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'Women for Hire: An Analysis  
of the Factors Influencing  
Attitudes to Work Among  
Female Temporary Clerical  
Workers.'

Fiona McNally

Master of Philosophy

1978

University of Durham.

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## ABSTRACT

Although office work is now the single most common occupational category in which women are located, our understanding of the 'white-bloused' worker remains fragmentary and heavily informed by untested assumptions about female orientations to work. This thesis is primarily concerned to breach this gap in our knowledge and to challenge the assumption that women are simply passive bystanders in the world of work.

The first part of the thesis represents a synthesis of sociological and other material relevant to an understanding of the nature of female participation in the white-collar labour market. Particular attention is paid to the factors which inhibit both job satisfaction and promotion opportunities for the female clerk. This section is also concerned to identify the range of available responses to the problems and dissatisfactions encountered by women in this sphere of employment, and, in this way, develops the theme of women as active agents in the determination of their working lives.

The second part of the thesis is devoted to a detailed analysis of women working as temporary office staff through the medium of the private employment agency. The temporary office worker is shown to be symptomatic of the disadvantages attaching to female status in the white-collar labour market, and as illustrative of women's capacity to negotiate and manoeuvre within the constraints which confront them in office employment. The discussion is based upon the findings deriving from a variety of research methods and incorporates an examination of the role of the private employment agency as an occupational gatekeeper, simultaneously extending and circumscribing women's opportunities to shape the course of their work careers.

The thesis concludes with a critical review of past and present perspectives encountered in the sociology of female employment, and suggests a number of issues to which future research in this area might usefully be addressed.

"It may be suitable that the women should have their turn on the stage when the men have quite finished their performance."

(from: The Republic of Plato)



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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 1970's there has been a steadily growing and increasingly strident body of criticism directed at the way in which sociologists have traditionally researched and represented female members of society. Much of the criticism has come from within the discipline itself, although it seems fair to say that the original stimulus for this examination of the sociological conscience lay in the neo-feminist movement which developed in the late sixties. The main themes of this critique have been, firstly, that women as a group have been neglected in the principal areas of empirical research; secondly, that an implicit sexism has characterised the dominant theoretical traditions in sociology; and thirdly, that the study of gender relationships has failed to progress beyond a narrow interest in patterns of sexual differentiation within the family context. The relatively low status of family sociology has itself impeded the development of a more sophisticated understanding of domestic relationships and organisation. The outcome of this critique has been a proliferation of literature concerned to reorient the manner in which sexual divisions are both conceptualised and investigated.

It is evident that one area in sociology which is very much in need of both a theoretical reorientation and a more abundant literature based on empirical research is the study of women in the labour market. A number of reservations may be expressed in relation to both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the existing material. Concerning quantity, one may note that the presence of women in the labour force has certainly been acknowledged by sociologists, but it is also true that the coverage has not been proportional to the degree of female participation in the work sphere. Occasionally, women have been accorded

little more than footnote status in some major empirical studies of work situations where both sexes were represented. Fashions within industrial sociology have played their part in rendering women an under-researched group. A mixture of preference, availability of funds, and contemporary trends has contributed to a diminished interest in organisational behaviour and a corresponding rise of interest in the field of industrial relations. Given women's relatively lower rate of union membership as compared with that of men, and given their significantly lower activity rates in the sphere of union affairs, it was perhaps inevitable that they should have become somewhat invisible in recent literature. This circumstance, however, forms only part of the explanation for the paucity of the material. It has been suggested that procedural difficulties may also account for the neglect of the female labour force:

"Women tend to work in smaller firms, and often on a part-time basis. Their rate of mobility between firms is likely to be higher than that of men. The employer may see high labour turnover as an indictment of the pay and conditions he offers, and not encourage the scrutiny of outsiders. Thus women may be difficult to 'get at' to be studied at all." (1)

The author of this passage, however, was of the opinion that the theoretical preoccupations of industrial sociologists were of greater significance in accounting for the neglect of women workers, and I share this view. If procedural problems really represent such an insuperable difficulty for research, then it is impossible to account for the existence of many excellent studies devoted to the most personal and sensitive areas of human life.

Quite apart from the general inattention to women at work, it is also the case that within the literature which has addressed itself more directly to women's participation in the labour market, certain categories of female employee have received considerably greater attention than others. It has been widely noted that the chief focus of interest has been the phenomenon of the working wife and/or mother. A great deal of research

has been concerned to account for rising rates of economic activity amongst married women since World War II, and to assess the impact of this trend upon familial relationships. Such studies have been largely characterised by what might be termed a 'deviance' perspective, since the central aims of the research appear to have been to provide an explanation for the unexpected and to identify the degree of disruption in family life which might follow from such a trend. Whilst all energies were therefore directed towards placing the working wife under a microscope, attention was diverted away from other categories of female employees, such as those first entering the labour market.

The paucity and selectivity of the literature represent major causes for dissatisfaction with the sociology of women at work, and these problems have been compounded by a number of qualitative deficiencies. In the first place, sociologists, in the past, have been more than willing to take their theoretical cues from the currency of popular stereotypes. The tendency for members of the discipline to confirm rather than to inform the popular wisdom in this area has been noted by Sheila Rowbotham (2). She claims that sociologists have proved that women are 'naturally' suited to certain types of work. They have observed that women are frequently employed in boring, monotonous and routine jobs and therefore conclude that this is because women's chief attachment is to the home. It is felt that because of this preference, the nature of the work is subjectively unimportant, just so long as it brings in enough money to pay for little extras for the house, or helps to stave off the occasional feeling of isolation in the domestic environment. An example of this line of reasoning may be drawn from the widely recommended 'A' level textbook, 'The Science of Society', in which Cotgrove speculates upon the reasons for the increasing participation of married women in the labour force:

'Such changes do not necessarily imply a shift of interest on the part of women away from their traditional role as wives and mothers to a growing interest in and pre-occupation with work. Although

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this may be a trend for women who have a professional training and career, the great majority of working wives use work instrumentally as a source of income to be spent on the home - on refurnishings and decorations, durable consumer goods, holidays and clothing for the family, and only secondarily because they are lonely or bored. The increase in working wives is, in fact, perfectly consistent with the growth in home-centredness. Such women put their families first and are not interested in promotion.' (3)

In putting forward this opinion, Cotgrove articulates a widely held view of women's attitudes, often confirmed in conversation or by observation. Yet the apparent unwillingness to explore more systematically the many sources of female home-centredness, where it exists, must be challenged. According to this popular stereotype, Britain's post-war economy offers women the opportunity to realise their modest ambitions, and women passively, naturally and happily accept subordinate status in the labour market. Another viewpoint might, however, stress the lack of choice and opportunities which necessitates resignation to one's fate and which renders an attachment to the home an understandable response to the fact of limited alternatives.

It is this inattention to the economic opportunity structure for women which represents a second major weakness of the literature. Whilst we now know a great deal about the growth of suburban housewives in the labour force, and whether or not this has created problems for their families, until recently we have had a correspondingly poor understanding of trends in the market position of women as a group. Insufficient attention has been paid to the function of women as a reserve army of labour and to the way in which changes in the economic climate of the country have effected their individual or collective bargaining power. There has been little attention to the barriers to satisfaction and/or advancement which prevail in the workplace, such as limited training opportunities or discrimination by employers and unions. The analysis of women's participation in the labour force has instead concentrated on the constraints arising in the domestic sphere, such as the attitudes of husbands and relatives, and obligations towards children and other dependants.

The net effect of the sociologist's predilection for popular stereotypes and inattention to the broader economic context of female participation in the labour market has been the reinforcement of a partial and unsatisfactory understanding of women at work. Moreover, the failure to systematically examine the factors influencing women's attitudes towards their jobs has enabled the belief to prevail that women attach little importance to promotion or to interesting work. Indeed, one may say that the nature of women's orientations to work represents the most conspicuous area of neglect as a subject for empirical investigation.

It is true that the recent growth of interest in women's position in society has done much to rectify the problem of general neglect. The claim that women in the labour force have been ignored becomes increasingly untenable given the amount of new publications which are concerned to describe and account for sexual differentiation within the labour market. It remains the case, however, that there are very few published studies which examine women's attitudes to work in a particular occupational context in a systematic manner. The aim of this research, therefore, is not only to offer a descriptive account of a mode of female employment hitherto neglected in the literature, but also to undertake an investigation of the diversity of factors which influence women's attitudes to work.

The particular focus of this study is represented by women in routine white-collar employment. Women constitute an overwhelming majority of those employed in this sector of the labour market and clerical work is the single most common form of occupation among women. For these reasons alone, the subject of female participation in the white-collar labour market merits a great deal more attention than it has so far received. The present research is to some extent concerned to remedy this deficiency by undertaking a synthesis of what can only be described as an impoverished and extremely scattered literature. However, even if one assembles the scraps of information in order to develop an idea of the nature of women's participation in this sphere of the labour

market, an important lacuna still exists, namely, an understanding of the attitudes which women actually hold towards this kind of work. The research is therefore centrally concerned to identify and to account for women's orientations towards routine white-collar work. Fundamental to this particular focus of the study is the assumption that factors both within the workplace and beyond it are of relevance for an understanding of work attitudes. To this extent it represents a departure from the work which has already been done in this area of female employment.

In order to highlight the configuration of circumstances surrounding not only occupational choice, but also changes in attitudes to work, I decided to conduct my research amongst female temporary clerical workers - those whose services are hired by firms from private employment agencies. Although the inevitable criticism which would be made of this strategy is that such workers may be greatly unrepresentative of women as a whole, or even of other clerical workers, it must be pointed out that the intention is not to provide information from which to generalise about all women, but to offer some insight into the diversity of factors which influence women's perceptions of their jobs. Moreover, the phenomenon of temporary work illustrates, par excellence, the manner in which women can manipulate and actively manoeuvre within a structure of limited economic alternatives. As we have seen, all too often, women have been characterised as passive, reacting agents, with limited occupational aspirations created by their socialisation experiences and domestic circumstances. For many women, it may well be the case that work is regarded as an unfortunate economic necessity, or that it is seen as very much a secondary activity to the main business of running a home and looking after children. This should not blind us, however, to the possibility that discontentment with the home environment may drive some women to seek alternative satisfactions in the labour market, or that other women may experience boredom with their work for want of responsibility, interest or variety. Their attempts to find



alternative solutions to their problems, even if sometimes founded upon an incorrect appraisal of the available alternatives, belie the notion that there exists a typically feminine orientation to work. To a very great extent, the study of women in temporary clerical employment illustrates this capacity for an active pursuit of personal satisfaction from work as well as the necessity for compromise in the face of restricted opportunities.

This study, then, incorporates a shift of focus away from the domestic circumstances of working women towards the nature of their work situation and their attitudes towards their jobs. It does not assume that female orientations to work are fixed solely by their upbringing and education and later by their domestic obligations, but explores the extent to which they are sustained, modified or frustrated by the experience of work itself.

In view of the points elaborated earlier, it will be apparent that it is essential to give consideration to a much wider range of sociological issues than the research findings themselves directly illustrate. If one is to avoid the tendency towards oversimplification and stereotyping noted above, then one has to draw upon a whole range of information pertinent to the subject of female clerical workers. Chapter Two is an analysis of women's economic participation from both a historical and contemporary perspective. It outlines the changing character of economic opportunities for women and the way in which women's association with the domestic environment has evolved since the early period of industrialisation. The intention is to demonstrate the historical structural constriction of their economic opportunities and the role of ideology in legitimating certain responses and adjustments on the part of women to this situation. That women's aspirations can be thwarted as well as fostered by changes in the economic climate will be demonstrated. It also examines the contemporary position of women in the labour market. One of the main aims of this section is to detail the ways in which job opportunities for women continue to be

circumscribed, in spite of recent attempts to legislate for equal pay and equal opportunities. Chapter Two also includes an extended discussion of sociological literature which deals implicitly or explicitly with the question of women's work attitudes. Chapter Three examines the existing literature concerning white-collar work. The majority of studies have focused on males occupied within this sector, but have nevertheless generated a great deal of information which is of direct relevance in the present context, particularly in relation to sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with white-collar work. Chapter Four concentrates exclusively on female office workers. It is essential to take full account of women's experience in the permanent sphere of office work if one is to comprehend the resort to temporary employment. It has been necessary, because of the dearth of relevant sociological literature, to draw mainly upon non-academic sources of information. It is not difficult, however, to fully document the disadvantages attaching to female status in this sector of the labour market, and material from a wide range of sources has been used to show how women experience and react to restricted opportunities.

Chapter Five examines the phenomenon of temporary labour and the role of the private employment agency. Although the principal focus of this research is represented by those employed in a temporary capacity, it is important to consider the activities of the agencies themselves and the extent to which they help or hinder women's attempts to ameliorate their work situation. Chapter Six incorporates the findings of my research among female temporary clerical workers. The discussion is based upon the results of a postal questionnaire issued in 1971/72 to women working in three areas of the country, and the results of a short period of participant observation which I undertook in 1971. The intention is to examine not only the general characteristics of women in temporary office work, but also the extent to which this mode of employment represents an occupational safety-valve for women whose work opportunities are otherwise greatly circumscribed. The findings are also used to illustrate the proposition that women's experience of work represents an

integral component of their attitudes towards it. In this way, I intend to demonstrate the redundancy of the idea that a woman's attitude towards work is usefully accounted for purely in terms of her gender or position in the life cycle.

In the final chapter, the broad conclusions of this study are presented and are discussed in relation to both past and present orientations in sociological literature.

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## CHAPTER 2. WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE

The study of women within a particular occupational context must be located within a broader analysis of the historical and contemporary nature of women's participation in the labour market. This affords a breadth of insight which can usefully inform the way in which one interprets the data yielded by a single investigation. There is now a copious literature describing women's work activities, both past and present and it is not possible, therefore, to offer anything but a very abbreviated summary of the available information. The aim here is not so much to present an exhaustive survey of the literature as to provide a framework within which to interpret the findings generated by my own study of women in temporary clerical employment.

### 1. Women at Work - a Historical Perspective

'Another error into which we easily fall through the shortness of our memories is the idea that women, were, of old, excluded from the economic life of society, and are now reluctantly and gradually being admitted into the masculine sphere of work. This is a misrepresentation of facts. Before the agricultural and industrial revolution, there was hardly any job which was not also performed by women. No work was too hard, no labour too strenuous, to exclude them. In fields and mines, manufactories and shops, on markets and roads as well as in workshops and in their homes, women were busy, assisting their men or replacing them in their absence or after their death, or contributing by their own labour to the family income.' (1)

Any attempt to interpret and account for contemporary attitudes to work amongst women must refer itself to the social and economic location of women in the structure of modern society. However, both the structural position of women and the attitudes which they adopt in today's world have evolved slowly over several centuries and it is essential, therefore, to take account of the legacy of past generations. In the explanation of work attitudes, the widely noted practice of failing to look 'beyond the factory gates' is paralleled by an equally widespread failure to probe the mists of time. A historical perspective casts light not only on the most crucial changes in the social and economic position of women, but also on some of the current mythologies concerning their 'natural' role which are used to

legitimate their unequal treatment in the labour market.

An examination of the part played by women in the economy of pre-industrial Britain greatly undermines the notion that the capacity for motherhood necessarily entails a marginal role for female labour. The experience of this period also discredits the belief that women are capable of performing only a narrow range of tasks. The 17th century economy was largely agrarian, with domestic textile production playing a secondary, though important, role. In the towns there was a growing number of retail trades and there were opportunities for employment in the service of skilled craftsmen. Whilst there was therefore some degree of occupational diversity, most people derived their living from the land. The basic unit and most common locale of production was the family home, although men, women and children might hire their labour elsewhere on an occasional basis in order to raise the standard of living afforded by domestic enterprise. Women worked alongside their menfolk in the fields and there was only a very rudimentary division of duties along sex lines. Production, for both the family's immediate requirements and the market, was based on collective endeavour, and thus the dominant mode of economic organisation was not characterised by the well-defined sexual division of labour that was to come in a later period. At this time also, some women earned a living in occupations with which they are no longer associated. According to Oakley, they were prominent as small traders in the beer and breadmaking industries and some even worked as smiths. (2)

While the modern conception of woman stresses her responsibility for the rearing of children, this period of history provides us with a different set of possibilities. Women bore many children, but the high incidence of infant mortality meant that few survived into adulthood. Booth has suggested that the care of, and attitudes towards young children may have reflected the precarious nature of their existence. (3) In other words, they may not have received the degree of attention and preparation for adulthood that

they do today. Moreover, when children did survive, they were expected to play their part in the productive process from an early age. For these reasons the presence of young children did not represent a major impediment to the economic participation of women.

Not only were women widely represented in the occupational structure and fully able to contribute to the business of making a living, but they also enjoyed a considerable measure of economic independence. Oakley has assembled an impressive array of evidence in support of her view that husbands were not expected to be responsible for the maintenance of their wives.(4) She maintains that a woman's earnings were not perceived as a mere supplement to those acquired by the male but as the source of her personal livelihood. Moreover, although common law and church doctrine sanctioned the subordination of women to their menfolk, there was an extensive body of legal provisions which upheld the status of women as individuals both within the family and beyond it.

Many of the women who were married to members of the middle ranks were active in their husbands' enterprises. According to Knowles, 'When the home was over the shop, the wife helped to run the business and marriage was as much a business partnership for the shop-keeping and trading class as it was for the artisan or farmer classes.' (5)

In aristocratic families, women, like their men, remained aloof from the process of direct production.

The pre-industrial period, then, does not offer much support for the contemporary notion that a woman's economic role is purely marginal. This is not to say that her daily round was then more satisfying or less demanding. The conditions of life were extremely harsh, and much of the work must have been arduous and physically debilitating. Nor can it be argued that men and women experienced a position of economic equality. Apart from the fact that the law granted men property rights in their womenfolk, the rates of pay which women could command in the agricultural labour market had long been lower

than those obtaining for their male counterparts. Yet the lesson which we may draw from this period is that women are capable of executing a much wider range of tasks than is now assumed, and that a purely domestic existence is by no means the inevitable destiny of the female. A woman's capacity to survive did not depend on her husband's willingness to support her but on those circumstances which affected men and women equally, namely a favourable climate, good health, and a market for labour and goods. The largely domestic and dependent existence for the married female implicit in the concept of the sexual division of labour owes its origins to a later phase in British history.

Of course, the preconditions for economic dependency on the part of married women were well advanced by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Patriarchy had long been upheld by the Church and common law, and the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which occurred between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, prepared the ground for a more complete extension of this ideology to the economic relationship between husband and wife. After the Restoration in 1660, landownership became increasingly concentrated, and the growing practice of enclosure was intended to facilitate a more productive and hence profitable use of land. It has been estimated that as much as half the English countryside had been enclosed by 1750. Corresponding to these developments was a progressive decline in the opportunities for self-sufficiency on the part of the mass of the working population. Initially, this led, not so much to rural depopulation as to the creation of a rural proletariat - a growing army of persons dependent on the sale of their labour power for their means of subsistence. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the English peasantry had been virtually eliminated and the vast majority of rural inhabitants were dependant on wages. In this way, the independence of the family as an economic unit had been steadily undermined by the economic transformations occurring in the three centuries prior to the Industrial Revolution. As yet, however, the cohesion of the family as an economic unit was preserved due to the continuation of



domestic industry as a major basis for commodity production.

The next stage in the evolution of the sexual division of labour was the growth of factory production. It was this development which brought about the physical separation of home and workplace, and which ultimately led to the functional differentiation of husband and spouse. In the early phase of factory production, the economic roles of the sexes were not greatly transformed. Women followed their men to the factories and the unity of the family as an economic unit prevailed in those places where couples and their children were employed together.(6) In 1835, women represented 46% of all factory based textile workers, but those who attempted to reconcile motherhood with factory employment exposed themselves and their children to the risk of permanent ill-health or death.(7) At this time the incidence of infant mortality among the children of factory workers was approximately 45%, and it is not surprising, therefore, that married women eventually came to represent a minority of the females in this type of employment. Quite a number of factors contributed towards this development. Firstly, there was a steady decline in the practice of employing entire families together in one workplace. As Oakley has pointed out, this necessarily created a problem of responsibility for the care of young children.(8) Secondly, there was a gradual introduction of legislation governing the employment of children which converted them from economic assets into economic liabilities. The possibility for parents or employers to exploit loopholes in the law was finally removed with the introduction of compulsory education. Again, a custodial role for the parent was implied by this development. Thirdly, the association of married women with the home and the care of young children was further encouraged by the introduction of legislation designed to regulate the

employment of women themselves. Legislation was advocated on the grounds that the employment of married women in factories and mines was detrimental to both the health and morals of the present and future workforce and would lead inevitably to the disintegration of the family unit. The reasoning behind these assertions, however, was based on a compound of fact and fiction. There can be little doubt that the working conditions in which many women found themselves were highly injurious to their health and that of their babies, but then the wretched circumstances of female agricultural workers likewise took a heavy toll in human life. Regarding the moral disposition of the females in factory employment, the evidence that this was in decline was not substantial. Indeed, a Factory Commission in 1833 concluded that vice and immorality was no more prevalent among this group of workers than amongst others of their social level.(9) There was also little foundation for the view that the institution of the family was hurtling towards annihilation. As Anderson has suggested, it was often the case that the woman's earnings prevented the dissolution of the family through poverty and destitution.(10) Yet, even though the assertions concerning the moral implications of female factory employment were contested at the time, the arguments carried considerable emotional weight among many groups within the population and ultimately found expression in protective legislation. In this way, the theme of familial neglect represented, as it does to this very day, a powerful ideological constraint upon the economic activities of women.

Taken together, these developments created a situation in which married women began to be identified spatially with the home as distinct from the workplace. At the same time, their functions became sharply differentiated from that of their spouses. A woman's role was to fulfil a man's basic requirements, to act as custodian of his children and to ensure a modicum of comfort in the family home. Although, a wife might work outside the home, and indeed, as late as 1851, one-quarter of all married women were thus

occupied, her contribution was increasingly regarded as supplementary to that of the male breadwinner.(11) Economic independence for the married woman was a thing of the past. The single working-class girl experienced a short-lived economic independence, but once married, the opportunity to support herself was effectively terminated.

The lifestyles of wives of men belonging to the middle stratum of society were similarly increasingly circumscribed by social and economic developments during the first half of the 19th century. The opportunity to participate with the husband in a businesslike partnership in the workshop or dairy diminished as the scale of trading activity increased. The wives of the new class of industrial capitalists were obliged to adopt a posture of inactivity. The new entrepreneurial class was anxious to gain acceptance with the traditional social elite, consisting of the landed gentry. Acceptance depended on the ability to display the appropriate social credentials - to acquire, as Banks has put it, the paraphernalia of gentility.(12) The wives of the nouveaux riches became instrumental in the process by which it was possible to manifest affluence and status. They were required to do little else except remain at home and issue orders to the servants, who were themselves charged with the task of looking after the house and children. Adorned in the finest lace and jewellery, these women testified to their husbands' wealth by their total inactivity.

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, industrialisation had led to substantial changes in the nature of women's economic participation. A sexual division of labour was becoming firmly established and an ideology which postulated domesticity as the natural destiny for women had arisen to confirm it. At the very root of this development was the change in the mode of economic organisation. However, a number of other features of the social and economic structure of the period reinforced the trend. Firstly, the dearth of formal educational provision effectively limited the range of economic

opportunities which were open to women. Working class boys and girls alike seldom received regular instruction, and that which was provided consisted of a narrow curriculum whose main aim was to provide a moral rather than a vocational training. The daughters of the middle classes might receive instruction from a governess or at a private school, but in both situations the main emphasis was on an education in female accomplishments and the acquisition of the social graces.(13) The aim of this education was to equip girls with the qualifications necessary to attract a male in what was a very competitive marriage market. As such, it effectively constrained, rather than extended their social and economic horizons.

Secondly, the range of economic opportunities for women was decreasing. Certain occupations, according to Oakley, were becoming masculinised.(14) These included, for example, certain branches of medicine which women had hitherto practised with considerable success, notably midwifery and dentistry. To some extent, this narrowing of opportunities may be attributed to the strategies of those men who had come to regard women as economic competitors.

Thirdly, women's freedom of action was severely limited by the large number of children which they bore and which subsequently survived. The average completed family size for those marrying between 1861 and 1869 was 6.16. This figure takes no account of the total number of confinements experienced by the average woman. In the mid-19th century, the expectation of life of a woman aged 20 was 46 years, and one third of these years would be spent rearing children. For many women, this lifetime of confinements and childcare represented a substantial, physically debilitating burden. In view of this, it is not difficult to comprehend why marriage was increasingly regarded as a major constraint upon, if not the termination of a woman's activity beyond the home.

Finally, the legal position of women greatly strengthened their economic dependence on man. Whereas much of the law enacted in pre-industrial times sought to uphold the individual rights of women, the legislation of the mid-19th century appeared to bolster their subjection. For example, although civil divorce first became available in 1857, the very high cost of litigation

meant that it was a luxury which few people could afford. It was not until 1878 that magistrates courts were given the power to grant separation orders, thus bringing some relief to working class wives, but the level of maintenance was extremely low. From 1886 to 1949, the maximum amount that could be awarded to a wife was £2 per week. The statistics of enforcement suggest that many women with orders had to resort to the poor law, owing to destitution.

From the dawn of the Industrial Revolution to the middle years of the 19th century, then, women's lifestyles were increasingly circumscribed. However, the fact that women are capable of resistance to structures of oppression is clearly demonstrated by the experiences of the period between 1850 and the First World War. These seventy years were a time of bitter struggle for women, and there were few aspects of the prevailing social arrangements which were not questioned by them. The feminist movement was a protracted, courageous quest for emancipation and was by no means confined solely to the middle classes.

The improvements which took place in the status of women during this period owed a great deal to the feminists, although it would be a mistake to attribute all the changes to the activities of women themselves. While feminists were very concerned to extend the range of educational opportunities, particularly at the tertiary level, increased access to formal schooling was an inevitable result of the State's recognition of the social and economic benefits of educational expansion. Similarly, the decline in family size which began in the last quarter of the 19th century was inextricably bound up with a deterioration in the economic climate. In the realm of economic opportunities, the most marked change of the period was the growth of clerical employment among women, but this was predicated upon the rapid growth of administration and commerce.

