a higher rate, and two respondents did not know what their entitlements were. Ten respondents were not able to accrue time-in-lieu or take overtime; seven of these were on individual contracts. Those who were paid overtime were usually employed in large organisations which were unionised and had their conditions of employment determined by an award or an EBA. Those respondents who were unable to accrue time-in-lieu or receive paid overtime stated that they were given salaries which compensated for their long hours. Fiona was of the opinion that she was paid a good salary to cover the long hours she worked:

“The longer hours haven't become an issue, because we receive salaries that compensate for any long hours we do. I look in the paper sometimes and see the salaries of what I do and I think oh my goodness I am very lucky.” (Fiona).

Although time-in-lieu was available, ironically, a number of respondents found it difficult to take this time off because of their heavy workloads. At the time of the first interview Isobel had worked up eleven hours of overtime, but could not find a suitable time to take it. Lucy was able to negotiate with her boss to take the occasional day off to reduce her accrued overtime hours:

“With that extra hour I work each day I can accrue that and take it as time in-lieu. Occasionally I take a day off, my boss will usually okay it. I just mention to him, is it alright if I take this day off. It's not annual leave, it is the extra hours. He says it's fine.” (Lucy).

Some of the respondents who worked the occasional weekend did so on a voluntary basis and were paid overtime. Again these respondents tended to work in large unionised workplaces. Other respondents were asked to work in order to complete specific tasks at peak times such as the end of the financial year or end of month statements. Sally and Melissa voluntarily chose to work on weekends if they took work home with them. Seven respondents worked on public holidays. Three of these worked at tertiary institutions where certain public holidays were not observed. These days were then taken over the Christmas and New Year period. The other four respondents noted it was not a requirement to work on public holidays but they had chosen to do this in order to catch up on the backlog of work.

Gina worked on weekends when she was extremely busy. She was not paid for working on weekends. Rather, any overtime work was included in her total salary package:

“I don't work on weekends very often. Maybe on a Saturday when I am mega busy and I have too much to do. I usually go in at 11.30am and out by 2.00pm. So it is not very much. I have never worked on a Sunday, not yet, but it has been known to happen. I don't get paid because it is considered to be part of my salary.” (Gina).

Bronwyn did not like working on weekends and noted that she was not paid any overtime, but rather was given time-in-lieu:

“I work on weekends under sufferance, normally if we have got the audit and things coming up or we are behind we are expected to work on the weekends. The only thing at our place we don't have is paid overtime. So any time that you are putting in, Saturdays and we have worked Sundays as well, is reluctantly given back to you as time-in-lieu.” (Bronwyn).

Vera worked on the weekends only when she was required to attend special events:

“I work on weekends only when I go outside of my scope and do conferences and the dinners and stuff like that when I have to work on the weekends and really late at night.” (Vera).

Penny had the option of being paid overtime at a higher rate on the weekends, but chose not to work because it would intrude on her family time.

Annual leave

This next section will discuss whether respondents in this study were able to use their annual leave at a time of their choosing. With the exception of the casual workers who did not have any annual leave provisions, all respondents received four weeks annual leave. Those working part-time received annual leave on a pro rata basis. In general, respondents could not take their annual

leave whenever they liked. Some were forced to take their annual leave over the Christmas period which left them with only two weeks annual leave to take at other times during the year. For those respondents in family mode two weeks did not go anywhere near providing adequate coverage for the school holidays. Many respondents could choose when to take their annual leave, provided it was not during a busy time, and/or if sufficient notice was given to ensure coverage during their absence. Women in family mode generally took all their leave entitlements, while the other respondents without family responsibilities were more likely to accrue untaken annual leave from one year to the next.

Among women in family mode, Heather, who job shared, could not take her annual leave whenever she liked, but noted she was able to negotiate taking her annual leave during school holidays. Winona said she could take her annual leave whenever she liked provided it was not during a busy period. During school holidays Winona had to organise additional care for her daughter via school holiday programs, friends and family. She was fortunate enough to have the flexibility to work her hours over three consecutive days (rather than over the usual five days) which enabled her to have two full days in which to care for her child. Barbara noted that she could take her holidays whenever she liked. However, she anticipated that most leave in the future would be taken during the Christmas holiday period. This would seriously curtail leave during any extended breaks like the school holidays during the year. Similarly, Elaine's company stipulated compulsory annual leave over the Christmas period:

"You must take the week between Christmas and New Year because the company closes down. Then after that you apply as you require and hope that it will be granted." (Elaine).

A theme identified by a number of respondents was that the employee's needs were perceived as being secondary to the organisation's demands. During busy times employees were discouraged from taking their annual leave. Some respondents had to go through a lengthy process to have their leave approved.

Leave forms had to be completed and submitted well before the leave date for consideration and approval. Dawn, who worked for a small firm of accountants, could only take her annual leave during the first half of the financial year. Bronwyn, noted that she could only take her annual leave provided it suited the organisation. She had more than nine weeks annual leave owing to her because she had put the needs of her paid employment first:

“Normally you can take your annual leave whenever you like provided it suits the organisation. If we are preparing for the audit, it wouldn't really be fair to take your annual leave unless all your work was up to date and all the reports and things were run, because it would mean somebody else perhaps who was a bit unfamiliar with your duties would have to run the reports and things. All of us in the accounts department are owed holidays.” (Bronwyn)

Granting leave at Fiona's workplace was also dependent upon whether the employee was needed at a particular time:

“They can stop you taking leave. If you want annual leave and it is not appropriate because they foresee they need you, they can knock it back. But nine out of ten times they don't. Sometimes they are not happy about when you choose to take your annual leave but they won't stop you. It would have to be an extreme case for them to stop you. But they do have a say.” (Fiona)

Only ten respondents were able to take their annual leave whenever they liked without stipulation.

Access to family friendly initiatives

As discussed in the previous chapter, respondents in this study tended to accept jobs as a complete package in terms of hours, job content and location.

The findings of this study indicate that family friendly initiatives were not widely available to the clerical workers in this study. A small number of respondents were able to negotiate favourable conditions of employment to meet their family needs. Broadly speaking, family friendly initiatives may include:

- Varying start and finish times at work;
- Permanent part-time employment with predictable hours;
- Access to paid family leave;
- Ready access to holiday leave;
- The ability to make up time later;
- Ready access to leave without pay;
- Paid parental leave;
- Job sharing;
- Career breaks;
- Flexible hours under the employees control;
- Work from home;
- Extended leave options.

This next section will look at the sorts of family friendly initiatives which were available to the respondents in this study and how widely accessible they were.

Sick leave

The most variable condition of employment among respondents in this study was sick leave. Many respondents were ill-informed about their entitlements and had to rely on the organisational grapevine or hearsay to clarify the number of days available to them. Most respondents were guessing when they stated the number of sick days to which they were entitled. With the exception of the casually employed respondents, who did not have any sick leave, only eleven respondents could definitively say how many days sick leave they received. For those working under awards there was a great deal of confusion around the number of sick days in the first year of service, which

increased in subsequent years of service. For example, the award Lucy worked under provided her with five days of sick leave during the first year of service and ten days after two or more years of service. Casual staff were not entitled to sick leave but were paid a leave loading in their wages. Tamara notes that as a casual worker she could not afford to get sick because she did not get paid.

Those in receipt of the minimum entitlement of five days sick leave per year were all on individual contracts (see table 7.1 below). In general most respondents received between six and ten days sick leave per year. Although Christine was on an award she thought she was entitled to an unlimited or uncapped number of days for sick leave provided she had a doctor's certificate. Meredith was unsure how many sick days she was entitled to, but noted that her place of employment was to about to commence trialling uncapped sick leave. According to Penny, uncapped sick leave can be a misleading term, because once a person reaches twelve days leave they need to justify their leave usage. Essentially, uncapped leave means that staff still have apportioned leave entitlements under the guise of a free rein:

“Technically there is no limit, but if you start taking too many days your team leader will take you aside and say is there some medical problem that we need to know about, or is it because you are unhappy here or whatever. Once you get over about twelve in a year that they might start thinking why is this person taking so many days.” (Penny).

Table 7.1 Sick leave entitlement by respondent

Sick leave entitlement	Respondent	Total respondents
None (all casually employed)	Mary, Tamara, Tracey, Anita, Ingrid	5
5 (the minimum stipulated under the <i>Workplace Relations Act</i>) (All respondents on individual contracts)	Cindy, Barbara, Meryl, Elaine, Fay.	5
6 to 10	Catherine, Rachel, Dominique, Samantha, Lucy, Clare, Fiona, Sarah, Belinda, Monica, Eleanor, Sally, Vera, Isobel, Gina.	15
11 to 15	Bronwyn, Brenda, Melissa, Paula, Amy, Selina	6
16-20	Pam	1
Uncapped	Christine, Penny	2
Don't know	Dawn, Miriam, Winona, Heather, Cheryl, Meredith	6
Total		40

Pam, who was on an EBA, had the most generous leave provisions out of all respondents as she was entitled to twenty days of sick leave annually. She claimed that once a person in her organisation had accrued forty days leave they were entitled to be paid out in monetary terms. It was not clear how a financial figure would be calculated.

The confusion around the issue of sick leave was exemplified by Dawn who had been employed in the same job for fifteen years but had no idea how many days sick leave to which she was entitled:

“I don't really know, I don't take any as such. I suppose I would have many years of sick leave, I just don't take it.” (Dawn).

Winona who worked part-time did not know how many sick days to which she was entitled, and was at a loss to calculate how many that would translate to on a pro rata basis:

“I haven't worked it out what it is equivalent to I am basically 0.6. I used to work in a school, and we got fifteen per year. I don't know what it is in a normal workplace. It used to be eight , but I think it is twelve. I

have got no idea. I think I would get about seven or eight per year, but I am guessing. The sick leave is pro rata.” (Winona).

Heather was also mystified as to how many days sick leave she was entitled to because she had never had the need to take days off:

“I never take any sick days, but I am sure it is in the award which is five or six or something like that, I don't know, I never take any sick time.” (Heather).

In general, most (25) respondents could accrue any untaken sick leave from one year to the next. The exceptions being Meryl, Samantha and Heather. Samantha and Heather tended to be vague about what their entitlements were in relation to leave. There is some evidence from the first interview that both were not receiving their full leave entitlements from their respective employers. For example, Samantha was not paid for public holidays and Heather was not entitled to any other leave other than annual and sick leave. Seven respondents (Dawn, Cindy, Rachel, Elaine, Miriam, Cheryl and Clare) did not know if they were able to accrue their sick leave. What is interesting about this group is that all but two respondents, Clare and Cheryl, were on individual contracts.

It would appear that family leave was not widely available, but rather respondents tended to use their own sick leave to care for sick children. A common retort from respondents when asked if they had ever used their sick leave to care for family members was “Oh yes!”. Nearly all the women in family mode and pre-retirees had used their own sick leave at one time or another to care for children who were unwell or to attend doctors' appointments. The exceptions were Tracey, who worked casually and was able to decline work on those days, as well as Dawn and Heather who were fortunate enough not to have to take time off to care for sick children. Dominique, Cheryl and Eleanor had family members who were willing to care for their children when they were ill. Elaine and Christine, who both worked part-time, were able to work on another day in lieu of the day they took off to

attend to their children. Pam reflected how in a previous job when her children were young that her sick leave did not seem to stretch far enough.

“I was constantly in advance on my sick leave it just didn't stretch that far, by six months it would be all gone. My boss was really good because he understood that women with kids were reliable and better workers than juniors who couldn't get out of bed in the morning.” (Pam)

Other leave entitlements

Respondents were asked whether they had any other leave stipulated in their conditions of employment. These included family/parent leave (19), long service leave (21), maternity leave (23) and special leave (20). These other sorts of leave generated a great deal of confusion among some respondents with a significant number not sure of what other leave they may be entitled to. Miriam, who had just started a new job, had no idea what her leave entitlements were. Samantha, with her limited experience in the workplace, also did not know what other leave was available to her. A common trend among the respondents in this sample was the lack of information they were given about their leave entitlements when they commenced their jobs. It was not clear whether this was an oversight on the part of the employer or a failure on the part of respondents to ask for these details. A number of respondents assumed that they had access to other leave entitlements, but because they had never needed to use them, their assumptions were based on conjecture rather than fact.

Sally did not know specifically what her other leave entitlements were, but assumed they were available to her:

“I would assume so. As I said I wasn't really shown a contract or service agreement for where I am. We are only a small part of the organisation.” (Sally).

Dominique assumed that all her leave entitlements would be guided by the award even though she was on an individual employment contract. Dawn was unaware of what other leave to which she was entitled. Winona, like many other respondents, was not clear what family leave was, let alone whether it was available to her. She was also unsure about special leave provisions:

“I am sure we would have long service leave and maternity leave. What's parental leave, is that when your child is sick or a family member? As far as I am aware that is what you use your own sick days for, to look after sick children. I don't know about special leave at my workplace. But in all the other places I have worked in, you are just given that. I have never had to use it here. As far as I know you are allowed time to go to funerals and still be paid. If it is a member of the family, you are allowed up to a week off.” (Winona).

Barbara knew that she had special leave in her individual contract, but did not negotiate maternity leave as she had completed her family. Long service leave was something she had not discussed with her employer and in her view may not have been included in her contract. Fiona was uncertain what types of other leave might be available to her:

“Maternity leave you can have, long service, and parental what is that? I don't think they have that. That is like unpaid leave, if you want to take some time off and not get paid for it, I think that is frowned upon. If someone has died in your family I think you get one day or two days depending. Jury duty, good question, I have never known anyone at this company to have that. I suppose they would, but I don't know if they got paid.” (Fiona)

As noted above, Pam, who worked for a trade union, had the most generous sick leave provisions. She also had the most generous other leave provisions and described how she and her colleagues had difficulties using up their leave. When the union closed down over the Christmas period, staff did not have to use their annual leave. Pam had been in this job for eleven years and had

retained an unusual leave provision which she called a “grandparent clause”. This clause had not been included in the union’s collective agreement. As well as a rostered day off every fortnight, four weeks annual leave, and three weeks off over the Christmas break, she received a half a day off a month to attend to personal business.

Only eight respondents had used any of the other sorts of leave. Christine and Eleanor had used maternity leave, Brenda, Meredith and Barbara special leave, Sarah and Penny family leave to care for sick relatives and Cheryl had used long service leave.

It was not clear why there was a reluctance on the part of respondents to take their leave entitlements. It may be because they did not know they were available to them, or as Elaine explained, “one does not know about these other types of leave until they are needed”. There was some confusion over the nomenclature of leave, for example, parental leave under the *Workplace Relations Act* refers to maternity and paternity leave. Workers taking leave to care for sick children or relatives is known as family leave under the Act.

Other family friendly initiatives

The findings indicate that there was very little negotiated flexibility in relation to family friendly initiatives. As noted above, annual leave was not readily accessible and was subject to approval from the respondent’s employer. The only initiative which was widely available was access to permanent part-time work with predictable hours and the ability of some respondents to make up time later if they took a day off to care for a sick family member. Maternity leave appeared to be widely available, but respondents did not state whether it was paid or unpaid. With very few exceptions, most maternity leave in Australia is unpaid. Other leave provisions which were not available included; access to leave without pay, flexibility in relation to core start and finish times, job sharing, extended career breaks with the option of returning to the same or a similar job within the same organisation and working from home. In relation

to access to paid family leave, respondents in family mode or pre-retirees had used their sick leave to care for family members.

Access to career breaks and parental leave was discussed in detail in chapter five. These types of leave were taken by women in family mode and pre-retirees. In relation to the other family friendly initiatives, Heather was the only respondent who job shared. Christine was the only respondent who appeared to have flexible hours which she controlled:

“I get paid for 32 hours per week. Some weeks I do more and some weeks I do less. If I ever need a day off I take it. Sometime I come in on Thursday which I am meant to have off, if something has to be done and I have that day off another time. So it varies that way, but mostly it is standard. I suppose it would even up in the long run.” (Christine).

Christine revealed in the second interview, after the birth of her second child, that she had negotiated with her employer to work from home.

Eleanor, a woman in family mode, had permanent part-time hours and was able to negotiate time off for study. However, she had to make up this time by working longer hours on other days. Those respondents who worked on a casual basis could choose when they wanted to work. For example, Tracey did not work during the school holidays and Anita was able to fit her business interests around her paid employment. In contrast, the casual nature of Tamara’s employment meant that her financial circumstances were insecure because she could not predict when work would be available.

Monetary rewards

The evidence presented above indicates that nearly all the respondents in this study (with the exception of the drifters) worked longer hours than they were paid for, they forfeited meal breaks, they were generally unable to take their leave entitlements at a time of their choosing and they could not choose the

hours they wished to work. This section will look at whether respondents felt they were adequately remunerated for their efforts in the workplace.

More than half (21) the respondents in this study felt that they were not paid enough. In contrast, nineteen respondents felt that they were paid enough. In general, those who were happy with their level of pay worked full-time in roles which could be defined as advanced clerical positions (see Appendix one for definition). Eleven of these respondents earned between \$30,001 to \$40,000 per annum, six between \$20,001 and \$30,000 (half of these were part-time). Only one respondent, Ingrid, who was a student and worked part-time earned between \$5,000 to \$10,000 per annum. Rachel was the only respondent who earned over \$40,000 and she was very happy with her level of pay:

“I do actually think I am paid enough. It is a good situation I am in. It is a win/win. I think I am getting paid the right amount for the work that I do.” (Rachel).

With the exception of two respondents, all of those on an EBA were happy with their level of pay. Those on awards and individual contracts were the least satisfied with their pay. Similarly, respondents whose jobs were classified as intermediate clerical workers were more likely to be dissatisfied with their level of pay.

When looking at the four sub-categories identified in this research, pre-reproductive women were the most satisfied with their level of pay. This is probably tied to the fact that they were more likely to work full-time in jobs which were more interesting than the other groups. Further, thirteen of these women were secondary earners who did not have the additional financial responsibility of a family. Women in family mode were the least satisfied with their pay. Seven said they were not paid enough, while three respondents who were secondary earners said they were happy with their pay. All the sole parents who were the primary earners would have liked to be paid more money.

Flippant comments like “is anyone ever paid enough?” were stated by a few respondents. Eleanor fell into this group. Although she did not categorically say she was underpaid she felt she would like to get more money for her efforts:

“Everyone aspires for a better rate. Everyone wants more money. I am pretty happy with the rate, but if it was more I wouldn't knock it back.”
(Eleanor).

Those respondents who felt they were underpaid believed that they should be paid over \$40,000 per annum. As noted above, most were paid between \$30,001 to \$40,000 per annum. Barbara, who was being paid in the high \$30,000 range, felt that because she often stepped into the role of General Manager in his absence, she should have been remunerated for these higher duties:

“That is difficult. As I said before I am doing two roles. I think I should be paid around about the same as the General Manager because that is what I am doing as well. That is about another \$5 to 7,000 per annum.”
(Barbara)

Sally believed that she should have been paid over \$40,000 for the job she did. Winona, who worked part-time as an executive assistant, believed her hourly rate should have been increased by \$3 to \$4 per hour:

“Gee that is a tough one. My hourly rate is just over \$14. That is a pretty standard rate. I would say probably \$17 to \$18 per hour for the responsibility they give me.” (Winona).

Heather, who worked in a stressful and hectic receptionist position, thought her hourly rate should rise by \$5 per hour. Elaine felt that there should have been some parity between her level of pay and that of senior personal assistants within the company she worked. What is interesting is that Gina, a senior personal assistant within the same company, was not paid nearly as much as

Elaine expected (Gina was paid \$38,000 per annum). This was a common theme among those working under individual contracts: there appeared to be a lack of information or misinformation about the rates of pay and conditions of employment of colleagues because of the secrecy clauses in the contract which prevented employees from openly discussing these issues. This will be discussed in more detail later.

The temporary office workers, Tracey, Anita and Tamara all believed that they were underpaid. Tamara, who worked as an intermediate level clerical worker, had an hourly rate of between \$11 to \$12 per hour. She believed that she should have been paid around \$16 per hour. Similarly, Tracey felt that she was worth a few extra dollars per hour. What is interesting is that all of these respondents had independently come up with a similar hourly rate. Anita believed she should not be paid any less than \$15 per hour, but was cautious when negotiating her rate of pay when allocated an assignment:

“I think that I shouldn't be paid any less than \$15 an hour. My wage varies between \$14 to \$17 an hour when I work privately. Fifteen dollars is the rate I get paid usually through an agency and I really think that should be reviewed as you go along, the longer you worked for an agency and the standard of work that you present I think should be looked at.” (Anita).