The feminists, from the earliest days, had campaigned for a very wide range of reforms. Increasingly, however, the issue of suffrage became the central concern. Political representation was, after all, fundamental to the acquisition of a better deal for women. The campaign, increasingly

militant, testifies to the redundancy of the belief that women are inherently passive and acquiescent. As Gardiner has pointed out, however, the feminist movement was largely concerned to secure liberal reform rather than revolution.(16) After the war, the vote was won and many improvements in women's legal status were acquired. Yet the prevailing mode of organisation of production, domestic labour and childcare remained intact, and the division of responsibilities between men and women persisted accordingly.

Between 1914 and 1950 it was war rather than feminism which had the greatest impact on women's lives. During both World Wars it became necessary to recruit female labour on a large scale, not only to staff the war industries, but also to replace men on active service. The importance of this development was that it demonstrated the capacity of women to perform jobs normally performed by men. However, during World War I, the trade unions and the government collaborated in an attempt to ensure that this situation would not prevail in peacetime. Moreover, during the Depression, widespread unemployment, coupled with the low degree of unionisation among the female labour force, meant that jobs went to men rather than to women. The inter-war economy firmly established the dependency of married women upon their husbands. After World War II, the augmentation of the female labour force was maintained, largely because of the growth of clerical work in both the public and private sectors and the growth of manual jobs in the light engineering, chemical and electrical industries. These occupations were perceived as women's work and consequently, male labour did not feel threatened by the growth of female labour in these spheres of employment.

One of the most significant developments since the last War has been the erosion of the norm of domesticity for married women. In 1911, 10% of married women worked outside the home. This had risen to 22% by 1951, and in 1974, the proportion had grown to 49%.(17) The largest increase in the proportion of married women at work has occurred among the 35-54 age-group. The explanation for this development is to be found in terms of post-war economic

trends and a greater ability and willingness to work among married women, largely due to changes in their domestic circumstances.

Post-war economic developments were highly favourable to a growth in the employment of married women. The expansion of the service industries - especially the public services - entailed a vast growth in the number of available jobs. In the 50's there was virtual full employment, labour was scarce, and this situation was exacerbated by the expansion of educational opportunities which deprived the workforce of new recruits among the lower age-ranges. Moreover, due to the increasing incidence of marriage during and after the 1940's, there were fewer available unmarried women. Given these circumstances, married women represented the only domestic reserve of labour for the expanding occupations. Thus, their growing participation in the economy was very much contingent upon the existence of an acute shortage of labour.

Until very recently, the continuing growth of the service sector has created a sustained demand for female labour. Moreover, the concentration of women in the service sector has protected them from the full effects of the economic recession of recent years. Between 1967 and 1977 the number of women in the labour force increased at the same rate as the number of men decreased.

It is also necessary to consider the factors which have propelled married women out of their homes and into the workforce. Demographic trends have played a considerable role. Since World War II women have been marrying earlier than they used to. From 1901 to 1931 the average age for first marriage among women was approximately 25.6. In 1951, it had fallen to 24.6 and in 1974 to 22.7.<sup>(18)</sup> Coupled with post-war trends in childbearing practice - the closer spacing of births and the small number of children that women typically bear - the decline in marriage age means that a woman is theoretically able to return to part-time or full-time employment in her mid-thirties. In other words, many mothers have at least half their working life ahead of them

by the time their last child has reached school age. Yet demographic trends do not explain the motivations which lie behind the decision to resume employment. A reduction in the time which women spend in producing and rearing children merely performs an enabling function, that is, it accounts for the ability to pursue work outside the home. Much ink has been spilt in the attempt to identify the reasons why married women have seized the opportunity to re-enter the labour force and there is no agreement as to what represents the chief motivation. In a later section of this chapter the various arguments will be examined within the context of a detailed discussion of women's attitudes towards work. For the present, it may be said that the post-war rise in the employment of married women represents a further example of the way in which women are able to take an active role in the determination of their own existence. When women have previously acted in the capacity of a reserve army of labour it has been a circumstance imposed upon them. When they came to play this role again after the War, however, it was largely the result of a spontaneous and collective unwillingness to accept that a woman's place was in the home.

Throughout history, men and women alike have been constrained into the adoption of certain attitudes and patterns of behaviour by their upbringing and by the nexus of ideological and structural forces encountered in adult life. However, it is essential to recognise that acquiescence is not an inevitable nor universal response to the fact of limited options. The processes which make for widespread adherence to the prescribed norms are deep-rooted and substantial, yet this does not preclude resistance nor the desire for individual or collective change. Although the lesson of history is that the role of women is very much dependent upon the nature of the economic structure, it is also clear, especially from the experience of the feminist movements, that their subjective attitudes are not always consonant with the accompanying ideological prescriptions. Industrial capitalism ushered in the concept of female domesticity and dependency, and the assumption that a woman's ultimate



destiny is in the home remains firmly entrenched in spite of the challenge to this supposition represented by post-war trends in female employment. Yet, there have clearly been times when women rebelled silently or vociferously against the social and economic bondage implicit in the sexual division of labour.

## 2. The Contemporary Position of Women at Work

'There are over 25 different jobs the Women's Royal Army Corps could train you for! Anything from clerical work to being a kennel maid. You'll work hard but you'll enjoy it. Start a new life in the New Army.'

(Advertisement in Honey, 1972)

There are now more women in full-time and part-time employment outside the home than at any other time during this century. The purpose of this section is to examine the nature and extent of women's participation in the labour force at the present time as a prelude to a more detailed analysis of female employment in routine white-collar occupations. The themes which present themselves in relation to clerical employment can be shown to characterise the structure of employment opportunities for women more generally, namely, limited promotion prospects, inflexible attitudes on the part of employers towards women with domestic obligations, and lower levels of status and remuneration than those experienced by male workers.

### a) Economic activity rates

The level of economic activity amongst women may be expressed in a variety of ways. In 1971, 38% of the total workforce were women, whilst the overall activity rate for women was nearly 43%. Approximately 87% of all women of working age have worked at some time in their lives.(19) Activity rates for both single and married women vary regionally, the highest rates being in the West Midlands and the South-East, and the lowest in Wales, but the differences are diminishing. Activity rates are also correlated with age, so that the 25-29 age group exhibits the lowest rate, whereas the 45-49 age group exhibits the highest.

Married women now represent 62.1% of all female employees. Married women with young children form the largest group among the economically inactive population, yet the number of females with small children who do work is quite substantial. 17.8% of married women with children aged under 5 and 45.8% of those with children of primary school age are economically active. However, age-specific activity rates show that there has been a drop in activity rates for women aged 25-34 in recent years. This is the time when women typically have dependent children. Whereas in the Soviet bloc and Communist China, governments have been obliged, mainly through labour shortage, to take measures which enable women with young children to work, the British Government has been less willing to accommodate the female population. We may assume that this is due to a number of reasons, including ideologies about family life, the fluctuating economic fortunes of this country and existing priorities in the allocation of resources. Unless there are marked changes in the labour requirements of this country, it is most unlikely that there will be any change in the economic activity rates of women with children under 5. Contrary to what might popularly be supposed, women themselves are not entirely content with this situation. The 1971 General Household Survey found that:

'39.1% of all females intending to work some time, but prevented from working by the need to look after their children, would have brought forward their plans to return to work if satisfactory arrangements could have been made to look after their children.' (20)

It is interesting to note that women represent one in five of the chief economic supporters of households in Britain. Although the majority of these women are single, separated, divorced or widowed, and it is impossible to identify how many are actually the chief breadwinner in a husband-wife relationship, such facts clearly do not square with the notion that women are invariably supplementary earners.

A picture thus emerges of a great deal of economic activity amongst women, and an expressed wish to join the labour force by many of those whom

ideology, personal anxiety, inadequate childcare facilities and the desire to be a good wife and mother have made redundant. Of course there are many women who do not wish to work under any circumstances. However, the decision not to work, where a real choice exists, should not be greeted with alarm, as though it represented a major 'problem'. Freedom lies not in work, but in the ability for women and men to pursue whatever course they wish within a wide range of alternatives. This clearly is not the case at the present time.

b) Types of employment

There has been a tremendous increase in the numbers of working women since the war, but there has been no corresponding increase in the quality of jobs available. Female labour has been characterised as forming part of what is referred to as the secondary labour market:

'Dual labour market economists suggest that the job structure of the economy can be divided into two, sometimes three, distinct sectors, usually just a primary and a secondary sector. Primary sector jobs have relatively high earnings, good fringe benefits, good working conditions, a high degree of job security and good opportunities for advancement, while secondary jobs have relatively low earnings levels, poor working conditions, and negligible opportunities for advancement, and a low degree of job security.' (21)

According to this model, there are few training opportunities for secondary workers and no hierarchical structure of skills and rewards, so that workers in the secondary sector remain there throughout their working lives. Amongst such employees there are high rates of both voluntary and involuntary turnover, the former due partly to the fact that little reward attaches to remaining permanently within the workforce, and the latter may be due to the calculated use of such workers by employers to meet short-term needs. There is little doubt, when one examines the distribution of women in the labour market that a great many are concentrated in what might be called a secondary sector. However, since there are also many women in the primary sector, it must be recognised that there is no necessary relationship between women and secondary status. Yet the concept of a dual labour market does represent a useful advance in the study of working women since it shifts

the analytic focus away from factors in the home towards the economic determinants of a differentiated labour market.

As a result of this shift of emphasis, there is now a growing interest in the inter-relationships between capitalism, patriarchy and labour market segmentation along lines of gender. It has been suggested that sexual differentiation in the labour force, whether conceived of in terms of a dual labour market, or in terms of reward and status hierarchies within particular occupations, is a phenomenon rooted in patriarchy, yet which serves to bolster capitalism by maintaining divisiveness and competition within the working class. According to this view, sexual divisions in the labour market may be compared to racial and ethnic divisions in so far as they are both felt to militate against the development of a cohesive class consciousness. The idea that capitalism has annexed the long-established efforts of men to maintain a position of relative economic advantage is, at first glance, highly persuasive. However, since this debate has been conducted mainly at a theoretical level, it has yet to be shown whether this alignment of patriarchy and the 'needs' of capitalism occurred due to the conscious effort of employers, or whether it was simply fortuitous. Until such time, if ever, as intentionality can be conclusively demonstrated, there is the danger that the void will be filled by a naive, somewhat conspiratorial model of employer behaviour.

Having noted that there is a growing level of theoretical sophistication in the analysis of sexual divisions in the labour market, the next task is to present an overview of the location of women within the contemporary industrial and occupational structures. One of the most significant characteristics of female employment is occupational concentration. According to the 1971 census, three-quarters of all working women were listed under four of the twenty-seven occupational categories. These were: clerical workers (29%); service,

sports and recreation workers (23%); professional, technical workers and artists (12%); and sales workers (11%). Conversely, .9% of women were administrators and managers, .1% painters and decorators, and .2% gas, coke and chemical workers. Although there is a degree of concentration of men in the 'engineering and allied trades workers not elsewhere classified' category (16.9%), males are more evenly distributed throughout the range of occupations.(22) Although figures do vary slightly from year to year, there is in fact a remarkable stability in the occupational distribution of the female workforce.

Women are also concentrated in certain industries. According to the 1971 Census, more than half of all female workers are employed in three main service industries. No similar pattern of concentration may be observed among men. Women outnumber men in several industries, including clothing and footwear, the distributive trades, and insurance, banking, finance and business services. They represent a tiny minority, however, of those in construction, and mining and quarrying.

The point to be made here is not that we should bemoan the under-representation of women in dangerous and unpleasant forms of work such as mining and construction, but that a large proportion of women are concentrated in low-paying jobs within the low-paying industries where there are few opportunities for advancement. Many men find themselves in demanding jobs with low pay and poor working conditions, but even with the breadwinner millstone around their necks, circumstances may often favour their extrication from such situations. Both assumptions about physical strength and also precedent mean that men can at least move into unpleasant jobs which are

highly paid, if that is their inclination. A married woman who opted for this would probably have to overcome the prejudices of male co-workers as to her suitability for the work and her husband's objections to moving house.

Although one should be cautious in ascribing characteristics to certain occupations without reference to the opinions of employees themselves, it seems fair to say that many of the jobs women do, particularly in manual work, are extremely repetitive. An Open University film entitled 'Biscuits' demonstrated very clearly the machine-like nature of women's tasks in a food factory. For hours on end women scooped up handfuls of biscuits and slotted them into containers which whizzed past on a conveyor belt. A colleague of mine who visited a pharmaceutical factory encountered women employed all day long on the task of weeding out mis-shapen cod liver oil capsules. There is no shortage of examples of what women's work has come to mean. It is unlikely that repetition will cease to be a widespread feature of female employment in the near future. The continued use of women in these types of jobs is often justified in terms of a belief in their natural suitability for the work - manual dexterity and a capacity for endurance are held to be innate female talents. Such reasoning mystifies the fact that the use of women in this way represents a cheap alternative to investment in machinery (23).

The concentration of women in low-skilled, low status jobs providing little work satisfaction is partly due to the fact that few women experience job training. It is often claimed that this is due to the attenuated ambitions of women themselves. Mackie and Pattullo, however, argue that while there may be some truth in this view, training opportunities for women are generally deficient. They state that in the distributive trades for example, training on the job is often haphazard and inadequate and that the operation of self-fulfilling prophecies denies women the chance of acquiring skills, promotion or prospects.(24) Even if women do display a reluctance to pursue the training opportunities which are available, it must be recognised that cultural forces encourage this. In its advice to the Committee on Sex

Discrimination, the Institute of Careers Officers stated:

'...girls' horizons are likely to have become restricted by social pressures even before they have considered a career ...attempts to encourage girls...were sometimes frustrated by the influence of the boy-friend.' (25)

In spite of the expansion of training opportunities since the war, women continue to receive little training in skills other than those traditionally associated with them, and men are much more likely to receive vocational instruction. Neither employers nor the government have done a great deal to change this situation.

Concentration and lack of promotion prospects similarly characterise the employment situation of qualified women. These are defined as women with qualifications above the standard of GCE A-level. A majority of both males and females who are qualified are located in the category of professional, technical workers and artists, but the concentration is much greater amongst women. No less than 89% of women who have qualifications above A-level, but below degree level are found in this category, compared with 59% of men.(26) According to Hanna, 'nothing indicates the inequality of men and women more starkly than an analysis of top jobs in industry and the professions.' He found that there was a heavy concentration of professional women in nursing, teaching and social work. Whereas almost one third of graduates from medical schools are women, they represent only 7% of hospital consultants. Under 3% of practising solicitors are women and they represent only 4% of senior executives listed in the I.P.C. Directory of Publications and Services.(27) The Civil Service has often claimed to be more pioneering in its recruitment patterns, yet women form a tiny proportion of those employed at the most senior levels. In 1974 there were 24 females and 793 males in the top posts. Many women who attain positions of high status and reward in professional and managerial occupations are unlike the majority of women of similar age, in that they are often single, divorced or separated. Hanna points out that of the total of 3% female members of the Institute of Directors,

one-quarter have never married, one-fifth are widowed and one in ten is divorced or separated (28).

Apart from the fact that women represent a minority of managers in all industries, the percentage of female managers varies according to the industry concerned. According to the 1966 Census, they represented 16% of managers in the clothing and footwear industries, but only 3.6% of those in the engineering and electrical goods industries.(29)

Oakley notes that since the time that women achieved the major breakthrough of acceptance into those professions which were formerly practised by men only, there has been little advance in the proportion of women in such occupations.(30) She maintains that the major stumbling block to future advancement is that qualified women face a problem of 'structural ambivalence'. As women, they are expected to display 'feminine' characteristics, namely a low level of career aspiration, submissiveness, and a marked orientation to the domestic environment. As educated individuals, however, they are expected to seek career advancement and to display initiative and a marked capacity for persistence and drive. The two sets of requirements are incompatible, with the result that women, for fear of being regarded as masculine or sexless, opt for the safe, traditional occupations where their femininity is not called into question and where they do not seek to outpace their male colleagues in the competition for promotion.

Whether or not this is the case, there is no doubt that the pattern of employment among qualified women has a great deal to do with their educational backgrounds. The scarcity of women in management and certain professions is related to the subject choices made by girls at secondary school and to their chosen courses at the level of higher education. For example, in 1972, whereas 49% of boys entered for 'A' level science and technical subjects, only 24% of girls did so.(31) In the same year, 5% of girl school leavers went to colleges of education, whereas only 1.4% of boys did so. These patterns are the outcome of the effects of years of broad cultural pressures, the



attitudes of peers and parents, and the attitudes and expectations of teaching staff. The educational decisions represented by these figures have major implications for the range of jobs which a girl may pursue upon entry to the labour market.

Career advancement is difficult for married women since they are likely to have to leave their occupation for several years in order to have children. A break of this kind may disadvantage a woman who wishes to resume her career, since she may be judged to have lost touch with the skills or knowledge in which she formerly specialised.

According to Fogarty and the Rapoports, career advancement is particularly difficult in the case of the two-career family, that is, where both husband and wife are in high-level occupations. They found, from their research, that most wives in dual-career families accept that it is hard for them to make long-range plans for their own careers because ultimately, the interests of the husband's career come first.(32) This theme of the primacy of the husband's plans is also mentioned in the Pahl's study of 86 managers and their wives. Although the attitudes of the wives, most of whom were not working, varied according to their upbringing, education, work experience, and relationship with their husbands, most of them considered a job for themselves as secondary to the demands of the husband's career. Since they moved frequently, in the spiralist fashion of many middle-class couples, the wives were unable to gain sufficient experience in one job or area as a basis for progress in a career.(33)

The jobs that women do are a function of a wide range of factors. The accumulated experiences of childhood and adolescence effectively channel women into a narrow range of occupations and industries. Long established ideas about what a woman is capable of doing, physically and mentally, continue to colour the attitudes of employers and militate against the development of a more pioneering spirit in their attitudes towards training and promotion. The idea that women are merely supplementary earners is used to justify the exploitation of female labour as a cheap alternative to machinery. Domestic responsibilities represent a major impediment to the occupational advancement of married women and even single women may find that their capacity for motherhood is used to justify covert discrimination by employers. The relative disadvantage of women in the labour market is the inevitable outcome of this nexus of circumstances.

c) Part-Time Work

Over one-third of all working women are in part-time employment, which is defined as thirty hours or less per week. Part-time work is very much a female phenomenon since only one in twenty males work similar hours.(34) Over 80% of women in part-time work are married, which reflects the problems inherent in the attempt to reconcile work with domestic commitments. Three industries account for 69.1% of all females working part-time. These are, professional and scientific services; the distributive trades and miscellaneous services.

It is important to give some attention to part-time women workers because they represent a minority group within the labour force. According to an IDS survey in 1975:

'many part-time workers are not allowed sick pay or holidays; they may be the first to go in a redundancy situation and not be covered by guaranteed work agreements. They are also less likely to be covered by pension schemes and often lose out on promotion, training and similar opportunities.' (35)

Part-time women are doubly disadvantaged - firstly because they are women workers and secondly because they are likely to experience inferior

conditions and remuneration, and prospects. This does not seem to have deterred more and more women from taking up part-time employment. Between 1961 and 1971 the total number of females working part-time in the manufacturing industries rose by 85,000. During the same period the numbers in full-time employment in manufacturing fell by 405,000. According to a Department of Employment report in 1975, women seeking part-time work are expected to be the main constituent of future growth in the labour market.(36) In some occupations there are more women seeking part-time employment than there are openings. This means that some women are obliged to work more hours than they would wish, and consequently they face major difficulties in the attempt to reconcile the dual demands of home and workplace. This problem exemplifies the extent to which women may have to adapt if they wish to work. Employers in this country have displayed a marked reluctance to grant concessions to women requiring special hours. Instead of adapting the conditions of employment to suit the needs of the female labour force, which would lead to reduced absence, lower turnover and better performance, employers demand that women make all the adjustments.(37)

d) Trade Unions

Women are often thought to be highly unwilling to join unions and even anti-union. Yet there has been a substantial increase in trade union membership amongst women during the last thirty years, and women are currently joining unions at twice the rate found among men. In 1939, women represented 11.4% of T.U.C. membership, whereas in 1977, the proportion had grown to 28%, so that now, over one in four of the Trade Union Congress members is a woman.(38) At the same time, there are very few women officials or shop stewards. This might be expected perhaps in a union such as the A.U.E.W., where women make up only 11.7% of the total membership, but it is rather surprising to find that there are only five women compared to 147 men acting as fulltime officials in the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, 54% of whose members are women.(39) A survey conducted in 1975 covering 62 unions, found that there

were only 71 fulltime female officials compared to 2,259 males. (40)

Undoubtedly, the lower rates of union membership and activity among women may partly be explained by women's own attitudes. It may be that especially in those occupations which women have only recently begun to enter, there is a feeling that unions are for the men, that the business of bargaining for better wages and conditions is more directly related to men's role as the chief breadwinner. In a television series on women at work, a number of women spoke about their feelings on the subject of campaigning for equal pay and better job prospects and many expressed these traditional views. Some women regarded their husbands' economic activity as far more important than their own, and did not want to force any measures which might have the effect of undermining their spouse's role as chief earner and head of the household.(41)

This is only part of the picture, however, and we should be cautious in attributing women's lower levels of membership and participation solely to traditional attitudes amongst them. One of the major obstacles lying in the path towards greater union density among women is the dispersed nature of much of the female labour force - trade unionism is usually strongest where large numbers of people are employed. This is particularly problematic in the case of shop work, where there are only a few employees at any one place of work, and where, in addition, there is a high rate of labour turnover. Another problem, especially in relation to active participation in union affairs, is that union life is geared to male social patterns. Meetings are usually held outside working hours in a local pub or club at a time when married women are usually preparing the evening meal or putting their children to bed, and in an age when women who enter pubs unaccompanied may still be confronted by suspicious stares from the other clientele.(42)

A further inhibiting factor is the attitude of the union hierarchy, which is dominated, as we have already noted, by men. The unions have long professed to be on women's side - the TUC called for equal pay in 1888 - but since, in the past, they have also secured a number of agreements which were indubitably discriminatory towards women, we must regard their campaigning zeal as somewhat

Janus-faced. A notorious example of union hypocrisy recently came to light. Many decades ago, the postal workers' union secured an agreement with the Post Office which defined the job of a postman as a man's job, and guaranteed sickness benefit and holiday pay to those who were employed as postmen. Women could be employed by the Post Office but they were to be called 'Temporary Postal Workers', and therefore not entitled to the same benefits. Not long ago, it transpired that there was a woman in Birmingham who had been employed as a temporary postal worker for no less than thirty years.

During the 1970's, the unions have been much more active than previously in the area of women's rights and many have established working parties to look into the position of their female members and that of women generally in their particular field of employment. The TUC organised a special conference on sex discrimination in 1976 and it has also designed an equal opportunity clause for inclusion in labour agreements negotiated by affiliated unions.(43) A number of unions supported the Working Women's Charter introduced in 1974 which incorporated recommendations extending far beyond the traditional terms of reference of the unions. The Charter was even debated, albeit unsuccessfully, at the 1975 TUC Congress.(44)

It would be a mistake to assume that this apparent burst of philanthropy on the part of the unions is simply due to a twinge of conscience. It is probable that their heightened degree of activity on behalf of women has more to do with their urgent need to recruit new members. Women represent an important source of potential revenue to the unions, and consequently the latter have been obliged to take women's interests much more seriously than they have done in the past. Whether or not they will be successful in this endeavour remains a matter for speculation, since the response of employers and government to any union pressure on the subject of women's rights is likely to be determined by future patterns in labour requirements and the norms dictating resource distribution.

It cannot be denied that in terms of the conventional indices of union-

mindfulness - membership, participation, and strike activity, women do not begin to compare with their male counterparts. However, it is clear that the differences cannot be adequately explained in terms of simplistic assumptions about innate female dispositions. Moreover, recent trends in union behaviour among women suggest that the traditional stereotypes are fast becoming redundant. Not only has there been a marked increase in union membership among women, but there is evidence that women are increasingly willing to display their economic strength in the form of a strike.

e) Legislation

During the last few years there has been a much trumpeted attempt by the government to secure an improvement in women's status through the enactment of legislation. One of the factors contributing to this development has been the pressure for change exerted by such groups as the N.C.C.L. within the more general context of the movement for women's liberation. However, less well-publicised pressures have also been at work. Britain's membership of the E.E.C. formally obliged the government to enact measures designed to improve women's position. For example, Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome requires that member states maintain the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work among male and female workers. The attempt to introduce a greater measure of sexual equality is an international phenomenon, although there is considerable variation in the extent to which the effort has been successful. The British experience is a story of missed opportunities.

The Equal Pay Act of 1970 was the first serious attempt to alter women's historic role as a primary source of cheap labour. The lower rates of pay usually received by women compared to men had long been justified in terms of the argument that most women only worked for pin-money, but the social climate of the late sixties rendered this reasoning more and more unacceptable. Prior to the enactment of this legislation, earnings had increased for all employees since 1948, but there remained a substantial difference between the average earnings of men and women. The following figures give some indication of

the dimensions of this discrepancy in the year of the Equal Pay Act:

Average Weekly Earnings - Administrative, Technical and Clerical

Employees, U.K., 1970

Manufacturing Industries

Males .....£36.49

Females .....£15.44

Average Weekly Earnings - Manual Workers, U.K., 1970

Manufacturing Industries

Men (aged 21 and over) .....£28.91

Boys .....£13.67

Women (aged 18 and over) .....£13.98

Girls .....£9.46

Source: Facts in Focus (Central Statistical Office, 1972)

The Equal Pay Act came into full force on 29th December, 1975, and during the last few years there has been a considerable improvement in the relative earnings of men and women. In the early nineteen-seventies, the ratio of women's to men's hourly earnings in fulltime adult manual work stood at approximately 60 per cent, as it had done during the previous thirty years. In 1973 and 1974, however, women's hourly earnings relative to those of men rose to 67%. Improvement also occurred in the sphere of non-manual work at this time. In 1970, median hourly earnings for adult female non-manual workers stood at 53% of the earnings of males. By 1975, however, the ratio had risen to 60%.(46) Figures for 1976 provided by the Department of Employment reveal further progress. Female manual workers' average hourly pay was 70% of that of males, and female non-manual workers' average hourly pay was 63% of that of their male counterparts. According to Jackson, the recent improvement can reasonably be assumed to have resulted in part from equal pay legislation.(47)

However, it is manifestly clear that there still remains a large difference

between the average hourly earnings of men and women in both manual and non-manual occupations. The differential is likely to continue in the future because these variations reflect the concentration of women workers in low-skilled jobs in low-paying industries and their relative absence from high-paying industries. If we consider figures relating to 1972, we find that only 7.8% of full-time manual men and 2.8% of full-time non-manual men were low-paid, compared with 70.3% of full-time manual women and 38.6% of full-time non-manual women.(48) Differences in gross earnings between men and women are partly explained by the greater propensity among men to do overtime, shiftwork, work during unsociable hours and work away from home, but the occupational distribution of the female labour force is of crucial significance in accounting for differences in hourly earnings. Thus while the greater rate of increase in earnings for women in recent years is often described as progress towards equal pay, there is no doubt that we shall never attain that goal so long as there are unequal opportunities for training and employment. Moreover, when one examines the Equal Pay Act itself, further doubts arise as to whether we may realistically expect equal pay to materialise in the future. Clause 1a carries the implication that in order for a woman to claim equal pay, she has to be in a situation where there are men doing equivalent work. Since many jobs are almost wholly performed by women, however, notably textile machining, typing and canteen work, there is no basis for a claim in such occupations. Clause 5 states:

'A woman is to be regarded as employed on work rated as equivalent with that of any man, if, but only if, her job and their job have been given an equal value, in terms of the demand made on a worker under various headings (for instance effort, skill, decision).' (49)

In response to this recommendation, many employers used the intervening five years between the enactment and the enforcement of Equal Pay, to full advantage. According to Rowbotham, the Engineering Employers Federation issued a confidential document to their members which informed them about ways of avoiding paying women the male rate for the job.(50) These included



investing in labour-saving machines, introducing job evaluation and having strict segregation of the sexes at the workplace. Members were also advised to reconsider the value of employing women in certain jobs and to give special attention to the problems of absenteeism, turnover rate and reliability with which women were associated. Obviously, not all employers have displayed this degree of unwillingness to honour the spirit of the Act, but clearly there has been plenty of time to engage in such practices if that is the preferred course of action. Most employers who object to the idea of equal pay maintain that since women are less reliable than men they should not have to pay them equal rates. Reliability is judged in terms of the incidence of absenteeism, late arrival, labour turnover and the willingness to work overtime. That women generally do score less well than men on all these criteria cannot be denied, but this can probably be explained in terms of the lack of skill, interest and responsibility in the jobs they perform, and in terms of the demands made upon them by their domestic circumstances.

In recognition of the inadequacy of an equal pay act without a corresponding movement towards equal opportunities in employment and training the Conservative Government introduced a Green Paper entitled 'Equal Opportunities for Men and Women' in September 1973. There was a great deal of controversy as to whether the Tory Government's proposals would really be effective in creating equal opportunity or whether it represented only a very half-hearted step in that direction. The proposed legislation included a large number of exempted jobs - where it would still be permitted to discriminate on the grounds of sex. For example, one could select a man (or woman) in preference to the other sex 'where it would be offensive to public taste or decency' to do otherwise. There was no major attempt by the Tories to tackle education or the provision of goods and services, such as mortgage or credit facilities, or problem areas such as entry to pubs. The Conservative Government did, however, propose the establishment of an Equal Opportunities Commission which was intended to oversee the workings of the law.

The 1973 proposals were upstaged by the Labour Government's own version

of anti-discrimination legislation which was introduced in September 1974, and which became law in 1975. It was far more comprehensive in scope than its predecessor in that it set out to eliminate sex discrimination (with some exceptions) not only in the sphere of employment, but also in the provision of goods, facilities and services such as housing accommodation, loans and credit. It was intended to complement the Equal Pay Act, and an Equal Opportunities Commission was empowered to conduct inquiries and investigations and to take action to promote equality of opportunity.

However, it has now become evident that a major discrepancy exists between the promise and the practice of the Sex Discrimination Act. According to a report in the Sunday Times in February 1977, the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission has been conducted on a very modest scale. After one full year of operation it had initiated only a single formal investigation, made no direct intervention in employment practices, failed to initiate any major research, had difficulty in spending its publicity budget and had generally kept an extremely 'low profile'.(51)

Luise and Dipak Nandy maintain that while the Act is 'one of the most far-reaching pieces of anti-discrimination legislation yet seen' there are profound limitations to what it can achieve.(52) They claim that there are three sources of sexual inequality, the first being direct discrimination such as when women are refused entry to a pub, the second is the effect of past discrimination, an example of which would be the effect on women's employment prospects of inferior careers guidance, and the third is continuing unequal demands which in the case of women, manifests itself in the greater responsibility for childcare and housework that they are expected to exercise, as compared with men. As the Nandys point out, it is possible to attempt to legislate away the first type of discrimination and to compensate for the effects of the second through positive discrimination, but the continuing unequal demands on women are not so easily amenable to legislative remedy. They claim that the only solution is a major rethinking of 'the whole social mechanism by which

children are reared<sup>9</sup> and suggest a number of possibilities, including payment for those who wish to remain at home to look after their children, more extensive use of childminders and flexitime, and better training for women. However, at a time of severe cutback in government spending and great uncertainty in private industry, it seems most unlikely that any of these proposals will receive serious attention from those who are in a position to implement them.

Another piece of recent legislation, the Employment Protection Act 1975, would seem at first glance to herald considerable improvements in the position of women at work. The Act provides a woman with the right to paid maternity leave and the right to return to work with the same employer up to twenty-nine weeks after her child is born. In order for these benefits to apply, a woman must have worked for her employer for at least two years prior to the last eleven weeks of pregnancy. In the event of the employer failing to comply with the law, an aggrieved party may complain to an industrial tribunal.

Although the aims of this legislation have been welcomed in principle by those who have long campaigned for statutory reform of this kind, the view has been expressed that the provisions are not sufficiently radical. Patricia Hewitt, writing on behalf of the N.C.C.L., feels that the period during which it is possible to seek reinstatement should be extended, and that a corresponding system of paternity benefits should be introduced.<sup>(53)</sup> Apart from the inadequacy of the proposals there is also the problem that the legislation may have implications for recruitment policies towards married women. Indeed, one such problem was anticipated by the government, namely, the likely impact of a maternity pay scheme which imposed the burden of cost upon employers of women. In order to spread the cost evenly, the government set up a Maternity Pay Fund to which all employers are required to contribute. However, further problems still remain. It is possible that an employer may now give covert preference to male applicants for jobs, believing that it is in his interest to hire those who are least likely to inconvenience him and to disrupt the operation

of the company. He may well feel that women, especially married women, are vested with considerable nuisance potential, in so far as they may make it necessary for him to hire and possibly train temporary staff in their absence. This consideration would probably loom very large in relation to jobs which require special qualifications and which carry a great deal of responsibility. An employer may judge that it would be costly, difficult and impracticable to engage a short-term replacement to fill a position which normally requires continuity and expertise. The way in which employers will respond to the legislation can only be a matter for speculation at the present time, but there does seem room for doubt as to whether the Act will in practice work towards women's advantage.

The fact that there has been a recent burst of legislation designed to improve the position of women at work should not give rise to complacency. It is evident that the goals of equal pay and equal opportunity remain as elusive as ever. Moreover, many aspects of the law continue to uphold the principle of married women's economic dependency on their husbands. According to Lister and Wilson, the Beveridge maxim that 'the attitude of the housewife to gainful employment outside the home is not and should not be the same as that of a single woman. She has other duties' continues to inform social security and taxation .(54) The less favourable treatment accorded to married women by these provisions represents a major deterrent to couples considering the idea of reversing traditional family roles. Consequently it is not only the inadequacy of the new legislation which represents a cause for concern, but also the persistence of a discriminatory perspective enshrined in many areas of social policy. However, even if these residual areas of discrimination were removed by legislation, the many other sources of sexual inequality and female dependency would still prevail. As John Lyttle has put it:

'Only the most encrusted reactionary argues that the law has no part at all to play in fostering equal opportunity and only fools believe that the mere enactment of laws creates it.' (55)

### 3. Women's Attitudes Towards Work

'While it has long been understood that women's labor-force participation is responsive to such major life-cycle events as education, marriage, divorce, bereavement, childbearing, and geographical mobility, the study of the motivational side has been neglected. Thus, when we turn to the theoretical work on work aspiration in women, and the empirical literature it has spawned, we find it both stagnant and unimaginative. Work aspiration (or occupational choice, or career commitment - rarely are these concepts distinguished) is usually treated as a discrete event like the menarche, which occurs at some time in adolescence and never again.'

(Judith Long Laws, 'Work aspiration of women: false leads and new starts' in Blaxall, M. & Reagan, B., (eds) Women and the Workplace 1976).

It is now appropriate to focus more directly on an aspect of female employment which has been greatly neglected. Despite the recent growth of literature concerning post-war trends in female employment and the characteristics which differentiate male and female occupations, we remain remarkably ignorant about such issues as occupational choice and sources of work satisfaction among female employees. As Long Laws has pointed out, the literature which is available in relation to these themes is theoretically obsolete and informed by a deficient methodology.(56) Consequently, the task of presenting an overview of women's work attitudes must inevitably involve a critique of the existing data lest one enables the simplistic and inadequate assumptions to prevail. It is possible to organise the literature into three main areas for discussion, each one of which examines a dominant theme or focus prevalent in both sociological and official material.

#### a) The Job Aspirations of Female School Leavers and Graduates

A number of surveys have been conducted amongst young school leavers with the intention of identifying differences between boys and girls in relation to occupational choice and levels of ambition. One of these, the Schools Council Sixth Form Enquiry, carried out in 1967, found that there were marked differences between the sexes in their chosen occupations.(57) A study by Hutchings and Clowsley of sixth form boys and girls found that even where scholastic achievements were of a similar standard, girls tended to hold lower levels of expectation than boys.(58) An investigation of

attitudes amongst sixth-form girls in London and the South-East found that their subject choices at school had followed traditional lines and that there was a reluctance to enter into certain types of science-based careers. The authors concluded that 'girls showed a great unwillingness to combat prejudice and a preference for work in which they would be welcome'.(59)

Studies of the occupational plans of male and female graduates have revealed similar patterns. A report produced by Sheffield University in 1970 showed that female graduates planned to take up a much narrower range of occupations than male graduates, and that some form of teaching was the chosen career of 60% of the women as compared with only 31% of the men.(60)

Studies such as these tend to confirm the idea that women enter the labour market with limited work expectations, even when they have attained high levels of academic achievement. Although it is acknowledged that much more could be done by careers officers and employers to encourage greater ambition and a willingness to enter careers not traditionally associated with women, one is apt to gain the impression from the literature that ultimately it is women's own defeatist attitude which stands in the way of further progress.

There is no objection to the view that a type of defeatism characterises the work expectations of female school-leavers so long as the sources of this attitude are adequately considered. In other words, one may readily concede that the different patterns of socialisation experienced by the sexes will become translated into different views about their future working lives, and that in the case of girls these may become expressed in the form of limited aspirations. However, few studies give close attention to the ways in which such attitudes evolve, and consequently one is unable to decide whether this defeatism represents a passive acceptance of the status quo or whether it is the result of frustrated attempts to challenge it, or whether it is perhaps an amalgam of both. Usually, the onus is upon the reader to discover this for himself or herself by reference to studies which deal more directly with

socialisation patterns in the home and school contexts.

A more fundamental point which must be made in relation to these studies is that because they demonstrate so positively the relatively lower job expectations of girls at this stage in their lives, the possibility that these attitudes may be susceptible to change at a later date may be overlooked(61). The findings which we have noted only inform us about the expectations which girls have prior to their entry into the labour market. It cannot be assumed that what holds good for schoolgirls and female undergraduates also holds good for women in paid employment or for women on the point of re-entry into the workforce. If such an assumption were made it would be rather like supposing that a person's attitudes prior to marriage were not in any way modified by the experience of that state. Although considerable interest attaches to the phenomenon of lower aspirations among female school-leavers and graduates, it is essential to investigate the nature of their attitudes at subsequent points in their working lives.

b. The Relationship of Job Attitudes to the Life-Cycle

One theme that appears with considerable frequency in the literature, both explicitly and implicitly, is the notion that women's attitudes towards work are directly related to their position in the life cycle. Thus variations in attitudes are assumed to depend primarily on differences in age, marital status and the presence or absence of dependant relatives. Few studies have focused directly on this question and this proposition emerges more in the form of common-sense knowledge than as a conclusion generated by rigorous empirical investigation.

This is particularly true of the way in which the work attitudes of single female employees are presented. In a number of studies, the young single girl is often presented as an instrumentally oriented worker - with a difference - marriage is her central life interest:

'Women have largely gone into office-jobs that require little skill and carry small responsibility...A large proportion are young, unmarried women and for many of them clerical work is 'just a job

like any other' taken up in the interval between leaving school and getting married. It is known that girls are especially attracted to clerical work because of its social status, and also, it may be surmised, because of the opportunity it affords for meeting desirable marriage partners in the blackcoated class. In short, the strictly vocational nature of office work is here very much attenuated.' (62)

Lockwood offers no evidence for his surmisings, a fact which renders them highly unsatisfactory. A similar perspective may be found in the work of Mumford and Banks:

'Why is so much of clerical work being taken over by women? The answer seems fairly obvious. Women - or rather girls, for the great majority are under twenty-five - will, at present, accept routine jobs that are unlikely to lead anywhere. For most of them matrimony is their principal objective or interest and work is regarded as temporary and incidental, rather than central in their lives. Because of this they are willing to put up with tasks that seem intrinsically dull and for the same reason they are not unduly anxious for promotion.' (63)

Nowhere in their data can one find evidence for this statement contained in the actual responses of their female respondents. It is true that many of their respondents described their work as dull and routine, but Mumford and Banks assume that this cannot matter very much to the girls or else they would move. This is a very unsatisfactory interpretation since it totally ignores the realities of the labour market, or, what is more important, perhaps, it ignores the subjective reality of the labour market for the workers concerned. As Audrey Hunt has pointed out, the conviction that 'better the devil one knows than the angel one doesn't' can be a powerful incentive to remain in a job, even though it may seem highly dull and routine. (64)

Recent findings tend to undermine one's confidence in the utility of this traditional conceptualisation of single women's attitudes still further. Firstly, Hunt has noted that girls in the 16-19 age-group are prominent among those who are not very satisfied with their jobs and she considers that this is because 'this group includes many who were in their first jobs which might not have come up to their expectations'. Similarly, in their study of female operatives in the electronics industry, Wild & Hill found that job dissatisfaction was more common among single girls. (66) Thus, contrary to what might be



supposed from the quoted passages, there are single girls who experience a shortfall between their expectations and the openings available to them. This situation can generate feelings of dissatisfaction which are not offset by the prospect of a marriage partner popping up over the nearest filing cabinet. Secondly, Hunt found that 78.6% of single women expected to go on working after marriage, and that in reply to the question, 'If you were to stop work after you were married do you think you would start again later?', 63.7% of these same women said that they would. These figures represent something of a rebuff to those who believe that the horizons of young unmarried girls do not extend beyond their wedding day, for as Hunt herself says, it is the birth of the first child, rather than the date of marriage which has become the point at which women give up paid employment, and then only temporarily.(67) To that extent, single girls' perceptions of their future work roles represent a realistic assessment of what is possible for them, given the existing set of prescriptions pertaining to the place of a married woman with young children. It must be pointed out that Hunt's findings present a rather different picture from those obtained in an earlier piece of research. In 1961, Joseph found that nearly half of his schoolgirl respondents gave marriage as their likely job at the age of 25, and only half of them expressed an intention to return to work when their children were 'old enough to be left'.(68) This discrepancy may have something to do with the fact, noted by Beynon and Blackburn, that single girls' preoccupation with marriage diminishes as they get older.(69) Hunt's survey included only those aged 16 and over, and three-quarters of her respondents in the 16-19 age-group were economically active, nearly all of them full-time. Once again, the necessity for a longitudinal approach to work attitudes is highlighted.

It is quite legitimate to suppose that the attitudes to work of single girls will reflect to some extent their out of work preoccupations. However, there is evidence to show that the future prospect of marriage for such women does not preclude job dissatisfaction, nor the desire to find a more stimulating

work environment. It should not be assumed that young girls simply adapt to seemingly mundane forms of occupation because their interests lie elsewhere. What should be investigated is the degree to which single women find themselves in occupational cul-de-sacs and whether or not this leads to resignation and an emphasis on substitute sources of satisfaction.

Whereas the single female is thought to use work instrumentally either to find a husband directly, or to purchase the means necessary to bring the hunt to a swift conclusion, the married woman is represented as using work as a way of financing home-improvement. As the home has increasingly become the central-life-interest of many post-war couples, so there has been every incentive for the female partners to add to its attractions and comfort by providing an additional income. In the past, much research has demonstrated the apparent utility of this model. Viola Klein, writing in 1965 claimed:

'Money is undoubtedly the largest incentive for married women to go out to work. Three out of every four women interviewed gave this as the main reason for having a job.' (70)

The husbands in her survey agreed that their wives' motives for working were mainly instrumental:

'From the answers given by husbands of working wives, it is evident that their wives' earnings are more often regarded by them as a subsidiary, as a help to buy 'extras', rather than as essential contributions.' (71)

Although one cannot dispute the universality of the finding that the desire for money is of considerable significance among the motives for working amongst married women, one must lodge certain objections to the image of acquisitive womanhood to which the research has given rise. Firstly, many sources of data have shown that working wives are not solely motivated by the quest for money. According to the work of Zweig and Hunt, such factors as 'the emotional pressure of loneliness' and the monotony of housework are also of considerable weight in propelling women into the labour force. (72) Hunt states:

'More than one attraction was named by the great majority of those who named any at all, and nearly two-thirds of those mentioning financial advantages mentioned at least one other advantage.' (73)

Hunt also canvassed the opinions of non-working wives, and while the desire for money was cited as a reason why they would be going back to work by 64%, 40% of her respondents named boredom at home and 25% gave the desire for companionship as additional reasons for this decision.(74)

This factor, dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the home environment, has received very little attention from sociologists until the last couple of years. Consequently, any attempts to assess its relative significance in the configuration of reasons for the increase in working wives have been largely speculative, and have probably underestimated its importance. In her pioneering study of women's domestic situation, Ann Oakley found that 70% of her respondents were dissatisfied with housework, and concluded that:

'Housewives experience more monotony, fragmentation and ~~speed~~ in their work than do workers in the factory.' (75)

We may suppose that this is not wholly a modern phenomenon, but certain post-war developments may have increased the social isolation of the housewife and made her tasks seem more thankless than previously. The increasing isolation of the housewife has gone hand-in-hand with the increasing physical isolation of the nuclear family. Young & Willmott's study of working class family life demonstrated very clearly how the physical and social characteristics of the modern housing estate can render a young wife very lonely indeed during the daytime with little else to do but cleaning, shopping and baby-minding.(76) Even where a housewife has occasional social contact with neighbours, the very superficiality of these relationships may only serve to heighten her sense of deprivation of meaningful social interaction.(77) It is not surprising then that more and more women take up paid employment with a view to injecting some interest into their lives.

On the basis of Hunt's findings, Ann Oakley has come to the conclusion that:

'...questions about married women's reasons for taking jobs tap the

normative tip of the iceberg...that women say they work for the money because this is the socially acceptable reason.' (78)

Like Hunt, Oakley is of the opinion that women may tend to advance reasons which they think they ought to give, rather than what they really believe. Married women are not expected to express profound dissatisfaction with their status as housewives - to do so might be to cast doubt upon their personal adequacy, and consequently they give answers which in no way detract from their capacities as homemakers and mothers. In view of the limited amount of recent data relating to working wives and their attitudes, it is impossible to come to any firm conclusions as to whether their responses are more likely to be rationalisations of their genuine feelings, or whether we should dismiss this idea as unwarranted speculation. The point cannot be resolved, it seems, until we have a great deal more research which attempts to probe the responses of working wives in much greater depth. In the meantime, the frequency with which sources of dissatisfaction with the home environment are mentioned by them is a finding which should not be overshadowed by the apparent significance of the pecuniary motive.

A second objection to this economic model of the working wife is that it helps to perpetuate the notion that women are only supplementary earners. Since the overriding impression is that of women exercising a choice over whether or not they go out to work and that their decision to work is borne out of the desire for little extras for the home rather than of necessity, the view that employment for women is always subsidiary, is thereby reinforced. According to Jean Gardiner, it is this view of women which 'perpetuates both lack of training and low pay for women workers and the traditional sex division of labour and responsibility within the family'.(79) Not only is this sociological vision of an ideological nature, but it also neglects the fact of lack of choice among those who have to work because they are the sole supporters of their households. Furthermore, even if one chooses to disregard the evidence that the bulk of the earnings of working wives typically goes towards necessities such as rent and housekeeping rather than on 'extras', it is impossible to disregard the

implications of the spiralling inflation of recent years. Many couples became accustomed to a certain standard of living during the fifties and sixties, and more recently married couples no doubt based their expectations upon the example of their predecessors. Until the late sixties, it is probable that within the middle-income groups, there was no driving necessity for the wife to work, but that if she did, then a somewhat higher standard of living could be maintained. Rising rates of taxation, interest and V.A.T., and soaring inflation have brought about a situation where it has become harder and harder for a husband to sustain his family's standard of living on his income alone, and have made it correspondingly more and more necessary for his wife to work as well. To the extent that this is actually happening, then the view of working wives as temporary, supplementary earners becomes increasingly untenable. One recent development may perhaps be taken as indicative of the changing significance of the wife's income, namely the falling birth rate. Although the birth rate has been falling ever since 1964, it has now pitched to an unprecedentedly low level. Demographers rarely agree among themselves as to the causes of fluctuations in the birth rate and there has been a great deal of controversy concerning this latest downswing. However, economic factors are usually of some significance, and a declining birth rate may thus be regarded as in part the aggregate of individual couples' responses to changing economic fortunes in the society as a whole. One such response is to limit the total number of children that one has, and another is to postpone the birth of the first child. Some demographers are of the opinion that there is a high incidence of the latter response among recently married couples, which is having its effect on the birth rate. It is possible to argue, therefore, that since the loss of a wife's income and extra expense incurred by the birth of a child represents a source of potential hardship at the best of times, contemporary economic circumstances are such as to make it necessary to postpone having a family until such time as this would constitute no serious threat to a couple's standard of living. According to an article by Frances Cairncross in the Guardian, evidence from the U.S. suggests that more and more couples are practising this 'new home economics':

'It looks suspiciously as if couples in the United States, at least, are well aware of the opportunity cost of having children, and trade off the wife's job satisfaction and earning power against the satisfaction of having a family.' (80)

It may be that this practice is more likely to occur where the wife's occupation is highly rewarded and accorded high status, for, as Adkins and Piepmeier point out:

'Only when women attain equal or greater social recognition for economic activity than for childbearing will the balance change and production of children become the less important activity.' (81)

The relationship between fertility, education and employment among women is a highly complex one, and there is very little way of knowing whether fertility patterns are the outcome of education and occupational experiences or whether they determine them. It does seem, though, that the analysis of recent trends in the birth rate leads strongly towards the conclusion that wives' earnings have now acquired strategic importance in the maintenance of the standard of living of contemporary couples. To the extent that trends in the birth rate reflect the heightened importance of the wife's earnings within the household economy, we must regard the notion that wives' incomes are of purely marginal significance as increasingly redundant.

Furthermore, it is possible that changes in the practical significance of wives' earnings may have been accompanied by changes in women's work attitudes. As work increasingly becomes a normal and essential component of a married woman's daily existence, the nature of work conditions, levels of remuneration, and job satisfaction may assume increasing importance at the subjective level. Married women may thus become less willing to compromise in the face of limited opportunities and inferior rewards.

The view that a woman's attitude towards work is dependent upon the stage reached in the life cycle is both deterministic and anachronistic. Whilst it may readily be conceded that attitudes will be greatly influenced by marital status and/or responsibility for dependants, it is also necessary to explore the impact of the work situation itself and any recent economic changes which may have

a bearing upon the way women perceive their jobs. It is also desirable that sociologists address themselves more to the sources of job satisfaction among married women than they have done to date. Unless more work is done in this area, the notion that marriage and motherhood represent the height of women's ambition will prevail.

c) Work Attitudes Among Women in Top Jobs

There is one area within the sociology of women at work where rather more attention has been paid to attitudes towards the nature of the work itself. This is represented by the literature concerning highly qualified women in professional careers. Yet once again, the approach taken must be considered less than satisfactory. Whereas the attempt to account for the phenomenon of working wives is heavily informed by a somewhat archaic model of worker behaviour which characterises people as motivated solely by economic ends, the study of women in top jobs leans on a more recent model which characterises people as having a hierarchy of needs which can be fulfilled through the experience of work. Work, then, is potentially a psychologically enriching activity, and adherents of this school argue that where this is not the case, jobs should be redesigned in order that the needs may be satisfied through a process of 'self-actualisation'. Fox, who is highly critical of this model, has pointed out that the aspects of work said to maximise this process of individual growth and development are those usually associated with high status occupations.(82) In terms of this model, therefore, top jobs emerge as more intrinsically rewarding than those lower down the scale and their incumbents appear as those most likely to experience work satisfaction. The self-actualisation model, then, has been criticised not only because it incorporates an a priori judgement about human needs, but also because it presents an idealised view of life at the top.