Belinda who worked as a travel consultant for a large airline thought that she should be paid more in order to achieve parity with commercial travel agents. However, she was resigned to earning less as she knew that this was part of the conditions of her employment prior to accepting the job:

“I should be paid at least another \$50 clear per week. We do practically equivalent to what commercial agents do. We work longer hours and we get paid less than them because we work in a non-revenue department for staff. We work as hard, but I guess we knew that when we joined the company. I wish we did earn a bit more, we deserve it.” (Belinda)

As noted above, those working on awards or under EBAs with specific levels or grades were mindful that once they had achieved the top level of their classification they would not receive any more incremental pay rises. For instance, those on awards would be dependent upon national wage cases in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission for a pay rise. In the case of those on an EBA, they would have to wait until it was up for renewal and hope that a reasonable pay increase would be factored into the new agreement. Bronwyn was one of the respondents who was not happy with the incremental system:

“We used to be paid on a yearly increment. It is done on a banding scale. I had a promotion a couple of years ago I haven't hit the end of the band yet. But theoretically, once you reach the end of the band, unless you go for another promotion you will not get another increment.” (Bronwyn).

In contrast Samantha, Sarah and Selina felt that they were being paid enough for what they were expected to do at work. Selina would have liked more pay but felt it was reasonable given her position and duties:

“I would like a bit more than what I am being paid now. But it's okay with my position that's the amount of money you have to get. It's okay for now, but later on I would probably want a bit more money.” (Selina).

Extra entitlements

A number of respondents received extra entitlements in their employment packages but they were not widespread or overly generous. Many of these extra entitlements were not negotiated features or employment conditions but were ex gratia payments given to staff by management. Unlike more senior management who might expect such fringe benefits as a car, school fees, health insurance, large bonuses and generous study or sabbatical leave provisions the clerical workers in this study received modest extra entitlements.

The most common extra entitlement was the provision of on-the job training, and a few received bonuses and study leave.

Penny, Dawn, Fay, Paula, Cheryl, Isobel and Heather all received bonuses either annually or on an ad hoc basis. Heather received a Christmas bonus of \$50 at Christmas and was able to get her hair done for free at the hairdressing salon at which she worked. Fiona noted that study leave would only be granted if the company felt it had something to gain. Isobel and Penny were given bonuses based on their performance at work. Isobel described how bonuses were performance based and attached to promotion at the bank where she worked. If the worker was performing well they would be remunerated, if they were under performing they may have to take a pay cut:

“Bonuses were part of our collective agreement. Bonuses will be given at the six month review between yourself and your direct manager. When you first start the position you are at a base level which is the lowest level. They grade you as either satisfactory, competent or commendable and then you are remunerated accordingly. After your six month review you may be graded as competent, so your wage goes up, you also get a \$500 bonus for being at the grade. If your grade goes down you do not receive a bonus but you are given a sunset period of six months where your wage doesn't go down, but you get that six months to improve your performance. After that time you are reviewed again, if you go back up that's fine and you get your bonus, if not your salary actually decreases”. (Isobel).

A number of respondents received a petrol allowance if they used their own cars for work purposes. Dawn had received a bonus from her employer in the past, but it was not something that was stipulated in her conditions of employment. Dawn and Meredith had the option of salary sacrificing, which did not mean that they were paid more, but rather through a reshuffle of their income, they had slightly more money available to them because they were taxed at a lesser rate. Belinda worked as a staff travel consultant for an airline and was given discount airfares to travel both interstate and overseas. If she

had to travel interstate for work, she was given a travel and meal allowance. As part of an incentive program many of the staff had been given 500 shares in the airline. Penny, who worked on three different shifts, was given a parking allowance when she worked on the late shift. The most unusual entitlement from this study was from Vera who worked for a trade union. She received a clothing allowance of \$350 per year to cover the cost of the clothes she wore to work.

Confidence to negotiate a contract and conditions of employment

As discussed in chapter two, individual contracts are the ultimate incarnation of labour market deregulation and the most preferred mode of establishing conditions of employment under the *Workplace Relations Act*. Under individual contracts, conditions of employment are determined directly between the employer and the employee. At the time of the first interview, individual contracts were reasonably new. Respondents on awards were asked what they knew about individual contracts and collective agreements and whether they were interested in working under these types of conditions. Those on collective agreements were also asked what they knew about individual contracts and whether they would like to work under them. In general, most respondents had heard about individual contracts but did not know much about them. They were less likely to have heard of collective agreements. A number of respondents did not feel confident in their ability to negotiate an individual contract and liked the idea of an award or an EBA which are collectively constructed to maximise employee protection.

Christine had limited knowledge about these other ways of negotiating with an employer, but said she wouldn't mind working under an individual contract because she believed it would give her the opportunity to have an input into her conditions of employment. In contrast, Eleanor did not know much about individual contracts and collective agreements. She took a cautious approach stating that she would not work under them until she knew more about them.

Lucy who worked in a legal firm was well informed about individual contracts and thought they were unfair:

“Individual contracts can be very unfair and oppressive, I think it is an unfair system for a lot of people, but for other people it is a good system. In relation to EBAs I am a little bit confused about them. I am very much of the belief that if you are going to enter into an EBA everyone should be involved to make sure they are protected and know what they are getting.” (Lucy).

A number of respondents felt secure in the knowledge that their best interests were protected by either an award or EBA. A number felt if they were to enter into an individual contract that their pay and conditions of employment would be compromised in some way. Winona felt that an award ensured that she would not be exploited by her employer. She did not feel confident that an individual contract could provide the same security as an award:

“I don't know if I would like to work under an individual contract. If you are under an award and if anything goes horribly wrong with your job, you have a bit of a back up. Whereas, if you had a personal contract, I don't think there would be any back up at all. (Winona).

Penny who worked under an EBA had never encountered individual contracts during her working life and was not confident that she would be able to negotiate a contract with the best possible pay and conditions:

“I think it is one of those things that I have never actually encountered, so I really don't know what the benefits are as opposed to this is how much your salary will be on commencement, take it or leave it. I guess it is the unstated things that are scary. I don't think I would be terribly good at negotiating my own contract. I think I would probably be too soft and probably end up ripping myself off.” (Penny)

Melissa had worked under a contract in the past and felt that there was no real difference between an EBA and a contract. Meredith felt that she would not be confident in negotiating a contract:

“I guess one thing I am not that confident with is negotiating. It is very hard to know what value you are.’ (Meredith).

Vera felt that individual contracts enabled the employer to have an unfair advantage:

“I just think individual contracts put the weak employee in a bad position. Say if you are a person from a non-English speaking background or someone along those lines where they don’t have good negotiation skills. It puts the weak negotiators on a different level, if you are a strong willed person you are able to achieve more. I just think that it creates a situation where you have got some workers in the same workplace doing the same job, on different levels of pay which is something that I just do not agree with.” (Vera).

Standardised contracts were commonplace among respondents on individual employment contracts. What is ironic about individual contracts is that they purport to cater for individual needs, but in reality they are just as standardised as awards or EBAs in terms of pay and conditions. The only point for individual negotiation appears to be in relation to salary. These contracts do not seem to take into account the needs of the individual nor their job content.

Meryl described her job contract as being stock standard where she was given no say at all in its contents. Miriam had a similar experience in relation to her employment contract where she was given a photocopy of an agreement which was the same as everyone else in the organisation. Fay spoke about how she had to negotiate leave provisions in her individual contract. The inclusion or exclusion of these provisions was dependent upon the discretion of the manager:

"I don't know what all the conditions are. Maternity leave is available if you have worked there a year. The others are probably negotiable. Most of their conditions are negotiable, at your manager's discretion." (Fay).

Cindy was handed her workplace contract and did not have the opportunity to negotiate its contents. If she wanted the job, she had no choice but to sign it:

"I am not sure because that was handed to me at interview, so I am not sure whether it was the interviewer who was the branch manager or someone higher up. I am not sure. I didn't negotiate anything the contract was presented to me and I had the choice of signing it or not." (Cindy).

Tamara, a temporary office worker, had no say in what was contained in her employment contract with an employment agency. If she wanted work from this agency she had to sign it without question:

"I have no say at all. There was no point in even reading it. If you want to work with an agency, you sign the contract. It seems to be there to protect the employer and many of the conditions of the old award are not present in the employment agreement. They practically don't have to give you any notice of firing you." (Tamara).

Gina described the dialogue between her manager and the Human Resources Department at her workplace when establishing an individual contract. On the face of it there appeared to be some negotiation taking place, even though it was unfairly weighted in favour of her employer:

"When I was offered the job I told them what I expected and they told me what they expected. They took my proposal, went away and came back to me. So there was some negotiation of sorts between the general manager, my manager and the HR manager. I got what I wanted, \$38,000." (Gina)

Two pre-retirees who had many years in the workplace did not feel threatened by the prospect of an individual contract. Brenda said she would prefer to work under an individual contract provided she could trust an employer to negotiate a good contract. She felt it would provide her with an incentive to work harder. Cheryl who was on an EBA felt an individual contract may have benefited her because she had reached the upper limit of her salary scale.

Although the respondents may have been dubious or misunderstood what it entailed to work under an individual contract, most tended to accept the job in the terms prescribed by the employer without the opportunity to directly negotiate or bargain.

The arbitrariness of the performance review

This next section will look at the arbitrary nature of performance reviews and the allocation of pay rises. In theory, performance reviews are meant to afford workers and management with a joint opportunity to assess work performance and to set future tasks and goals. It provides a forum where staff can have an input into not only shaping their own jobs, but to some degree in determining the direction of the department or company in which they are employed. However, performance reviews are far from the perfect instrument in which to assess the performance of women clerical workers.

Bradley (1999:218) argues that systems of appraisal and assessment are highly gendered and tend to disadvantage women. The criteria in which to assess women clerical workers is arbitrary and may not adequately reflect the full range of skills and competencies within their job. As noted in chapter six, many of the respondents in this study did not have an up-to-date job description. Without an up-to-date job description it would be difficult for management to accurately assess what a clerical worker does on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Acker (1989:95) argues that male managers were often ill-placed to conduct performance reviews because they did not have a

comprehensive understanding of the tasks and skill required to perform clerical work. As a result, they may focus on tangible criteria such as the ability to work long hours which is looked upon in favourable terms because it is indicative of employees' commitment. Criteria such as this tends to disadvantage women, particularly those with family responsibilities. Further, there is an paradoxical element to performance reviews. On the one hand they aim to evaluate workers as individuals, but on the other, most workers are expected to work as part of a team as motivated team players with desirable personal qualities such as intuition, empathy and self-awareness.

Pay rises

It could be argued that pay rises should be an important outcome of the enterprise bargaining process and a major point of negotiation between respondents and their bosses. Yet pay rises were not necessarily actively sought or even given to respondents from one year to the next. In general, pay rises were granted for two reasons. The first was attached to the incremental award structure which meant that pay rises were passed onto employees incrementally as an entitlement of the award. Secondly pay rises were attached to work performance. Respondents on awards tended to receive incremental pay rises, although some on awards received pay rises attached to performance. Those on individual contracts were more likely to receive a pay rise based on performance. Respondents on EBAs had pay rises based both on incremental rises and performance. Incremental pay rises were prominent in larger organisations which rigidly adhered to the award system. Small businesses tended to use the award as a basis upon which to determine pay and conditions. Pay rises in these type of organisations were more likely to have been discretionary and ad hoc and not necessarily linked with performance per se but on the ability and/or willingness of the organisation to pay the worker more. Small organisations were more susceptible to the vagaries of the market place and were therefore more likely to assess pay rises on their ability to pay.

Individual employment contracts and EBAs for most respondents were usually fixed for a twelve month period. Pay rises and other negotiated conditions of employment were generally assessed at the time the respondent's contract was renewed.

Respondents were asked the following hypothetical question, "Say if you wanted a pay rise or you wanted to change your hours of work, how would you go about doing this?" What is interesting about the responses to this question is that most respondents had a strategy on how they would approach their boss and put their request forward, but in reality there appeared to be a quantum difference between talking about what they might do and what they actually did. Most respondents in this study simply did not make direct overtures to management to obtain a pay rise or change their hours of work. The reasons being they lacked confidence, they did not think they had a hope of getting a pay rise or there were procedures in place to deal with such issues which were deemed to be outside their sphere of influence.

Christine's place of employment combined both performance reviews and increments when extending pay rises. When asked how she would go about getting a pay rise or changing her hours of employment, Christine felt confident enough to speak with her manager. Eleanor worked in a community organisation which adhered rigidly to the award system. Eleanor's course of action for getting a pay rise or to change her hours of work would have been to approach her Unit Manager. The fact that her pay was fixed and predetermined did not seem to act as a deterrent from this possible course of action. In all likelihood Eleanor would probably be unable to secure more pay because of the fixed funding arrangements within the community organisation in which she was employed.

Heather had received two pay rises in five years and these were assessed at the end of each financial year. Heather's situation is interesting because it underlines two possible scenarios. Firstly, Heather's experience may highlight an example where pay rises are attached to an organisation's ability to pay. The fact that she received a pay rise every two years when clearly she was

becoming more proficient at her job may have indicated either an inability or unwillingness to increase her wages. Secondly, Heather may have inadvertently traded off a pay rise for non-monetary benefits such as getting her hair done for free or the fact that her job-share position enabled her to balance work and family.

Sally worked in an organisation where her employment conditions were determined by an award, but her pay rises were attached to performance. When asked what sort of things her employer would be looking for in order to assess her performance, Sally said the output and quality of her work would be assessed:

“Where I am now, I have actually had one pay rise within a short time. That was based upon my performance. He said he was pleased with the quality of work, plus the amount of work I was able to produce because I am a fast typist. Also on the telephone, clients were saying I was really pleasant, it was all the good feedback he was getting from other people as well.” (Sally).

Although Sally had received a pay rise at the instigation of her boss, she did not feel she could ask for a pay rise or to change her hours of employment because she was already paid above award rates and her hours of work were fixed.

Barbara’s pay rises were based on her performance and were not necessarily negotiated at the time her contract was renewed. She described the way in which pay rises were assessed. She stated her boss did not use set criteria but rather made subjective assessments based on the number of hours she spent in the office and work output:

“How my bosses assesses my performance is not really clear. He has got his finger on the pulse, he knows if people are producing. He mainly goes by gut instinct. He does not have a set criteria that he works from. I know that is not very specific, but that is the way he works.” (Barbara).

Bronwyn felt that she could not ask for a pay rise because she was worried that she would be replaced by someone who could do her job for a lesser rate of pay. Bronwyn was working a nine day fortnight which management were trying to phase out. They would have preferred her to work a nineteen day month. She had to use all the resources at her disposal including her role as a union shop steward and the support of the union to keep her nine day fortnight:

“If you wanted a pay rise at the moment with the climate that it's in, that would be quite difficult because they seem to have this view that if you won't do the job there's plenty of people out there who are unemployed that will come in and do the job.” (Bronwyn)

Ingrid who worked in a calls centre said that it would be impossible for her to ask for a pay rise because all staff were on the same rate. However, she said that she could change her hours of employment without too much difficulty.

Performance based pay rises: what the employer looked for

More than half (22) the respondents in this study were subject to a performance review from time to time. In some instances the outcome of these performance reviews determined whether a pay rise would be forthcoming. Some organisations had structured reviews where respondents would be assessed on how well they had performed their tasks according to key performance indicators. Key performance indicators are designed to be transparent, fair and objective measures of performance. Those respondents working in large organisations under EBAs and individual contracts were more likely to participate in highly structured performance reviews based on key performance indicators. However, for a number of respondents performance was not objectively assessed or measured but was subject to managers intuitively analysing performance. Generally speaking, performance reviews assessed respondents in the following areas:

- perceived importance within the organisation,
- quality and quantity of work output,
- customer service feedback,
- how the employee worked as a team member,
- how the employee liaised with all levels within the workplace from senior management to junior staff,
- ability to tow the corporate line which involved being compliant and not disrupting the workplace,
- having a positive attitude to work,
- timely completion of work and being able to meet deadlines,
- demonstrated ability to use the latest computer technology,
- willingness to learn new technology and participate in relevant training,
- good interpersonal skills,
- ability to recruit new customers/clients.

Fiona believed that she was performing very well at work. However, she felt that unless her boss was willing to acknowledge her achievements, her output and conduct at work would go largely unrecognised:

“I think it is based on performance. Also in my case how willing the boss was to deal with it. He was really happy with me. When we got to appraisal time he couldn't pick anything. It is based on performance, but your boss has got to be willing to recognise it.” (Fiona).

When asked about the sorts of things her bosses would be assessing in the performance review, Fiona mentioned the following criteria which were largely based on tacit skills:

“Your efficiency, hard working, willingness to work as a team, how you fit in, you know if you are seen to be a stirrer you have buckleys, you have to try and do well with all levels of the company, professionalism, assertiveness, that is what will get you a rise.” (Fiona).

Meredith detailed the informal nature of her performance reviews and noted that these reviews ensured that due process was being followed. It would appear pay rises were not necessarily attached to the performance review at Meredith's workplace. She believed it was difficult for her manager to measure how successful she had been over the year:

“Officially we have a review, but I don't know anyone who has not been given a pay rise. What normally happens is, you would sit down with your supervisor once a year and write down a few things that you want to achieve in the coming year. In the following year they will sort of look back to see if you have done those things. But sometimes they're just really basic things like attend a computer course. It is hard to measure you success, it is more a question of yes I have done this.” (Meredith)

Sarah described how her pay rise was directly linked to her performance. Her experience also highlights the discretionary nature of pay rises. If her boss felt she deserved the pay rise then it was awarded. Lucy worked under an award that determined her pay and conditions of employment and included incremental pay rises each year. At her performance review Lucy wanted to let her boss know that she felt that she deserved more than the incremental rate because her duties had increased and she thought she was doing a good job. Again this exemplifies the discretionary nature of pay rises. It also highlights how management's decision to award a pay rise is shaped by organisational culture as well as preconceived notions of what clerical workers actually do. Those tangible tasks like typing and filing are easy to quantify and measure, but those tacit skills involved in the job which are not readily identifiable but integral to good customer service and workplace relations are more difficult to assess.

Belinda noted that attitude was an important component of the performance review at her workplace:

“Basically they have all your tasks set out and they just have to make sure that you are performing all those tasks correctly. If there is something that you are not sure of they will go through it with you. Your attitude has a lot to do with it. One girl was recently knocked back because she is very negative so they had to sort something out with her before they would give her a higher banding.” (Belinda).

Cindy was of the view that the performance of the worker should be a secondary consideration in awarding a pay rise. In her case the company she worked for could not absorb the cost of staff pay rises because it had been running at a loss. Meryl, who worked under an individual contract, felt that the performance review gave her the opportunity to negotiate her level of pay and discuss her conditions of employment such as hours. It was not clear how much leverage she had as an employee in these matters or even whether her input had any impact on changing the conditions of employment in her contract. What is apparent is the fact that the option was available for her to have some level of input.

Penny’s work performance was appraised every three months which provided staff at her workplace the opportunity to negotiate their level of pay. There were some easily quantifiable indicators such as attendance and punctuality which were measured, but attitude was seen as a little more difficult and subject to personal interpretation:

“They have an appraisal system where quarterly they will sit down and assess your performance on how you’re going and what their expectations are for the next quarter. Providing that you are meeting your productivity requirements, your commitments to attendance, things like punctuality, attitude and those kind of things, it is then something that you would negotiate at that stage. It is up to your team leader, they have a certain flexibility so they would rate you at a certain level and then within that rating they then have a flexibility as to what percentage pay rise they would be able to give you.” (Penny).

Respondents' evaluation of their conditions of employment

A respondent's level of satisfaction in relation to her conditions of employment was significantly shaped by the organisation in which she worked. Respondents were asked to summarise what was good and bad about their conditions of employment. It was clear that those on awards were the happiest and those on individual contracts were the least satisfied with their conditions of employment. In fact, half the respondents on awards could not think of anything negative to say about their conditions of employment.

In general, what were identified as being positive features of the job fitted with the respondent's life circumstances. For example, Christine, who was a woman in family mode, liked the flexible leave arrangements while Brenda, a pre-retiree, felt that her employer provided her with a generous superannuation package. Other positive conditions of employment identified by respondents included:

- flexible leave arrangements;
- ability to multiskill;
- job security;
- well defined duties and job role;
- provision of training;
- good work environment;
- a good industry to work in;
- good working relationship with colleagues;
- good client/customer contact;
- good pay;
- bonuses;
- good boss;
- reasonable working hours;
- flexible hours;
- employee input;
- autonomy and freedom in the workplace.