Yet both the language and the assumptions of this school of thought may be identified in some of the sociological studies of professional women. In their discussion of the orientations to work among wives of dual-career families, Fogarty et al state:

'The overriding impression created by the reasons actually given for working among women of this sample can be summarised in the term 'self-expression'. For women of this type not to work made them feel in some sense personally untrue to themselves - wasted, unfulfilled, restless and bored - or, in more extreme cases, not to work was simply considered impossible. Work was essential for these women's self-conception and therefore for their mental health.' (83)

The conclusion which appears to follow from this statement is that women fall into different categories, distinguished in terms of their various need structures. One gains the impression that women in senior positions in management and the professions represent a certain 'type', whose natural habitat is the conference room and who differ from other women in that they have a greater need for self-expression. The way in which the authors appear to consider that top jobs are the most intrinsically rewarding and that their incumbents are primarily motivated to seek self-expression through work is exemplified in the following passage:

'In present conditions in even advanced societies, work remains for many people a necessary evil, something to be endured, to which at best one becomes habituated...For many of the highly qualified the world of work has an entirely different character. It is for them an area within which major satisfactions may be derived, sometimes superior to those of other spheres of life, including elements of family life, of leisure and of responsibility for an participation in the development of the community as a whole.' (84)

One tends to gain the impression that whereas the 'motivational syndrome' of women in top jobs may be explained in terms of the need for self-realisation, brought on by a feeling that 'housework is not enough', the motivational syndrome of working wives in more humble occupations must be explained in terms of less exalted aspirations, such as the pursuit of monetary rewards.

Fogarty et al do not seem to have considered the possibility that the responses given by their female subjects are those which the women felt were expected of them, given their education, social status and career background. It may be that such women, like many men at the apex of the occupational hierarchy, would hesitate before stressing the importance of remuneration. Although the authors of this study display a great deal of sympathy for the many problems which women experience in the sphere of work, and although they propose many important changes, one cannot help but feel that their view of the female



working population is oversimplified and that it renders a disservice to women who are employed at lower levels of the occupational structure. Their conclusions help to perpetuate the notion that only a tiny minority of women wish to experience some degree of interest in their work. It may be that this blinkered vision is influenced by the authors' own position in the occupational hierarchy.

From this review of some of the studies of women in the workforce, it emerges that there is a tendency to construct a priori models of female motivation which are thought appropriate to the population of women under investigation. In some cases, a woman's position in the life-cycle is held to be the crucial determinant of attitudes. In others, social or educational background are accorded primary significance. Recent debates concerning the concept of orientation to work lead one to be cautious in accepting unilinear explanatory models of this kind. These debates have involved arguments as to whether workers may be said to display a consistent set of priorities in the rewards they seek from work and whether these priorities, if they exist, derive primarily from the work situation or from out-of-work factors. The main protagonists agree that worker behaviour in general is a function of influences deriving from both sources, but Goldthorpe's contention that a fairly stable set of priorities or orientation to work arises to some extent independently of the work situation, is hotly disputed by Daniel.(85) The latter maintains that workers exhibit different sets of priorities at different times, such that job choice, job satisfaction and job leaving are not necessarily influenced by the same factors. Thus, for Daniel, the key question is not 'what do people want from work?' but 'at what point are they interested in particular rewards?'(86) Consequently, it becomes necessary to focus on the way in which the experience of work itself generates different sets of priorities at different points in time.

The two main contenders in this argument have yet to reach agreement on these issues. However, those who have attempted to resolve the debate on their

behalf have come to the conclusion that whilst the concept of orientation to work is not as redundant as Daniel would have us believe, it is inappropriate to give too much emphasis to workers' priorities when they enter a job as the determinants of subsequent attitudes. Brown, for example, agrees with Daniel that one must pay considerable attention to the context of choice and action since this may well lead to the modification of a person's priorities:

'Consideration must be given to the priorities among workers' objectives and aspirations, and to the way the order of priorities may be influenced by practical possibilities of realising them, or what could be termed the conditions of action as perceived by the actors themselves. Workers who would like to have interesting jobs with high pay may give low priority to the former objective because they realise that they are unlikely to find both; but this order of priorities may change over the long, or even the short term.' (87)

This observation highlights the point that a preparedness to read between the lines is particularly important in the measurement of job satisfaction. As Baldamus has suggested, when workers express satisfaction with their work, it may be that these satisfactions are only 'substitute goals or rationalisations which are a function of deprivation, not an independent variable in the motivation to work'. (88)

The sociological studies of women at work which were discussed earlier have largely failed to heed this principle. Respondents' attitudes have been taken at face value and little interest has been shown in the way in which the opportunity structures which confront women in various occupations interact with patterns of expectations and priorities. Following the line taken by Lockwood, factors which are independent of the work situation are held to be the primary determinants of attitudes. In a critical assessment of this literature Richard Brown concludes that:

'In contrast to the existing studies of 'orientations to work', therefore what is needed is an extension of enquiry beyond the conventional dichotomy of work and a limited range of non-work factors to include, in particular, patterns of socialisation and the nature of the labour market. Consideration of the ways in which 'orientations to work' for the majority of women might be generated, and sustained or changed, also draws attention to the constraints on their possibilities of action, constraints which for many are so restrictive that the explanatory value of the notion must be called into question;

job 'choice' or behaviour at work would be much the same whatever the 'orientation to work'. (89)

The sentiments expressed by Brown seem particularly apposite when one considers the general themes which have informed this chapter. Firstly, it is evident from the historical discussion of women's role in the labour market that females have long been forced into a position of compromise within the prevailing structure of economic opportunities. The physical separation of home and workplace and the activities of men concerned to protect their own interests have greatly restricted the nature of women's economic participation. Secondly, it is also clear that the apparently attenuated work ambitions of most women cannot be attributed to some innate desire to seek fulfilment in marriage and motherhood. Since the early nineteenth century women have been encouraged by their socialisation to accept responsibility for childcare and domestic labour. The ideologies in currency at the present time still endeavour to represent women's economic participation as purely marginal to that of men. Thus, both the structure of opportunities and the prevailing ideologies continue to constrain women's possibilities for action.

It is also clear, however, that women are capable of resistance to structures of oppression in diverse ways. Their discontent may take the form of open militancy through strike action, or it may assume the form of a manipulation of the opportunities available. It is important therefore not only to examine the factors which promote acquiescence, but also to those which foster an active posture. The next two chapters will be concerned with both sets of factors in the world of white-collar work.

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## CHAPTER 3.

A SOCIOLOGY OF WHITE-COLLAR WORK

'The white-collar people slipped quietly into modern society. Whatever history they have had is a history without events; whatever common interests they have do not lead to unity; whatever future they have will not be of their own making.'

(C. Wright Mills, White Collar 1951)

The paucity of information concerning women in white-collar occupations is a function of a more general lack of sociological interest in this sector of the labour market. Revolutions, when they occur, are usually accompanied by a torrent of controversy. Yet the remarkable growth of the white-collar labour force during the twentieth century, which amounts to a truly dramatic change in the occupational structure, has received scant attention. These writers who have examined this development are all agreed that it is one of revolutionary dimensions. Crozier describes it as:

'a veritable administrative revolution comparable to the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century.' (1)

and Bain writes:

'The growth of the white-collar labour force is one of the most outstanding characteristics of the economic and social developments of the twentieth century.' (2)

In spite of such superlatives, our knowledge and understanding of the evolution and contemporary character of the white-collar labour force remains fragmentary and inadequate. Perhaps this has something to do with the very nature of white-collar occupations. They have been characterised as dull, boring and dehumanised, in short as having all the classic properties of alienation. Yet the numerous studies of alienation have not typically been located in the typing pool or in the filing department but in those industrial settings which are somehow regarded as more colourful. Indeed, if one had to paint a caricature of the alienated worker, based on information from sociological literature, the finished product would probably depict a man prematurely aged,

sweaty, stooping, staccato actions determined by the inevitability of the assembly line, gasping amidst the roar and thunder of technology, a perfect representation of the Marxian vision. Although the concept of alienation has acquired the status of an overworked cliché within the field of industrial sociology, it is very rarely associated with the nine-to-five world of office workers.

Even if white-collar work were appropriately labelled as monotonous or alienating, and certain doubts must attend such a judgement, it would be quite wrong to conclude that the incumbents of these occupations were equally uninteresting, and therefore unworthy of attention. Just as this sector of the labour force includes a tremendous diversity of skills, we may also assume that here is to be found a vast range of attitudes to work and relationships at work. On numerical grounds alone, the white-collar labour force merits close analysis. According to Bain, the number of white-collar workers increased by 147% between 1911 and 1961. During the same period, the number of manual workers rose by only 2%.<sup>(3)</sup> Growth in the numbers of white-collar workers and in their proportional representation within the labour force as a whole has been particularly dramatic since 1951. Elliott notes that there were 5.74 million white-collar employees, amounting to 29% of all employees in industries and services in Great Britain in 1951. In 1971, they totalled 8.88 million and accounted for 42% of workers in industries and services.<sup>(4)</sup> According to Lumley, the annual average increase in their numbers in the early seventies was 1.3%.<sup>(5)</sup>

Some confusion, however, surrounds the use of the term 'white-collar work'. Broadly it may be used to distinguish all non-manual occupations from manual ones, connoting differences in working conditions, career prospects, method of payment, and even orientations to work and towards trade unions. More narrowly, the term may be used as a shorthand for all lower and intermediate categories of non-manual work, thus making a further distinction

between such groups and professional and managerial employees. According to this meaning, the terms 'white-collar work' and 'clerical work' are interchangeable, and I shall adopt this usage for the purposes of this thesis. It is important to remember, however, that this practice tends to exclude certain workers who are elsewhere regarded as part of the white-collar workforce (6), and in addition, fails to do justice to the vast range of skills which may be included under this umbrella heading. Indeed, in his book 'White Collar', Wright Mills cites everyone from the office tea-boy to the director of the board, from the department store floorwalker to the head of a law factory.(7) Apart from these qualifications, it is appropriate to question the very aptness of the term 'white-collar' for a group of employees of which women represent 46%.(8)

This chapter chronicles the origins and subsequent development of white-collar work and focuses on some of the sociological literature relating to those currently employed in a clerical capacity. This affords an insight into the general nature of white-collar employment which is essential for an appreciation of the status and location of women in this sector of the labour market.

#### 1. The Origins and Early Development of White-Collar Work

'The achievement of high economic and social status, the goal held out to clerks and certainly realised by some, was the result of a happy conjunction of appropriate talents with diligent, tactful, and personal association in work with a particular employer. The dependence of the clerk on a particular employer, and the difficulty of mobility between firms once a mature age had been reached, were, in theory at least, counterbalanced by the opportunities for advancement through staying with one firm and gradually 'making oneself indispensable'. (9)

'The skill of shorthand becomes obsolete; the white-collar girl becomes almost immediately replaceable; work in offices becomes increasingly a blind-alley. The new white-collar girl cannot know some segment of the office or business, and has lost the private contact that gave status to the secretary and even the stenographer. The work is regulated so that it can be speeded up and effectively supervised by non-executive personnel. In short, the prized white-collar spot for women is becoming more and more the job of a factory-like operative.' (10)

I have quoted these passages, the former from 'The Clerk' written in 1878, and the latter from 'White Collar', written in 1951, because they demonstrate quite strikingly changes which have taken place in the nature of office employment during the last century. Although the marked growth of white-collar occupations is associated with the period of rapid industrialisation and expansion in world commerce in the second half of the nineteenth century, the origins of white-collar work date back much further. As Benet has pointed out, the word 'clerk' has the same root as the word 'cleric', and throughout the Middle Ages clerks were a part of the church organisation, their job being to maintain records and perform routine book-keeping. Gradually, clerks developed more secular associations with the world of commerce, achieving a measure of security and status as the employees of the new entrepreneurial class.

With the expansion in the scale of manufacturing and commercial enterprise, in the second half of the nineteenth century there came a tremendous demand for those equipped with clerical skills. In Britain, the expansion of the empire and overseas markets accentuated this demand still further since workers were urgently required to process correspondence. At the same time, the natural habitat of the clerk came into being - the office. Benet writes:

'Here for the first time, was a wholly middle-class workplace. There was no danger of being required to rub shoulders with the sweaty workers or to endure the noise and dust of heavy machinery.' (11).

These old-style clerks of the nineteenth century, almost exclusively male, held a highly personal relationship with their employers. This may have had something to do with the fact that clerks were often sons of the owners of the enterprises, undertaking training with a view to eventually taking over the business themselves. Those who were not in such a favourable position nevertheless remained loyal to their employers, hoping that the rewards of long service and faithfulness might be perhaps a stake in the business, or at least promotion and gradual increments of pay. Lockwood

writes of the relationship between the clerk and his employer:

'In many cases it took the form of a 'gentleman's agreement'. Needless to say, this relationship was often exploited by the employer and great expectations frequently came to nothing.' (12)

Wright Mills' description of the American counterpart is strikingly similar, a picture of servitude, dependence and low pay.(13) It seems that many were willing to submit to these conditions because they might gain, in so doing, respectability and the external trappings of a gentleman. Both employers and manual workers despised clerks for their lofty aspirations in this regard. There was little glamour or excitement in the clerk's daily round of activities. Indeed, some of the characters in Dickens' novels such as Bob Cratchit in 'A Christmas Carol' and Mr. Carker in 'Dombey & Son' conjure up an image of a very dreary and depressing life. It is possible that the clerk of the past obtained some job satisfaction. No doubt he took a certain pride in his book-keeping, just as an industrial apprentice might derive a certain pleasure once he had mastered the intricacies of his craft, but this was small compensation for a lifetime of underpaid servility. The appeal of clerical work for many persons lay in its potential for secure employment, a feature of white-collar work which has persisted, at least for female employees, throughout the twentieth century. One male clerk whom I interviewed described how this aspect of clerical work made it particularly attractive during the Depression:

'In the thirties things were very insecure, and so it was really an achievement to get a staff job. I was brought up to show loyalty to the firm. It was essential to get a staff job, as such you were a 'staff', something for the manager to lean on.'

Braverman has suggested that whilst there was considerable diversity in the character of clerical occupations during early industrial capitalism, their incumbents had little in common with the clerks of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He maintains that even though many of the nineteenth century clerks may have experienced pay and conditions akin to that of the

manual labourer, in general, clerks had more in common with their employers than with factory operatives. For this reason, Braverman insists that one view the clerical workers of monopoly capitalism in the modern era as a distinct stratum from the clerical workers of an earlier period. In his view, this distinction derives from the fact that early generations of clerks were virtually untouched by the twin processes of rationalisation and mechanisation.(14)

Despite their numbers and the demand for their labour the clerks of the nineteenth century rarely attempted to display their bargaining strength. Trade Union activity was anathema to those who wished to distance themselves from the industrial proletariat. In any case, problems of organisation arose from the fact that they were scattered throughout a great number of offices and business enterprises. The development of white-collar unionism during this century is therefore all the more interesting seen against this background. To some extent it has been the product of a number of developments in the white-collar world which progressively undermined the only clear advantage stemming from non-manual work - social status. It is to these developments that we now turn.

## 2. The Feminization of White-Collar Work

Before one attempts to account for the growing association between women and clerical work it is appropriate to offer further explanation for the expansion of clerical occupations which began in the late nineteenth century. According to Braverman, this development may be regarded, in part, as a reflection of the growing importance of the accounting of value, itself a consequence of the growing complexity of capitalism and the growth in scale of capitalist enterprise:

'As capitalism becomes more complex and develops into its monopoly stage, the accounting of value becomes infinitely more complex. The number of intermediaries between production and consumption increases, so that the value accounting of the single commodity is duplicated through a number of stages. The battle to realise values, to turn them into cash, calls for a special accounting of its own.' (15)

However, Braverman suggests that the proliferation of paperwork under monopoly capitalism has not resulted simply from a desire to maintain accurate records of company transactions with a view to monitoring the transference of value. He considers that it has also derived from an assumption that dishonesty prevails in intercorporate dealings and characterises the outlook of company employees. In order to insure themselves against the possibility of double-dealing on the part of clients and workers, companies have instituted systems of checking and cross-checking with corresponding implications for the amount of clerical work to be discharged. Thus, the proliferation of clerical occupations in the twentieth century may be seen in part as an attempt to prevent the subversion of the principle that ownership of value confers sole right to the realisation of value.

Whilst Braverman provides an interesting and thought-provoking interpretation of the growth of clerical work in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the widely documented existence of white-collar 'fiddles', even at the present time, leads one to doubt whether the aims of capitalist accounting are always realised in practice. Yet, no matter how one seeks to interpret the expansions of paper processing, there can be little doubt that the remarkable growth of clerical occupations has been paralleled by an equally remarkable transformation in the sexual composition of the clerical labour force.

It is curious that office work has come to be thought of as a typically feminine occupation when one considers the fact that in the nineteenth century it was essentially a masculine preserve. In 1851, there were precisely 19 female commercial clerks, that is, 0.1 per cent of all clerks.(15) In 1971, however, women accounted for 71.9 per cent of all clerks, and, according to Lumley, in 1966 they constituted about 46 per cent of the entire white-collar labour force. Male secretaries were highly opposed to the intrusion of women into the office world in the nineteenth century. Alexander Dumas was a secretary before he became a playwright and novelist, and he warned women that 'if they put one foot inside an office they would lose every vestige of femininity'.(17)

Lockwood is less inclined than Dumas to take the view that such work was ever considered masculine. He maintains that clerical work was already stigmatised as unmanly before women began to enter this form of employment in large numbers, hence the origin of the phrase, 'Born a man, died a clerk'.(18)

The proliferation of white-collar jobs in the late nineteenth century was an important factor in the move towards the recruitment of women into clerical work. It was also a matter of technology, for not only were there more jobs, but there were more tasks as well, as a result of the introduction of typewriters and telephones into offices.(19) Typing and telephoning were considered eminently suitable tasks for women and as long as women were confined to these activities, male clerical workers were not concerned for their own security and status. It was not long, however, before women began to make inroads into what had hitherto been regarded as male territory. The ability to write in shorthand was a skill jealously guarded by the male sex, but during the 1880's women began to attend courses and were soon offering their services as 'shorthand-typists'. This development dealt a severe blow to the self-esteem of the male clerical worker since there were few aspects of his work left which were not now performed by women as well. Office work was now coming to be regarded as women's work and it was already widely felt that women's work consisted of occupations which did not make too many demands on the intellect or physical capabilities. Lockwood writes:

'When women began to pour into those jobs which required neither manual strength nor prolonged training - clerical work and elementary-school teaching being the supreme examples - it was wellnigh inevitable that these occupations should suffer a fall in status. This is in fact what happened.' (20)

In addition, women were quite prepared to work for less money and so the male clerk's economic security was also threatened.

With regard to the 'supply' side of this development, it should be noted that these women were drawn from a fairly narrow range of the population. Most came from middle-class backgrounds and worked out of sheer necessity, having no husband to support them and, in many cases, no financial assistance



from their families. The alternatives, teaching, governessing and nursing, held few attractions, especially since these often necessitated 'living-in'. Consequently, many women were glad of these new opportunities to obtain a measure of independence from their families and employers. The recruitment of female labour into office-work therefore did not represent a massive advance towards emancipation so much as an extension of the opportunities by which the unsupported middle-class woman might avoid destitution. Certainly, employers were little interested in furthering the cause of women's liberation. In hiring female labour they were motivated by expediency and cost efficiency. Conditions were very harsh for the new army of office girls, their freedom being curtailed in a number of ways, such as not being allowed to leave the office building during working hours. The notion that women only worked for pin-money was a useful ideology in that it helped to justify low remuneration.

The First World War created still more white-collar jobs, and it was at about this time that novelists began to display an interest in the phenomenon of the female clerk. In his book 'Angel Pavement', J.B. Priestley maps out the clerical career of a young spinster, focusing on her frustrated ambitions and secret fears.(21) In Christopher Morley's 'Kitty Foyle', the heroine is rather more successful in achieving her plans for a fully-fledged business career.(22) These novels reflect the fact that the recruitment base for office workers had now grown somewhat wider. Even those families where a young unmarried daughter was not a financial liability now encouraged their female offspring to undertake a clerical career. Benet writes:

'Once fathers found out that their daughters could contribute to the family income without losing caste, they were all in favour of sending them out to work. Those with some residual prejudice in the matter still allowed typing by the sheet at home, which brought in enough to dress the girl, if not entirely to offset the cost of her keep.' (23)

Many girls from working-class backgrounds likewise sought jobs in offices in preference to the drudgery of domestic service. Benet suggests that the

fact that office girls were typically single, young, much more independent, and often more 'daring' in their appearance has much to do with the contemporary image of the typist or secretary as a man-hunting good-time girl.(24)

In 1931, according to Rhee, men still outnumbered women at the lower levels of white-collar work. Thereafter, women formed the majority of such employees so that office work had become well and truly feminized by 1951.(25) This development had not been without effect on the male clerical population. On the one hand, it had brought clear disadvantages in terms of depressed status and pay. This to some extent accounts for the development of a more militant stand among male clerks than had been the case in the nineteenth century. The growing competition for jobs led to the formation of white-collar unions divided not only along occupational lines, but also according to gender.(26) On the other hand, many men gained from the feminisation of the office world. Corresponding to the growth of routine non-manual jobs was a proliferation of lower and middle management positions. Since these necessitated prolonged training and extensive qualifications, women were effectively disqualified from such jobs and confined to the lower levels of the office hierarchy.

The last category of women to enlist in the office battalions were married women. This development was mainly a consequence of the growing need for white-collar workers at the time of the Second World War II. For some women the problem of dependent children was then solved by the provision of state nurseries. The growth of the service sector of the economy after the war entailed a sustained demand for female labour. The idea that a married woman's permanent location should be the home never really managed to re-establish itself as the increasing number of women who entered this and other forms of work after bearing children clearly demonstrated.(27)

### 3. The Rationalisation of the Office

During the twentieth century, and especially since the last war, office work has been substantially transformed. This has involved both the

increasing specialisation of functions and the standardisation of administrative procedure. The process has been a gradual one, but real enough to lead many writers to draw a parallel with the processes of industrial rationalisation. The concept of alienation, which is more commonly used to describe the work situation of the manual labourer, has been extended by one sociologist to cover the field of white-collar work. Wright Mills writes of the 'alienating conditions of modern work', with respect to the commercial enterprise. If this were to be regarded as an appropriate description of contemporary office work, however, it might be necessary to think in terms of the gigantic, impersonal bureaucratic structures that Wright Mills regards as the typical modern office. Where workers are little more than extensions of elaborate accounting machinery, automations of the commercial venture, then it is possible that here we might find feelings of social and self-alienation. The development of business rationalisation in America has been uneven, but the process would seem to be more advanced than it is in Britain:

'The modern office with its tens of thousands of square feet and its factory-like flow of work is not an informal, friendly place. The drag and beat of work, the 'production unit' tempo, require that time consumed by anything but business at hand be explained and apologised for.' (26)

Lockwood is inclined to contest this image of the modern office, maintaining that the proportion of clerical employees who are likely to find themselves in this situation is very small, and that in any case, the traditional social relationships of the office militate against the development of impersonality and bureaucratisation.(29) He considers that small administrative units are still the norm in the area of white-collar work.(30) Crozier also disagrees with Mills' representation of the office and its attendant consequences for workers' attitudes. He argues that Mills fails to make direct reference to the actual world of the office worker, his or her subjective reality, and concludes that:

'the analysis of the frustrations of white-collar employees is only a means for Mills to give vent to an overall critique of American society.' (31)

Although, in the past, the pace of administrative rationalisation has been slow and uneven, there does seem to be a heightened interest in methods of office organisation at the present time. This appears to have been prompted by the spiralling costs of labour, equipment and space. One can gain some idea of the probable response to these economic pressures from the special reports on office organisation which appear with growing frequency in the quality press. In 1976, and again in 1977, the Times ran a series of articles which were entirely taken up with the themes of productivity and efficiency in the office, and which canvassed a wide range of strategies by which management might achieve these goals. These included, work measurement and job evaluation schemes; the calculated and systematic use of office space; and the introduction of bonus and incentive schemes.(32) In a similar report published in the Guardian, one finds ominous echoes of the Millsian scenario:

'There is no doubt that most office workers are slow to adapt to open planning. They usually complain about the noise and the distraction, but there is evidence that productivity generally improves and people are happier in well-designed open-plan offices. In many ways, people in open-plan offices are more like free-range chickens while those in traditional cellular offices are like battery chickens. It just depends how you like to lay your eggs.'

Later in the report, still further emphasis is laid on the boost to productivity if the chickens are housed in open-plan offices:

'It is this last advantage (improved throughput) of open planning that one suspects is really the biggest disadvantage as far as some office staff are concerned. When people complain that they do not like working in open-plan offices, what they really mean is that they do not like to be seen not working, coming in late, going early, being told off, flirting, dozing, or doing any of the one hundred and one things it is possible to get away with in conventional cellular offices.' (33)

It may well be that with the passage of time, one will be obliged to discard Lockwood's version of the office and to accept the view, canvassed by Braverman, that there is little distinction between the modern office and the factory. A more determined pursuit of cost effectiveness by management is certainly likely to encourage a major modification of the office environment and its traditional relationships in the future. It should not be forgotten,

however, that there are still thousands of offices which have more in common with the counting-house than with the factory. Both Lockwood and Braverman have pointed out that the opportunity to rationalise clerical processes is very much a function of office size. Until such time, if ever, as the small administrative unit has been swept away, there will always be some offices which defy comparison with the factory, by virtue of their more traditional organisation and their more intimate character.

Given the limited amount of evidence, one can only speculate as to whether or not progressive rationalisation, spurred on by the drive towards greater efficiency, productivity and profitability will have important consequences for the outlook of clerical workers. Even though there may be a trend towards greater bureaucratisation and larger, more impersonal offices, it nevertheless remains true that this sector of the labour force is extremely diversified both in terms of worktask and social background, and easy generalisations are therefore inappropriate.