Although Heather did not have the best conditions of employment in terms of hours of work (most were outside standard working times), lack of meal breaks, inflexible leave provisions and few pay rises she enjoyed the hairdressing industry in which she worked and dealing with clients:

“I like working within the industry. I am not told how to dress or I am not told what to do, I know my job. Yeah, I like it, there is no big boss man or anything like that to tell you what to do, when to do it, it is quite a nice environment. It is just busy. Yeah, the people are nice, I like the people.” (Heather).

Amy, a tertiary qualified respondent who had limited promotion opportunities within the organisation in which she was employed, felt that the conditions of employment offered to staff were fair and reasonable:

“It probably covers most areas that the public service covers. They have fairly generous leave arrangements and things like that, so I think they are fair and they are pretty good with their performance appraisals, at least they are committed to improving people and they are willing to discuss issues that come up. They are pretty good like that.” (Amy)

Rachel, who was the best paid respondent in this survey, believed that her conditions of employment were well defined and fair where she and her employer were both winners. Vera, who worked for a union, felt that all the conditions of employment in the organisations EBA were reasonable:

“We are quite well paid, I think our base line is \$35,000 that is sort of your receptionist, so I think our levels of pay are quite good. Our hours, if you stick to them are pretty good. The conditions - we get rostered days off, annual leave, we get 20 per cent leave loading, hospital leave, sick leave. I think there are a lot of positive things.” (Vera).

Those on individual contracts were the least satisfied with their conditions of employment. Catherine felt her conditions of employment favoured the employer and did not adequately reward people who worked hard for the company:

“Nothing is good really. It is quite restricting I suppose. It favours the employer rather than the employee. There is no real flexibility and they want blood from their people who are working. They are not happy to give any returns from it really.” (Catherine).

Tamara felt that her employment contract highlighted that she had no rights to negotiate a good contract and that the employer had all the bargaining power:

“The contract is bad because it makes it quite evident that you have no bargaining power, it just doesn't allow you to bargain. It just shows you what few rights you have and how many rights the employer has.” (Tamara).

Those who were unhappy with their conditions of employment identified the following issues:

- no meal breaks;
- poor level of pay;
- long hours;
- overworked and understaffed;
- high stress levels due to overwork;
- lack of job security;
- lack of direction at work;
- lack of career path;
- lack of union representation;
- no flexitime;
- lack of flexible leave arrangements;
- inadequate sick leave provisions;
- undervaluing administrative staff.

Lucy disliked the long hours she was expected to work:

“I dislike the hours. One of my biggest criticisms, the employment conditions vary from department to department and depending on who your partner is. You have all these little offices within the firm, they don't operate all together as one. It's not just me, most people are overworked with heavy workloads from solicitor staff to support staff.”
(Lucy)

Fay disliked the leave arrangements in her individual contract. She found the idea of being presented with an individual contract where she had no say in its contents daunting and impersonal:

“Sick leave isn't very good, the four weeks notice, that stinks. I don't know what the long service is, but I know it isn't that much. Just generally, when I received the contract it scared me. It seemed really cold.” (Fay).

Elaine highlighted how her workplace did not value administrative staff and this was reflected in their pay:

“I don't think they pay exceptionally well in comparison to other places. I think like most companies they undervalue administrative roles and professional people are the focus of their companies. They don't seem to even acknowledge that the administrative roles are the ones that keep the professionals doing what they are. Administrative support is taken for granted.” (Elaine)

How organisational culture undermines collective power and the ability to bargain

Within some organisations the cultural context promotes both overt and covert ways in which to undermine the worker's ability to bargain. As described above, many of the respondents in this study were ill-informed about their leave entitlements because these were not openly discussed or made available at the commencement of their employment. Many had to rely upon hearsay and the grapevine to find out this information. In chapter two I showed that collective bargaining either at the enterprise level or through the award system is the least preferred option advocated by the current conservative government. The active role Human Resources plays in negotiating contracts and EBAs means that unions are often excluded from the process.

This next section will look at where respondents in this study would go for help if they were having problems at work. It will also look at respondents' views on trade unions and whether they were members.

Employee protection measures

Employee protective measures include redundancy, and grounds upon which an employee could be terminated may or may not be included in conditions of employment. Awards and EBAs were more likely to include sections which covered employee protection. Those on individual contracts had a limited knowledge of whether these sorts of protections were available to them. Overall, respondents had a poor knowledge of the types of employee protection measures available to them.

Eleven respondents said that their conditions of employment detailed redundancy, while fifteen said that their conditions of employment did not cover redundancy and fourteen did not know. Sally described how she had been

made redundant in the past and the impact this experience had on future employment:

“I was made redundant with the last company I worked with. I was made redundant within one day and all I received was X amount of money for X amount of service. I didn't like how it was done. You were told all these negative things and asked to leave. They did not take into account the loyalty you had given to the company, like the long hours. It was good in many aspects because it made me harder about the workplace and about the workforce. I decided I would never allow people to take advantage of me. (Sally).

Respondents were most knowledgeable about the grounds upon which they could be terminated. Most were aware of disciplinary procedures which were in place or the sorts of actions which would warrant immediate dismissal. Twenty-six respondents said their conditions of employment detailed the grounds upon which an employee could be terminated, seven respondents said their conditions of employment did not detail this and seven did not know.

Paula and Vera were well informed about employee discipline procedures and how they and other work colleagues could be terminated. Vera, who worked for a union, described the termination policy and procedures in her organisation:

“Basically there are certain rules that apply, you get three written warnings and then you would be terminated, but it is something that has never really been dealt with. There has really never been a case for it.”
(Vera)

The findings of this study indicate that information relating to leave entitlements, establishment of pay and conditions and employee protection measures was not provided to most respondents prior to commencing employment. Many respondents had not sought out this information until they

needed it. In the absence of any written documentation, many respondents were forced to rely on other staff in relation to these matters.

Confidentiality and conditions of employment

Organisational culture determines the dissemination of information in relation to conditions of employment. Being able to talk about one's conditions of employment to colleagues enables staff to use informal networks to learn about entitlements. Overall, only sixteen respondents in this study had spoken about their conditions of employment with work colleagues while 24 had not. Respondents on awards and EBAs were more likely to discuss their pay and conditions with other colleagues. Only three of those on individual contracts had spoken about their conditions of employment because of confidentiality clauses in these contracts.

Those who worked in larger organisations were more likely to air their grievances with others. In general, most respondents had experienced similar issues to their colleagues. Nearly all had found solidarity in being able to air their views with others. Fiona found the staff cafeteria was a good meeting place to air grievances with work colleagues:

“Work conditions like when you go to the cafeteria and you whinge about ‘how come they?’ From time to time you get a bit disgruntled with different things and you can't understand why things happen. I can't think of examples though, but there are times where you think gosh why the hell do I bother coming in the morning. I definitely talk to other staff.” (Fiona)

Isobel stated that the section in which she worked openly discussed employment conditions:

“Yes it is very open, I guess that is because our manager had been part of setting up the collective agreement. We get quite a lot of queries

from the branches and employees. People discuss it and debate it. On the whole most people think it is good. As far as the pay goes, it is renowned for being a low paying bank. Aside from the actual wage everyone seems to be happy.” (Isobel)

Vera spoke about how discussion amongst staff was encouraged whilst their EBA was being finalised:

“We went through quite a process when we were establishing our EBA. Everyone seems to be really happy with it after a long negotiating period, like it took six months probably. So it has taken us a while to get it up and running but each staff member had the opportunity to have their input.” (Vera)

Tamara, a temporary office worker, was told not to discuss her conditions of employment because it could result in her being dismissed from the employment agency who gave her work. Fay, who was on an individual contract, highlighted the lack of parity between one worker and another. It was not clear whether she had a confidentiality clause in her contract or not. By speaking openly about her conditions of employment to other staff she was able to gauge how well she was being paid. The experience of Fay highlights why employers choose to put a confidentiality clause into individual contracts which disallows divulging its contents to others. Huge differences in pay and conditions could lead to significant levels of employee dissatisfaction and disaffection:

“Yes I have spoken to other colleagues. There is probably three other secretaries, two of them are temporary and they get paid what the agency pays them. The other secretary has been there two years and I have no idea what she is on. They are advertising for a secretary at the moment and they are offering \$6,000 a year less than what I am on. It is a secretary, but it is not secretary to the MD. It will end up being the same or similar duties. The pay varies a lot. It is the company that nominates how much pay. Some people are really pissed off about

what they get paid. Everyone agrees that the four weeks notice is a bit much and that the sick leave is a bit stingy. Pretty much everyone agrees, on what I have said.” (Fay).

Union membership

Union membership among clerical workers has traditionally been at low levels. As discussed in chapter two, clerical workers tend to align themselves with management and are reluctant to transgress the closeness of their relationship by making demands for improved conditions or taking militant action. In addition, some organisations are more tolerant of union membership while others actively discourage it. Union membership among the respondents in this study was low. Only nine respondents were union members: five were on awards (Selina, Christine, Bronwyn, Brenda, Lucy), three on EBAs (Pam, Cheryl, Vera) and Dominique, who had an individual contract, had joined a union to assist her to fight an unfair dismissal claim. All of those who were union members worked for large public institutions or trade unions. There were six respondents who had formerly been union members in the past. Bronwyn was the only shop steward in the sample and Lucy was on the shop committee at her workplace. Vera had been a shop steward in the past.

Belinda was no longer a union member because she disliked the fact that they could go on strike without good cause:

“Unions I think are too keen to have stop work meetings which I am totally in disagreement with if the company is having problems with colleagues, I don't think the general public should have to suffer because of it. So I decided to actually resign from the union for that reason.” (Belinda).

Christine was a union member at the time of the first interview and was not entirely impressed with the union. However, she had kept up her membership as form of safety net:

“The union is not very helpful. I have never had to use them, thank goodness. I have never had to worry about it. I more or less had to join and I have just kept my membership even though it is not compulsory now. I just kept it on, just as a safety net I suppose. I have never found them helpful when other people have had to use them.” (Christine)

The most common reason why respondents had not joined a union was because the need had never arisen. Other reasons included not knowing much about how a union could assist them, working in an organisation which discouraged union membership, not being able to afford membership fees and being ideologically opposed to unions. Among the temporary office workers there was a perception that unions did not cover their sector of the workplace. Fay sums up the sentiments of a number respondents:

“I don’t know why I didn’t join a union. I have never needed one, couldn’t afford it, I didn’t think I would need to use one. It is not readily offered where I work now. It is not something that is publicised, they don’t have their own union. It would have to be independent.” (Fay)

Dominique was reluctant to divulge her union affiliation to a prospective employer because in her years of experience, employers do not like workers who are union members. Sally worked in an organisation which discouraged union membership. She was also mindful that clerical workers in general are reluctant to join a union:

“Basically within secretarial work, you just don’t get asked to join a union and you are not expected to join a union. Within the corporate world unions are seen as being quite threatening to organisations like mine and within the industry I work I have never ever been approached by an employer to join a union.” (Sally).

Sarah was put off joining a union because of the high cost of union fees:

“Mainly for the cost side of it. We were given forms to fill out when we first started at the airline and I just didn't think it was necessary. But then I was speaking to a friend today and he said that like if you got sacked you wouldn't have a chance of getting a redundancy package. But if you are in the union you have got a really good chance of sort of winning. I just haven't bothered mainly because of the money.” (Sarah)

Amy's work place did not encourage union membership. She worked in the manufacturing industry which probably had union coverage in other areas, but she did not know what union would cover clerical work.

Finally Paula and Rachel were two out of four respondents who were ideologically opposed to unions:

“No I am not a union member because I am a capitalist. I do believe that unions have their place, however, I don't necessarily agree that everything they do is right. I think that a lot of what they do is for themselves. Unless I really had to join a union, I wouldn't.” (Paula)

“I have never had the need, desire or inclination to join the union in all of my sixteen years in the workforce. Probably my Liberal upbringing coming through. Maybe it is unconscious indoctrination. Unions are Labor and Labor is bad.” (Rachel).

Problems in the workplace - where help was sought

As noted above, the respondents were reliant upon work colleagues and the grapevine when they had employment issues. In the event of a serious crisis and in the absence of union involvement, respondents were asked where they would go for help. Respondents on awards and EBAs said they would contact

a union even if they were not members. Those on individual contracts said they would contact independent bodies such as Wageline or Jobwatch. Conversely they would deal directly with a senior manager or Human Resources.

Fiona said she would probably go to Human Resources for assistance:

“Do you mean problems with my actual immediate boss or the company as a whole? Where would I go? If I was having problems with my boss I would go to Human Resources. If that didn't work that is a good question, I have never been in a situation, where I have had to go that deep. I don't know if I did have problems I would probably seek legal advice.” (Fiona).

Penny said she would go to her team leader in the first instance and then try Human Resources. Only as a last resort would she turn to the union:

“Initially it would be something that I would discuss with my team leader and try to resolve whatever the problem was. If I wasn't getting any satisfaction I would then just continue to take it higher, we actually have a representative in HR who is specifically assigned to our area. I guess if push came to shove, the union is somewhere I would probably turn to even though at the moment I am not actually a member, it would be something I would look at as an option or just for advice”. (Penny).

One could argue that there might be a conflict of interest in relation to the role of Human Resources. As discussed in chapter two, the involvement of Human Resources ensures that the establishment of pay and conditions is an internal affair and is designed to exclude union involvement. In this context, Human Resources is not a neutral body because it represents the interests of management. Yet, there was an expectation among some clerical workers in this study that Human Resources should be involved in any conflict resolution between management and staff in relation to conditions of employment.

Cindy who was on a individual contract said she would go to Wageline. Fay, however, was at a loss as to where she might go to get help if she was having problems at work:

“I don't know. If it was my employer, I would go to my boss. If it was him, I honestly don't know where I would go because there is such animosity between him and some of the other bosses. So that is a hard question.” (Fay)

Advocacy and assertiveness

The results of this study also indicated that cumulative years of experience in the workplace meant that workers became aware of their entitlements and were better able to advocate and assert their rights. Often the confidence to do this only comes with years of experience and exposure to the foibles of the workplace. Sennett (1998:94) argues that older people are more likely to speak against bosses who often are younger than them in age. From an organisational perspective younger workers may be preferred because they are more malleable and less likely to question the authority of management. This study found that younger workers were more likely to be exploited than older workers who were generally more conversant with their rights and entitlements.

Samantha was one of the youngest respondents in the survey and had in her short working life experienced the whole gamut of exploitation and “shonky” employers. Samantha had trained as a drafts person and after completing her studies was keen to get a job. Samantha worked for her first employer for nothing. He did not pay her for the first month she was employed and after much pressure he sent her a cheque. The cheque bounced as did several other cheques which followed. Samantha discontinued at this place of employment because she could no longer afford the petrol to get to and from work. In the next job in which she was employed she was forced to leave because the boss kept making lewd remarks and spoke in great detail about

his personal life. Samantha's confidence in the workplace and dealing with management demonstrated a clear lack of experience. She found the whole idea of negotiating a pay rise quite daunting and said she would be tentative about her negotiations:

"If I had been working really hard and putting in a lot of time to make things really good. I would say that to him. I would say, I don't know, I have been working really hard. I don't know I have never had to do it, so I don't know how I would go about that. Probably very timidly." (Samantha).

In relation to the last job she had at the time of the first interview Samantha was unsure how her conditions of employment were determined. Her main motivation was to secure a job and was therefore happy to receive minimum wages in order to get the necessary work experience:

"I don't know how my conditions of employment came about. When my boss employed me, I said look I am happy getting minimum wage. He said okay, that is good. There was no agreement signed or nothing. The only written declaration was for the tax office, that was the only thing that said such and such is employed from this day. That was the only thing that we ever signed." (Samantha).

Samantha's father expressed some concern that perhaps his daughter was being exploited:

"My father kept saying I don't understand why you don't have a written thing. But I don't know that was really the only bad thing, everything else was okay. Except they smoked in the office. I am not a smoker which is a bit tough." (Samantha).

In contrast, the older women in this study had experienced significant harassment issues by senior staff because they dared to question organisational protocol. Brenda was threatened by a male academic at the

university where she worked. As a result of the altercation Brenda was forced to take a demotion:

“I was physically threatened by a large male academic and found myself removed from my job as office manager in an extremely unfair and unethical manner. Industrial Relations became involved and the union. It's still ongoing. Once again the same old thing of the hierarchy and extremely poor management, appalling, absolutely appalling, no communication. The supervisor that I had when all the trouble happened, in my opinion had absolutely no personnel skills at all.”
(Brenda).

Elaine also had experienced physical and verbal harassment from a senior manager which she found distressing and disturbing. A very tall and overweight man used his size to threaten and intimidate her. Elaine described the incident as one of gender discrimination where the man tried to talk her down. Elaine tried to address his irrational outbursts with logic until he completely lost control and became angry and abusive. She described the man as a workplace bully who had a reputation for tearing strips off young clerical workers. Elaine believed maturity saved her from becoming emotionally involved and prevented the situation from escalating even further.

Bronwyn was an active union member and a shop steward at the local government office where she worked, and experienced emotional harassment from management about her union work. Bronwyn had been fighting for backpay and to retain her nine day fortnight. As far as management were concerned she was a real thorn in their side. Bradley (1999:180) argues that women in shop steward positions are usually seen as being “oppositional and in contravention of their role as subservient clerical workers.” These women challenge the right to male autonomy and authority and as Bronwyn’s case demonstrates are susceptible to harassment and retribution.

What is interesting about these three women is that at the time of the second interview, two were working at different places and Brenda had retired. A

combination of factors lead these women to resign from their jobs. In the case of Bronwyn it was the pressure to conform and the constant harassment. For Brenda it was the boring and routine nature of the work she had to perform in a lower clerical position after her demotion and for Elaine a change in her family circumstances after she separated from her husband meant that she had to find a full-time job which paid more.

Conclusion

The current Coalition and past Labor governments in Australia have argued that enterprise bargaining is good for women because it allows them to negotiate pay and conditions of employment that suit their needs. This study has found that there is limited bargaining and negotiation around pay and conditions among the clerical workers who participated in this research. In fact, those on individual contracts probably had the least favourable conditions of employment and were more likely to closely parallel the minimum entitlements stipulated in the *Workplace Relations Act*. The respondents who fell into this category were certainly the least satisfied in relation to their pay and conditions of employment. The most satisfied were respondents whose conditions of employment were determined by a collective agreement or Enterprise Based Agreement. Those whose conditions of employment were determined by an EBA had the most generous leave provisions. Those on awards were also happy with their conditions of employment but realised that once they reached the top level of their incremental pay structure there was nowhere else for them to go. They were dependent upon an external legislative body in the form of the Industrial Relations Commission, for any further pay rises.

In terms of pay there appeared to be very little difference between advanced and intermediate clerical workers. Clearly there was some distinction in the complexity of their duties but this was not reflected in their pay. Most full-time clerical workers in this study were paid between \$30,001 to \$40,000 per annum. There was one exception, Rachel, who was paid over \$40,000 per

annum. The minimal variation in levels of pay indicates that among many employers there was no differentiation between skill levels from one clerical worker and another, they tend to be lumped into one homogenous group. This was borne out when respondents described the arbitrariness of the performance review process. A number were concerned that their bosses did not have a clear idea of what they did and that they relied upon their own intuition rather than objective measures such as key performance indicators. Organisational perceptions of what clerical work is worth play an important role in determining the outcome of performance reviews. It would appear that the white-collar factory described by Braverman (1974) is still alive and well where there is very little differentiation between one group of female clerical workers and another.

Those respondents who fell into the drifter category were the lowest paid because they worked the least number of hours in low skilled positions. Women in family mode who were sole parents were the least satisfied with their pay. As primary earners, they would have found it difficult to survive on this level of income. As noted above, there was very little room for most respondents to manoeuvre in terms of negotiating levels of pay. For those on awards and EBAs their pay was attached to banding or specific salary levels where pay rises were awarded incrementally. Those on individual contracts had some input into justifying why they should get a pay rise during a performance review. This review was usually attached to the annual renewal of their employment contract.

Evidence from this survey indicates that respondents were not fully informed by employers prior to commencing a job or even while they were on-the-job in relation to sick leave, other leave, and employee protection measures. A common theme among respondents was that they relied upon hearsay or second hand sources to access information about entitlements. Relying on the organisational grapevine is fraught with problems, because it may spread misinformation and lead to misunderstandings occurring between management and staff.

Many of the respondents did not know about particular entitlements because they had no cause to use them. Many sought information only when they needed it. Those on individual contracts were least likely to know about their leave entitlements and employee protection measures because of the confidentiality clauses in their contracts. In general, those on awards and EBAs had some written documentation which they could consult. In contrast, respondents on individual contracts were more likely not to have any written documentation. Those who were unable to discuss the contents of their contract with work colleagues were the least informed about their entitlements.

Most of the respondents did not weigh up the pros and cons of collective bargaining versus individual contracts. They were not aware that collective bargaining would in most cases guarantee them more secure conditions of employment than an individual contract. This may be a reflection on the fact that the respondents had no choice in how their conditions of employment were determined. If the respondent wanted a particular job they took it without considering any of the finer details relating to entitlements. Information relating to leave and employee protection measures tended to be after thoughts which were called upon when required.

Work intensification and the longer hours culture impacted upon nearly all the respondents in this study. Organisational panopticism appears to be alive and well where long hours culture demonstrates employee commitment. All respondents with the exception of the drifters, who it could be argued were underemployed, were expected to work longer hours than normal either on a daily basis or when the need arose due to large workloads or hectic schedules. Large workloads also precluded many respondents in this study from taking their allocated meal breaks. Although there were no written directives per se which discouraged tea breaks, lunch breaks or a preference to work longer hours, there was a cultural expectation reinforced through observation and surveillance. Further, a number of respondents did not take all their allocated annual leave from one year to the next because they could not find an appropriate time to take it for fear of getting too far behind in their workloads.

Findings such as this debunk the widespread perception within organisational culture that women in feminised occupations are less committed to their jobs.

Evidence from this research indicates that respondents shaped their personal lives around their working lives. Clerical work does lend itself to intermittent careers and part-time and casual employment for secondary income earners, but in the enterprise bargaining arena women are unlikely to fair well. Embedded within corporate culture is this notion that part-time work is shorthand for casual, and low status work for mothers. As part-time workers women are seen as uncommitted, clerical work is a feminised occupation with a skill base that is largely unrecognised and women themselves are willing to put up with sub-standard jobs with poor pay and conditions because work is not the central priority in their lives.

The clerical workers in this study provide a good example of the passivity of clerical workers where they felt powerless to confront management to bring about any change. Being a subordinate acted as a psychological barrier which inhibited them from advocating their claims. There was also the fear of being dispensable. Most respondents were aware that there are literally thousands of women in the labour force with similar skills to them; if they were seen to be making contentious or unreasonable overtures to management they may risk losing their jobs. This was compounded by a perception among a number of respondents that they had to present themselves as being compliant employees and “team players”.

The findings in this study also demonstrate the pervasiveness of organisational culture in relation to wages and conditions are determined. Whether conditions of employment were defined by individual contracts, EBAs or an award was dependent upon the individual workplace. The cultural milieu seems to have a significant hand in defining the most desirable and undesirable qualities in the workplace. Desirable conditions include flexibility, training, job security, good pay and bonuses. Those conditions which are unpleasant are stress, long hours, lack of recognition, lack of job security, lack of career path and undervaluing clerical work. These all emanate from the

organisational climate in which the clerical worker was employed. As noted in chapters one and two, this is largely shaped by definitions of skill and its application to clerical workers.

The following, final chapter will reevaluate Hakim's preference theory in the light of the findings from this study.

Chapter 8

Clerical work: the ultimate family friendly occupation for adaptive women or white-collar ghetto?

At the beginning of the twenty-first century women have more opportunities than ever before to choose the extent to which they wish to participate in the labour market. This choice has been largely brought about by five major events within what Hakim (2000) terms the “new scenario”. These include; reliable contraception, the equal opportunity revolution, an increase in white-collar and service work, deregulation within the labour market which has created flexible employment and the shift towards individualism where individuals determine their own life course.

Historically, clerical work has developed as a feminised occupation and has always been seen by many women as a clean and respectable job to do before marriage. With the advent of the “new scenario” over the past 25 years and a burgeoning service sector, more women than ever before are well placed to take advantage of the multitude of employment opportunities available to them. I have argued that clerical work is the quintessential occupation for adaptive women because it is widely available on a full-time, part-time and casual basis in a broad range of industries and sectors. Most women can readily access this type of work either directly from secondary school or with some post-secondary training. Clerical work lends itself to intermittent or part-time work, it tolerates discontinuous employment patterns and high labour turnover. It can accommodate women who want to be either primary or secondary income earners and can usually be sourced in a workplace close to home (particularly for women in large urban centres). Essentially, clerical work provides women with the opportunity to participate in paid employment across their life cycle.

According to Hakim, women born after 1960 are more likely to have benefited from the “new scenario”. Access to reliable contraception means that women can choose whether to have family or not, and the timing of children. The

equal opportunity revolution has increased access to education and employment opportunities for women in a range of occupations. Finally, the expansion of white-collar jobs means that women have a broader array of employment options from which to choose. Although women born before 1960 still derive some benefits from the new scenario, economic and social conditions were more likely to constrain their employment decisions. As a result, older women grew up with the idea that they could not make lifestyle choices and were probably more likely to follow a traditional marriage career. In late modernity personal choice and autonomy are seen as essential and desirable qualities which enable women to freely express and choose their identity, values and lifestyle.

This thesis has used Hakim's preference theory as a basis to explain why clerical work has an enduring appeal among adaptive women. Preference theory recognises that women have heterogeneous work preferences and that not all women want to have a continuous career in full-time employment. Some women may prefer to stay at home while others choose to combine both work and family. Hakim represents these qualitatively different life courses as three distinct ideal types. These ideal types are; home-centred, work-centred and adaptive. Women in the latter category were unable to choose one single life focus. Given that about 70 per cent of the female population within advanced modern societies are adaptive, I did not feel that this type accurately portrayed the work and lifestyle choices of women across their life cycle. Based on the research findings in this study I devised four new sub-categories of the adaptive type which take into account the age and life experience of women. These included pre-reproductive women who were yet to have a family; women in family mode who were juggling paid employment with family responsibilities; pre-retirees who as the name suggests were in the final phase of their working lives; and drifters who had a peripheral and marginal link to the labour market.

These four sub-categories were integrated into the data chapters with the view to illustrate how respondents combined their paid employment with their family

lives and how their family commitments impacted upon their attachment to the labour market over the life cycle.

Women in family mode were more likely to work part-time in a job close to home than the other respondents. Even though two of the respondents in this sub-category were well educated, they chose jobs which involved a demotion because it enabled them to combine their work and family. This study found that because respondents had very little opportunity to negotiate their hours of employment and were given very limited flexibility in the workplace to attend to family matters, they deliberately selected jobs with hours which specifically suited their needs. Most of the women in family mode were not interested in seeking a higher paid job through promotion while they had young children.

Most of the pre-retirees in this study were in the last ten years of their working lives. By comparing the experience of pre-retirees and the younger women in this study, I was able to glean how the “new scenario” had affected their lives. Pre-retirees spoke about the lack of opportunities to undertake further education when they were young because they were expected to follow a marriage career. All the pre-retirees in this study had children who were no longer dependent. These women were more likely to have had extended career breaks of ten years or more before re-entering the labour market. When these women did return to paid work it was usually at the same level as when they left. The main motivation for these women to work was for social reasons and personal fulfilment rather than for financial reasons. These respondents were most informed about their rights and entitlements. They were also more likely than younger women to challenge masculine authority emanating from cultural practices within the organisations in which they were employed. Their actions were not without consequence, with two respondents forced to leave their workplace which was evident at the second interview. These women did not have any long-term career goals nor did they aspire to promotion or higher status jobs.

The largest group represented in this study were pre-reproductive women ranging in age from 21 to 39 years. All of these respondents worked full-time

and were more likely to be employed in workplaces located in either the central business district or inner city. Most of these women were subject to the culture of long hours and were expected to work longer than the stipulated start and finish times. All but two of these respondents expressed a desire to have a family in the future. Their views on balancing work and family were quite a contrast to the pre-retirees who had less choices available to them when their children were young. Most pre-reproductive respondents had anticipated a disruption to their working lives after having children. It was widely thought that shorter rather than extended breaks from the labour market was preferable. They envisaged returning to the labour market in a part-time capacity while their children were young. Some thought that they might return to full-time work once their children had started school. However, those respondents working in personal assistant roles anticipated that they would have to seek alternative employment elsewhere which would involve taking a demotion to secure the flexible part-time work they desired.

The final group identified in this study were drifters. Some of these respondents had overlapping characteristics with the pre-productive women, like the desire to have children. What defined respondents in this sub-category was their marginal and peripheral attachment to the labour market. Most drifters worked on a casual or temporary basis, less than 20 hours per week. They were more likely to have a tenuous and insecure grip on the labour market. These respondents could not predict how many hours each week they would work and they did not like the idea that they could be sacked at anytime with little or no notice. All of the respondents in this category aspired to more secure employment with longer hours.

Clerical workers and industrial relations

Clerical workers in Australia have a history of being industrially weak, for a number of reasons. Firstly, clerical workers tend to align themselves with management because they support their ideals and expectations. As a result, they are less likely to take militant action or place any undue demands on their

employer to improve their conditions of employment. Secondly, trade unions have traditionally supported the full-time male breadwinner model of employment and the family wage. Thirdly, the arbitration system, male union officials and employers are complicit in their failure to recognise the full range of skills and competencies clerical workers bring to their job. All of these stakeholders fail to recognise the level of both formal and informal training women clerical workers bring to their job. As a result, the focus on improving men's conditions of employment has often been at the expense of women.

Over the past twenty years Australia has moved toward a deregulated labour market where the most favoured way of negotiating pay and conditions is at the enterprise level. Advocates of enterprise bargaining believe that it creates flexibility for both employers and employees. However, there is some evidence to suggest that instead of creating flexibility for women working in occupations like clerical work, it has eroded their entitlements. Under the centralised award system there was a high degree of transparency relating to what clerical workers could expect in terms of pay and conditions. In contrast, the secrecy clauses within many individual contracts mean that workers are unable to discuss their conditions of employment with anyone else. In this context the employer may only be offering minimum pay and conditions. Further, there is no compulsion for the employer to adhere to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Evidence from New Zealand (Harbridge, 1993), which was one of the first countries to fully embrace labour market deregulation, indicates that enterprise negotiations did not resolve sexist notions of skill but rather it reinforced the gender division of labour. Further, where there were no controls in place to monitor the outcomes of enterprise bargaining, women's labour market position was significantly weakened.

Although women clerical workers tend to fare better under collectively negotiated Enterprise Based Agreements, they may still be excluded from the bargaining process. For example, in the manufacturing sector where women clerical workers provide administrative support, they may be perceived as being outside the core business operations and could be excluded from the

bargaining table. Even in unionised workplaces, part-time clerical workers in particular may be excluded from enterprise negotiations.

Research indicates that enterprise bargaining tends to favour those workers who have highly sought after skills, particularly where there is a scarcity of those skills in the labour market. Clerical work is a widely available occupation and there are literally thousands of women who are qualified to do this sort of work. Consequently, women in feminised occupations like clerical work tend to have limited leverage when negotiating an employment contract.

Reconciling the agency versus structure paradox

One of the main arguments presented in this thesis has been in relation to the paradoxical relationship between agency and structure. On the one hand the arguments in this thesis have supported Hakim's basic premise that not all women have the same work and lifestyle preference. Under the "new scenario" women in modern societies will consciously use their agency to determine the best course of action in relation to paid employment and family. Preference theory is congruent with theories of reflexive modernity where women actively create their own biographical narratives. By taking a reflexive approach women can ascertain whether they will work or not, whether they will have a family or not, or what sort of job they would like to pursue. This process of individualisation, according to Hakim, means that many women now base their choices upon their own needs and circumstances rather than being influenced by patterns of economic activity, social expectations or socialisation. Although Hakim does not entirely refute the impact of social structures, she believes that preferences and values are more important determinants of behaviour than macro structural factors within modern societies where post-materialist values have emerged.

Despite all the criticisms levelled at preference theory discussed in chapter three, it still provides one of the most useful ways to understand why many women choose occupations such as clerical work. It could be argued that

clerical work has developed to meet the needs of adaptive women because it is widely available, easy to access in terms of the required skills, it offers flexible employment and the opportunity to earn a secondary income over the life cycle.

This thesis supports the notion that preferences are an important part of any analysis of gender and work. However, they do not adequately explain how external factors such as gender ideology, government and fiscal policy, and organisational culture impose parameters which determine suitable roles for women, mothers and workers. In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the way in which women make their work and lifestyle choices, this thesis builds upon Hakim's preference theory and offers a new theoretical paradigm. This new paradigm incorporates the notion of theoretical pluralism which enables an understanding of the social world from both a macro and micro perspective. A pluralistic approach has enabled me to understand why not all women clerical workers are lucky enough to have a free choice in their employment options. Further, the adoption of a more holistic approach means that I have been able to move beyond how and why women clerical workers make the initial decision to undertake paid employment to looking at how extraneous factors beyond their control influence their labour market experience in the context of their work and family choices.

Throughout this thesis I have identified the main structural factors within our modern society which are largely responsible for skewing the individual priorities of the women clerical workers in this study. Broadly speaking these include:

- Education system
- Geography
- Government policies and the legal system
- Organisational culture
- Childcare

- Family structures and gender ideology
- Globalisation and consumer culture
- Trade unions

The following information briefly outlines the argument put forward in this thesis in relation to each of these points. Although I have made reference throughout the data chapters to the different ways in which structural factors affect women within the four sub-categories, for the purposes of this overview I will refer to women in the adaptive type more broadly.

Education system

Historically, increased access to education by women meant that employers had a larger pool of well educated women to fill the increasing number of clerical positions. In the past, typing and stenographic courses were part of the mainstream curriculum and provided young women with ready access to the job market as clerical workers. Today all secondary school students are expected to be conversant with computer technology before they leave school. Having the ability to type and being computer literate are basic clerical work requirements.

The respondents in this study had either secondary education or had done some post-secondary training in office skills. Some had left secondary school and went straight into the workforce. The findings in this study support Hakim's view that education may not necessarily be an accurate predictor of occupational choice. A significant number of respondents had either completed or were completing a tertiary qualification. But this did not necessarily mean that these women could move into professional employment. The transition from clerical work to a professional career was fraught for a number of respondents because there was a perception by prospective employers that they lacked the necessary experience and skills. For those who had not completed tertiary studies, education had shaped their choice of occupation. A number of respondents said that because they did not have

professionally recognised qualifications they were largely confined to clerical work with little prospect of promotion without further training.

Geography

Job selection for a number respondents in this study was based on the proximity of their workplace to home. The geographical location of the workplace was of particular interest to women in family mode and pre-retirees. Most of these respondents worked either one or two suburbs away from their home. The pre-reproductive women were mostly likely to travel some distance to work. Their workplaces were mostly in the central business district or inner city.

Although childcare was not an issue for the women in family mode in this study, it may well be an issue for pre-reproductive women at a later time. In relation to geography, pre-reproductive women planning to return to work would need to consider quality affordable childcare with hours which coincided with their work days, in a location close to home or their workplace. The cost of childcare is also a major issue for many women returning to the labour market because it is expensive and in some areas it is difficult to access because of a shortage of places.

Although it was not evident in this study, other studies (e.g. Probert and Hack, 1991) have revealed that there is a geographical divide between urban areas, regional centres and rural areas in relation to the availability of work. If a woman living in a small country town wishes to get a part-time job in a clerical position, this choice may be curtailed due to the lack of jobs.

Government policies and the legal system

Various government policies and the legal framework in which these policies operate have been discussed throughout this thesis. Those policies which are

most influential to women clerical workers and the choices they make include issues around labour market deregulation and the *Workplace Relations Act*. The Act prescribes the minimum employment entitlements (see Appendix two) which an employer has a legal obligation to pass onto employees and describes the legislative framework in relation to unfair dismissal.

Agencies which monitor employer and employee relations include the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) which is responsible for overseeing the contents of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs). It monitors awards and agreements and settles disputes between unions, workers and employers. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) not only advocates on behalf of individuals, it identifies employment issues of concern such as maternity leave and makes recommendations to government. The Equal Opportunity Commission in each state deals with cases of discrimination at an individual and group level. The Office of the Employment Advocate provides assistance to employees and employers (particularly those in small business) on the Workplace Relations Act, Australian Workplace Agreements and freedom of association.

Although the rhetoric behind the *Workplace Relations Act* is to promote flexibility for both employers and employees, the reality is that for clerical workers flexibility is often one-sided because they have little or no scope to negotiate conditions which suit their family needs. The Act favours and promotes bargaining at the enterprise level between the individual and management. The findings in this study indicate that respondents on individual contracts were the least satisfied with their conditions of employment in terms of their level of pay, the amount of sick leave they were given and the expectation that they work longer hours. These respondents were also less likely to know about their entitlements when compared to those on awards or EBAs and had to rely on hearsay. Those on awards and EBAs expressed a scepticism about the advantages of individual contracts and felt that they would not fare well if they were to negotiate their conditions of employment.

Fiscal policies can vary greatly from one elected government to the next. The current conservative Coalition government lead by the Prime Minister John Howard has introduced fiscal policies which tend to favour single income families. Women with dependent children have to weigh up the advantages of paid employment versus the money they will receive if they stay at home. Under the current government, women who enter the labour market are penalised because every dollar they earn means a significant reduction in their family tax benefit and childcare benefit entitlements. A woman clerical worker who wishes to work part-time needs to weigh up whether she will be financially better off earning relatively low wages after paying childcare fees, income tax and the subsequent loss of either part or all of the family tax benefit.

Government policy also extends to family institutions and is instrumental in defining the nature of household types, laws governing marriage, divorce, and cohabitation and social policies directed toward supporting or discouraging particular kinds of family structures. Coupled with fiscal policies these factors may impact upon how women make a job selection. For example, a woman who is divorced or widowed may need to assess the income available to her in terms of child maintenance and family tax benefit and then determine her workplace commitments. It should not automatically be assumed that she would work either part-time or full-time.

Organisational culture

As has been argued throughout this thesis, organisational culture has a significant and influential impact upon shaping the work and lifestyle choices of adaptive clerical workers. Organisational culture is complex and multi-layered and offers an insight into both the overt and covert treatment of clerical workers. As discussed in detail in chapter one, at the subconscious level organisational culture ascribes men with positional power where it is automatically assumed that they will hold all of the senior management roles. Technical power defines what men do as skilled, while symbolic power has a hegemonic role and maintains the superior status of men within the

organisation. Collective power serves to exclude women from union activities or male networks within the organisation. Sexual power is used to subvert female influence through harassment and establishes conformity by stipulating how women should dress and behave.

Although equal opportunity employment is meant to promote the equal employment of women, organisational culture has managed to circumvent this. Equal opportunity employment at the workplace has been interpreted as the same treatment for men and women regardless of their circumstances and needs. Promotion opportunities for men to move into management positions are contingent upon women staying in low status clerical jobs because it maintains internal job hierarchies. In contrast, the lack of promotional opportunities for women is based upon the view that women are less skilled than men.

Evidence from this study indicates that management did not possess a good understanding of the full range of skills and competencies respondents brought to their jobs, particularly in relation to tacit skills. These skills were seen as being an innate talent or an extension of their home duties rather than conduct that ensured harmonious relationships with customers and colleagues. Further, there was also a lack of understanding in relation to how the clerical workers in this study contributed to overall functioning of the organisation. A failure to acknowledge the contribution women clerical workers make to an organisation means that management do not have to pay them what they are worth.

There is a widely held view in some organisations that women are less committed to their jobs than men. Part-time work in some organisations is shorthand for casual, low status jobs for mothers. The ideal worker is someone who is unhindered by family and is available to work full-time without any career breaks. From an organisational perspective, working very long hours each week is indicative of their workplace commitment.

There is a commonly held assumption within some organisations that women clerical workers are less committed to the workplace because they are filling in time before they have a family. Although work is not the central priority in the lives of adaptive clerical workers, this should not necessarily preclude them from promotional opportunities or more highly skilled jobs if they show a desire or aptitude. All the women in this study largely shaped their personal lives around their working lives rather than the other way around. All were prepared to work longer hours than stipulated at busy times. Most could not take their annual leave a time of their choosing and some could not even organise to take off a day here or there to use up the hours they had accumulated through time-in-lieu.

Organisations often make it difficult for women returning to work after having a family. The transition from full-time work to part-time work often means that clerical workers have to find another job because their original job cannot be done on a part-time basis. This was the case for pre-reproductive respondents who worked as personal assistants. Most could not envisage doing their jobs part-time because they were expected to work very long hours to provide the necessary coverage for their boss. To move to part-time work would involve taking a demotion. Many organisations in which respondents were employed did not provide flexible employment arrangements such as extended career breaks, flexible leave arrangements, and variable start and finish times. One respondent did job share and those who were working in permanent part-time positions had regular and predictable hours. The acquisition of flexible arrangements often meant that women had to endure a counter measure in its place, for example, working longer hours .