#### 4. The Mechanisation of Tasks

The office world has not only been subject to a degree of rationalisation but it has also experienced mechanisation. Since the nineteenth century more and more machines have been introduced into the white-collar environment in order to cut the cost of clerical work and in order to meet the growing need for clerical services. However, at the present time, capital investment per member of office staff is relatively low compared with that found among industrial workers. In Britain, average investment per office worker is £500 compared with £5,000 per industrial worker.(34) The reason for this disparity is not simply a matter of differences in the character of work performed:

'...in the past office staff has been cheap and fairly efficient, and the scope for spending on capital equipment for the office was limited. Today costs of office staff are rising while the general level of competence is falling.' (35)

Since the last war, office costs have risen dramatically. In 1950, they represented only one-fifth of the total costs of a typical business

whereas today they represent half. It is this development which is likely to lead to a much more extensive use of office machinery in the future.

Some writers take the view that the growth of office mechanisation has eliminated the traditional distinctions between non-manual and manual work. Mechanisation, especially where it is coupled with administrative rationalisation, is said to have eliminated mental processes, or else to have routinised them in such a way that clerical workers now stand on an equal footing with blue-collar labour. Clearly, this assertion merits close analysis, since, as Lockwood has pointed out, machinery alone cannot transform the clerk into a factory-hand.

According to Lockwood, there are few office machines which dictate the tempo of the work and to which the operator is merely an appendage. Normally, it is the other way round, machines being an extension of, or aid to the operator.(36) This is also true of many of the machines which have been introduced since Lockwood wrote The Blackcoated Worker in 1958. The calculator, for example, can hardly be said to have transformed either the work situation or the status of the clerk. Lockwood believes that there are cases where office work has become like factory work, that is, where the application of mechanisation and rationalisation have together converted the clerk into a machine-minder, but he considers that such instances are rare. In his view, therefore, the degree of office mechanisation has not proceeded far enough to warrant a comparison between the clerk and the factory operative.

Braverman's description of the contemporary office, which postdates Lockwood's book by some sixteen years, presents a very different picture. Braverman considers that the modern office is now virtually indistinguishable from the factory. He suggests that the clerk has become a 'helpless attendant' of a highly mechanised, high-speed process, and lists a large number of technological innovations in the character of clerical functions in support of his arguments.(37) However, one is inclined to doubt whether this version of the

modern office has universal application. Certainly, there have been major technical advances in office equipment during the last decade. These include word processing systems, micro-computers, automated filing systems and visual display units. Many of these innovations bear comparison with the most advanced factory mechanisation, and in some case, entail the subordination of the operator to the machine. Yet it is doubtful whether it is legitimate to regard these as the typical equipment of the average office. Whilst they are certainly being used by the larger companies, and whilst the number of more rudimentary machines is rapidly proliferating, even in the smaller offices, it is more accurate to describe office automation as the shape of things to come. The availability of a large pool of cheap female labour has acted, and continues to act, as a brake upon the extent of capital investment in the office. Business machine manufacturers are increasingly at pains to acquaint managers with the advantages of mechanisation, but there is every indication that managers are very slow to respond. Even in the future, there are likely to be offices where extensive mechanisation would not prove cost effective. For these reasons, it would appear that direct comparisons between the objective character of office work and factory work are still premature, at least as far as Britain is concerned.

Whatever the extent of mechanisation and its consequences for the outlook of the office worker might be, it is clear from certain studies that the transition from elementary business methods to more streamlined procedures is not made smoothly. Enid Mumford and Olive Banks' 'The Computer and the Clerk' is a study of the effects on staff of the introduction of computerisation. They studied two different work settings, and in both, the installation of a computer was beset by difficulties of adjustment for the employees from the very start. In particular, they found that the attitudes to work of their respondents were actually modified by this technical innovation. They refer to 'alienation', and comment that for many employees work was seen as less interesting and less varied after the introduction of the computer. On the other hand, those who had previously been employed on fairly elaborate accounting machines

found the innovation to be welcome since it made their jobs more interesting and responsible.(38) From this study, it would appear that attitudes towards automation depend on familiarity with office machinery, and more importantly, perhaps, the extent to which it is seen as a threat to one's job.

As yet, it is difficult to assess the impact of increased mechanisation and automation upon the demand for white-collar labour. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour found that the net effect of office automation up to 1st January, 1965, had been to reduce the number of office jobs by only three-quarters of one per cent. It predicted that, in any case, by the year 1975 more new jobs would have been created than those which had been eliminated. It also suggested that the growing application of computers merely offset a growing shortage of office staff.(39) Since this report was produced, however, the cost of clerical labour has risen very markedly, and some of the more recent forms of office mechanisation are quite clearly intended as aids towards the planned reduction of staff costs. This is particularly true of the word processor. In an article in the Times, (15.9.76), entitled 'The £4,000 typist substitute that will soon pay for itself', the chief of office administration at a Lloyd's underwriting agency was reported as saying that without her word processor she would need the assistance of at least one full-time typist or perhaps two. Machines of this nature do not necessarily create redundancy, but they most certainly curb the demand for labour because of their revolutionary impact upon levels of productivity.

The silicon chip is another development which may well have a profound impact on the demand for office labour. This is a tiny wafer of silicon on which it is possible to put as much information as was once stored by a huge computer. This chip facilitates the production of very small, very cheap data processing systems and thus places automation within the range of even small firms. Although the full impact of this development belongs firmly to the future, the government has already expressed concern regarding the employment consequences of micro-processors. According to a report in the Sunday Times (June 4, 1978), the government has even set up a number of committees to investigate this issue.



It seems that it is the lower grades of white-collar work which have been most noticeably affected by the twin processes of mechanisation and rationalisation, and, it should be noted, it is these very categories which are overwhelmingly dominated by women. J.R. Dale found this to be very much the case among clerks in industry:

'If the mechanised and the simple manual routines become - as they are rapidly doing - the province of women ..... then the humbler non-routine jobs will fall to the newly recruited male clerk'. (40)

##### 5. White-Collar Unionism

In spite of the general dearth of sociological literature relating to white-collar workers, there are quite a few studies of the growth of white-collar unionism. The expansion in membership is essentially a post-war phenomenon, and, as Bain has noted, the figures are impressive, as the following table shows: TABLE I

The Growth of Total White-Collar and Manual Unionism in the U.K. 1948-64

Type of Union Membership	1948 (000s)	1964 (000s)	% Change 1948-64
1. Total white-collar unionism	1,964	2,623	+ 33.6
2. Total manual unionism	7,398	7,442	+ 0.6

Source: Bain, G.S. The Growth of White-Collar Unionism p.25

However, if one considers changes in the density of membership, that is, the relationship between actual and potential membership, then, as Bain has pointed out, the figures are far less dramatic. For during the period 1948-64, the density of total white-collar unionism only increased from 28.8 per cent to 29 per cent. In fact, the apparently remarkable growth represented by absolute numbers merely reflects the growth in the number of white-collar occupations.

More recent figures, however, show that there has been a definite expansion in membership density since the mid-sixties. Bain and Price state that there was a 9% increase in density between 1964 and 1970 and

that density rose to as much as 39.4% in 1974.(41) The increase in union density after the mid-sixties proceeded at a faster pace than the growth of white-collar employment.

Lumley has pointed out that if one were to include staff and professional associations within the category of white-collar unions, the current overall density would be approximately 50 per cent, a figure which compares favourably with that of 52.7 per cent for manual workers.(42) Statistics relating to white-collar unionism are notoriously difficult to interpret, however. Quite apart from the kind of problems which they pose for a sociologist sensitive to meaning, other difficulties arise over the question of classification. For example, Bain has noted that one-fifth of total white collar union membership belongs to unions which cater for both manual and non-manual workers and separate figures are not always available. The figures also conceal wide variations in membership density between different occupational categories. Nevertheless, the figures do present us with a rough guide, and in themselves offer a striking contrast with the low-degree of unionisation in the nineteenth century. The history of the growth of white-collar unionism includes many developments which have already been discussed, such as feminisation, but an important feature is the declining status and economic position of the clerk relative to that of the industrial labourer.(43)

Although instances of collective action by clerical workers in the nineteenth century have been documented, particularly in those occupations where large numbers of clerks were concentrated together such as the civil service, banking and the railways, prior to the 1890's most clerks relied on friendly societies rather than trade unions as a means of ensuring their economic security. At that time, respectability and the collective redress of grievances were incompatible objectives. One of the first developments to have any impact on the clerk's consciousness was the introduction of universal elementary education in 1870. Mary Benet writes:

'Education had always been the distinguishing mark of the clerk, and the comparative scarcity of literate employees gave him his prestige. This advantage was now being eroded. The demand for clerks was one impetus behind the growth of the educational system, but the influence of universal education on the status of the office worker was profoundly destructive.'

The unions which became established at the end of the nineteenth century rarely engaged in strike-action, and instead devoted themselves to gentle pressure on the government and to research and propaganda. One of these unions published 'The Clerk's Character', which focused attention on the setbacks to the clerk's pay and status after the Education Act. Between 1900 and 1914, the clerk experienced, according to Lockwood, some very lean years indeed. Even the best paid clerks were not substantially better off than the skilled manual worker, and very often, they had to sustain a higher cost of living in order to present an image of 'gentlemanliness'. Thus, in the period immediately prior to World War I, both the membership and the militancy of white-collar unions increased considerably.

It was not until the late thirties, however, that the superior economic position of the non-manual worker relative to that of the manual worker began to decline more dramatically. According to Lockwood, wages increased more rapidly than salaries during the period 1939 to 1956, and at the same time, the differential between higher and lower paid white-collar workers was narrowing. Writing in 1959, he maintained that:

'The average clerk is now very roughly on the same income level as the average manual worker, or perhaps even slightly below.' (45)

Of course, this had much to do with the fact that the manual labourer worked considerably longer hours for his pay, as indeed they still do. Yet, as Lockwood has noted, this knowledge would be of little comfort to the clerk if manual workers were thereby in a position to display a similar lifestyle.

The economic decline of the clerk was arrested in the mid-fifties, for during the years 1956 to 1967 his average salary earnings rose by 94.7%. (46) The average earnings of manual workers rose by 92.3% during the same period (though their basic rates increased by only 64.2%) and thus the differential

was maintained.

Figures provided by Westergaard and Resler for 1971, however, suggest that the relative position of clerks and manual workers has changed in favour of the latter. In terms of average earnings, male clerical workers lag behind not only skilled but even semi-skilled manual employees.(47) The fact that the manual worker is likely to work much longer hours for his extra earnings may not be taken into account by the non-manual worker when assessing his relative status in the income hierarchy. If this is the case, then it is perhaps small wonder that more and more clerical workers have turned to the unions rather than to their employers for ameliorative action.

In terms of fringe benefits, the clerk has traditionally been in a superior position to that of the labourer, although even here a narrowing of differences has been reported. (48) More and more manual workers are covered by pension schemes (although these are usually based on basic rather than on average earnings), receive sick pay and have longer holidays. With reference to the latter, Scott and Deere comment:

'Office staff entitlement seems now to be little different from that of many manual workers.' (49)

In recent years, one of the main pressures making for an improvement in the work conditions of manual workers has been the introduction of statutory and 'voluntary' incomes policy. The granting of longer holidays is just one of the ways in which employers have sought to circumvent the pay restrictions imposed by successive governments. Although, as Lumley has stated, the narrowing gap between manual and non-manual workers in terms of pay and fringe benefits cannot by itself account for the growth of white-collar unionism, it nevertheless remains an important background factor:

'Many white-collar employees see the relative advance of the blue-collar labour force as due to strong organisation and so they seek to emulate this in order to defend their position.' (50)

Another factor which may possibly account for trends in white-collar unionism is the changing class base of the clerical workforce. In the nineteenth century, clerical positions were dominated by people from middle-class

backgrounds, but by 1950, fifty per cent of clerks came from working-class homes. This was due not only to the great increase in the number of white-collar jobs, but also to the extension of educational provision and the influx of women into this sector. Although higher status white-collar occupations still recruit mainly from the middle-classes, this changing class composition may have consequences for union consciousness. Lumley believes that although it may not affect the density of unionism, it undermines the status value of a white-collar job. He puts forward the hypothesis that a union's attitude to the existing power structure depends upon the perceived status of the white-collar occupation which it represents. Thus, given a perceived decline in the status of white-collar occupations, unions will be increasingly likely to challenge rather than to work within the existing order.(51)

In a document published in 1966, the TUC suggested that the level of employment was one of the most important factors influencing union membership.(52) This relationship has not yet been adequately documented, but historically, there does seem to have been some degree of association between rising employment and rising membership, and between falling employment and declining membership, and this pattern holds good for white-collar and blue-collar unions. Lumley has suggested, however, that 'as white collar unionism grows increasingly strong, rising unemployment will provide an incentive for increasing membership and activity,' thus reversing the historical pattern. In other words, during a period of general economic uncertainty such as we are now experiencing, white collar workers who feel that their jobs may be threatened are increasingly likely to turn to the unions for protection because of the growing strength and effectiveness of white-collar unions. The contemporary insecurity of the male clerk represents a significant change from the days when such workers looked down upon the manual workforce as those whose jobs were far more vulnerable than their own. Yet another advantage which was formerly associated with white-collar as opposed to blue-collar work appears to have been eroded with the passage of time.

In the past, the favourable promotion prospects of white-collar work tended to inhibit union membership, with the notable exception of banking, where there has been a long history of unionism despite good promotion prospects for male clerks. Sykes has investigated the relationship between opportunities for occupational advancement and work attitudes and has also considered the extent to which the presence or absence of promotion prospects accounts for similarities and dissimilarities in the work attitudes of clerical and manual workers.(53) His study demonstrated the prevalence of distinctly different attitudes towards management and its interests, which he attributes to differences of 'ethos'. These different ethoses were a function of differences in opportunities for promotion. Whereas the lack of such opportunities had caused the manual workers to develop very rigid class boundaries and to reject the idea of upward social mobility, the clerks had developed no such notion of rigid class boundaries, and attached importance to upward social mobility. Sykes' study may have certain limitations in that it only includes workers in one Scottish steelworks, but it nevertheless draws attention to the significance of promotion prospects in shaping attitudes. He found that when the management effectively blocked the promotion opportunities of the clerks when they introduced a management training scheme, the clerks became a much more cohesive group and subsequently joined a union. Indeed, given a very definite trend towards external recruitment for management positions, one wonders how long promotion prospects will continue to fasten the attachment of clerical workers to their employers. The rewards for long service in the counting house are no longer characteristic of white-collar work. Wright Mills states that the 'ideology of promotion' is being rapidly undermined by the growing emphasis on technical competence and related tendency to favour highly qualified outsiders as candidates for senior positions. Thus, attainment of the upper echelons of management is no longer a realistic possibility for the middle brackets of the cadres, much less the broad ranges of routine clerical workers.(54)

In attempting to account for the growth of white-collar unionism, it is

important to consider not only the attitudes and status of the workers, but also the attitudes of both employers and government. For example, union density in the public sector is extremely high, the figure being something like 80 per cent. In this sector, not only are unions granted recognition, but staff are positively encouraged to join them. In the private sector, on the other hand, particularly in small manufacturing firms, employers' attitudes to unions may range from mistrust to open hostility and the refusal of recognition. The government, however, has been active in attempting to ensure employer recognition for white-collar unions. The government may also indirectly affect union membership by introducing measures which further reduce the differences between manual and non-manual incomes and working conditions.

Some writers, in fact, prefer to attach more weight to the actions of government and employers than to other factors in their analyses of trends in white-collar unionism. Bain, for example, while not wholly discounting the significance of changes in the relative status, income, and security of white-collar workers, is of the opinion that these factors are of only negligible importance.(55)

'If this has left white-collar workers unhappy, it does not seem to have encouraged them to unionize. At least, it is not possible to demonstrate any connection between the economic position of various white-collar groups and the degree to which they are unionized. This does not mean that white-collar workers who join unions are not interested in higher salaries, better fringe benefits, and greater security. They obviously are. But then, so is almost everyone else including those white-collar workers who do not join unions.'

In his view, employment concentration tends to promote the growth of white-collar unionism, but more important determinants are the extent to which employers are prepared to recognise the unions, and the willingness of the government to introduce policies which enable the unions to exert pressure for recognition. He therefore concludes that the activities of employers and governments in these respects will determine the future growth of white-collar unionism.

While Lumley's interpretation perhaps overstates the degree to which

white-collar workers take account of changes in the relative position of blue-collar workers, Bain's analysis tends to cast non-manual workers in an unduly adaptive posture, particularly in relation to the government. The latter study conveys the impression that numerous clerks have been restrained from joining unions in the past because to have done so might have jeopardised their career prospects. Now that the government has rubber-stamped the respectability of white-collar unionism, all are clamouring to join. Furthermore, Bain's analysis is somewhat time-bound, that is to say, it relates to a period of relative economic stability, when such things as statutory incomes policies and soaring inflation had not yet begun to threaten the structure of differentials. It seems reasonable to suggest that such developments might have had the effect of promoting a more 'economistic' outlook on the part of non-manual workers, which in turn might have had some impact on their propensity to join the unions. It has been suggested that whereas most people are socialised into an acceptance of the political order, there is no corresponding normative order underlying the economic status quo. Consequently, any attempt to manipulate the economic order, for example, by the use of statutory or 'voluntary' incomes control, is likely to be challenged.(56) This, to some extent might help to explain a noticeably more militant strain in recent white-collar unionism, even if the effect on union density is not so clear. Certainly, Hyman considers that inflation may have had the effect of forcing employers to abandon their former (not wholly disinterested) guardianship of their clerical employees' pay levels, and one would have supposed that this would surely have some significance for membership density.(57) In support of this point, and indeed, in fairness to Bain, it should be pointed out that he appears to have modified his position in recent years, and now accords considerable weight to inflation and also to wage rises in the explanation of trends in unionism as a whole:

'This reasoning is confirmed by an econometric model which demonstrates, among other things, that the rate of change of prices and the rate of change of wages have been highly significant determinants of the rate of change of union membership in the United Kingdom not just in 1969-70 but over the whole period 1892-1970.' (58)



It is manifestly clear that the factors which account for the growth of white-collar unionism are highly complex and extremely difficult to interpret. One should not overlook the fact that the various factors will affect white-collar workers very differently, depending on their market position and orientation to work. David Silverman, who has conducted research into the relationship between clerical ideologies and organisational factors considers that it is most important to emphasise the heterogeneous nature of the white-collar workforce:

'If we are to advance from speculation, the pressing need would now seem to be the attempts to dismantle the notion that there exists a unitary occupational group of 'white-collar workers' or 'clerks'. (59)

One thing is certain, the white-collar world has come a long way since the turn of the century, a fact which is clearly demonstrated by Routh's description of the clerk's dilemma at that time:

'A trade union that cannot strike is like a muzzled dog - however fierce its noises, no-one is really afraid. But as every organizer knows, white-collar workers are extraordinarily difficult to get out on strike; it goes against some deeply held feelings - their sense of social equality with the boss, their privilege of payment for time lost through illness, their semi-permanent attachment to the firm, their sense of responsibility for the performance of their work (which accumulates while they are away), their hopes of promotion, their superiority to the manual workers. When to this is added the small and scattered distribution of the units in which they are frequently employed and the geographic dispersion of their homes, a strike becomes almost impossible.' (60)

The restraining muzzle, the unwillingness of the clerk to jeopardise his hard-won respectability, has now, it seems, been removed by the gradual accumulation of insecurity, competition, loss of status and prospects, and a host of other humiliations. Perhaps we should now consider whether the clerk has any cause to be content with his lot in the modern world of administration.

## 6. Work Satisfaction

The awareness that occupations on the shop-floor have grown further and further away from traditional notions of craftsmanship has led to a great deal of interest in what, if any, sources of job satisfaction remain for the contem-

porary manual worker. There has been a corresponding, if not quite as extensive a literature relating to the changing nature of work satisfaction for the white-collar worker. Very few of these studies, it should be noted, focus on this phenomenon amongst female office staff. In some cases, they have been deliberately sifted out of the research, without any explanation for the logic behind such a course.(61) In other studies, sex differences amongst white-collar workers are not regarded as problematic, and it is impossible to tell from the evidence whether work attitudes do vary along sex lines.(62) In spite of these limitations from the point of view of the present study, it is useful to review some of the main findings.

Studies of worker satisfaction in this area take a number of forms, some of which have more to offer than others. One which has a distinct flavouring of management orientation is Nancy Morse's 'Satisfactions in the White-Collar Job'.(63) In this study she explores the conditions which are held to produce satisfaction in an industrial organisation. She suggests three factors as likely determinants of job satisfaction - these are, job content, individual levels of aspirations and the surrounding context of other satisfactions. Whilst her work has something to contribute in its delimitation of those areas where job satisfaction might be wanting, it is somewhat difficult to accept the psychologicistic foundations of her theories:

'We believe that the following variables are necessary for predicting the amount of behaviour of a particular type which an individual will display in a given time unit:

1. Strength of needs for which the behaviour is a path.
2. The probability that this path will yield need satisfaction.
3. The amount of behaviour (or amount of energy) required for a given unit of tension reduction.
4. The availability of other sources of tension-reduction for the same needs (the availability of other behaviour paths).

.....etc.'

The idea of 'needs', whether arranged in some hierarchy or having equal weight yet all requiring fulfilment, is popular with many organisational

psychologists. As Silverman has pointed out, however, there is very little opportunity to validate their existence.(64) Morse talks about needs as if they had some kind of autonomy:

'The need for skilled, varied work is quite widespread in the white-collar population and those who are doing highly routine work will tend to be less satisfied with their jobs than those doing skilled, varied work.'

If one must speak of white-collar workers as having 'needs', then it is essential to make explicit the conditions under which they are held to arise, and to make some attempt to identify them. There is no justification for assuming the presence of needs merely by juxtaposing some rather tenuous correlations. Morse's deterministic approach is further illustrated by the 'operational formula' which she uses to measure job satisfaction:

$$'S(\text{satisfaction}) = ER - (T_1 - ER) \text{ or, } 2ER - T_1'$$

This formula bears no relation whatsoever to the subjective experience of her subjects for she claims that:

'The best test of the formula, then, is through measures of need-level and amount of return which do not depend upon the insight of the subjects.'

Most studies of white-collar job satisfaction do, however, refer themselves directly to actual workers and central to their analyses is the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic sources of job satisfaction. No matter what other changes may occur in the work situation of the white-collar worker, it is claimed, he will always derive his primary satisfaction from intrinsic factors such as interest in work, opportunities for exercising responsibility, skilled and varied tasks, and to that extent, the clerk differs markedly from the manual worker, who is supposedly bound to his work by the cash nexus. In their investigation of the embourgeoisement thesis, Goldthorpe et al compared attitudes to work among manual and non-manual workers in the Luton area. They found that the performance of work tasks and work roles was a direct source of work satisfaction significantly more often among non-manual workers. Expectations from work in terms of social relationships, promotion prospects (as a means of enhancing one's prestige and responsibility as

much as one's pay-packet) and relations with superiors were also markedly different between the two groups.(65) It is these very differences, real or imagined, between white-collar and blue-collar workers which are thought to constitute the clerk's primary source of satisfaction.

Crozier's study of white-collar workers in France leads him into basic agreement with the views of Lockwood, although he regards the latter's explanatory models as oversimplified.(66) He considers that whilst white-collar work is fast assuming some of the disadvantages which are associated with manual work, such as lack of autonomy, it nevertheless 'facilitates identification with the ruling classes and has many compensations'. Crozier feels that it is important to distinguish between 'interest in the work' and 'satisfaction'. The former, he maintains, derives from an employee's location in an hierarchical order, whereas satisfaction derives from a person's ability to manoeuvre within the system. The overall picture of white-collar attitudes that emerges, says Crozier, is one of:

'persons relatively lukewarm toward their work and their positions, but whose opinions are nevertheless varied and do not correspond at all to the image of the downtrodden small bureaucrat, robot of modern civilisation, disseminated by the literature of the years between the two wars.' (67)

The most important contribution of this study is its focus on relative satisfactions and degrees of interest among white collar workers themselves. Although these differences are not fully explored, he does point out that male employees are slightly more satisfied than females, as are those who have more seniority over those with less. He found that great rivalry prevailed amongst groups, and that each group asserted their interest in their work as a means of demonstrating superiority:

'Members of higher-level categories received as a traumatic shock the news that their colleagues in lower-level categories were really interested in their work; this was the point whose significance they made the greatest effort to minimize even when quantified results were submitted.' (68)

According to Crozier, the white-collar world emerges as 'one dominated by stratification'.

There are some grounds for thinking that the white-collar worker is not as untainted by instrumental thoughts as some of these studies would lead us

to believe. Mercer & Weir, in their study of four groups of male clerical workers, maintain that whilst their respondents attached importance to intrinsic features of their work, it would be highly surprising if they did not. For, after all, a person's self-image is closely bound up with his or her occupation, and it would be tantamount to an admission of personal failure if one admitted to no satisfaction in one's job.(69) Moreover, their research findings show quite clearly that there is a strong emphasis on work as a source of economic reward, although the extent to which this is so varies according to the occupational group. Whilst a question relating to current sources of satisfaction showed that these are overwhelmingly the intrinsic aspects of work, a question concerning the most attractive features of a prospective job revealed a different picture:

TABLE II "What factor would you look for first in a job?"

	<u>%age of Sample Giving Each Answer</u>			
	<u>Clerks</u>	<u>Public Employees</u>	<u>Technicians</u>	<u>Draughtsmen</u>
<u>Intrinsic Aspects of Job:</u>				
Interest and variety	11	28	32	28
A chance to use responsibility and initiative	13	20	21	14
<u>Economic Aspects of Job:</u>				
Security and steady income	24	18	15	15
Good salary	26	25	17	31
Prospects of promotion	20	11	11	8
Opportunities for study and training	0	0	1	1
<u>Environmental Features:</u>				
Pleasant working conditions	2	0	4	0
A supervisor who doesn't breathe down your neck	0	0	0	1
Congenial hours	0	0	0	0
Good friends at work	1	0	1	1
A strong and active union	0	0	0	0
Within easy reach of home	0	2	0	0

Source: D.E. Mercer & D. Weir 'Attitudes to Work and Trade Unionism Among White-Collar Workers' Ind. Rels. Vol.3 No.2.