Clerical workers in this study had limited access to training. The findings indicate that one of the essential requirements prior to starting a job was to be job ready. That is, respondents had to have the necessary experience and skills to perform the job. To provide clerical workers with additional training would not only mean having to pay them more but also would provide them with the opportunity to use their skills in more senior roles.

Research from this study and other academic studies indicates that the size of the organisation has a significant role in determining organisational culture. Larger organisations are more likely to encourage collective bargaining and support union involvement in order to have conditions of employment determined at the enterprise level. However, the type of organisation and the sector in which it operates are also determining factors. In contrast, small businesses (employing less than 20 people) may be run by a family and are more susceptible to the vagaries of the market. Women clerical workers may not have the flexibility to negotiate when to take annual leave or to work an alternate day in lieu of caring for a sick child because of the small number of staff and the issue of staff coverage. Further, where small businesses are more likely to subscribe to individual contracts and minimum entitlements the conditions of employment are generally less favourable than those in larger organisations.

Family structures and gender ideology

Family structures and gender ideology have a significant impact on women's attachment to the labour market and may override personal attitudes and orientations. Gender ideology defines suitable roles for men (breadwinners/primary income earners) and women (homemakers/secondary income earners) and the occupational structure reflects this. As has been demonstrated in this thesis, discrimination within the labour market against women, particularly those in feminised occupations such as clerical work, reinforces women's continued dependence upon men. As part-time workers, women receive low wages and have little prospect for promotion. Ironically, even though these circumstances disadvantage women in the workplace, they suit adaptive women who are reliant upon a primary source of income to achieve a work/family balance.

The culture of domesticity is alive and well in popular culture and heavily influences the expectations of women in relation to their parental and domestic roles (Probert, 2001b:14). The hours most women spend attending to household matters and childcare is time that they cannot devote to paid work.

In contrast, the hours men gain by leaving the household work and childcare to their partners, is time they can devote to paid work. In the context of the culture of long hours, having two parents work very long hours means that personal, family and social relationships suffer (Gatens, 1998:9, Pocock, 2003:23). To maintain quality relationships is one of the primary reasons why adaptive women choose to work in part-time paid employment as secondary income earners.

The findings in this study indicate that among the younger women (those under 45) all of their partners supported the fact that they worked. However, most of them still did the majority of domestic duties at home. Some of the older women (those over 45) in this study stated that their partners did not support them returning to paid employment when their children were young. The partners of these women prided themselves in being the primary breadwinners and earning enough income to support their families.

Personal and family networks were also important in steering women towards clerical work. A number of respondents got their jobs through either family or friends. Clerical work is seen as a clean and respectable job for women and as has been exemplified in this study, provides instant access to employment directly from school. It also provides an ideal fall-back position for those who are tertiary qualified and unable to secure professional employment or for women in family mode who want to work in less demanding jobs.

Family structure also determines a woman's attachment to the labour market. The financial imperative to work is greatest among women who are single, sole parents, widowed or divorced. A number of women in this study were compelled to be sole breadwinners even though they would have preferred to be secondary earners. Sudden changes in family structure can also be a prime motivation to change one's attachment to the labour market. As was shown in this research, a number of respondents who became separated from their partners or who had a child had moved from part-time to full-time work and vice versa.

Globalisation and consumer culture

The arguments in this thesis need to be understood in the context of global changes that have led to the development of a more highly competitive internationalised capitalist economy. In response to global competitiveness, organisations typically either restructure, downsize or employ flexible work practices. Organisational flexibility may be achieved by altering the spread of hours beyond the standard working week, the recruitment of people with specific skills and qualities and the increase or decrease in staff numbers according to demand. This has meant that organisations are using more casual and temporary employees. Essentially the firm's bottom line has become more important than the welfare of its workers (Hamilton, 2003:111). These changes have also resulted in an increasingly insecure and precarious labour market where the threat of job loss makes it difficult for employees to resist changes at work: these include increased workloads and an emphasis on monitoring the performances of individuals (Bradley, 1999:217).

Temporary and casual employment may be ideal for adaptive women wanting to achieve a work/family balance. However, this type of flexibility has its disadvantages especially when they are expected to work outside normal working hours or when they are unable to predict when work will be available. In the case of the drifters in this study they were underemployed and would have preferred to work longer hours. For two of these workers their employment status was temporary and for another it was short-term. It could be argued that their position in the labour market was precarious as they could have their employment terminated at any time.

Esping-Andersen (cited in Crompton, 2001:45) argues that the post-industrial job hierarchy is composed largely of women working in the service sector. He argues that there will be a polarisation between households as the two-earner household becomes increasingly common. The increase in two-earner households has been largely driven by consumer culture where families strive for the latest household items. People are locked into a cycle of creating wealth and consuming, often at the expense of their quality of life. Households

have become bigger than ever and are filled with the latest consumer durables which require two incomes to pay for them (Hamilton, 2003:xi). In order to ensure their job security and to demonstrate a commitment to work people feel compelled to work very long hours to dispel the fear of redundancy (Hamilton, 2003:173).

The women in this study were well aware that their labour was seen as a dispensable commodity and most were of the view that they could easily be replaced. The impetus to conform to the culture of long hours was certainly evident in this study. This was due to staff shortages and large workloads, but it was also driven by cultural practices emanating from the organisations in which they were employed. Ironically, the compulsion to undertake paid employment for financial reasons to pay off the household mortgage may override any adaptive woman's preference to achieve a work/family balance.

Trade union involvement

Trade unions are good for women particularly those who are powerless in low skilled and low paid jobs like clerical work. It could be argued that collective bargaining with the support of a trade union is the best way to secure flexible employment arrangements, promotional opportunities and good levels of pay. The women clerical workers in this study who had their conditions of employment determined by an EBA or award were more happy than those on individual contracts. Although those on individual contracts had comparable levels of pay, their leave entitlements were significantly less than other respondents. Individual contracts without union involvement not only reinforce occupational segregation and comparable worth through a lack of transparency but also threaten to reduce female wages and widen the gender pay gap. Essentially, trade unions provide the best avenue for negotiation and support for adaptive women wanting to achieve a work and family balance.

The organising and recruiting of women into unions is problematic because of the nature of women's employment. A large number of clerical workers are

located in small businesses which are scattered across a wide geographical area. The difficulty for many unions is to find the resources to access these widely dispersed workplaces. Most unions believe that their resources are best placed to support members in large organisations.

Clerical workers still show a reluctance to join a union. Most of the women in this study were not union members. They were not necessarily averse to joining a union, but could not see how it would advantage them. The reason why respondents did not join a union included: the cost of joining a union, not working enough hours to warrant becoming a union member, a lack of knowledge on how unions could help them, working in firms where union involvement was frowned upon and feeling that they could cope on their own without union support. Those who were members of a union felt that the union provided an insurance policy to protect them against untoward incidences in the workplace.

Clerical work: the ultimate family friendly occupation for adaptive women or white collar ghetto?

This thesis has argued that clerical work is an ideal occupation for adaptive women. As was stated very early on in this thesis, the term “ideal” is socially constructed. It has been the contention of this thesis that clerical work is an ideal job because it conforms with what is expected of woman as workers and carers.

Adaptive women tend to have an ad hoc attachment to the labour market, moving in and out of it over their life cycle. They are attracted to a feminised occupation like clerical work because it offers flexible employment and is widely available in a range of industries and sectors. Another defining feature of adaptive women is a preference to earn an income as a secondary income earner. Adaptive women who are secondary earners consciously choose occupations and jobs which are compatible with their family life. These include

jobs which lend themselves to intermittent or part-time work, and jobs which tolerate interrupted employment patterns and high labour turnover.

Clerical work is the ideal occupation for women across their life cycle. Clerical work is readily accessible, and with a few basic skills most women can secure a clerical job. Although clerical work offers jobs which are often low in status and pay with little or no scope for promotion, it still has broad appeal among women. The low wages received by clerical workers reinforce the primacy of the male breadwinner, yet many women clerical workers are happy to be secondary income earners because it enables them to achieve a work/family balance.

There is a widely held expectation among female clerical workers that they will follow a marriage career rather than one in the labour market. Many women are socialised through their personal and family networks and the education system to aspire to feminised occupations such as clerical work because it will enable them to combine work and family.

Clerical work is indeed the ideal occupation for adaptive women who put their family responsibilities either ahead of or equal to their paid work because of the flexibility it offers which allows women to move in and out of the labour market over their life cycle.

However, this life cycle friendly job does have a downside. The skills associated with clerical work are not highly regarded within most organisations. As a result, clerical work does not offer women a high salary, high status or promotion opportunities. Essentially, adaptive women who opt to combine paid work and family as clerical workers are on a “second class mummy track” (Pocock, 2003:147). Clerical work is regarded as a second class job where incumbents have little or no leverage in which to negotiate pay and conditions of employment. This perception is fuelled by a view that women are less committed in the workforce and that their primary focus is on their family responsibilities. Employees in the labour market with the greatest bargaining power are those with highly sought after skills which are in short supply.

Clerical workers are commonplace in all industries and sectors and are therefore unlikely to have much leverage when striking an enterprise bargain. Many respondents in this study did not have the opportunity to bargain, they were given the option of taking the job as presented or finding something else.

Studies have shown that underemployment is a significant trend in the Western world, and highly qualified people are working in jobs where they are overqualified and not being fully utilised to their maximum potential (Martin and Schumann, 1997: 166). In this study a significant number of respondents were either working towards a tertiary qualification or had been awarded a degree. None of these respondents had been required to use any of the skills attained in their degree. A number of respondents were keen to move into professional occupations but found that they could not secure employment elsewhere. Findings such as this confirm that clerical work is a white-collar ghetto with limited opportunities to secure promotion.

The real conundrum lies in the willingness of some adaptive clerical workers who work as secondary income earners, to trade-off convenience factors such as permanent part-time work in a job close to home, for low pay, low status and the lack of career advancement. As this research has demonstrated the women in this study were all committed to their workplaces. Although those in family mode had chosen part-time jobs with hours that suited them they still tended to organise their family life around their paid work. If given the choice, most women would welcome a significant improvement in their pay and conditions of employment, recognition of the contribution they make to the organisation in which they were employed, the opportunity to participate in further training, access to incremental career paths and the ability to take extended career breaks without being severely penalised.

Future directions

The Federal Coalition government lead by the Prime Minister John Howard has been elected for a fourth term with a majority in both houses of parliament.

The government has stated that it is keen to bring in further workplace reforms including the modification of the unfair dismissal laws which have been rejected in the Senate 41 times in eight years. Small businesses employing less than 20 workers which make up a large proportion of employees who employ clerical workers will be exempt from unfair dismissal laws. The rationale for modifying this law is to make it easier for small business to create jobs. Those concerned with the adverse effects of the bill argue that workers will face increasing job insecurity and will be more dispensable. For many clerical workers who work in small businesses this may mean that employers no longer need substantial grounds to dismiss a person. For example, if a clerical worker refused to work extra unpaid overtime this could be grounds for dismissal.

Other proposed changes include amendments to redundancy laws where small businesses will be exempt from making redundancy payments to sacked employees and the curtailment of industrial action during the term of a certified agreement. In addition, the assessment of any wage rises on the future employment of low paid workers will have to be approved by the AIRC. The assumption being that if a pay rise to low paid workers is seen as having a deleterious impact on the economy, this may constitute grounds for refusing such an increase (*The Age Newspaper*, "Howard sets his sights on workplace", October 12, 2004:1). All of these proposed changes will almost certainly enhance managerial prerogative and decrease the flexibility available to women with family responsibilities

What is the likelihood of clerical workers securing good pay and conditions of employment in the near future? In an ideal world, good pay and conditions should be seen as a symbol of the respect and confidence for the employee within the context of the organisation in which they work. Once a reasonable level of pay has been set, non-monetary rewards such as flexible leave arrangements make the difference between a good workplace and an excellent one (Hull, 2003:21). Under the proposed changes to Australia's industrial relations law, one can only conjecture the ideal workplace is a "pipe dream". In all likelihood, pay and conditions of employment for clerical workers

in small business will be significantly eroded without the input of an independent umpire like the AIRC or union support, while those who are working in larger unionised organisations will probably remain fairly stable.

At the present time the expectation that employees work longer and longer hours can only be detrimental to family relationships. For adaptive women who work as secondary earners who are dependent on a partner to earn their primary source of income, the longer hours culture will reinforce their adaptive status and the impetus to continue working part-time. Further, it will exacerbate the inequalities associated with the division of labour in the household. The alternative option of two partners working very long hours is simply untenable and unsustainable over the long term (Pocock, 2003:152).

By combining Hakim's preference theory which incorporates the notion of agency and the structural constraints outlined above we can predict with a high degree of certainty the factors which influence the heterogeneous work and lifestyle preferences of women clerical workers over their life cycle. If policy-makers, social scientists and those involved in the process of labour market reform utilise this pluralistic approach, the basis upon which they undertake their research or base their policies will be greatly enhanced and will more accurately reflect the choices and constraints faced by women in the context of their family lives.

If we wish to maintain the central role of parents in the care of young children then gender equity policy will have to turn its attention to reforming and regulating the labour market, with the development of renewed campaigns around working hours, circumventing the "time bind", and gender pay equity. It would require for example, reduced hours of work, secure part-time jobs, provide flexible leave arrangements, job sharing, working from home, extended career breaks, a reduction in over consumption and normalisation of the fact that employees have families and will need to attend to them. Changes in work practices are needed which measure productivity by performance rather than the number of hours at work and finally a change in

corporate culture which promotes family friendliness rather than just paying lip service.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) definition of clerical workers

This study has included the first two classifications of clerical work. These classifications have been linked to accredited Technical and Further Education Programs as well as on-the-job experience.

According to the ASCO definitions, advanced clerical and service workers “perform a range of complex organisational, administrative, service and liaison tasks requiring a degree of independence, discretion, and judgment”. People employed in this major group have a level of skill commensurate with an Australian Qualifications Framework Certificate III (Certificate III in Business – Office Skills) or higher qualifications or at least three years relevant experience. Intermediate clerical workers “produce documents, record information, operate office equipment and perform associated duties”. People in this group have a level of skill commensurate with the Australian Qualifications Framework Certificate II (Certificate II in Business – Office Skills) or higher and at least one years relevant experience. Elementary clerical workers have a level of skill commensurate with completion of compulsory secondary education or a higher qualification. People in this classification could be office trainees.

The following table details the sorts of duties under each classification as well as the types of occupations which form part of each sub-group.

Major sub-group	Occupations	Duties performed
Advanced clerical and service workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretaries and Personal Assistants • Advanced legal and related clerks • Court and Hansard reporters • Insurance agents • Desktop publishing operators • Travel attendants • Bookkeepers • Credit and loans officers 	The sorts of duties performed by Advanced Clerical and Service Workers include performing secretarial and other administrative tasks; recording and maintaining financial, credit and insurance information, recording proceedings of meetings and hearings; compiling and preparing documents, texts and technical information for distribution and publication; providing liaison and communication services and sales support.
Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typist and word processing • Data Entry Operator • General clerks • Keyboard operators • Receptionists • Intermediate numerical clerks • Material recording & dispatching clerks • Accounts clerk • Credit clerk • Cost clerk • Payroll clerk • Bank worker • Insurance clerk 	The sorts of tasks performed by Intermediate Clerical Sales and Service Workers typically include typing correspondence, reports and other documents; proofreading and correcting copy; greeting people and responding to inquiries; producing and recording basic financial and statistical information; recording details of production, transportation, storage and purchase of goods; providing information on the services or goods offered by organisations; maintaining and updating personnel records; and administering and enforcing government legislation and standards.
Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registry and filing clerks • Mail sorting clerks • Switchboard operators • Messengers • Betting clerks • Office trainees • Meter reader • Classified advertising clerk • Interviewer • Parking inspector 	Elementary clerical, sales and service workers perform a range of tasks which are usually under supervision, within established routines and procedures. Tasks performed including sorting, classifying, filing and sending information, receiving, processing and despatching information, mail and other documents, providing telecommunication service to customers, taking bets for customers, providing basic information in relation to security, personal and domestic needs, learning the skills of an office worker.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Standard Classification of Occupations*, Catalogue Number, 1220.0, Second Edition.

Appendix 2

The 20 Allowable Award Matters

Awards must now conform within the rigid guidelines specified by the Workplace Relations Act to include items below

- Classifications of employees and skill-based career paths.
- Ordinary time hours of work and the times within which they are performed, rest breaks, notice periods and variations to working hours.
- Rates of pay (such as hourly rates and annual salaries), rates of pay for juniors, trainees or apprentices, and rates of pay for employees under the supported wage system.
- Piece rates, tallies and bonuses.
- Annual leave and leave loadings.
- Long service leave.
- Personal/carers leave, including sick leave, family leave, bereavement leave, compassionate leave, cultural leave and other like forms of leave.
- Parental leave, including maternity and adoption leave.
- Public holidays.
- Allowances.
- Loadings for working overtime or for casual or shift work.
- Penalty rates.
- Redundancy pay and notice of termination.
- Stand-down provisions.
- Dispute settling procedures.
- Jury service.
- Type of employment, such as full-time employment, casual employment, regular part-time employment and shift work.
- Superannuation.
- Pay and conditions for outworkers, but only when compared with those specified in a relevant award or awards for employees who perform the same kind of work at an employer's business or commercial premises.
- Provisions incidental to the allowable matters and necessary of the effective operation of the award (for example, date and period of operation of the award, and facilitative provisions).

Minimal employee entitlements

The *Workplace Relations Act* specifies minimum employee entitlements. These entitlements include

- Annual Leave - Paid annual leave of four weeks per year, cumulative, accruing on a pro-rata basis.
- Meal Breaks - A meal break of not less than 30 minutes, after five hours continuous employment.
- Parental Leave - There are three types of parental leave available to employees. These are maternity, paternity and adoption leave.
- Pay slips - Employers must provide their employees with pay slips.
- Sick Leave - Sick Leave of one week per year, cumulative, accruing on a pro-rata basis.
- Termination - An entitlement to notice of termination or payment in lieu of notice depending on the length of service (source: www.dewrsb.gov.au).

Appendix 3

Questionnaires

The questionnaire below is for respondents on individual contracts. All respondents were asked the first 70 questions. Those on collective agreements or awards were asked specific questions relating to their conditions of employment.

QUESTIONNAIRE - ENTERPRISE BARGAINING: WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

Thank you for your time today. I am currently undertaking post-graduate studies at LaTrobe University. I am doing a study about the work that women do, what they like and dislike about it.

PAST

I would like to start by getting some background information about yourself.

1. What is the highest level of Secondary education you have completed?
2. Have you undertaken any training since you finished school? If yes, what sort of course? (prompt for example a TAFE course, secretarial course, tertiary course etc.)
3. Have you undertaken any courses which are unrelated to your job? If yes, what courses?
4. Have you started any courses, but did not complete them?
5. If yes, which course(s) and why didn't you finish?
6. Do you have any dependent children?
7. If yes, how old are they?
8. Are they are school?
9. While you are at work, who minds your children?
10. Do you find this childcare satisfactory? Why or why not?
11. Have you had any breaks from the paid workforce where you haven't worked at all?
12. Why did you have this break? (have children, unemployment, travel, redundancy)
13. How long was each break?

14. Have you had periods when you worked part-time?

PRESENT

I would like to ask some questions about how you came to get your current job. But first, I want to start with a few questions about your place of work.

15. What is the name of the organisation where you work?
16. What sort of business is this?
17. How many people are employed in this business?
18. What is the title of your immediate boss?
19. What is the title of the boss above them?
20. Are there people on the same level as you?
21. Are there people who are less well paid than you in your organisation?
22. How important do you think your job is in the organisation?
23. What happens when you go on holidays?
24. How long have you worked here?
25. How long do you think you will stay here?
26. What are the good things about your job?
27. What are the bad things about your job?
28. How well do you think you do your job?

Specific questions about what you do in your job

29. Why do you work?
- because you like work
 - because you enjoy the friends you make at work
 - you couldn't imagine being at home
 - you have to work for money reasons.
30. Why did you choose your current job?
31. What is your job title? Which one matches your job?
- receptionist
 - switchboard operator/telephonist

- secretary
- executive secretary
- personal assistant
- administrative assistant
- counter clerk
- data entry operator
- word processor
- accounts clerk
- bookkeeper
- clerk
- Girl Friday
- Other (please specify)

32. How easy do you think it would be to find someone else to do your job?
33. What sort of things do you do in your job?
34. The duties you have just mentioned, what would you do regularly and occasionally?
35. Do you have a formal written job description?
36. If no, why don't you have a formal written job description?
37. If yes, how does the formal written job description compare with what you actually do? Is it the same or does it differ?
38. If the job description is different, how does it differ?
39. How is your work day planned?
 - Does your boss tell you what to do from one day to the next?
 - Do you handle your own work load, i.e. you know what you have to do from one day to the next and just get on with it?
 - Is it a combination of these two?
40. Do you get taken away from your job to do other things?
41. If yes, how often?
42. How much contact do you have with other work colleagues at your level in your workplace?
43. Do you work as part of a team?
44. How do you get along with your work colleagues?
45. How much contact do you have with your immediate boss? Daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly?

- 46. Do you feel this is enough, too much or too little contact?
- 47. Do you ever have to cover for your boss? How often and under what circumstances?
- 48. Do you feel that you have enough contact with senior people in regard to work matters in your organisation? Why or why not?
- 49. Do you think you have enough or too much responsibility in your job?
- 50. If no what else would you like to do?
- 51. If you could change your job, what changes would you make?
- 52. Some people wear a uniform to work, what do you wear to work? Who decides what you should wear?
- 53. Could you imagine a man doing your job?

Questions about your conditions of employment.

- 54. Do you work part-time or full-time?
- 55. How many hours per week do you work?
- 56. Do the hours you work vary from day to day or week to week?
- 57. Can you choose which hours you would like to work?
- 58. What time do you usually start work?
- 59. What time do you usually finish work?
- 60. Which days of the week do you work?
- 61. Do you work on weekends (Saturday &/or Sunday)?
- 62. Do you work on public holidays?
- 63. Do you vary the days of the week you work, or does your employer?
- 64. Do you get tea breaks? If yes, how long? If no, why not?
- 65. Do you get a lunch break? If yes, how long? If no, why not?
- 66. Do you like the hours that you work?
- 67. If you could change your hours would you like to work more or less, on different days, start at different times?

68. If you work longer hours than normal, do you
- get paid extra money at your normal hourly rate?
 - get overtime penalty rates, if so, what are these
 - take time in lieu of the extra hours work
 - receive no time in lieu or extra money, but get concessions/perks
 - receive no time in lieu or extra money and no concessions/perks
69. Can you tell me whether you:
- have an individual employment contract between yourself and your employer
 - are part of a collective agreement
 - work under an award
 - don't know

Questions for respondents on an individual contract

70. Who was involved in setting up your individual contract?
- yourself and your employer
 - yourself, your employer and a union representative
 - yourself, your employer and another representative (e.g. HR representation, industrial lawyer)
71. If you had someone to help set up your individual contract, were they male or female?
72. Were you able to choose who was involved in setting up your contract?
73. How did you draw up this individual contract?
- roll over an old award
 - negotiate individual contract from scratch
74. How many weeks annual leave do you get per year?
75. Can you take your annual leave whenever you like or does the organisation you work for or your boss tell you when you can take your annual leave?
76. Do you have to work 12 months before you get annual leave?
77. How many days sick leave do you get per year?
78. Can you accrue any sick leave that you do not take from one year to the next?
79. Do you have any other leave in your contract?
- Long service leave
 - Maternity leave
 - Parental leave
 - Special leave e.g.. bereavement leave, jury duty.

80. Have you ever used any of these other types of leave?
81. If yes, which ones?
82. If no, why not?
83. If you have taken time off work to have a family did you return to work at the same or a similar job in terms of pay and conditions?
84. **This question is for respondent who works part-time** - Do you get pro rata annual leave, sick leave or any other type of leave? If no, why not?
85. **This question is for respondent who works part-time** Is there less responsibility in your job because you work part-time?
86. **This question is for respondent who works part-time** Do you job share? How is this arranged?
87. Do you think you are paid enough?
88. If no, how much do you think you should be paid?

If the respondent is a casual worker:

89. If you have been employed as a casual for a certain period of time, has your employer suggested you move to a permanent part-time or full-time position?
90. If yes, how long must you be employed?
91. If no, what do you think of this?

If respondent has dependent children.

92. Does your employer assist you with the cost of childcare?
93. If yes, how? (subsidy, childcare facilities provided)
94. Is this part of your employment contract?
95. Are there any other extra entitlements in your contract?
 - travel allowance
 - parking
 - school fees
 - bonuses
 - study leave
 - training paid for

96. Does your employment contract detail
 - grounds upon which you can be terminated?
 - what happens if you are made redundant?
 - unfair dismissal?
97. Is your employment contract fixed for a certain period of time?
98. If yes, how long?
99. Can your employment contract be varied at any time?
100. Say if you wanted a pay rise or you wanted to change your hours of work, how would you go about doing this?
101. Regarding pay rises:
 - Do you receive a pay rise automatically each year?
 - Do you have to renegotiate a new wage?
 - Is pay assessed on your performance at work?
102. If a pay rise is performance based, what sort of things would your employer look at before he or she gave you a pay rise?
103. Are there any other details in your employment contract that we have not spoken about? If yes what are they?
104. Is there any thing you would like to change about your employment contract?
105. Are other people within your organisation on individual contracts?
106. If yes, how many?
107. If no, how are their conditions of employment determined?
108. Do you know if your employment contract is similar to other people who work in your organisation?
109. Have you spoken about your employment contract with other work colleagues?
110. What do they think about individual employment contracts?
111. Overall, what are the good things about your employment contract?
112. Overall, what are the bad things about your employment contract?

Questions about where you could go if you were having difficulties at work

113. Did you have any problems negotiating you contract?

- 114. If yes, what difficulties?
- 115. Did you seek help to overcome these problems?
- 116. Where would you go for help if any problems arose in the future?
- 117. Have you ever had any other problems with your employer?
- 118. If yes, what were these problems?
- 119. Did you seek help to sort out these problems?
- 120. Were you satisfied with the help that you received?
- 121. If no, what help would have been useful?

For respondents who have had no problems with employer.

- 122. If you were having problems with your employer, where would you go for help?
- 123. Have you ever experienced problems with work colleagues or your employer because you are
 - female
 - married, single, divorced
 - old or young
 - ethnic background
 - pregnant
 - sick or disabled
 - what you wear for e.g. veil, jewellery, tattoos
 - other please state.
- 124. What do you understand about the term “Equal pay for equal work”?

Union Membership

- 125. Are you a member of a union? If yes, which union?
- 126. Have you ever been a member of a union? If yes, which union
- 127. Why are you no longer a union member?
- 128. How helpful was or is your union?
- 129. Have you ever been a union official (e.g. shop steward)?
- 130. What office did you hold?
- 131. Did you want to hold a union office? What stopped you?

132. **For those who have not been a union member.** Why haven't you joined a union?

FUTURE

133. Thinking about the organisation you are working in have you ever worked
- in another job, if yes what job?
 - filled in for someone who works in another section or department?
 - taken training to improve your skills on the job?
134. What are the promotion opportunities in the organisation you are currently employed?
135. Have you sought a promotion?
136. If yes, what sort of promotion, where?
137. What happened when you sought promotion?
138. Will you seek further promotion in the future? If no, why not?
139. How would you go about getting this promotion? What could you do to enhance your promotion prospects?
140. Have you thought about moving to another section in the organisation or another organisations to get a promotion? Why or Why not?
141. Would you be prepared to undertake further training to get a higher paid job with higher duties?
142. How would you feel about taking a higher up job?
143. If you could choose any job you like, what would it be and why?
144. Where will you be in five years time?
145. Where will you be in ten years time?

If respondent does not have dependent children

146. Are you planning to have children in the future?
147. Will you take maternity leave if you have children?
148. If you are planning to have children in the future, what sort of things would you expect from your employer, for example, assistance with childcare?

- 149. What impact do you think having a family will have on your work?
- 150. If you decide to have a family do you think you will work after the child is born?
- 151. Will you work full-time or part-time?
- 152. Will this change as the child gets older?
- 153. Do you think you will stay in the same or a similar job? Why or why not?
- 154. How understanding do you think your employer will be when you have a family? For example if the child is sick?

Family matters - for respondents who have children

- 155. Do you organise your paid work to meet your family needs?
- 156. Does your partner support the fact that you work?
- 157. How are household chores divided in your family?
- 158. Do you ever find there is a conflict of interest between your work and family life? If you have any problems, how do you work them out?
- 159. Have you had to use any of your sick leave to care for family members?
- 160. Does your employer allow you time off to attend to family matters?
- 161. Would you refuse a promotion if it meant spending less time with your family?

Questions for respondents on an Award

70. What state award do you work under?
71. Do all the staff who work in your organisation work under a state award?
72. If no, what do they work under?
 - Federal award
 - Collective agreement
 - Individual contract
73. Have you heard about individual contracts and collective agreements?
74. If yes, what do you know about them?
75. Would you like to work under an individual contract or collective agreement? Why or why not?
76. How many weeks annual leave do you get per year?
77. Can you take your annual leave whenever you like or does the organisation you work for or your boss tell you when you can take your annual leave?
78. Do you have to work 12 months before you get annual leave?
79. How many days sick leave do you get per year?
80. Can you accrue any sick leave that you do not take from one year to the next?
81. Do you have any other leave under your award?
 - Long service leave
 - Maternity leave
 - Parental leave
 - Special leave e.g. bereavement leave, jury duty.
82. Have you ever used any of these other types of leave?
83. If yes, which ones?
84. If no, why not?
85. If you have taken time off work to have a family, did you return to work at the same or a similar job in terms of pay and conditions?
86. **This question is for respondent who works part-time** - Do you get pro rata annual leave, sick leave or any other type of leave? If no, why not?

87. **This question is for respondent who works part-time** Is there less responsibility in your job because you work part-time?
88. **This question is for respondent who works part-time** Do you job share?
89. Do you think you are paid enough?
90. If no, how much do you think you should be paid?

If the respondent is a casual worker:

91. If you have been employed as a casual for a certain period of time, has your employer suggested you move to a permanent part-time or full-time position?
92. If yes, how long must you be employed?
93. If no, what do you think of this?

If respondent has dependent children.

94. Does your employer assist you with the cost of childcare?
95. If yes, how? (subsidy, childcare facilities provided)
96. Is this part of your award?
97. Are there any other extra entitlements in your award?
- travel allowance
 - parking
 - school fees
 - bonuses
 - study leave
 - training paid for
 - over award payments
 - supplementary payments
98. Does the award detail
- grounds upon which you can be terminated?
 - what happens if you are made redundant?
 - unfair dismissal?
99. Say if you wanted a pay rise or you wanted to change your hours of work, how would you go about doing this?
100. Regarding pay rises:
- Do you receive a pay rise automatically each year?
 - Do you have to renegotiate a new wage?

- Is pay assessed on your performance at work?
101. If a pay rise is performance based, what sort of things would your employer look at before he or she gave you a pay rise?
 102. Are there any other details in your award that we have not spoken about? If yes what are they?
 103. Is there any thing you would like to change about your conditions of employment contained in the award?
 104. Are any people within your organisation on individual contracts or collective agreements?
 105. If yes, how many?
 106. If no, how are their conditions of employment determined?
 107. Have you spoken about the award you work under with other work colleagues?
 108. What do they think about it?
 109. Overall, what are the good things about the award?
 110. Overall, what are the bad things about the award?

Questions about where you could go if you were having difficulties at work

111. Do you have any problems with your conditions of employment?
112. If yes, what difficulties?
113. Did you seek help to overcome these problems?
114. Where would you go for help if any problems arose in the future?
115. Have you ever had any other problems with your employer?
116. If yes, what were these problems?
117. Did you seek help to sort out these problems?
118. Were you satisfied with the help that you received?
119. If no, what help would have been useful?

For respondents who have had no problems with employer.

120. If you were having problems with your employer, where would you go for help?
121. Have you ever experienced problems with work colleagues or your employer because you are
- female
 - married, single, divorced
 - old or young
 - ethnic background
 - pregnant
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 - other please state.
122. What do you understand about the term “Equal pay for equal work”?

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123. Are you a member of a union? If yes, which union?
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126. How helpful was or is your union?
127. Have you ever been a union official (for e.g. shop steward)?
128. What office did you hold?
129. Did you want to hold a union office? What stopped you?
130. **For those who have not been a union member.** Why haven't you joined a union?

FUTURE

131. Thinking about the organisation you are working in, have you ever worked?
- in another job, if yes what job?
 - filled in for someone who works in another section or department?
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134. If yes, what sort of promotion, where?

- 135. What happened when you sought promotion?
- 136. Will you seek further promotion in the future? If no, why not?
- 137. How would you go about getting this promotion? What could you do to enhance your promotion prospects?
- 138. Have you thought about moving to another section in the organisation or another organisation to get a promotion? Why or Why not?
- 139. Would you be prepared to undertake further training to get a higher paid job with higher duties?
- 140. How would you feel about taking a higher up job?
- 141. If you could choose any job you like, what would it be and why?
- 142. Where will you be in five years time?
- 143. Where will you be in ten years time?

If respondent does not have dependent children

- 144. Are you planning to have children in the future?
- 145. Will you take maternity leave if you have children?
- 146. If you are planning to have children in the future, what sort of things would you expect from your employer, for example, to assist with childcare?
- 147. What impact do you think having a family will have on your work?
- 148. If you decide to have a family, do you think you will work after the child is born?
- 149. Will you work full-time or part-time?
- 150. Will this change as the child gets older?
- 151. Do you think you will stay in the same or a similar job? Why or why not?
- 152. How understanding do you think your employer will be when you have a family? For example, if the child is sick?

Family matters - for respondents who have children

- 153. Do you organise your paid work to meet your family needs?

- 154. Does your partner support the fact that you work?
- 155. How are household chores divided in your family?
- 156. Do you ever find there is a conflict of interest between your work and family life? If you have any problems, how do you work them out?
- 157. Have you had to use any of your sick leave to care for family members?
- 158. Does your employer allow you time off to attend to family matters?
- 159. Would you refuse a promotion if it meant spending less time with your family?

Questions for respondents on a collective agreement

70. Who was involved in setting up the collective agreement you are part of?
- employer and staff representatives
 - employer and staff representatives and union
 - Collective agreement was in place when I started
 - Don't know
71. How many staff in your organisation work under this collective agreement?
72. How many women and men were involved in setting up the collective agreement?
73. Did you have any input into what is contained in your collective agreement?
74. If yes, what input?
- involved in direct negotiations
 - consulted by staff representatives
 - consulted by union
75. If no, why didn't you have any input?
76. Would you like to have had some input?
77. Is your collective agreement?
- an add-on to an existing award
 - a new workplace agreement which is drawn up from scratch
 - roll over of an old award
78. How many weeks annual leave do you get per year?
79. Can you take your annual leave whenever you like or does the organisation you work for or your boss tell you when you can take your annual leave?
80. Do you have to work 12 months before you get annual leave?
81. How many days sick leave do you get per year?
82. Can you accrue any sick leave that you do not take from one year to the next?

83. Do you have any other leave in your collective agreement?
- Long service leave
 - Maternity leave
 - Parental leave
 - Special leave e.g. bereavement leave, jury duty.
84. Have you ever used any of these other types of leave?
85. If yes, which ones?
86. If no, why not?
87. If you have taken time off work to have a family did you return to work at the same or a similar job in terms of pay and conditions?
88. **This question is for respondent who works part-time** - Do you get pro rata annual leave, sick leave or any other type of leave? If no, why not?
89. **This question is for respondent who works part-time** Is there less responsibility in your job because you work part-time?
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93. If you have been employed as a casual for a certain period of time, has your employer suggested you move to a permanent part-time or full-time position?
94. If yes, how long must you be employed?
95. If no, what do you think of this?

If respondent has dependent children.

96. Does your employer assist you with the cost of childcare?
97. If yes, how? (subsidy, childcare facilities provided)
98. Is this part of the collective agreement?

99. Are there any other extra entitlements in the collective agreement you are part of?
- travel allowance
 - parking
 - school fees
 - bonuses
 - study leave
 - training paid for
100. Does the collective agreement detail
- grounds upon which you can be terminated?
 - what happens if you are made redundant?
 - unfair dismissal?
101. Is the collective agreement you work under fixed for a certain period of time?
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107. Are there any other details in your collective agreement that we have not spoken about? If yes, what are they?
108. Is there any thing you would like to change about your conditions of employment contained in your collective agreement?
109. Are any people within your organisation on individual contracts? If yes, how many?
110. Would you like to work under an individual contract?
111. If no, how are their conditions of employment determined?
112. Have you spoken about the collective agreement you work under with other work colleagues?
113. What do they think about it?

114. Overall, what are the good things about the collective agreement?

115. Overall, what are the bad things about the collective agreement?

Questions about where you could go if you were having difficulties at work

116. Did you have any problems negotiating your collective agreement?

117. If yes, what difficulties?

118. Did you seek help to overcome these problems?

119. Where would you go for help if any problems arose in the future?

120. Have you ever had any other problems with your employer?

121. If yes, what were these problems?

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For respondents who have had no problems with employer.

125. If you were having problems with your employer, where would you go for help?

126. Have you ever experienced problems with work colleagues or your employer because you are

- female
- married, single, divorced
- old or young
- ethnic background
- pregnant
- sick or disabled
- what you wear for e.g.. veil, jewellery, tattoos
- other please state.

127. What do you understand about the term “Equal pay for equal work”?

Union Membership

128. Are you a member of a union? If yes, which union?

129. Have you ever been a member of a union? If yes, which union?

130. Why are you no longer a union member?
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133. What office did you hold?
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135. **For those who have not been a union member.** Why haven't you joined a union?

FUTURE

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- in another job, if yes what job?
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145. How would you feel about taking a higher up job?
146. If you could choose any job you like, what would it be and why?
147. Where will you be in five years time?
148. Where will you be in ten years time?


If respondent does not have dependent children

- 149. Are you planning to have children in the future?
- 150. Will you take maternity leave if you have children?
- 151. If you are planning to have children in the future, what sort of things would you expect from your employer, for example. to assist with childcare?
- 152. What impact do you think having a family will have on your work?
- 153. If you decide to have a family do you think you will work after the child is born?
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- 155. Will this change as the child gets older?
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Family matters - for respondents who have children

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- 161. Do you ever find there is a conflict of interest between your work and family life? If you have any problems, how do you work them out?
- 162. Have you had to use any of your sick leave to care for family members?
- 163. Does your employer allow you time off to attend to family matters?
- 164. Would you refuse a promotion if it meant spending less time with your family?

This form was given to respondents prior to starting the interview. It collected personal details about the respondent.

This section is about yourself. Could you please tick the boxes marked ☐ and write comments when you see this symbol .

Your age is

- | | |
|----------|--------------------------|
| under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19-20 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21-29 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30-39 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 40-49 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 50-59 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 60 plus | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Your current salary gross per annum.

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| under \$5,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$5,001-10,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$10,001-20,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$20,001-30,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$30,001-40,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$40,000 plus | <input type="checkbox"/> |


What is your household income?

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| under \$5,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$5,001-10,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$10,001-20,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$20,001-30,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$30,001-40,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$40,001-50,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$50,001-60,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$60,001-70,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$70,001-80,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| \$80,001-90,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

\$90,001-100,000 ☐

\$100,000 plus ☐

Partner's Occupation 

Your country of birth 

Your parents' country of birth:

 Mother

Father

Your residential postcode  **3 3 3 3**

Thinking about your current job, what are the most important aspects of this job? Could you please circle the most appropriate response.

1. Unimportant
2. Somewhat important
3. Important
4. Very Important
5. Don't know

Opportunities for advancement	1	2	3	4	5
Having the opportunity to do quality work	1	2	3	4	5
Having responsibility	1	2	3	4	5
Having a job that is secure	1	2	3	4	5
The amount of money I make	1	2	3	4	5
Being important to the organisation I work with	1	2	3	4	5
Doing my own work in my own way	1	2	3	4	5
The physical surroundings where I work	1	2	3	4	5
Having a supervisor who is available and tells me what to do	1	2	3	4	5

*Questionnaire for Second round interviews***FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE WOMEN AND ENTERPRISE BARGAINING****Respondent Name:**_____**Date:**___/___/___**Postcode respondent**

It is eighteen months since I have spoken to you about your job. I am wanting to follow up the original interview we had and discuss whether there have been any changes in your work situation.

1. Are you still employed in the same job? Yes No

Questions for respondents who are employed in a different job?

2. Is your new job in the same or a different organisation?
3. Why did you leave the job you were employed eighteen months ago?
4. Do you regard the move to your current job as a promotion?
5. Was the move to another job motivated by family responsibilities?
6. Have you worked at any other organisations between this job and the job you were employed in eighteen months ago (e.g. may have done temp work?)
7. Have you had any breaks from the paid workforce over the past eighteen months?
8. What was the reason for the break? (have children, unemployment, travel, redundancy)
9. How long was the break?