These findings draw attention to the fact that it is erroneous to assume that employees display a consistent set of priorities in their attitudes to work.

Another important point made by these authors relates to the question of boredom on the job as a principal source of dissatisfaction for the white-collar worker. Whereas Dale considers that 'boredom and monotony are the major occupational hazards of the clerk', they are somewhat wary of such typifications and labels.(70) They, like Crozier in his study, found that seemingly boring, repetitive work was not necessarily a cause for dissatisfaction.(71) They maintain that:

'Valid satisfaction (relative to the expectations of those involved) may, in fact, be derived from work which appears to the outside observer to be boring, monotonous and repetitive.'

There may well be more than a grain of truth in these words. It should never be forgotten that studies of white-collar workers are typically undertaken by those who occupy more prestigious positions in the occupational hierarchy. When academics cast their eyes downwards upon the serried ranks of clerical workers, perhaps there is a subconscious feeling of 'there, but for the grace of God, go I.' Just as the more exalted clerks in Crozier's study found it impossible to accept the fact that the lower orders found genuine satisfactions in their work, it is equally possible that sociologists cannot tolerate the idea that intrinsic job satisfaction is not peculiar to highly qualified occupations. From the remote and lofty observation platform of the sociologist, routine non-manual work may seem a colourless enclave of boredom and monotony. He should be more prepared to put his prejudices to the test by undertaking a close examination of the white-collar world. All too often, these subjective judgments are a reason for ignoring it.

### General Perspectives

In this chapter, I have done no more than to summarise, in very broad terms, some of the key developments in white-collar work since the end of the nineteenth century, and to present some of the main sociological findings concerning the clerical labour force at the present time. If the foregoing analysis seems in any way limited, then it must be said that this reflects the lack of relevant sociological literature. Indeed, the world of entertainment appears

to have devoted more attention to the clerk than have the industrial sociologists. I have already mentioned the proliferation of novels in the twenties which explored the life of the female office worker. In the cinema industry too, the office has provided the setting for many a film. Some, such as 'The Rebel' and 'The Apartment' have emphasised the alienating conditions of the office environment. In the former, Tony Hancock attempts to overcome perpetual boredom by doodling caricatures of the other male clerks in the huge open-plan office where he works. In the latter, Jack Lemmon is so intent upon escape from a similar environment that he is obliged to offer his apartment to senior executives for their extra-business, extra-marital activities, in the hope that they will reward him with promotion. 'How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying' presents a rather different image. Here, employment as a clerk, far from being dull and monotonous, is an occasion for song and dance, and the journey to the top of the organisation is smoothly and swiftly accomplished.

Whilst sociology has never glamourised the white-collar world to this extent, it nevertheless offers a similarly wide-ranging set of images. At one end of the spectrum is Wright Mills' gloomy pessimism, a vision of frustrated hopes and alienation, and at the other, Crozier's qualified optimism, a belief in greater opportunities for the clerk to determine his own work-situation. It hardly needs to be said that more information is required before we can reasonably assess these very different interpretations. One thing is certain, the female office-worker remains something of a mystery, since few of these studies have focused on her directly. In the next chapter, I shall endeavour to make up for this discrepancy.

Finally, in case it should be felt that the case for studying the office world still requires further justification, I shall conclude this chapter with a quotation from C. Wright Mills:

'By understanding these diverse white-collar worlds, one can also understand better the shape and meaning of modern society as a whole, as well as the simple hopes and complex anxieties that grip all the people who are sweating it out in the middle of the twentieth century.' (72)

### References

1. Crozier, M., The World of the Office Worker, (University of Chicago Press: London, 1971), p.1.
2. Bain, G.S., The Growth of White-Collar Unionism, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1970), p.11.
3. Ibid., p.11. Table III shows the precise changes in the occupational structure between 1911 and 1961. (Table III attached)
4. Elliott, R.F., 'The Growth of White-Collar Employment in Great Britain 1951-1971', British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.XV, No.1., p.39.
5. Lumley, R., White-Collar Unionism in Britain, (Methuen: London 1973), pp.16-20.
6. M. Crozier, for example, writes:  
  

'According to current usage, two large groups of occupations comprise the nucleus around which the notion of white-collar employee has crystallized: the occupations of office employee and sales worker.'

op.cit., p.8
7. Wright Mills, C., White Collar, (Oxford University Press: New York, 1951).
8. David Lockwood has suggested the term 'white-bloused' worker as a more precise title: The Blackcoated Worker, (Allen & Unwin: London, 1958), p.36.
9. Ibid., p.22. From The Clerk: a Sketch in Outline of His Duties and Discipline, (London, 1878), p.127.
10. Wright Mills, op.cit., pp.208-209.
11. Benet, M.K., Secretary, (Sidgwick & Jackson: London, 1972), p.34.
12. Lockwood, op.cit., p.29
13. Wright Mills, op.cit., p.191.
14. Braverman, H., Labor and Monopoly Capital, (Monthly Review Press: New York, 1974), pp.293-295.
15. Braverman, H., ibid., p.302
16. Lockwood, op.cit., p.36. It is likely that there were more women employed in clerical positions at that time, but that they were recorded under different occupational categories
17. Taken from, Sullerot, E., Woman, Society and Change, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: London 1971), p.147.
18. Lockwood, op.cit., pp.122-125
19. Mary Benet writes:

'The typewriter was introduced to the public in 1873, and Remington had the revolutionary idea of training girls to demonstrate it.



Called 'typewriters' themselves, the girls created a sensation, and the firms that bought the machines wanted the operators too. Typing was seized on by women as a golden opportunity to get out to work, and men said, 'Of course they can play the piano, so it's not surprising that they can type'.'

op.cit., p.39

20. Lockwood, op.cit., p.125
21. Priestley, J.B., Angel Pavement, (Heinemann: London 1930).
22. Morley, C., Kitty Foyle, (Faber & Faber: London 1940).
23. Benet, op.cit., p.46
24. Ibid., pp.53-54
25. Rhee, H.A., Office Automation in Social Perspective, (Blackwell: Oxford, 1968), p.25.
26. Mary Benet notes that the sexes had separate clerical unions until 1939.
27. Women who had been engaged in all types of work during the war had found the experience 'liberating'. In a recent television series which focused on women at work, one woman claimed that her work experiences in the Second World War broadened her outlook and changed her attitudes to marriage and birth control, in particular because of her workplace contacts with other women and their ideas: 'Women at Work' BBC2, 1974.
28. Wright Mills, op.cit., p.204
29. Lockwood, op.cit., pp.72-81
30. Ingham has attempted to trace out the relationship between organisational size and structure and workers' involvement in and attachment to their firms. He maintains that whilst types of involvement and levels of attachment have a great deal to do with the size and internal control structure of organisations, the extent to which this is so depends very much upon the orientations to work of employees. These derive both from within and beyond the confines of the workplace.
31. Crozier, op.cit., p.27.
32. The Times' Special Report on Office Efficiency', 13-17 September, 1976; and 'A Guide to Productivity in the Office', 12-16 September, 1977.
33. The Guardian, March 28th, 1974.
34. Observer, May 8th, 1977, p.17.
35. Ibid., p.19.
36. Lockwood, op.cit., p.93
37. Braverman, H. op.cit., pp.326-348.
38. Mumford, E., and Banks, O., The Computer and the Clerk (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London 1967).

39. Ministry of Labour, Computers in Offices (London: HMSO, 1965).
40. Dale, J.R., The Clerk in Industry, (Liverpool University Press: Liverpool 1962).
41. Price, R., and Bain, G.S., 'Union Growth Revisited: 1948-1974 in Perspective', British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.XIV, No.3, p.345, Bain, G.S. and Price, R., 'Union Growth and Employment Trends in the U.K. 1964-1970', BJIR, November 1972, p. 378.
42. Lumley, R., op.cit., p.25
43. Bain believes that the crucial variables which explain the growth of white-collar unionism are, employment concentration, union recognition and government action. Whilst he does not discount the importance of other factors, such as variations in personality or attitude structures, these 'strategic variables predominate' and he regrets their absence from the design of most attitude surveys in this field, Op.cit., p.187.
44. Benet, op.cit., p.40
45. Lockwood, op.cit., p.49
46. Lumley, op.cit., p.48
47. Westergaard, J. and Resler, H., Class in Capitalist Society, (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1976), p.76.
48. Ibid., pp.48-51
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50. Ibid., p.50.
51. Ibid., pp.30-34
52. Trade Unionism, (London, TUC, 1966), p.131. Mentioned in Lumley, ibid., p.37
53. Sykes, A.J.M., 'Some Differences in the Attitudes of Clerical and Manual Workers', Soc. Review, xiii (Nov. 65) pp.297-310.
54. Wright Mills, op.cit., p.275.
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56. Goldthorpe, J.H., 'Social Inequality and Social Integration in Modern Britain', Poverty, Inequality & Class Structure, Wedderburn, D. (ed), (C.U.P.: London, 1974), pp.217-38.
57. Hyman, R., Strikes (Collins: London 1972), pp.128-129.
58. Price, R. and Bain., op.cit., p. 350.
59. Silverman, D., 'Clerical Ideologies: A Research Note', BJS, Vol.19, pp.326-333.

60. Routh, G. 'White-Collar Unionism in the United Kingdom' in Sturmthal, A., White-Collar Trade Unions, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana and London 1966), pp.165-204.
61. For example, J.R. Dale's, The Clerk in Industry focuses only on males. References to women are extremely hard to find, despite the salience of feminisation noted by other writers.
62. See, for example, M. Crozier's, The World of the Office Worker, (University of Chicago Press: London 1971).
63. Morse, N., Satisfactions in the White-Collar Job, (University of Michigan, 1953).
64. Silverman, D., The Theory of Organisations, (Heinemann: London 1970), pp.77-78.
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66. Crozier, op.cit., p.33
67. Ibid., p.95
68. Ibid., pp. 104-5.
69. Mercer, D.E. & Weir, D.T.H., 'Attitudes to Work and Trade Unionism Among White-Collar Workers', Industrial Relations Journal, Summer 1972, Vol.3 No.2, pp.49-60.
70. Dale, J.R., op.cit.
71. Crozier, M., The Bureaucratic Phenomenon, (University of Chicago Press: 1964).
72. Wright Mills, op.cit., p.xv

TABLE III

*The Occupied Population of Great Britain by Major Occupational Groups, 1911-61*

Occupational groups	Number of persons in major occupational groups, 1911-61 (000s)					Major occupational groups as a percentage of total occupied population, 1911-61					Growth indices of major occupational groups, 1911-61 (1911 = 100)				
	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961
1. Employers and proprietors	1,232	1,318	1,407	1,117	1,139	6.7	6.8	6.7	5.0	4.7	100	107	114	91	92
2. All white-collar workers	3,413	4,094	4,841	6,948	8,450	18.7	21.2	23.0	30.9	35.9	100	119	141	202	247
(a) Managers and administrators	631	704	770	1,245	1,268	3.4	3.6	3.7	5.5	5.4	100	112	122	197	201
(b) Higher professionals	184	196	240	435	718	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.9	3.0	100	107	130	236	390
(c) Lower professionals and technicians	560	679	728	1,059	1,418	3.1	3.5	3.5	4.7	6.0	100	121	130	189	253
(d) Foremen and inspectors	237	279	323	590	682	1.3	1.4	1.5	2.6	2.9	100	118	136	249	288
(e) Clerks	832	1,256	1,404	2,341	2,906	4.5	6.5	6.7	10.4	12.7	100	151	169	281	360
(f) Salesmen and shop assistants	659	980	1,376	1,278	1,368	3.4	5.1	6.5	5.7	5.9	100	99	130	129	141
3. All manual workers	13,685	13,970	14,776	14,450	14,020	74.6	72.0	70.3	64.2	59.3	100	102	108	106	102
4. Total occupied population	18,350	19,332	21,024	22,515	23,630	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100	105	115	123	129

Source: Bain, G.S., The Growth of White-Collar Unionism p.12.

N.B. The following breakdown of the white-collar labour force is derived from White-Collar Unionism in Britain by R.Lumley (1973) and shows a rather different distribution from the above:

	<u>% of white-collar labour force</u>
Clerks	34½
Salesmen and Shop Assistants	16
Lower Professionals & Technicians	17
Managers & Administrators	16
Higher professionals	9
Foremen & Inspectors	8

## CHAPTER FOUR.

## WOMEN IN THE OFFICE

'Nine o'clock in the morning on a cold winter's day in the city... and everywhere you look women are striding briskly to work, bare-legged in zero degree weather... Most of these women are striding towards their typewriters and yesterday's unfinished dictation, towards a banking job where they count money rather than make it, towards work with no future except more of the same. Married or unmarried, ambitious or not, they are making their daily rendezvous with a world in which women are largely tolerated, on the grounds that men can no more be expected to use a typewriter or answer the telephone than to wash socks or clean house.' (1)

In spite of the fact that nearly half of all white-collar workers are women, few sociologists have considered it worthwhile to turn the spotlight on their experiences and attitudes. They are often deliberately excluded from empirical studies of clerical workers, or, at best, accorded footnote status of a purely statistical nature. Some studies attach no importance whatsoever to the sexual composition of their subjects, their authors seemingly of the opinion that the gender of a white-collar worker is of no consequence for attitudes to work, location in the office hierarchy, opportunities for promotion, or indeed, any other aspect of the work situation. Amongst those few studies which have paid some attention to the significance of sexual variations in the office world, albeit a marginal area of interest, explanations for the status quo often appear to be based on the preconceptions of the authors. One example is provided by Mumford and Banks' study of clerical workers:

'Young women in dull, routine jobs with few prospects of promotion are not, and cannot be expected to be, highly job-oriented. Their important goals usually lie outside the work situation and work is treated as a means for ensuring a living and securing a pleasant social situation.' (2)

These authors, as we noted earlier, operate with an *a priori* model of young girls' attitudes towards work. Young girls are presumed to be principally concerned with finding their future mates, and for this reason, their concentration at the bottom of the office hierarchy may be understood in terms of these 'short-term personal work goals'. Most female office workers are thus portrayed as victims of their own limited horizons, and in this way, the authors prepare the ground for the operation of self-fulfilling prophecies.

Another well-known study of white-collar workers, Lockwood's 'The Blackcoated Worker', tends to give minimal attention to female employees and generally subscribes to the stereotyped images.(3) Crozier's study of white-collar workers in six Parisian companies presents us with a picture of women workers concentrated in the more routine positions, but does not offer any satisfactory explanation as to why this should be so. Although he recognises that women clerks tend to occupy an inferior status within the firm, which in his view accounts for the presence of apathy and indifference among them, one gains little insight into the mechanisms which confine women to the lower levels of the office status hierarchy.(4) Apart from these studies, there are very few 'established' pieces of research which have concerned themselves wholly or in part with the subject of life in the female ghetto. There is no shortage of references, however, among the many volumes of feminist literature, which add up to a picture of frustration, servitude and exploitation.(5) Here, at least, there is some attempt to relate women's low status in the office to their inferior social and economic status within society as a whole. Benet's 'Secretary' is the only published book known to the present writer which is exclusively devoted to the subject of the female office worker.(6) There is no attempt to disguise the feminist orientations of the author, but it represents a truly comprehensive and thoughtful investigation which succeeds in exploding many of the myths concerning female clerks and secretaries. Since it does not incorporate any systematic analysis of their attitudes and work situations, however, it is unlikely to gain academic respectability, especially because of the author's journalistic background. The same is probably true of Korda's discussion of sexual gamesmanship in the office, 'Male Chauvinism: how it works' which affords a rare insight into the fantasies and prejudices of male executives in the American business community.(7) Wright Mills, who is, of course academically respectable, wrote a fascinating book about white-collar workers, but while his section on girls in the office is highly

illuminating with regard to how they were perceived by novelists in the twenties, we learn very little about the contemporary situation.(8)

There is every reason to suppose that the future will yield a torrent of literature on the subject of women in the office, mainly because the feminist movement has brought about a heightened interest in the subject of women generally amongst sociologists. It seems inevitable that they will shortly focus on that field of work which accounts for over one-quarter (29%) of all female employees, and one hopes that their findings will dispel many of the assumptions which for too long have lingered in the minds of managers and academics alike. For the present, however, one is obliged to rely heavily upon a great deal of non-academic source material in order to construct a picture of female white-collar employment. At an advanced stage of this research, I was fortunate enough to gain access to two studies of a sociological nature, both of which are as yet unpublished. One of these is Silverstone's 'The Office Secretary', and the other is Elsy and Shaw's 'Office Girls: Education and Job Choice'. Both represent a marked departure from earlier studies of office life in that they focus primarily on women and are not based on the assumption that women's attitudes to work are fixed by their out-of-work preoccupations and circumstances. The findings of these studies have proved invaluable for the purpose of providing strong support for observations based upon non-academic sources of information.

A further source of information was provided by the numerous American and British journals which publish articles concerning personnel policy and work attitudes. Since many of the studies have been conducted from a managerialist perspective, however, they possess certain limitations from the point of view of the sociologist. However, one may derive from these sources a great deal of data which is relevant in the present context.

The following discussion covers a great many aspects of female employment in white-collar work. The ultimate aim of this section, however, is to demonstrate the ways in which the decision to engage in temporary as opposed to permanent employment may be regarded as a response to a range of problems

encountered by women in this sphere of the labour market.

1. Female White-Collar Workers - A General Survey

a. The Occupational Distribution of Female Office Workers

At the present time, more than two million women in England and Wales are employed as clerical workers, and there is every sign that their numbers will continue to grow.(9) According to the D.E.S., in the late sixties, 40% of girl school leavers aged under 18 went into this kind of work.(10) Recently, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of girls entering clerical work, so that in 1973 this was the occupational choice of no less than 60% of girl leavers.(11)

Table I illustrates the principal trends which took place in the proportion and distribution of female office workers during the period 1911 to 1971.

TABLE I. The Proportion of Female Workers in White-Collar Occupations in Great Britain 1911-1971

<u>Category of White-Collar Work</u>	<u>Percentage of Females</u>					
	1911	1931	1951	1961	1966	1971
All white-collar workers	29.8	35.8	42.3	44.5	46.5	46.2
Managers and Administrators	19.8	13.0	15.2	15.4	16.7	18.5
Higher professionals	6.0	7.5	8.3	9.7	9.4	10.0
Lower professionals and technicians	62.9	58.8	53.5	50.8	52.1	51.9
Foremen and inspectors	4.2	8.7	13.4	10.3	11.4	12.8
Clerks	21.4	46.0	60.2	65.2	69.3	71.9
Salesmen and shop assistants	35.2	37.2	51.6	54.9	58.7	59.4

Source: Price, R., and Bain, G.S., 'Union Growth Revisited: 1948-74 in Perspective' British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.XIV, No.3.

Price and Bain interpret white-collar work in its very broadest sense to include, for example, sales personnel, whereas we are strictly concerned with clerical workers, but their data is of considerable interest in that women's minority representation among the ranks of managers and administrators is clearly



a constant feature of the white-collar world. In contrast, their representation among the humbler ranks has actually grown more than three-fold during the same period. The term 'clerk' tends to operate as an umbrella term for a whole multitude of occupations, some of which present opportunities for movement upwards through the ranks, some of which do not. It is important therefore to examine whether there is any degree of concentration of women in different clerical jobs. According to the 1971 Census, women represented: 63% of all clerks and cashiers; 83% of all telephone operators; 86% of all office machine operators; and 99% of all typists, shorthand writers and secretaries.(12)

The jobs of comptometer operating, filing, copy-typing, and telephone answering are not renowned as stepping-stones to the director's chair, while the job of secretary is sometimes alleged to lead in that direction, but quite incorrectly so. The jobs that women do in the white-collar world on the whole preclude upward movement, and in the case of those positions which theoretically offer some opportunities for advancement through the ranks, men rather than women tend to benefit. Blackburn's study of bank clerks is illuminating with regard to this latter point:

'Careers in banking are for men; the routine work such as machine operating is for women. This distinction is basic; women are employed for 'women's work' and it is only the outstanding women who can progress to 'men's work'. (13)

Blackburn states that the banks regard men and women as 'two different classes of employee', and that this attitude is particularly noticeable in recruitment literature where the banks encourage young men to aspire to careers in management, and young girls to aspire to jobs as secretaries, supervisors or super-clerks:

'the keen and intelligent girl may ultimately undertake the duties of: Cashier, Ledger Supervisor, Income Tax Clerk or Correspondence Clerk'. (14)

Blackburn concludes that any change in this sex differentiated structure of banking occupations will only come about if there is a shortage of male recruits. While recent legislation is designed to foster improved opportunities for women in jobs such as banking, the fact that more and more women seem to be

handing us our money over the counter these days has probably more to do with the diminishing supply of male school-leavers who opt for banking, rather than a pioneering attitude on the part of the Big Four.

Sullerot has noted that the concentration of women in the least-skilled, least prestigious, lowest paid, white-collar jobs is the rule in most western societies, especially in the public sector of employment. Even in 'go-ahead' Sweden, 73% of women in public employment are found in the lowest categories, whereas 73% of the men are found in the higher categories.(15)

The work of Fogarty et al offers considerable insight into the promotion prospects of secretaries. Part of their research is concerned with the occupational background of 96 male and 96 female managers in a large company. Apart from the fact that women are 'a distinct minority' among top management, only 20% of the women managers came up via the secretarial route, whereas well over a third 'came in with some expertise already established as a result of specialist training or experience in other work'.(16) Men, on the whole, took longer to reach management status than women, but some of them had been 'plodding up the ladder from the humble beginnings of errand boy or junior clerk', whereas no women had worked their way up from such modest levels on the occupational ladder. Thus, the fact that there is a diminishing number of opportunities for long-range upward mobility in the white collar world appears to be especially true in the case of women. The findings of this study suggest that entry into management without specialised training will be a very rare experience in the future for either sex.

Stassinopoulos is inclined to regard women's relative absence from the higher echelons of the white-collar hierarchy as something of a blessing in disguise. Unlike men, they are not vulnerable to any stresses and strains in their work, because they possess 'freedom':

'They are not trapped by a career ladder to which they must hang on like grim death, struggling from rung to rung, hoping against hope to succeed 'old Boggins' as deputy assistant acting temporary manager, and dreading the day when a rung snaps and plunges the climber into the proletarian abyss.' (17)

It may well be true that most women are not constrained, as many male breadwinners are, into risking their physical and mental health for the sake of moving up a few grades in the office hierarchy, but this is small consolation to those women who do aspire towards more responsible positions but who can find no way round the obstacles which stand in their path.

b. Pay and Conditions

Evidence from a number of sources shows quite clearly that female clerical workers are paid less than their male counterparts, even when one excludes the effect of overtime earnings. The New Earnings Survey of 1977, for example, showed that the average hourly earnings of adult male clerical workers was 167.1 np, whereas that of women was 129.3 np.(18) Further confirmation of the existence of a marked differential is provided by Elsy and Shaw. Whereas 54% of their male respondents earned £1,500-2,000+, only 7.8% of their female respondents fell into this bracket. They also found that this differential could not be accounted for simply in terms of the relatively greater age of their male sample.(19) Within the broad occupational category of clerical work, women's earnings do vary, depending on the particular skill and level of responsibility, but as a group their earnings are significantly lower than those of men. An IDS survey of women's pay and employment shows that part of the reason for this discrepancy is the existence in many companies of 'men's work' and 'women's work', which are differently graded.(20) A number of companies are making efforts to eliminate these separate scales for men and women, but it may be that there are a great many other firms, smaller and less well-known than those mentioned in the survey, which are moving in the opposite direction, in response to the implications of the Equal Pay Act. In the latter type of company, regrading and other means of evading obligations in respect of equal pay may well be serving to concentrate women more than ever into the lower paid, lower skilled non-manual jobs.

With regard to sickness pay and occupational pension schemes, women

clerical workers are once again found to be in an inferior position. According to the 1970 New Earnings Survey, 93% of males in non-manual office and communications occupations were covered by sick pay schemes, and 70% by occupational pension schemes. The corresponding figures for women were 55% and 36% respectively.(21) With regard to annual holiday entitlement, women clerks again hold a less favourable position. Although the majority of both men and women employed in full-time clerical work can expect to receive between three to four weeks annual holiday, the New Earnings Survey of 1974 found that whilst 53% of men in these occupations received four weeks or more annual holiday, only 32% of women did so.(22) Benet considers that women not only receive inferior pay and fringe benefits, but that their working environment is usually less favourable than that of men:

'It has recently been shown that women tend to receive the same proportion of office space as they do of pay - 20% to 50% less than that of men doing roughly the same work in the same office... The higher the concentration of women in a particular area of the office, the lower the standard of decor.' (23)

Although there has been a great deal of sociological interest in the subject of workplace inequality, the main concern of research in this area has been to assess the extent of differences in the situations of white-collar workers as a whole as compared with blue-collar workers as a whole. There appears to have been little interest however in the extent of variation between male and female white-collar workers. The information cited above suggests that there are significant differences, and that this would therefore be a fruitful area for further study.

#### c. Union Membership

Throughout the twentieth century women white-collar workers have exhibited a lower overall density of union membership than men. It is often supposed that this discrepancy may be explained in terms of female personality traits. For example, one writer has suggested that 'women are generally more conservative than men'.(24) Bain, however, considers that the difference between the sexes in respect of union density cannot be explained in terms of innate or learned

dispositions. In his opinion, the lower proportion of female employees who belong to unions must be accounted for in terms of the occupational and industrial distribution of the female workforce. He points out that there is a direct relationship between union density and size of establishment, and that since female employment is 'skewed in the direction of small establishments', we would expect them to exhibit a lower rate of union membership. He also proposes that 'the greater the degree of employment concentration the greater the density of white-collar unionism'.(25) Women, however, are less numerous in those industries which have a high degree of employment concentration, and more numerous in those which have a low degree of employment concentration. He concludes that women do not possess inherent qualities which make them more difficult to organise and agrees with the view of Lockwood that:

'The proportion of women in most of the major clerical unions is roughly equal to their representation in the field of employment which the unions seek to organise.' (26)

The idea that women in white-collar work are less union-minded than their male counterparts is also undermined by the fact that there is a higher proportion of unionisation among women than among men in the public sector. Moreover, a historical perspective casts considerable doubt on the notion that the propensity of women white-collar workers to organise is finite. Table 2 shows the trends in both union membership and union density for the period 1948-1974. It is evident from these figures that whilst women still lag behind men in terms of both criteria of unionisation there has nevertheless been a very considerable growth in female white-collar unionism since the war.

TABLE 2. Sex Differences in White-Collar Unionism in the U.K. 1948-1974

<u>Membership of White-Collar Unions (000s)</u>											
<u>Male</u>				<u>%age increase</u>		<u>Female</u>				<u>%age increase</u>	
1948	1964	1970	1974	1948-74	1970-74	1948	1964	1970	1974	1948-74	1970-74
1,267	1,681	2,143	2,593	+104.7	+21.0	697	1,003	1,447	1,629	+133.7	+12.6
<u>Union Density (%)</u>											
				<u>%age increase</u>						<u>%age increase</u>	
1948	1964	1970	1974	1948-74	1970-74	1948	1964	1970	1974	1948-74	1970-74
33.8	33.4	40.0	44.5	+10.7	+4.5	25.4	24.9	30.7	32.6	+7.2	+1.9

Source: Derived from, Price, R. and Bain, G.S., 'Union Growth Revisited: 1948-1974 in Perspective', B.J.I.R., Vol.XIV No.3., p.349.

There is no way of knowing whether the growth of female membership and union density has been due simply to greater activity on the part of the unions in their drive to recruit new members, or whether changes in the situation of female clerical workers has brought about a heightened interest in union membership. At any rate, this development does represent a challenge to stereotyped thinking, as do instances of union militancy among certain categories of white-collar workers. In the summer of 1974, the Civil and Public Services Association, of which women represent nearly two-thirds of the total membership, organised a protest march and a campaign of industrial action in an attempt to force the government to reduce the number of temporary staff working in government offices in London. Similar action was taken by A.P.E.C.C.S., over half of whose members are women, and a number of other unions. A B.B.C. film on the subject of women and trade unions showed a number of female clerical employees at a Manchester factory hotly disputing the intransigence of management and male colleagues over the issue of equal pay.(27) Many of the women had only joined the union (A.P.E.C.C.S.) because of this particular dispute, having been unaware of or uninterested in union affairs previously. Once involved in the strike however, there had been a lasting effect on their consciousness.

A more recent example of militancy, this time involving secretaries belonging to NATSOPA, provides a useful insight into the way in which attempts to secure better wages and conditions can be frustrated by the indifference of union hierarchies. In 1977, according to a report in Spare Rib, secretaries working at the Times decided to press for higher wages. Seven months after this decision was taken, the women concerned were still waiting for the union to arrange a meeting with the management. The secretaries were reported as saying that they had been instructed to stop writing to the branch because they were annoying the union. In the meantime, the secretaries had embarked on a vigorous campaign to publicise their cause, which included such tactics as sticking up posters and writing slogans on letters.(28)

There are no grounds for supposing, therefore, that female white-collar workers are simply more conservative than men. However, it is important to

bear in mind that female clerical workers are highly stratified. There are tremendous differences between the filing clerk and the executive secretary, not only in terms of their social and educational background and degree of training, but also in terms of their work situation, status and, in particular, their relationship with employers. Lumley considers that the close contact between the secretary and her employer generates a strong feeling of company loyalty on the part of the former, which militates against her identification with the office proletariat.(29) Thus, a knowledge of the sources and character of differentiation within the ranks of female office staff is relevant to an understanding of variable patterns of unionisation among this group. It is appropriate, therefore, to examine the various types of office work in rather greater detail, in order that the sharp differences which characterise the work situations of female office workers may be highlighted.

## 2. The Office Secretary

Official statistics often make no distinction between typists, shorthand-typists and secretaries, as though one could legitimately regard life in the all-girl typing pool as identical to life in the inner sanctum of the senior executive's suite of offices. Nothing could be further from the truth. The twin processes of technology and business rationalisation have brought about a division of clerical functions into two separate components, executed by two different groups of employees. The first category comprises the true secretary - the boss's personal assistant who, whilst performing a degree of routine work such as typing, taking dictation and filing, spends a great deal of time organising her employer's daily activities. The other category of worker is engaged almost exclusively on routine paper work, and is increasingly located at some distance from the corridors of power. The only aspect of their work situation which is common to both groups is that men typically hire them and fire them, administer and control them, and in some cases, regard them as sexual entertainment. It is essential, therefore, to consider them separately, and this section will be devoted to those who are situated at the apex of the status hierarchy of female office workers.

a. On Becoming a Secretary

'There is no need for a woman to prove herself equal: she is acknowledged equal, and different. The making of a home its happiness, beauty and comfort is for younger married couples today a partnership of equals. For girls who look forward to this, at a time when people are getting married at younger ages, what careers are there which provide the dignity of intelligent work without prolonged years of study and several years of practice to ensure competence? Perhaps the most obvious is a secretarial career?' (30)

Ever since Remington introduced his first female typewriters in 1873, secretarial work has been considered an ideal occupation for women. It has attracted women of all social backgrounds and ages, and will no doubt continue to do so for many decades to come, despite the frenzied activity of office machine salesmen who would like to persuade employers that word processing machines are more productive. There is not a great deal of systematic evidence in published form relating to modes of recruitment to secretarial positions, but it is possible to identify different routes into this occupation.

Firstly, it is possible to become a secretary by undertaking a specialised training course at a private college. The reputation of these colleges, their typical recruits and the degree of emphasis placed on purely vocational skills vary enormously. They range from the select finishing school type of establishment which offers a training in grooming, gourmet cooking and etiquette, in addition to instruction in secretarial skills, to the more matter-of-fact locally attended private commercial college. The former variant represents the natural extension of boarding school for many daughters of the upper-middle class, its curriculum reminiscent of the training in accomplishments for mid-19th century characters in search of a husband. One suspects that the latter variety is more likely to recruit ex-grammar school girls (or their contemporary equivalents from the comprehensive schools) or those from private day schools.

A second mode of entry is via a college of further education, where the emphasis is strictly on skills appropriate to the office, although there may be provision for specialised courses involving the use of foreign languages and the chance to learn secretarial skills among many others in a general



business studies course. It appears that many of the women who undertake these more specialised courses subsequently enter secretarial work only by default. In the spring of 1978, I spoke to a group of girls who were pursuing a bilingual secretarial course at a college of Higher Education in the South-East. Without exception, the secretarial component of their course was regarded as entirely secondary to the task of developing linguistic proficiency. Not one of them expressed any interest in following a secretarial career and all envisaged an occupational future which would grant them the opportunity to use their language skills. However, their optimism was not shared by the member of staff who taught them:

'Their bread and butter subject is their shorthand-typing. They're not going to go in and get jobs as linguists. In very few instances will they be able to say to a firm, "Look, I can speak French and German. I can write it. I've got my Grade II in this and my intermediate in the other - employ me as a linguist." Very few graduates in languages are employed as linguists.'

In the case of girls such as these, secretarial work is seen as a last resort. Yet while this view may be based on a correct appraisal of the limited opportunities to be found in secretarial jobs, it appears to be matched by an equally incorrect assessment of the likely outcome of their training. It seems highly probable that the ranks of secretaries include many girls like these, for whom the last resort has actually become a way of life.

A third route is the graduate secretarial course, the development of which betokens the limited pool of opportunities for female graduates. It is possible to take such a course at one or other of the establishments named above, but some institutions of higher education offer special courses for women graduates. There is even a first degree course in secretarial studies at Strathclyde University for girls who have anticipated the likely outcome of three years devoted to the complexities of Middle English. The course includes the usual training in shorthand, typing and business machines practice (involving 'machine laboratory work'), plus a selection of courses in business studies. It is hard to see what distinguishes this B.A. in secretarial work from any

other high-powered course in office skills, although the Director of the Centre, Mary Dunn, clearly believes that her products will represent some kind of master-race in the offices of the future:

'The Centre has a firm belief that modern management, consistently on the go, facing pressures their predecessors never dreamed of, needs the assistance of secretaries whose education and training is of university level. This is not to underestimate or in any way to denigrate the many competent experienced secretaries who have not been to university nor indeed had any formal higher education. But such women will become rarer... The top positions in the future are likely to be held by the University and Polytechnic trained girls, and the most important jobs will go to the graduate secretary.' (31)

It seems unlikely that the prophecies of the Director will be fulfilled, when one considers the findings of Silverstone concerning the attributes which employers value most in their secretaries. She claims that most employers operate with a set of minimum requirements with regard to the education and secretarial qualifications of potential secretaries. Furthermore, they tend to place much more emphasis on ability in such traditional skills as typing and shorthand than on business acumen, or knowledge of finance, banking and economics.(32) This being so, one would suppose that given a choice between a girl equipped with a B.A. (Secretarial Skills) and a more conventionally qualified secretary, both displaying equal dexterity on the typewriter and the notepad, an employer would be more likely to choose the girl whose training had not aroused 'great expectations' with regard to income.

A fourth route into this occupation is by attempting to gain or to work one's way towards a secretarial position on the basis of skills acquired at school. One would have thought it unlikely that this method would lead to the high-status, well-paid jobs without some form of further training being undertaken en route. Silverstone maintains, however, that in Central London the general shortage of office staff tends to enhance the opportunities for advancement among those having only the bare minimum of qualifications.(33) Over half of her secretarial respondents had worked their way up from positions as typists, clerks, shorthand typists or general

office workers.

These represent the principal routes of access to secretarial positions, although there are many other ways in which it is possible to train. Both private and state institutions run part-time courses and evening courses, and many crash courses are available in the larger cities. Some firms are willing to train girls themselves or to sponsor them for courses at local colleges. The government operates a training opportunities scheme which enables those who wish to train somewhat later in life to do so at the government's expense.

The battallions of secretaries are thus highly differentiated in terms of training and also in terms of social and educational background. It is likely, however, that many of them will have been encouraged prior to their entry into the labour market, to foster ambitious hopes for the future:

'Promotion prospects for secretaries are legion. The fascinating world of business is alive with endless possibilities for still greater advancement. Secretarial experience is often the "way in" to interesting and highly paid posts in big firms and organisations. Many prominent women in the advertising world started their working lives as secretaries, and the knowledge they gained during those early years led to the wider horizons of advertising... Women executives in senior Government positions have graduated from the ranks of secretaries. A large percentage of successful business women also started life this way.' (34)

The advice manuals for prospective secretaries are filled with tempting visions of the future, usually based on the careers of most exceptional women. Girls are frequently informed in these books that it is but a short step from the job of personal assistant to that of junior executive, and that devotion to one's boss and company will inevitably reap the due rewards. All this is quite at odds with the facts. According to Silverstone, most employers do not consider that there is a natural progression from secretarial to executive duties, and any such movement necessitates a specialised form of training.(35) Advertisements similarly tend to propagate the 'Marcia Williams Myth'. For example, one advert placed by the Department of the Environment reads:

'I never dreamt when I became a Senior Personal Secretary here just how closely I'd be involved with affairs of national importance.'

(36)

Upon closer examination of the copy, this involvement with top-level affairs turns out to be somewhat more humble than first impressions would indicate:

'You take notes for your boss at high level meetings, arrange appointments for him (and remind him to keep them!) and organise his Diary generally. Depending on whom you're working for, you could be dealing with telephone calls and correspondence from Cabinet Ministers, M.P.s, important businessmen and specialists of every kind.'

A great many advertisements tend to activate the career ambitions fondly nourished by the secretarial colleges, although the majority apparently recognise that the exercise of power will be experienced, at most, vicariously, by the average secretary.

The theme that the ultimate ambition of a secretary should be to attach herself to an important boss is a recurrent one in the advice manuals. The importance of her work is determined by his prestige and position, rather than in terms of any ultimate standard of competence:

'You want to be a secretary - a top secretary, the able assistant to an important executive. You know that as a secretary you'll enjoy a busy, exciting career. And when Mr. Important Executive brags that credit for his success goes to you, his secretary, you can beam proudly, knowing that your contribution is, indeed, a valuable one.' (37)

In view of the fact that the manuals place so much emphasis on obtaining important, glamorous jobs in close proximity to important glamorous men, it is not surprising to find that prospective secretaries have very clear preferences regarding the type of employers they would like to work for. In a survey by Williams and Root, the following Top Ten of employers emerged from the responses of a sample of women secretarial trainees:

TABLE 3. The Type of Employer Which Trainees Secretaries Would Most Like to Work For.

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Employers</u>	<u>Number of mentions on 'popularity'</u>
1	Airlines	70
2	Travel Agencies	51
3	BBC	50
4	Film Companies	47
5	Fashion Houses	36
6	Advertising Agencies	26
6	Newspapers and Magazines	26
8	Hospitals	25
9	Hotels	21
10	Doctors and Dentists	16
10	Oil Companies	16

Source: Williams, R. and Root, M., 'Has your company got secretary appeal?' Personnel Management, Nov. 1971, pp.33-35

At the bottom of the list were building societies, building firms, gas and electricity offices, London Transport and trade unions, with not a single mention between them. The authors conclude that:

'The reasons for the overwhelming popularity of the top ten employers are probably fairly complex, but their frequent exposure in the mass media, linked with glamorous situations and young people, may be an important contributive factor.' (38)

During the process of becoming a secretary, therefore, a girl may be exposed to mouth-watering images of the future. If she is not actually encouraged to displace the boss, she will inevitably be told that there is room at the top for those with ambition and ability.

#### b. The Image of the Perfect Secretary

'I should say that the six qualities I require in a personal and private secretary, in addition of course, to basic secretarial skills, are:  
 Fragrance: an unsavoury secretary would render my work quite impossible.  
 Punctuality: a late secretary is an abomination. Tidiness: I consider slovenliness to be a cardinal sin. Alacrity: a slow-witted woman is worse than one who chatters. Intelligence: this is of supreme importance.  
 Speed: I always require everything done the day before yesterday.'

(Sir Gerald Nabarro, MP., in Top Secretary)

The available data shows that girls do not invariably undergo a concentrated training programme for secretarial work. However, for those who do, it is likely that they will be exposed to images of their future role and consequently it is important to examine the concept of the ideal secretary as presented to

them during training. Ideally, one should examine the prescriptions for success which are canvassed by the various training establishments, but in lieu of any systematic data, it has been necessary to draw one's information from a number of advice manuals for intending secretaries.

The perfect secretary is expected to combine in herself a mixture of abilities and qualities in much the same way as the perfect wife. Not only must she be capable of certain minimal speeds on the typewriter and when taking dictation, just as wives must display a certain bare level of competence with a frying pan, but she must also 'understand' her boss, just as a wife must be sensitive to her husband's whims and moods:

'Study him closely; tread warily during the first few weeks; get to know his likes and dislikes, his every mood. Find out the best time to interrupt him, if interrupt him you must. Gradually adjust your methods of working to fit in more easily with his. A lack of understanding will mar your success as a secretary.' (39)

In view of the similarity which exists between the duties of wives and secretaries in relation to their male superiors, Benet has referred to the girls of the office as 'substitute wives'. In both cases, women spend a great deal of time performing the drudgery, whilst men make the decisions. Both types of work involve endless routines of tidying up which begin again as soon as they are completed. Both types of work are increasingly mechanised with the result that secretaries and wives are becoming potentially more and more productive rather than less burdened with routine tasks. Furthermore, each woman's status derives from that of her man. Benet points out that there is a crucial difference between the wife and the secretary, and that is, their security of tenure:

'Even the weakest marriage is longer-lasting than a work partnership, and much harder to get out of. Wives can use money, sex, the children, bad temper, and an almost infinite number of other weapons to get their way, but insecurity keeps the secretary sweet.' (40)

In view of the strong market position of contemporary secretaries, one cannot be quite so certain that insecurity alone would prevent them from voicing their grievances. It seems more likely that their loyalty and sub-

missiveness, where it exists, may be attributed in part to the emphasis on these qualities encountered during training. There is a prevalent opinion, canvassed especially by the manuals, that 'the boss is always right, even when he is wrong'. Intending secretaries are frequently informed that the strength of the boss's right-hand woman lies in her ability to defer to his judgments, and that any errors on his part must be communicated to him in the most roundabout way possible. Any weaknesses on his part must be 'understood' and managed. The secretary who expresses dissatisfaction with her employer's time-keeping or manners is in danger of jeopardising her 'highly personal relationship' with him, if not her future as a Golden Girl Executive.

The perfect secretary, like the perfect wife, knows her place. Not only are girls cautioned to know their station, but bosses are told how to ensure that this shall be so. In her advice to employers, Lewis-Smith writes:

'Every secretary should have a job description, carefully written and linked where relevant to her boss's (or bosses') job descriptions. Make sure she knows exactly what is expected of her and how you like your office run. Lay it on the line! A lot of secretaries just don't know.' (41)

In this handbook, managers are further cautioned to make sure that they can distinguish between:

'Jobs only you can do; jobs your secretary could do with guidance/training; (and) jobs no manager should do, e.g. filing.' (42)

The extent to which secretaries are willing to do 'jobs which no manager should do' is quite remarkable. One survey discovered that 80% of secretaries were willing to run errands, and 74% were willing to do the shopping for their bosses and their families.(43) Perhaps it is these sort of activities which are thought to distinguish the exceptional girls from the merely capable ones, or, as one textbook informs its readers, 'little things mean a lot'.(44)

The perfect secretary exudes an antiseptic femininity. There is great attention to the cultivation of this quality in the manuals and one suspects, during training. The ideal secretary must not only achieve a perfect balance

between appearing attractive and competent, but must also ensure that all her bodily functions are in good, working order:

'Is your hair sparkling clean and free from dandruff? Do you see to it that your breath is clean and sweet smelling? (Especially after a meal with onions.) Do you bathe daily? Do you use a good deodorant every day? Are your clothes spotless and free from perspiration odour? Do you shave underarms and legs regularly?' (45)

Woe betide the girl who isn't using Amplex. If her best friend won't tell her, then her boss surely will.

The would-be secretary is cautioned against any attempt to appear sexy or glamorous, particularly when attending an interview. In the opinion of the manuals, such a presentation of self would automatically disqualify the candidate. Since the boss's secretary is his personal status symbol, her appearance reflects on him, and therefore he no more wants a blonde, mini-skirted bombshell for his First Lady of the Office than he would want such a woman for his wife.

Not much is known about the preferences of bosses themselves in this matter. It is quite likely that they feel that sex must not rear its head during dictation sessions, although it may be quite acceptable when flaunted by the pretty little filing clerk down the corridor. Accordingly, there may be a tendency to hire girls who are not overtly sexy - to keep the flamboyantly attractive ones at a safe distance in the typing pool where they can do no harm to the business-like image:

'An attractively turned-out secretary is not only a decorative asset; her tasteful appearance marks her as being pretty smart - and the boss as quite a clever fellow for having chosen her.' (46)

The perfect secretary is thus like the perfect office - unadorned and uncluttered, yet contributing towards the establishment of a comfortable environment for the careworn boss.

The perfect secretary must never be idle - a busy secretary denotes a busy executive...or does she? Korda believes that this obsession with being continually on the go is nothing more than 'a hysterical charade played



out for other people's benefit.(47) Most girls who are active all the time are simply experts in the art of 'making work', they are merely keeping up appearances for the sake of their own and their boss's image in the eyes of others. The manuals give a great deal of advice on how to be super-efficient, although it is equally possible to regard this information as useful tips on making work for the otherwise inactive secretary:

'When Evelyn's boss had to go to an office in an out-of-the-way part of the city, Evelyn thoughtfully worked out the shortest route and typed up the directions so that he would have no difficulty changing trains and finding his way. These are the thoughtful little acts that relieve an executive of bothersome details and impress upon him that you are capable of more than routine work.' (48)

This extract also draws attention to the fact that the perfect secretary must be something of a mother figure. When she is not tidying up her desk for the nth time, or striving to produce a perfect letter, she must be trying to look after her boss. She should ensure that he does not get lost on trips to remote parts of the city, she should buy his favourite sandwiches for his coffee-break, and she should make excuses for him to other people.

The perfect secretary is thus not only required to maintain high standards of proficiency as a human word processor, but is expected to evolve a relationship with her employer where she must act out the roles of wife and mother, and where deference is the key to success, but not to promotion. There is something curiously old-fashioned about this superwoman of the textbooks and training courses. In many ways she is the twentieth century version of the male clerk of a former age - a picture of uncomplaining servitude made tolerable by never-to-be-fulfilled aspirations for the future. A number of what are thought to be essentially female characteristics have been grafted on to the image of the ideal secretary, but the past and present versions display a remarkable similarity.

#### c. Barriers to Promotion in Secretarial Careers

As we have seen, many trainee secretaries are encouraged to regard the years spent at the typewriter as a preliminary stage in the process of becoming a junior executive, yet few girls ever cross the big divide without

taking a special course of training. In this section, the factors which render secretarial work more of a cul-de-sac than a stepping stone to the bright lights will be considered.

A number of writers have suggested that one of the main factors which confine women to the lower rungs of the office ladder is the belief among employers that females tend to be 'unstable' employees. Employers are reluctant to promote or to train employees whom they feel are unlikely to stay with the firm very long. This attitude bedevils the occupational progression of women in the field of non-manual work and yet it is based only on half-truths. It is true that the majority of British evidence supports the notion that women in employment generally exhibit higher turnover rates than those of men, but this is not necessarily the case with all occupational groups, nor is it true of all age-groupings. Pettman, in a review of research literature bearing upon this issue, concludes that 'the hypothesis relating turnover to the sex of the employee is, as yet, neither substantiated nor refuted'.(49)

One is inclined to doubt whether many employers who subscribe to the hypothesis have actually undertaken a thoroughgoing review of the relevant research data. It seems likely that their attitudes are based rather upon fallacious or simplistic perceptions of women and their attitudes to work. Wild and Hill have listed what they consider to be the most commonly advanced reasons for female labour turnover:

- 'a. The existence of a restless 'roving population'.
- b. The large number of young people employed.
- c. The inherent irrationality and unpredictability of women.
- d. The availability of other jobs.
- e. Pregnancy or illness.
- f. The existence of better paid jobs elsewhere.
- g. Domestic difficulties.
- h. Leaving the district.'

(50)

Although they concede that there may be a grain of truth in the first four reasons, these are dismissed as common fallacies. The remaining four are not fallacies, in their opinion, but 'f' and 'g' are factors over which firms could exert some control if they so wished, thus reducing the volume of

turnover and avoiding 'wastage of labour'. Pregnancy, illness and geographical mobility are beyond the firm's control and 'render a certain amount of labour turnover virtually inevitable'. According to their own research findings relating to a sample of female operatives in the electronics industry, 51.7% of leavers were quitting their jobs for reasons which were theoretically within the firm's control. Furthermore, job dissatisfaction was pronounced amongst those who were leaving for these reasons. In other words, the pull of a better paid job elsewhere was often matched by the push of the boring, unsatisfying, depressing nature of the job they were leaving. Similarly, a study by Harris & Clausen of labour mobility amongst men and women found that of the six reasons which accounted for the highest proportions of job changes by women, dissatisfaction with the work itself was third highest on the list.(51)

The attitude held by employers in relation to job turnover amongst women appear to have something of the character of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since employers anticipate that women are likely to leave their jobs, they do not give them responsible positions, nor train them for more interesting and more skilled work. Many women become frustrated and bored in these undemanding occupations and eventually leave for what they hope will be greener pastures, and in the process confirm the views of the employers that women are unstable members of the labour force.

According to Silverstone's research among London secretaries the only strategy which bosses have evolved in order to try to stem the tide of labour turnover, is to offer higher and higher salaries. Employers in London, it appears, believe quite erroneously that 'a high salary is the most effective way of attracting and keeping staff'.(52) It has not occurred to them that turnover might be reduced by opening up promotion channels for secretaries, or simply by giving them more responsibility. Apparently the turnover rates are very high in London, which Silverstone feels is partly due to the preponderance of young women, some of whom leave their jobs to get married and have children, and some of whom are simply dissatisfied. Again, employers do not appear to

have reacted to this in what would seem to be an obvious manner by trying to recruit older women. Older females are much more likely to remain in their jobs as the following table suggests:

TABLE 4. Turnover - Percentages of Full-Time Employees Employed By Their Employer for Less Than 12 Months - April 1974.

<u>Age</u>	<u>Women Non-Manual Workers</u> (18 and over)
18-20	39.9
21-24	35.2
25-29	27.1
30-39	23.3
40-49	17.8
50-59	10.3
60-64	8.3

Source: New Earnings Survey 1974, Part E

Whilst employers prefer to regard high turnover as a fact of life, rather than to make an attempt to arrest it in ways which are based on an informed knowledge of the characteristics of female office workers, a major ideological and practical barrier obstructs the path of those women who wish to make it to the conference table, or of those who would simply like a more interesting, responsible job.