If respondent works in a different organisation?

10. What is the name of the organisation in which you are currently employed?
11. What sort of business is this?
12. What is your job title?
13. How did you find out about this job?
14. What suburb is the job located?

For all respondents who are in different jobs

15. Did you undertake any further training to get this job?
16. How long have you been employed in this position?
17. How long do you think you will stay in this job?
18. What sort of things do you do in your current job?
19. How does the work differ from this job and the one eighteen months ago?
20. What are the good things about your current job?
21. What are the bad things about your current job?
22. Do you have a formal written job description in this job? Why or why not?
23. Is this job part-time or full-time
24. How many hours per week do you work?
25. Do the hours you work vary from day to day or week to week?
26. Can you choose which hours you would like to work?
27. What time do you usually start work?
28. What time do you usually finish work?
29. Which days of the week do you work?
30. Do you work on weekends (Saturday &/or Sunday)?
31. Do you work on public holidays?
32. Do you get tea breaks? If yes, how long? If no, why not?
33. Do you get a lunch break? If yes, how long? If no, why not?
34. Do you like the hours that you work?
35. If you could change your hours would you like to work more or less, on different days, start at different times?
36. If you work longer hours than normal, do you
 - get paid extra money at your normal hourly rate?
 - get overtime penalty rates, what are these?
 - take time in lieu of the extra hours worked?

- receive neither time in lieu or extra money?

37. Can you tell me whether you have an individual employment contract, workplace agreement or do you work under an award?

Individual contracts & workplace agreements

38. Who was involved in setting up your individual contract/workplace agreement?

39. Were you able to choose who was involved in setting up your individual contract/workplace agreement?

40. How did you draw up this individual contract/workplace agreement?

- roll over an old award
- negotiated from scratch
- an add-on to an existing award

Awards

41. What is the name of the award you are on?

All respondents in different jobs

42. How many weeks annual leave do you get per year?

43. How many sick days do you get per year?

44. Can you accrue any sick leave that you do not take from one year to the next?

45. Do you have any other leave in your contract/AWA?

- Long service leave
- Maternity leave
- Parental leave
- Special leave e.g. bereavement leave, jury duty

46. Do you think you are paid enough?

47. How much do you think you should be paid?

48. Are there any other extra entitlements in your contract/AWA?

- travel allowance
- parking
- school fees
- bonuses
- study leave
- training paid for

49. Does your employment contract/AWA detail
 - grounds upon which you can be terminated?
 - what happens if you are made redundant?
 - unfair dismissal?
50. Is your contract/AWA fixed for a certain period of time?
51. If yes, how long?
52. Can your contract/AWA be varied at any time?
53. Say if you wanted a pay rise or you wanted to change your hours of work, how would you go about doing this?
54. Regarding pay rises:
 - Do you receive a pay rise automatically each year?
 - Do you have to renegotiate a new wage?
 - Is pay assessed on your performance at work?
55. If a pay rise is performance based, what sort of things would your employer look at before he or she gave you a pay rise?
56. Are there any other details in your employment contract/AWA that we have not spoken about?
57. Is there anything you would like to change about your conditions of employment?
58. Overall, what are the good things about your conditions of employment?
59. Overall, what are the bad things about your conditions of employment?
60. In our last interview you were not a union member. Have you joined a union? Why/Why not?
61. In our last interview you were a union member. Are you still a union member?
62. What are your job plans for the future?
 - seek promotion
 - planning to move jobs
 - move from temp work to permanent
 - undertake further training to get a different job
 - move full-time to part-time
 - move part-time to full-time have a break in workforce to have children, travel, other reasons
63. Where you think you will be in five years time?

64. Where do you think you will be in ten years time?

For respondents who are working in the same job

65. Have you had any breaks from the paid workforce over the past eighteen months?

66. What was the reason for the break? (e.g. have children, unemployment, travel, redundancy)

67. How long was the break?

68. Are you still working the same number of hours since we last spoke?

69. Has your job changed in any way over the last eighteen months? (e.g. more responsibility, different duties, additional duties, less duties)

70. Have you undertaken any training over the last eighteen months?

71. If yes, what sort of training?

72. Was this training related to your job?

73. Have you sought promotion over the last 18 months?

74. Was the promotion within the organisation you are currently employed or elsewhere?

75. Have you looked for other jobs or applied for jobs elsewhere?

76. When I last spoke with you your conditions of employment were determined by a contract/AWA/Award. Have your conditions of employment changed over the last eighteen months?

77. If yes, what changes have been made and why?

See questions above which relate to details in Contract/AWA/Award - Q24-56

78. Have you had an increase in pay? If yes, how much? If no, why not?

79. Where you think you will be in five years time?

80. Where do you think you will be in five years time?

81. I would like you to reflect on the last 18 months, has your attitude to work changed?

Appendix 4

Consent Form

WOMEN AND THE WORKPLACE

Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. I am very keen to talk to you about your workplace and the work you undertake. Your answers will be very valuable and provide the basis for a thesis I will be writing. This thesis is part of a post-graduate study program I am currently undertaking at LaTrobe University. Your answers to the questions will be confidential. This means that your answer will not be identified, or quoted in the thesis unless I obtain your permission to do so.

This interview has seven sections:

1. In the first section I will be asking you some general questions about the type of education and training you have undertaken and whether you have any children.
2. Section two will be about your place of work.
3. Section three about your job and what you do in that job.
4. Section four will be about your conditions of employment.
5. Section five I would like to ask some questions about unions.
6. Section six is around your future plans in the workplace.
7. Finally, section seven is about family matters.

CONSENT

I agree to be interviewed for the Women and the Workplace project. I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions and that I may withdraw from the interview at any time. I also understand that my answers are confidential unless I give my written permission to have my replies quoted in the thesis.

Signed: Date:

Name:

CONSENT TO AUDIO TAPE INTERVIEW AND INCLUDE QUOTES IN THE THESIS

I give my consent to my answers to this interview being audio taped and included as quotes in the thesis. I understand that there will be no identifying details about myself or my family.

Signed: Date:

Name:

If you have any comments or queries about this interview, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor, at the School of Anthropology & Sociology, LaTrobe University.

Appendix 5***Outcomes of second round interviews.***

Pseudonym	Second Interview	Reason for non-contact	Same or different job	New job title. Promotion, demotion, sideways move
Anita	No	Did not have her home telephone number. Not listed in white pages	N/A	N/A
Amy	No	Left message on answering machine did not return calls	N/A	N/A
Belinda	Yes	N/A	Maternity leave	Pregnant with second child
Barbara	Yes	N/A	Same job title	Promotion with additional responsibilities & higher pay
Brenda	Yes	N/A	Retired	N/A
Bronwyn	Yes	N/A	Different job, new organisation	Accounts Officer. Sideways move working at same level as former job.
Christine	Yes	N/A	Same job, work at home.	On maternity leave with the birth of her second child.
Catherine	No	Left message on answering machine did not return calls	N/A	N/A
Cheryl	Yes	N/A	Same job	N/A
Cindy	Yes	N/A	Same job, new title	N/A
Clare	No	Moved place of employment no longer had a contact telephone number	N/A	N/A
Dawn	Yes	N/A	Same job	N/A
Dominique	No	Retired from paid employment, declined to comment further	N/A	N/A
Elaine	Yes	N/A	Different job, new organisation	Quality Co-ordinator, promotion

Pseudonym	Second Interview	Reason for non-contact	Same or different job	New job title. Promotion, demotion, sideways move
Eleanor	Yes	N/A	Same job	N/A
Fay	Yes	N/A	Different job, new organisation	Secretary/ Receptionist, demotion
Fiona	No	Moved home address, no longer had a contact telephone number	N/A	N/A
Gina	No	In hospital ill, unavailable to interview	N/A	N/A
Heather	Yes	N/A	Same job	N/A
Ingrid	No	Moved home address, no longer had a contact telephone number	N/A	N/A
Isobel	Yes	N/A	Different job, same organisation	Training & Development Officer, promotion
Lucy	Yes	N/A	Maternity leave	Was about to return to the same job on a part-time basis
Mary	No	Moved home address, no longer had a contact telephone number	N/A	N/A
Monica	No	Moved place of employment no longer had a contact telephone number	N/A	N/A
Miriam	Yes	N/A	Same job	N/A
Melissa	No	Moved place of employment no longer had a contact telephone number	N/A	N/A
Meredith	Yes	N/A	Different job, same organisation	Administrative officer, promotion
Meryl	Yes	N/A	Different job, same organisation	Administrative assistant, promotion

Pseudonym	Second Interview	Reason for non-contact	Same or different job	New job title. Promotion, demotion, sideways move
Pam	No	Moved home address, no longer had a contact telephone number	N/A	N/A
Paula	Yes	N/A	Different job, same organisation	Accounts payable team leader, promotion
Penny	Yes	N/A	Different job, same organisation	Acting team leader, promotion
Rachel	Yes	N/A	Same job	N/A
Sally	No	Left message on answering machine, did not return calls	N/A	N/A
Sarah	No	Moved home address, no longer had a contact telephone number	N/A	N/A
Selina	Yes	N/A	Same job	N/A
Samantha	Yes	N/A	Different job, different organisation	Architectural draftsman, promotion
Tracey	No	Diagnosed with breast cancer unavailable for interview	N/A	N/A
Tamara	Yes	N/A	Different job, different organisation	Temporary office worker, same level
Vera	No	Left message at workplace, did not return calls	N/A	N/A
Winona	Yes	N/A	Same job	N/A

Appendix 6

A short biography of each respondent

Pseudonym	Biography
Anita	<p>Age: 50-59 Marital Status: Single Residence: southern suburbs Children: two Age Dependent Children: none dependent Hours of work: Casual/PT – 24 hours Salary: \$10,001-\$20,000 Job title and role: receptionist/secretary Second Interview: not available</p> <p>Anita was born in the UK and came out to Australia some forty years ago. She had been working as a temporary office worker while establishing her own business. Anita had worked as a clerical worker all her life, taking time out to raise her family. She was reasonably flexible in terms of how far she would travel to seek work. At the time of interview she preferred to work about three days per week. Much of Anita's experience had been gained via self teaching and on-the-job training. Anita enjoyed the challenge of doing temporary work, in particular working in different office environments. However, she disliked the fact that did not know whether she would get a job from one week to the next.</p>
Amy	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Single Residence: southern suburbs Children: none Hours of work: Full-time - 45 hours Job title and role: Finance Secretary Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: not available</p> <p>Amy is tertiary educated having completed a Bachelor of Arts and post-graduate qualifications in psychology and management. She worked as a finance secretary and was frustrated that she had been overlooked for promotion within the large organisation she works simply because of her clerical experience. Amy does a large number of menial jobs and does not feel like she contributes significantly to the company. She had been looking for other positions elsewhere, but had found her age and lack of experience a hindrance.</p>
Belinda	<p>Age: 21-29 Marital Status: Married Residence: western suburbs Children: none first interview, one child and pregnant with the second child at second interview. Age Dependent Children: preschool Hours of work: at first interview: Full-time - 50 hours with Overtime Job title and role: Staff Travel Consultant Salary: \$30,0001-\$40,000 Second Interview: was on maternity leave and expecting her second child.</p> <p>Belinda worked for a large multinational company. She worked long hours because the area is grossly understaffed. She found this to be extremely stressful. Her main role was to issue travel passes to staff members across the organisation. This involved working at the front counter as well as behind the scenes in an administrative role.</p>
Barbara	<p>Age: 40-49 years Marital Status: Divorced Residence: eastern suburbs Children: two Age Dependent Children: 10 years Hours of work: full-time – 50 hours Job title and role: Administrator Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: Was employed in the same position but with additional responsibilities. She was doing more customer service, PR and sales work</p> <p>Barbara was employed as an office administrator in a small business close to home. She was a sole parent with one dependent child. In the past Barbara worked in a family business and her hands-on experience appealed to her current employer. Her job afforded her with autonomy and responsibility which she enjoyed. Although her primary role was to co-ordinate the running of the office, she was also involved with quite a bit of hands-on work such as typing, photocopying and filing.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Brenda	<p>Age: 50-59 Marital Status: Divorced Residence: eastern suburbs Children: yes Age Dependent Children: none Hours of work: full-time – 38 hours Job title and role: Secretary Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: yes. Had received a “package” from the university and was retired.</p> <p>Brenda had successfully ran her own business for many years and over a very long period had accrued a great deal of experience prior to commencing employment with a university. Brenda was employed as a senior administrative officer at the university. However, she was demoted from this position amid much turmoil to a lower level administrative assistant within one of the university's departments. At the time of the first interview Brenda was fighting an unfair dismissal case. As a result of her demotion she found her new job boring, repetitive and lacked a challenge. At the time of the first interview she was hoping to secure a redundancy "package" prior to retiring. At the time of the Second interview she had received that package and was retired.</p>
Bronwyn	<p>Age: 40-49 Marital Status: Married Residence: western suburbs Children: three Age Dependent Children: 21, 19, 18. Hours of work: full-time - 38 hours Job title and role: Accounts Receivable Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: At the time of the Second interview Bronwyn had received a redundancy package from her former job and had a new job as an accounts officer in a city firm.</p> <p>Bronwyn lived in the western suburbs and worked in accounts receivable for a local government. Bronwyn aged in her forties had taken ten years off paid employment to raise her family. Her return to work was initially on a part-time basis, she had only recently moved to full-time work with her job at the council. The work relationship with her superiors was described by her as acrimonious. At the time of the first interview she was fighting to protect her conditions of employment including over award payments and a nine day fortnight. As a union member she was ostracised by management and treated with a great deal of suspicion. Her main role at the council was to manage accounts which included bank and debtors reconciliations as well as arranging payments for outside contractors used by the council.</p>
Christine	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Married Residence: northern suburbs Children: two Age Dependent Children: 4, 1 Hours of work: part-time – 32 hours Job title and role: Administrative Officer Salary: \$20,000-\$30,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Christine was a qualified school teacher. She had returned to work part-time in an administrative support role after the birth of her first child. She worked in a government department and had the flexibility within her job to make it more challenging by doing more than the prescribed activities in her employment contract. She was given the freedom and relished the opportunity to extend herself and move into core business areas. Christine undertook a broad range of tasks in her job including requisitions and purchase orders, typing, filing, photocopying, desktop publishing, answering customer queries on the telephone, organising meetings, assisting with training trainees, providing advice on word processing, computer problems and was a general “fix it all”. At the time of the Second interview, Christine was on maternity leave with the birth of her Second child. She was planning to work for the government department from home on a part-time basis.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Catherine	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Married Residence: southern suburbs Children: None Hours of work: full-time – 55 hours Job title and role: Human Resources Officer Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: No</p> <p>Catherine was employed as an administrative assistant in the Human Resources (HR) area for a large construction company. She was undertaking tertiary training and hoped to move into the HR area in a more senior capacity. Her duties included assistance with recruitment and selection, performance appraisals and staff inductions, as well as general clerical work, typing and administration. She provided staff with information on issues such as sexual harassment and equal employment opportunity policy.</p>
Cheryl	<p>Age: 50-59 Marital Status: Married Residence: eastern suburbs Children: two Age Dependent Children: 20, 17 Hours of work: full-time - 60 Job title and role: Assistant to general manager Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Cheryl worked as a senior personal assistant to the deputy general manager of a partially privatised public utility. Her experience, skill level and commitment to her job are exemplary. In fact, some may argue that she goes beyond what is required of her without any recompense for her efforts. It was not uncommon for Cheryl to take work home each night and return to the office on the weekends. Cheryl was recruited especially for this position by her boss. Her role was much more than providing secretarial support, she had a more hands-on role which allowed her to take on some of her bosses work. At the time of the Second interview Cheryl was working in the same job but with a different manager. She was not happy with her new manager and had hoped to move with her old manager to the strategic area of the organisation.</p>
Cindy	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Single Residence: Western Suburbs Children: None Hours of work: full-time – 45 hours Job title and role: Receptionist/clerical assistant Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Cindy worked as a receptionist for a personnel company. She had completed VCE but did not go onto tertiary education. She regrets this decision but finds the prospect of combining study and work daunting. Cindy had a busy and responsible job and felt she was grossly underpaid for what she did. Her duties were broad and varied and included everything from flower arranging and food preparation to answering the phones, receiving people when they came into the office, payroll, work contracts, typing and ordering stationery. At the time of the Second interview Cindy was working in the same position but with a different job title. She was known as the Office Co-ordinator.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Clare	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Single Residence: northern suburbs Children: None Hours of work: part-time – 16 hours Job title and role: Accounts clerk/administrative assistant Salary: \$10,001-\$20,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Clare lived and worked in the northern suburbs. She was employed by a large community agency on a part-time basis as an accounts clerk/administrative assistant. Her duties included managing petty cash floats, data entry, general typing, purchase orders, cheque requisitions, reconciliations, general administration such as photocopying, ordering stationery and supplies. Clare had an acrimonious relationship with her boss and had considerable time off work due to a stress related illness. She was studying for a Bachelor of Theology and hoped to move into education at a later time.</p>
Dawn	<p>Age: 40-49 Marital Status: Married Residence: south eastern suburbs Children: Yes Age Dependent Children: 16 Hours of work: full-time – 45 hours Job title and role: Secretary Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Dawn lived and worked in the south eastern suburbs. She had been working as a secretary for a small business over the past fifteen years and as a result had become an indispensable part of their team. Her duties included client contact, preparation of tax returns, computer maintenance and general secretarial duties. Her workplace was close to home and was very convenient when the children were younger. Dawn described herself as a "continual worker" only taking the minimum amount of maternity leave to have her family. Dawn hoped to stay in her place of employment until her retirement. At the time of the Second interview Dawn was working in the same job with the same duties, her job title had changed from Secretary to Personal Assistant.</p>
Dominique	<p>Age: 40-49 Marital Status: Married Residence: western suburbs Children: six Age Dependent Children: one dependent aged 9 years Hours of work: full-time – 38 hours Job title and role: Office Manager Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Dominique was born in Italy. She lived in a newly built home in the western suburbs. She had a total of six children but only one was dependent. Dominique had always worked, only having short breaks to have her children. Her family needed two incomes to make ends meet. At the first interview, Dominique was fighting an unfair dismissal claim with her former employer. She was unemployed but had previously worked as an Office Manager with a small business. Her duties included preparing reports for board meetings, journals, bank reconciliations, payroll, money allocating and receipting as well as the supervision of other office staff. When contacted for a Second interview, Dominique had retired from the paid workforce and declined to comment any further.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Elaine	<p>Age: 40-49 Marital Status: Married first interview, separated Second interview Residence: eastern suburbs Children: two Age Dependent Children: 17, 11 Hours of work: part-time – 40 hours Job title and role: Records Manager Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Elaine lived in the eastern suburbs and worked for a large multinational organisation. After taking fifteen years off from paid employment to raise her family Elaine returned to work on a part-time basis, four days per week. However, the hours Elaine was expected to put in equated to full-time hours usually 36 hours or more per week. Elaine, a trained teacher, was offered a clerical position which she found fairly routine and not particularly challenging. Her duties included monitoring and recording incoming and outgoing correspondence within the company. She was also responsible for training staff on how to use the computer to access information on files and a library that held technical references, standards, subject files for certain departments, tenders and contract documents. On the Second interview Elaine had moved organisations and was no longer working in a clerical role. She was also working full-time having recently separated from her husband.</p>
Eleanor	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Married Residence: Northern suburbs Children: one Age Dependent Children: 8 months Hours of work: part-time – 36 hours Job title and role: Word processing officer Salary: \$10,001-\$20,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Eleanor recently migrated to Australia from Eastern Europe. She lived in the northern suburbs with her family including her parents who migrated a few months prior and her baby son. Eleanor was employed as the word process operator at a community organisation with a large multicultural base. Her duties included word processing, photocopying, sorting mail, arranging interviews for people for new positions, ordering stationery, booking buses and vans. She took five months maternity leave after the birth of her child. She was also studying a business degree part-time and was heavily involved in an ethnic newspaper which served her community. Eleanor is ambitious and hoped to establish her own business one day. She did not see family commitments as being a barrier to her career advancement.</p>
Fay	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Single Residence: Inner city Children: none Hours of work: full-time – 37.5 hours Job title and role: Secretary to the Managing Director Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Fay was in her early twenties and had left school in year 9. She had been unemployed for a considerable period of time prior to obtaining a youth traineeship. Fay was working in her Second job since completing the traineeship and had moved to an inner city firm where she was working as an executive assistant for considerably more money than her previous job. Her duties included typing, some accounts work, reception, filing and preparing presentations. However, she found the job boring and lacking in variety having come from a busy office where she did almost everything. At the time of the Second interview Fay had moved back to her parents' home in the southern suburbs and had found a job with more variety closer to home.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Fiona	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Married Residence: outer eastern suburbs Children: none Hours of work: full-time – 52 hours Job title and role: Executive Secretary Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Fiona worked and lived in the outer eastern suburbs. She was employed by a multinational company as a senior personal assistant. Fiona enjoyed her work including the level of responsibility, the social contact and flexibility. However, she found the huge volume of work quite stressful. Her duties included organising domestic and international travel, internal and external meetings, keeping her bosses diary up-to-date, ensuring her boss has the relevant documentation to take to conferences and meetings, prepare agendas for meetings and minute meetings. Fiona did not necessarily choose to become a secretary, but rather her marks at school determined her vocation. She felt she needed to pursue a career commensurate with her skill level having received As for secretarial studies and Cs and Ds for her other subjects.</p>
Gina	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Single Residence: Western suburbs Children: None Hours of work: full-time – 40 hours Job title and role: Personal Assistant Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Gina was from an Italian background and lived with her parents in the western suburbs. Although Gina completed VCE she did not undertake tertiary education, she moved straight into the workforce. She noted once she had the taste for money she did not consider further training. Gina was rapidly promoted from junior secretary to executive secretary for a large company. Her duties included typing, managing her boss's diary, making appointments, screening phone calls, buying her boss's lunch and preparing contracts and tenders. She described her boss as a difficult person to work with and took pride in having established a good rapport and working relationship with him.</p>
Heather	<p>Age: 40-49 Marital Status: Single Residence: eastern suburbs Children: one Age Dependent Children: 8 years Hours of work: part-time – 25 hours Job title and role: Receptionist Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Heather worked as a receptionist at an exclusive hairdressing salon. Prior to having a child Heather worked as a sales representative, but this did not accommodate the part-time hours needed to raise her child as a sole parent. Heather worked in an extremely busy and stressful environment having to deal with very difficult customers on a daily basis. Her duties included taking appointments for the clients, greeting them when they came into the salon, taking payments from clients, taking them to the operator and letting the operator know that their client was ready. She also co-ordinated the times with hair colourists and cutters so that the client's time at the hairdresser was minimised. She was aware that her employment conditions were not as good as they could be, particularly in relation to leave, work breaks, and pay. But she put up with these inconveniences because of the flexible work hours and free hair cuts. She was acutely aware of her lack of computer skills which would limit future employment prospects. At the time of the Second interview, Heather was working the same hours in the same job. The salon had become computerised and Heather had undertaken training to familiarise herself with the new way of doing things.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Ingrid	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Single Residence: southern suburbs Children: none Hours of work: part-time – 15 hours Job title and role: Telemarketer Salary: \$5,001-\$10,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Ingrid was employed as a telemarketer on a part-time basis. She was a university student in her early twenties who lived in the southern suburbs. Ingrid's reason for working was purely for financial gain in order to complete her studies. As a telemarketer her work was highly structured, she was given a script to which she was required to adhere. Her task was to try and sell books of raffle tickets for charities. Ingrid liked the money and the after hours work which fitted into her study routine.</p>
Isobel	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Single Residence: south eastern suburbs Children: None Hours of work: full-time – 45 hours Job title and role: Recruitment administrator Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Isobel was aged in her mid twenties and lived in the south eastern suburbs. She had undertaken welfare studies, but decided to change her career direction by undertaking a degree in training and development. Isobel was employed by a large bank as an administrative officer in the recruitment area. Her duties included organising interviews for candidates either by telephone or form letter, follow up queries in relation to salary and job descriptions, provide administrative support to the recruitment team, keeping statistics on recruitment across the bank and preparing monthly and weekly reports on recruitment activities. She hoped to stay in her current position for five years and after completing her study and on-the-job experience move to a more senior role within the organisation. At the time of the Second interview Isobel had indeed received a promotion and was working as a Training and Development Officer. She believed the clerical role enabled her to learn the ropes and provided a stepping stone to professional employment.</p>
Lucy	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Married Residence: northern suburbs Children: none first interview, one Second interview Age Dependent Children: one Hours of work: full-time – 40 hours Job title and role: Legal clerk Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Lucy was employed at a large legal firm in the city as a law clerk. Lucy enjoyed her work particularly dealing with clients on a daily basis, she also enjoyed the social interaction with work colleagues. Her duties included costing of files and sending out bills, keeping track of individual solicitor's budgets and the department's budget, chasing up debtors, dealing with new client enquiries which involved taking initial details when a client rang and then referring them to a solicitor. She also did instruction work prior to a matter being heard at court. This involved talking to the barrister and ascertaining what he or she required and ensuring that all documentary materials were completed on time. Other duties included training new staff, attending meetings and taking minutes, dealing with mail and follow up phone calls and the occasional piece of research. She found the long hours and large workload particularly stressful. At the time of the Second interview Lucy was on maternity leave and was negotiating with her employer to return to work on a part-time basis.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Mary	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Single Residence: inner city Children: None Hours of work: part-time – 15 hours Job title and role: Administrative Officer Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Mary was in her early twenties and worked as a contract graphic design/clerical worker for a government department. She was originally employed on a traineeship and had continued in a casual capacity in the same department. Her duties included general administration, answering phones, dealing with purchase orders and requisitions, designing flyers, newsletters and brochures. She lived in the inner city of Melbourne and dressed in an "alternate" style. She was aware that her appearance hindered her ability to seek employment elsewhere.</p>
Monica	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Single Residence: northern suburbs Children: none Hours of work: part-time – 20 hours Job title and role: Sales support/receptionist Salary: \$10,001-\$20,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Monica left school in year 10 and worked as a process worker for ten years until she developed RSI (repetitive strain injury). Monica had been unemployed for four years before starting a retraining and rehabilitation program to allow her to return to work. Part of the training was a course in clerical work. Monica was working part-time in her first clerical position at the time of the first interview. Her duties included filing, photocopying, sending faxes, organising couriers for dispatch of goods, monitoring incoming calls, data entry, word processing, customer enquiries, sorting incoming and outgoing mail, house cleaning every now and then and ordering stationary. She felt she was ready to increase her work hours for not only financial reasons but work satisfaction.</p>
Miriam	<p>Age: 40-49 Marital Status: Married Residence: southern suburbs Children: yes Age Dependent Children: no longer dependent Hours of work: part-time – 30 hours Job title and role: Customer service Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Miriam was in her forties and lived in a southern beachside suburb. She had two short breaks from paid employment to raise her now grown children. She had worked on either a part-time or full-time basis ever since. Miriam had only just started a new job when I interviewed her for the first time and she was unaware of her employment entitlements. She had just commenced work on an individual employment contract but had not been given any documentation. Her duties included processing new memberships, reception, banking and general office work. Miriam was still employed at the same job at the time of the Second interview.</p>
Melissa	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Married Residence: outer eastern suburbs Children: none Hours of work: full-time – 60 hours Job title and role: Executive Assistant Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>At the time of the first interview Melissa worked as the executive assistant to the Chief Executive Officer of a large company. Melissa took great pride in the years of hard work and on-the-job experience which she believed had entitled her to work in a senior secretarial position. Her duties included managing her boss's time schedules and his appointments to ensure he attended meetings on time, preparing documentation to take to meetings, organising travel and attending board meetings.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Meredith	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Married Residence: outer eastern suburbs Children: none Hours of work: full-time – 37 hours Job title and role: Secretary Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Meredith was a quietly spoken woman who worked at a tertiary institution as an executive assistant to the head of a department. Her duties included taking minutes at executive meetings, administrative tasks for the personnel department, inputting publications into a database, looking after post-graduate students, answering telephone calls and some typing including preparation of PowerPoint presentations. Meredith had a Bachelor of Business majoring in office administration and was about to start a Graduate Diploma in Accounting. Meredith lived in the outer eastern suburbs and found the travelling tedious. She would have preferred to work somewhere closer to home. At the time of the first interview she said she would work in her current job for another two years. At the Second interview she had changed jobs and was working in a different department in the same institution as an Administrative Officer with an accounts focus.</p>
Meryl	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Married Residence: Outer Eastern suburbs Children: none Hours of work: full-time - 50 hours Job title and role: Secretary Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Meryl was employed as a secretary in a large multinational company. She lived and worked in the outer east of Melbourne. She enjoyed the convenience of her workplace being close to home. Meryl acquired the job after she worked as a temporary office worker in the organisation and was then offered full-time employment. Her duties included typing, filing, organising travel, incoming and outgoing mail, answering telephones, photocopying, faxing and doing presentation work. Meryl had minimal Secondary education and no post-Secondary training. She had essentially acquired all her skills on-the-job. At the time of the Second interview Meryl was working as an Administrative Assistant in the same organisation. She regarded this change in job as a promotion.</p>
Pam	<p>Age: 40-49 Marital Status: Divorced Residence: northern suburbs Children: yes Age Dependent Children: no longer dependent Hours of work: full-time – 35 hours Job title and role: Membership clerk Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Pam lived in the northern suburbs and was from a Koori background. She had been a sole parent with dependent children for many years. She was employed by a large union as a clerical worker. All of Pam's training has been on-the-job. Pam's workplace provided her with not only income but invaluable social support and friendship. Her duties included answering phones, data entry, reception and dealing with incoming and outgoing mail. In comparison to the other clerical workers in this study, Pam had the best employment conditions of all respondents.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Paula	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Married Residence: northern suburbs Children: no Hours of work: full-time – 38 hours Job title and role: Accounting Officer Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Paula worked for a multinational bank in the accounts department. She originally worked as a temporary worker for twenty months prior to securing a permanent position. In Paula's view the job offered a high salary and congenial work environment. Her duties included dealing with accounts payable, paying creditors, dealing with internal queries, and preparing information relating to accounts for other departments. At the time of the Second interview Paula had received a promotion within the same organisation. She had moved to a supervisory position and was working as Accounts Payable Team Leader.</p>
Penny	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Defacto Residence: Northern suburbs Children: no Hours of work: full-time – 38 hours Job title and role: Financial services representative Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Penny had left school after year 9 and tried a number of different jobs such as fashion design and horticulture before pursuing clerical work. She worked for a large telecommunications company in a team leader position where she oversaw six other staff. Most of Penny's training had been provided on-the-job. Even the management aspects of her job had been provided in-house. Her duties included collecting outstanding money on corporate accounts, training new staff, co-ordinating her staff, co-ordinating the generation and sending out of 3,000 accounts per month and preparing reports. At the time of the Second interview Penny had been promoted to Acting Team Leader.</p>
Rachel	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Single Residence: inner city Children: none Hours of work: full-time – 45 hours Job title and role: Training Co-ordinator Salary: \$40,001-\$50,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Rachel worked for a number of years as a temporary secretarial worker before securing her job through an agency as the Training Co-ordinator within a large multinational organisation. Rachel worked very long hours to get through the huge amount of work she was expected to complete. Rachel enjoyed her job because it gave her a great deal of autonomy. Her duties included a lot of time spent on the phone, e-mail, faxing, answering queries about forthcoming workshops as well as the dissemination of information. She also provided confirmation to registrants and organised external conference venues. At the time of the Second interview Rachel was working in the same position although her list of duties and workload had significantly increased.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Sally	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Married Residence: western suburbs Children: one Age Dependent Children: 5 Hours of work: full-time – 55 hours Job title and role: Resource Co-ordinator Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Sally was employed by a personnel recruitment agency. She was able to type extraordinarily fast at 120 words per minute. Sally had also completed a Bachelor of Arts and was undertaking post-graduate studies. She lived in the western suburbs with her husband and preschool age child. Sally had been unable to tell her employer that she had a child for fear it may jeopardise her job. There was a perception at her workplace that employees with family responsibilities were less committed to their work. Sally enjoyed her current employment because of the good pay and flexibility offered by her boss. Her duties included typing, preparation of resumes, answering the telephone and filing.</p>
Sarah	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Single Residence: south eastern suburbs Children: none Hours of work: full-time – 38 hours Job title and role: Administrative Assistant Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Sarah was aged in her early twenties and lived in the south eastern suburbs. She had just completed a traineeship with a large multinational Australian business. The combination of on-the-job training and a TAFE course provided her with the necessary skills to work as an administrative assistant. Her duties included typing reports as well as the data input associated with these reports, answering phones, writing and typing memos, and the manual distribution of material within the various departments in the organisation. She had hoped to stay in her current place of employment for a number of years.</p>
Selina	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Single first interview, married second interview Residence: inner city Children: no Hours of work: full-time – 37 hours Job title and role: Administrative assistant/receptionist Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Selina was from a non-English speaking background and lived in the inner city. Selina worked as receptionist/administrative assistant in a department of a large tertiary institution. Her duties included reception, preparing stationary orders, providing assistance to anyone who required it, accounts and general typing. Selina left school in year 11 and completed a two year secretarial course. One of the most important aspects of work for Selina was having a secure job. At the time of the Second interview Selina was working in the same job where her duties had increased. Her contract was due to expire at the end of the year and she was intending to reapply for her own job.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Samantha	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Single Residence: outer eastern suburbs Children: no Hours of work: full-time – 38 hours Job title and role: Architectural draftsperson Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>At the time of the first interview Samantha had just finished post-Secondary training and was embarking on the world of work for the first time. Her first job had not been successful as an unscrupulous employer had taken advantage of her. She had not been paid and consequently left that job. Samantha was not employed as a clerical worker per se, but much of her job entailed reception, administration and clerical support. Samantha was still learning about her entitlements such as sick leave, annual leave or even whether she was entitled to be paid on public holidays. At the time of the Second interview Samantha had secured a full-time job in an architectural firm and was working solely as an architectural draftsperson.</p>
Tracey	<p>Age: 40-49 Marital Status: Divorced Residence: eastern suburbs Children: Yes - 2 Age Dependent Children: 10, 13 years Hours of work: casual Job title and role: Temporary word process operator Salary: \$20,001-\$30,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Tracey was a sole parent and worked as a temporary word process operator to fit in with her family commitments. She did temporary word processing but was also employed as a temporary executive secretary. Tracey had worked as a clerical worker all her life, taking short periods of time off to have her children and then returning to work on a part-time basis. Tracey was hoping to secure full-time employment, but had not found any job she wished to undertake on a full-time basis. She liked the flexibility of temporary work because it allowed her to take time off to attend to family matters, particularly during school holiday periods.</p>
Tamara	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Single Residence: inner city Children: none Hours of work: casual Job title and role: Temporary office worker Salary: under \$5,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Tamara was in her early thirties and had just completed tertiary studies at the time of the first interview. She was working as a temporary clerical worker and was looking for full-time work where she could use the skills gained during her degree. Tamara did not have typing and word processing skills, so was limited in the types of casual work available to her. As a result, she was constantly frustrated by the boredom and repetition in many jobs, the insecurity of temporary work and its low pay. At the time of the Second interview, Tamara had not secured professional employment, but had worked in two long term temporary assignments. She was still seeking permanent full-time work.</p>

Pseudonym	Biography
Vera	<p>Age: 20-29 Marital Status: Married Residence: northern suburbs Children: none Hours of work: full-time – 60 hours Job title and role: Personal Assistant Salary: \$30,001-\$40,000 Second Interview: no</p> <p>Vera worked as an executive assistant for a large union. Vera had planned to undertake tertiary studies after year 12, but secured her present union job. She found her job challenging and rewarding but did not see the need to explore further study. Her duties included managing her boss's appointments, taking minutes, organising venues for rallies and big demonstrations as well as general secretarial duties such as typing, photocopying and answering the telephone. Vera was expected to work the same long hours as her boss, although there was some give and take in relation to having time off to attend appointments and so on.</p>
Winona	<p>Age: 30-39 Marital Status: Divorced Residence: eastern suburbs Children: yes - 1 Age Dependent Children: 5 Hours of work: part-time – 20 hours Job title and role: Executive Assistant Salary: \$10,001-\$20,000 Second Interview: yes</p> <p>Winona worked for the Chief Executive Officer of a small community based organisation. Her duties included attending board meetings and taking minutes, assisting the Chief Executive Officer and his staff, preparing correspondence, reports, newsletters, maintaining the internal filing system and photocopying, Winona was a sole parent and worked part-time to suit her family needs. At the time of the Second interview Winona was happily working in the same job.</p>

Appendix 7

TABLE: Clerical duties by respondent name (based on what the respondent said they did in their job)

Pseudo- nym	Answering phones	Reception	Data entry	Inward outward correspond- ence	Stuffing envelopes	Photo- copying	Collating	Referrals	Protecting confidential- ity	Typing	Prepar- ing reports	Organis- ing travel	Stationery	Faxing	Research	Budget work	Maintain- ing a bring up system	Filing	Purch- asing	Record keep- ing
Anita	X	X				X	X			X				X				X		
Amy	X			X		X	X			X	X			X					X	
Belinda	X	X	X			X				X		X		X					X	X
Barbara						X				X										
Brenda	X			X					X	X	X						X			
Bronwyn	X		X		X															X
Christine	X		X			X				X	X		X		X			X	X	
Catherine	X								X	X								X		X
Cheryl	X			X		X				X	X				X			X		
Cindy	X	X		X						X								X		
Clare	X		X	X	X					X			X					X		
Dawn			X								X									X
Dominique	X					X					X					X				
Elaine				X											X			X		X
Eleanor	X	X			X	X				X	X	X						X		
Fay	X	X								X	X							X		
Fiona	X			X		X			X	X		X						X		
Gina										X	X									
Heather	X	X																		
Ingrid	X																			
Isobel	X									X	X									
Lucy	X			X			X	X		X	X				X			X	X	X
Mary	X					X	X			X									X	
Monica	X	X	X	X	X	X				X			X	X						

Pseudo- nym	Answering phones	Reception	Data entry	Inward /outward correspond- ence	Stuffing envelopes	Photo- copying	Collating	Referrals	Protecting confidential- ity	Typing	Prepar- ing reports	Organis- ing travel	Stationery	Faxing	Research	Budget work	Maintain- ing a bring up system	Filing	Purch- asing	Record keep- ing
Miriam		X																		
Meiissa	X			X					X			X					X			
Meredith			X			X			X	X	X				X			X		
Meryl	X	X		X		X				X		X		X				X		
Pam	X	X	X	X	X															
Paula	X										X					X				X
Penny	X															X				
Rachel	X			X						X		X		X				X		
Sally	X									X	X							X		
Sarah	X			X		X				X				X				X		
Selina	X		X	X	X	X	X			X			X	X				X		
Samantha										X										
Tracey	X									X								X		X
Tamara	X	X													X					
Vera	X	X							X	X		V								
Winona	X	X		X		X	X			X	X			X				X		

Pseudonym	Liasing with clients/ customers	Write letters	Keep statistics	Prepare agendas and minutes	Database maintenanc e	Powerpoint presentations/ presentation work	Account keeping/ petty cash	Email	Keep a diary	Organising venues	Food formal/ informal	Policy & procedures	Pay- roll	Liasing with manage- ment/staff	Organisi ng manage- ment	Flower arranging	Managin g staff	Desktop publishing/ design flyers	Costing of services
Anita	X							X											
Amy																			
Belinda	X							X						X					
Barbara	X													X	X		X		
Brenda	X	X	X																
Bronwyn			X				X						X	X					X
Christine	X	X						X		X	X			X				X	
Catherine	X											X		X					
Cheryl	X	X		X				X	X	X	X	X		X	X				
Cindy	X										X		X	X		X			
Clare		X					X												
Dawn	X													X	X				X
Dominique	X						X						X	X	X		X		
Elaine		X										X		X			X		
Eleanor																			
Fay						X	X												
Fiona		X		X					X	X				X	X				
Gina	X								X		X								
Heather														X					X
Ingrid	X																		
Isobel	X	X	X							X				X					
Lucy	X	X		X										X					X
Mary																		X	
Monica	X				X		X							X					
Miriam	X																		
Melissa				X						X					X				

Pseudonym	Liasing with clients/ customers	Write letters	Keep statistics	Prepare agendas and minutes	Database maintenance	Powerpoint presentations/ presentation work	Account keeping/ petty cash	Email	Keep a diary	Organising venues	Food formal/ informal	Policy & procedures	Pay- roll	Liasing with manage- ment/staff	Organisi ng manage- ment	Flower arranging	Managin g staff	Desktop publishing/ design flyers	Costing of services
Meredith				X	X				X										
Meryl						X													
Pam	X				X														
Paula	X				X		X							X					X
Penny	X						X							X			X		
Rachel	X	X						X		X	X				X				
Sally	X		X	X	X	X	X			X			X	X				X	
Sarah																			
Selina																			
Sanantha		X																	
Tracey	X																		
Tamara							X												
Vera				X					X						X				
Winona		X		X					X	X				X	X				