A second problem which may be encountered by the ambitious secretary, is male prejudice. The notion that women exhibit high rates of turnover is at least based on some degree of fact, but the notion that 'women aren't cut out for business', the view that 'they haven't got what it takes', can make no appeal but to the stereotypes which inhabit the mind. The lesson of both World Wars was that women have to be seen doing a job before they are believed to be capable of doing it, and at the present time, very few women have been seen executing management functions. Employers often declare that they are more than willing to promote their secretaries and to give them more responsible positions but one looks in vain for evidence that they follow their intentions through. That many employers fail to practise what they preach is evinced by the findings of several surveys conducted by the Alfred Marks Bureau. One of these, carried out in 1972, found that 79% of bosses considered

that their secretaries were worthy of promotion, yet only 45% said that they would be willing to promote them to a junior management position.(53) Korda is of the opinion that there is more than a hint of male chauvinism in the office. He considers that the characteristics which would be rewarded in an aspiring young man would be severely censured in an aspiring young woman. A man is assertive, a woman is bitchy; a man shows signs of knowing when to take the initiative, a woman always wants her own way; a man requests the opinions of his more experienced colleagues, a woman is a troublesome nuisance who has no confidence in her own judgments. According to Korda, if a woman is not permitted to progress up the career ladder by displaying those attributes which are required of men, she is obliged to use feminine wiles to get her there. For this, she will be accused of being temperamental and emotional, and told to stop acting like a woman.(54)

An interesting theory regarding male chauvinism in the office and its implications for female advancement is suggested by Benet. In her opinion, there has been something of a managerial revolution during the past few decades, not in the sense that Burnham meant, but in a direction identified by Bell.(53) Although managers today represent the largest property owning group among the population, they cannot compare in this respect with the owner-managers of early industrial capitalism. Unlike the latter group, neither the position nor the status of modern management is assured. Accordingly, the chief executive of the 1970s attempts to resolve his status anxiety through the pursuit of success, and furthermore, by surrounding himself with the symbols of achievement. One of these 'status trappings' writes Benet, is the secretary. The display of sexual superiority which her presence affords the boss, confirms him in a position of power and authority. An employer is unlikely, therefore, to undermine his status, albeit anchored on delicate foundations, by promoting his subaltern to a position similar to his own, or by transforming in any way the master/slave colouring of their relationship. This theory would certainly seem to go some way towards explaining the reluctance of many managers to offer their

secretaries more exalted positions in their companies. At the same time, it is possible that many men simply cannot tolerate the idea of a woman as an equal in the sphere of executive functions.

The presence or absence of discrimination is exceedingly hard to prove and one is usually unable to do more than infer its existence in a particular situation from the evidence available. A belief in the presence of discriminatory attitudes within a work context may, however, be an important component of women's assessment of their chances for promotion. According to Elsy and Shaw, the majority of their female respondents considered that women in clerical work could not gain promotion as easily as men:

'Of the various reasons given, discrimination by men against women is cited most frequently and the next most frequent response is that preference is given to men. These two responses were given by 48% of all women responding.' (56)

A third reason why secretaries rarely become management executives is that some of them do not seek promotion of this kind. It may be that their career aspirations are tailored during training, and subsequently, during social interaction with bosses and other secretaries. If the trainee secretary learns and accepts that the greatest achievement is to secure a job in close proximity to a famous, important, glamorous man, it is quite possible that she would never wish to attain anything beyond that goal. For such women, promotion takes on a quite different meaning - it is synonymous with the acquisition of a job as handmaiden to Mr. Big. These girls enjoy the kudos which attaches to this role and do not entertain thoughts of moving into the arena of decision-making. It is this kind of secretary who considers that there is no comparison whatsoever between her functions and those of her boss. For her, the secretary and her boss are as distinct as chalk and cheese in terms of their responsibilities and abilities, and to think otherwise would constitute delusions of grandeur. The girl who was voted Top Secretary in 1972 represents an example of the kind of secretary who regards herself as functionally different, if not inferior to her employer:

'I couldn't, for example, do my boss's job. He is a man with a string of technical qualifications, and my role is to relieve him of as much non-technical work as possible.' (57)

This girl was the private secretary to the Engineer and Manager of a Water Board, and whilst one would not dispute that her employer's job probably involved the application of a great deal of specialised knowledge, there is a clear implication here that the secretary has taken over at least some of the managerial functions, which would seem to be at odds with her self-image. It is this kind of self-image, however, which tends to perpetuate the status quo.

According to Silverstone, most secretaries recognise that promotion is unlikely to mean anything other than working for a higher status boss. However, few of her respondents placed any value on this qualified form of promotion, whereas most of them attached a great deal of importance to that kind of promotion which entailed greater responsibility and more interesting work. Only four per cent of her respondents felt that they would be likely to experience this latter kind of elevation.(58) Indeed, when one assesses the definitions of secretaries themselves, in accounting for the rarity of their progression into high status, highly rewarded responsible posts, it would seem that it is their resignation to the inevitable rather than a low level of ambition which is the most important determining factor. Furthermore, as Silverstone points out, the existence of two types of promotion, one for male 'junior' executives and the other for female secretaries tends to structure the perceptions of employers as well:

'If it is accepted that secretarial advancement is achieved by working for more eminent people, then there is no need to incorporate secretaries into the normal promotion hierarchy of an organisation.'  
(59)

Finally, it is appropriate to dispense with the hypothesis that secretaries do not seek and therefore gain promotion because they are more interested in seeking husbands. Lockwood, it will be remembered, goes so far as to say that young girls regard the office itself as a marriage market - a view which

carries the implication that the quest for a partner displaces any interest in career progression. According to Benet, however, no more than 5% of office girls in the U.S. and England meet their husbands in the 'enormous file', and, in her opinion, this poor record would surely discourage many husband-hunters from trying this method.(60) This is not to say that office romance is a phenomenon which only exists in the minds of novelists and David Lockwood. Evidence on this subject is extremely thin, since most studies of white-collar work as of other occupations have maintained a strictly clinical interest in modes of interaction in the workplace. If one is prepared to accept the rather unconventional methodology used by Quinn in his study of 'The formation, impact and management of romantic relationships in organisations' which consisted of interviews with people with time to kill in airport lounges, then it would seem that office affairs are widespread. Of the 130 men and women he accosted, all had either had an office affair or had witnessed one 'close to'.(61) However, he found that the most common type of affair was 'the fling', which was in essence a search for excitement or sexual experience, and one which people entered into with the expectation that it would last only a short time. He also found that the most common affair was one which involved a male boss and a female subordinate, but not an immediate subordinate. This view is shared by Benet and Korda, who consider that most bosses prefer to maintain their office sex and romance either on the plane of fantasy or else at a safe distance, rather than to have it thrust upon them during dictation sessions. Thus, whilst one would not deny that there are sexual undertones to office life, it is necessary to distinguish an interest in flirtation and affairs, which, after all, involve both men and women, from husband-hunting. The existence of the latter has not been satisfactorily documented and it is time that this ridiculous perception of the female secretary as office predator is dismantled once and for all. While it persists, it constitutes part of the ideological ammunition of those who wish to keep the secretary in her place.

d. Sources of Work Satisfaction and Work Dissatisfaction among Secretaries

According to Benet, office girls have experienced dissatisfaction with



their jobs for over half a century.(62) In her book she cites the findings of an American study conducted in 1925 which investigated the social and educational background of office girls, and their aspirations for the future. Amongst those girls who were leaving their jobs, the most important reasons for the decision to resign were that they wanted to go back to school, they wanted a change, or they saw no future in their current occupation.(63) Then, as now, marriage did not come very high up on the list of reasons. It would seem then, that despite the limited range of alternatives to office work and the fact that it compared very favourably in terms of remuneration and status with other work for girls, women at that time did not invariably stay with their office jobs and count their blessings. In Benet's opinion, the fact that office life disappointed girls almost from the very beginning, partly explains the falling marriage age during the 20th century. According to her, many girls have regarded marriage as an escape route from the drudgery of the office. Although this is an interesting idea, which reverses the traditional stereotype that women's boring jobs reflect their preoccupation with finding husbands, it is impossible to verify this assertion in view of the absence of any relevant historical data. From a purely speculative point of view, one would have thought it unlikely that girls of the twenties and thirties regarded marriage in this way - as some kind of last resort - when one recalls the social and economic climate of the period. Feminism was at a low ebb, and where it existed, it was reformist rather than revolutionary, seeking to elevate the domestic conditions of the wife and mother rather than to challenge the traditional role of women. Marriage was regarded as an altogether natural destiny. Jobs on the whole were scarce, and it was deemed more appropriate for men to fill them. It is possible that the unappetising nature of office work was one factor which propelled some girls towards matrimony, but it is important to recognise that this would have been only one of several reasons, and the same must be said of all subsequent generations of office girls.

As we cautioned in the previous chapter, it is essential that one does not typify or label certain types of work as boring, monotonous or unrewarding

without reference to the attitudes of the workers themselves. The next task, therefore, is to investigate the work attitudes among secretaries more directly - to document the extent of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and to consider possible explanations for the patterns which emerge. The picture which seems to emerge from the evidence available is one of girls who, for the most part, enjoy their jobs, but who are clearly dissatisfied with certain aspects of their employment situation. It seems fairly clear from the available surveys that a principal source of job dissatisfaction among secretaries is the lack of opportunities for promotion or for the exercise of a greater degree of responsibility. The conclusions of an Alfred Marks Survey conducted in 1974 were as follows:

'One rather distressing conclusion we have to draw from this survey is that the executive secretary has not progressed in terms of responsibility since we last took a look at her five years ago. Although we were looking at the job descriptions of 104 of Britain's top secretaries, there was a high incidence of limited job satisfaction and misuse of highly trained and effective woman-power.' (64)

This opinion is shared by Silverstone, who found that there was a feeling of disillusionment among her secretarial respondents, which could be partly explained in terms of 'the great lack of promotion opportunities'.(65)

They placed a high value on jobs which offered variety and interest, freedom from supervision, responsibility, a sense of achievement, and opportunities to use their initiative. Yet secretarial jobs, by their very nature, do not display these characteristics. In response to the frustrations which this situation yields, many secretaries frequently change jobs in the hope that they will discover a firm which will offer them a more interesting, responsible post. It seems that the sense of frustrated ambition experienced by many secretaries is exacerbated by the expectations of achievement generated by their social and educational backgrounds. Top secretaries, in particular, are usually drawn from the middle-class and have emerged from grammar or public schools with a handful of 'O' and possibly 'A' level passes and it is not unknown for them to have a degree.(66) According to Benet, of those college graduates in

the U.S.A. who do not join the teaching profession, about 10 per cent become secretaries and clerical workers.(67) In fact, about one-fifth of women in the U.S.A. with four years of college education work at unskilled and semi-skilled jobs as clerks, service workers, factory operatives, and cooks and sales assistants. The figures in Britain are not as dramatic as these but there can be little doubt that there is a certain lack of congruence between educational achievement and the realities of occupational choice for women in this country, with the consequence that a number of well-qualified girls are obliged to take up secretarial work in lieu of any alternatives. Certainly, the significance of a 'Graduate Girls' Secretarial Employment Agency cannot be dismissed lightly. If the Director of the Centre for Secretarial Studies at Strathclyde University is correct, that the secretary of the future is more rather than less likely to have a degree, then assuming that the opportunities for promotion and the exercise of greater responsibility among secretaries remains static, dissatisfaction is likely to increase.

A second source of dissatisfaction among secretaries is the experience of under-utilisation. A number of secretaries find that they are never fully occupied, and this generates acute boredom. Silverstone found that the majority of her respondents always or nearly always had work to do, but a series of letters on this subject in the correspondence column of the Guardian in 1974 suggested that boredom was by no means unusual:

'What is going on? I've finished my book, come to a difficult bit in my knitting which I'll have to ask someone's advice about, painted my nails, and rung every friend I can think of...now what do I do? I've been a London secretary for some five years and have never yet managed to find a job which didn't involve an obligatory one third of every day spent in trying to ward off boredom. If I complain I'm offered more money... It isn't just me either. Every time I have a moan to friends about my inactivity they swear that it's the same everywhere.' (68)

This original letter generated a great deal of correspondence from secretaries and even employers for whom the above had obviously struck a familiar note. In the opinion of one manager who wrote to the Guardian, the under-utilisation of the secretary is the result of a number of features of office life.(69) Firstly, it results from the unwillingness of many managers

to share the services of a single secretary. This would be tantamount to losing one's special parking place in the car park, or one's access to the executive dining room. Employers regard their personal female assistants as one of the perks of the job, and are therefore unwilling to relinquish exclusive rights to such a very important status symbol. Secondly, some bosses regard their secretaries as a 'worktime version of the little woman at home' and expect them to do no more than look pretty and make tea from time to time'. "Such 'M.C.P.s' would scoff at the view that a secretary should be a colleague and an equal". Thirdly, secretaries tend to establish demarcation lines and restrictive practices which represent 'massive obstacles to a more flexible use of their services'. Fourthly, secretaries are often under-utilised, but this may be offset by the number of occasions on which they are very much over-utilised. This is often a reflection of the boss's own workload, but it also indicates the haphazard nature of work organisation in many offices. Finally, most secretaries lack the training necessary for more involved work in their departments. Once they have completed the typing, shorthand and filing, they often lack the training which would enable them to execute more responsible tasks. Furthermore, even where they possess the training they are seldom encouraged to make full use of it.

According to one article in a management journal, 'secretarial under-employment is a phenomenon often recognised by efficiency experts.' It goes on to cite a former editor of a secretarial magazine who considers that the under-employment of a secretary increases as her boss rises in the executive galaxy:

'Typically where a boss needs a secretary most is when he's on the lower end of the echelons, and where the volume of work he will produce that requires transcribing and typing will be heavy. As the boss moves up the ladder, his needs may change, he may not produce as much documentation, he will probably travel more - and she may just sit around and do his Christmas card list. But even if she has little to do, he's still entitled to a secretary.' (70)

Even the top secretary, therefore, may be obliged to 'make work' or to covertly indulge her reading preferences in the shelter of the filing system. The secretary is expected to look busy even when she is not - an experience which

one secretary cited in the above article described as one of the most oppressive functions she had ever performed.

A further source of job dissatisfaction among secretaries has been identified by Silverstone. It appears that many secretaries feel that the status of the occupation has declined in recent years. There is a general impression among them that 'standards have fallen' and that they are continuing to decline.(71) The same finding emerged from an Alfred Marks Survey in 1974:

'These senior women clearly feel that their own position is being eroded by the general deterioration in standards. Such deterioration is clearly affecting the usefulness of the secretarial career as a stepping stone into management levels for women.' (72)

As far as the London situation is concerned, it appears that this belief among senior women is not without foundation. According to Silverstone, the age structure of the female secretarial work force in that area is extremely unbalanced towards the younger age-groups, as compared with the age structure of the female working population as a whole. The result of this imbalance is that employers tend to offer quite senior positions to girls who are both young and relatively inexperienced. Owing to the chronic shortage of office staff in Central London, employers have no choice in the matter. Many of Silverstone's respondents regarded this development as highly damaging to the status of executive secretaries.(73)

In this situation, where girls who have barely emerged from their training colleges are free to style themselves as experienced secretaries, it is not surprising perhaps that the older woman feels threatened. She has spent years clawing her way to the top, bending over backwards to please male executives, becoming expert at producing the instant smile for boorish clients, producing gallons of tea and coffee, and what does she find?...the bosses now prefer beauty and youth to experience. Some little teenager manages to find a short-cut into her office, yet all she has to offer is speedwriting and a certificate from one of those crash courses in typing!

These apprehensions on the part of the older woman secretary exactly parallel the fears which male clerks of the 1880s entertained when their occupational territories were invaded by women. Then, as now, these anxieties found expression in the formation of quasi-union organisations. In 1970, the Executive Secretaries Association was founded, and it has developed a very selective recruitment policy. Those applying for membership have to be over twenty-five, have shorthand, and they have to be working for top management only. Although the Association has several aims, it is very much concerned with establishing the superior status of the secretary, as its founder points out:

'Anyone who can type these days calls herself a secretary. We call them typists.' (74)

Thus, while it is clear that the status of a secretary (or rather, her lack of it) within a particular company is an important key to her work satisfaction, it is also important to take into account the status of the occupational group as a whole, when considering an individual's attitudes to work.

A fourth source of dissatisfaction, according to Silverstone, is the submissive, self-effacing role which many secretaries are obliged to assume. She maintains that some secretaries resent playing traditional feminine roles in the office - 'the little woman' with notepad instead of a frying pan. Many of them are conscious that they are human status-symbols - there to buttress their boss's ego rather than to play a significant part in the execution of his duties.(75) The secretary's day is riddled with domestic acts ranging from pouring out the boss's coffee to tidying up his desk, and even the most exalted personal assistant is required to adopt the handmaid posture on occasions. Some of the chores which secretaries are asked to perform by their bosses would not even be demanded of wives. A contest organised by W.O.W. (Women Office Workers) in 1977 to determine the most ridiculous chore asked of office workers by their bosses elicited some very bizarre entries. One secretary maintained that she had to take her boss's toupee to be dry-cleaned and re-styled. Another

said that she had to clean her boss's false teeth. The winner of the contest was a secretary who had to pluck out her boss's grey hairs and who at one stage had been required to shave off his moustache, taking photographs of 'before' and 'after'.(76)

However, in the opinion of Bernard Marks, Chairman of the Alfred Marks Bureau, the supporting role which secretaries are expected to play represents a major source of job satisfaction:

'Whatever our friends in the Women's Lib movement say, it is, in my view, an absolutely natural, classically appropriate role for women. They want to feel needed, they want to feel wanted, they want to feel that they're contributing towards the success of the man. It's rather like being an office wife - and that, really, is the way of describing a secretary's role.' (77)

According to one of the surveys conducted by his organisation, 80% of secretaries are quite satisfied with their supportive role and have no desire to take over from their bosses. At the same time, they would like to 'play a more important and valuable part in the boss-secretary partnership'.(78) Even Marcia Williams, who is often supposed to be personally ambitious, has said that she prefers the supportive role of the secretary, and is ambitious for the people she works for rather than for herself.(79)

It is important therefore, that one does not overstate the degree of work dissatisfaction which secretaries subjectively experience. Most of them, like most wives, no doubt, are basically satisfied with their role, although they may feel that the work tasks themselves are rather boring and repetitive, and would prefer to be more closely involved with the execution of their boss's own activities. Moreover, even though there are some anxieties about the future status of the occupation, the levels of remuneration and the prestige of the work compare very favourably with other female dominated occupations. In this respect, the position of the modern secretary greatly resembles that of the male clerk of the 1880s. The latter, it will be remembered, often held a very lowly status in his own firm, yet there was the consolation of knowing that he was much better off than his blue-collar counterparts. The secretary of the 1970s may compare her situation with different occupations, and judge herself

to be better paid, and to have the benefit of superior working conditions, or she may look down the corridor at the typing pool battalions and think how lucky she is not to be confined to a machine all day, far from the more exciting environs of the executives' suite. All this does not mean that the secretary is never exploited, discriminated against, under-rewarded or prevented from realising her ambitions, but one is obliged to recognise the fact that her job may yield her a great deal of satisfaction, and meet all her expectations. (80)

e. Is the Secretary Really Necessary?

The role of the secretary has remained very much unchanged for the last fifty or so years, but the spectre of technology hangs like the sword of Damocles over the traditional boss-secretary relationship. The introduction of the dictating machine has already shown that shorthand is theoretically obsolete, and now the IBM's word-processing machine, introduced in 1965, threatens to completely transform the office environment. This is intended to speed up the production of correspondence, albeit at considerable cost, by mechanising it and concentrating it in specialised 'word processing departments'. In theory, the boss no longer needs a personal secretary, since all the tasks which do not involve shorthand and typing can now be performed by one girl who is employed to keep the diaries of several executives.

According to Thackray, however, salesmen have not had an easy time persuading employers that their secretaries are interchangeable with machines:

'Industry sources suggest that each salesman has a quota of one and a half word processing centres a year to sell. The biggest obstacle they face is 'to avoid the confrontation with the executive who has to give up his private secretary. For him that can be traumatic', says Daniel O'Connor, marketing director of Remington Rand. One Montgomery Ward executive who was faced with the loss of his secretary to word processing complained, only half humorously, 'It's like getting a divorce. We've been together for six years.' (81)

It is not only bosses who fear the threat to their status implied by the introduction of such machines. Thackray maintains that secretaries are often vocal in their opposition to the idea of word processing, since it entails the destruction of their special relationship with one man, if not their rele-



gation to a typing pool.

Word processing is not the only phenomenon which threatens to displace the secretary, or at least, to greatly transform her work situation. Computers are technically capable of performing many of her tasks, such as processing correspondence and reports:

'The time could come when a central office computer could mastermind all office communications, which would include the handling of correspondence for outside and the monitoring of inter-office contacts through television and videophone... The only dictation the secretary would then take would be for very personal or confidential correspondence, and if correspondence is analysed there is very little which falls into this category.' (82)

Although one might have supposed that these developments were very much a thing of the future, Braverman has maintained that the disappearance of the secretary is imminent. In his view, the 'drain on the corporate pocketbook' represented by the practice of granting secretarial assistance to even the lowliest of executives has grown to such proportions that 'major surgery' lies just around the corner.(83) A similar view is canvassed in a BBC publication entitled 'Office' and in which it is also suggested that shorthand will either be dead or else regarded as an oddity by the 1980s.(84) Whilst both sources present a convincing account of the reasons why the secretary may one day follow the same path as the dodo there is little evidence to suggest that the process of extinction is well underway. A weakness of Braverman's account is that it depends very heavily on the views expressed in management periodicals and he fails to make a clear distinction between the strategies which are advocated and those which are currently practised.

No matter what the future holds, one may be certain that for the present, training schools continue to emphasise the importance of high speeds at shorthand and typing, while bosses continue to resist the displacement of their personal status symbols by impersonal machines. And, as Thackray points out, although there may be a tremendous 'cumulative inefficiency' in the traditional boss-secretary relationship, it does afford certain gratifications to both parties, which no machine of the future is likely to be able to match.

### 3. The Paper Jungle - A Review of Other Forms of Female Clerical Employment

While there has at least been some concern to investigate the working life of the secretary, the interest shown in the vast armies of filing clerks, copy and audio-typists, comptometer and keypunch operators, and other assorted paper processors of the office has been entirely minimal. The growth in their numbers has corresponded to the enormous growth of paperwork during the twentieth century, and yet their situation remains very much a mystery.

As I have already mentioned, official statistics relating to the occupational distribution of the workforce sometimes fail to make any distinction between different types of clerical work. Not only does this neglect the points of differentiation between the secretarial grades and the lower grades of clerical work, but it also ignores the fact that there are also subtle distinctions obtaining in the work situations of those who constitute the latter group. Consequently, few generalisations can be made about the girls who are employed in the lower grades of non-manual work, but it is possible to identify certain aspects of their work situation which tend to differentiate them, as a group, from secretaries. In the first place, their work is much more likely to be mechanised, or in the process of becoming so. Although a great deal of the secretary's day is spent over the keyboard, the great range of other, non-mechanical tasks which she is expected to perform are held to distinguish her from the 'mere' shorthand-typist. Moreover, there does seem to be some evidence that many bosses are highly resistant to the intrusion of technology into the relationship which they share with their secretaries. Yet employers are often more than willing to harness machine-power to the routine grades. In recent years, the division of labour has infiltrated much of the office, while leaving the secretary's job, as yet, intact. With the exception of certain categories of clerk, and supervisors, many of these office girls are defined in terms of the machine they operate, in much the same way as many blue-collar workers. Although the degree of machine-pacing may be less pronounced in the office, the extent to which routine office-workers use machinery

is quite substantial. Machines now exist for almost every task, ranging from the 'Addressograph', which speeds up the process of addressing envelopes to clients on mailing lists, to sophisticated duplicators, which produce thousands of perfect copies at the touch of a button.

Secondly, the jobs of many members of the office proletariat, as Benet calls the lower-grade workers, are likely to be much more routinised than that of the secretary. Part of the latter's job is to be able to cope with the unexpected - be this a sudden change of plan on the part of the boss, or having to make an unusual errand. There is a great deal of routine in her job, but there is no-one standing close at hand, making sure that the tasks are done in a strict order. Those who are solely occupied with the typing of invoices, or the filing of insurance claims, however, encounter little variation in their day-to-day tasks, and they are often subject to the control of a hawk-eyed supervisor who attempts to ensure that they adhere to the prescribed order of duties. The unusual, in their case, is more likely to present itself in the form of a new girl in the office, the installation of a new duplicating machine, or a change in the procedure for making coffee, all of which arouse some initial controversy and are then quickly forgotten as life goes on as before. In this type of job, the newcomer is obliged to conform to the existing way of doing things, whereas the secretary is expected to evolve the method which suits her best.

A third feature which distinguishes the routine grades from the secretary is their degree of proximity to the management, both spatially and socially. The great majority of females employed in the lower grades of work are physically segregated from the environs of the executives. This is probably less true of smaller offices and less likely to be the case with higher grades of clerks. Where, however, there is a concentration of females engaged on principally mechanical tasks, they are often situated in a special work area at some distance from the executive suite. Routine clerical workers, on the whole, do not hold highly personal relationships with the management, and indeed, they are not

expected to. Their immediate boss is much more likely to be a female supervisor, and their contact with executives may be minimal.

The office battalions, therefore, are in several respects, somewhat distinct from the secretaries, and the differentiation also extends to remuneration, as any glimpse at the sits. vac. columns will confirm. There are also only limited opportunities for promotion, even that kind of promotion which secretaries experience, namely, being appointed to work for a rising star in the executive firmament.(86) A filing clerk is a filing clerk, no matter whether the paperwork comes from one of the salesmen or from the managing director. These girls also differ from the secretaries in terms of social and educational background and training. With regard to the latter, there are many office jobs for which no special qualifications are required, and there are many others where the appropriate skills may be learnt on the job in a very short space of time.

Yet while these girls may experience lower pay and status than their diary-keeping sisters, they enjoy certain advantages over the girls on the factory-floor, with whom they frequently share a similar social background. The average hourly earnings of the routine non-manual female worker do not greatly exceed those of the female manual operative, but their working conditions are very much dissimilar. Both may experience a great deal of tedium, but the noise and the dirt of the factory are seldom matched by the conditions of office work. Office workers are vulnerable to certain health hazards, deriving not only from the use of machinery but also from exposure to toxic chemicals, but the risks involved are somewhat different from those encountered in the factory environment.(87) For example, they are unlikely to find themselves trapped in a piece of machinery nor are they likely to experience prolonged exposure to cancer producing substances. They are also less likely to have to clock in at work, or to lose pay in the event of late arrival or because of a visit to a doctor. The routine office worker is more likely to have certain fringe benefits, such as pension schemes or sick pay benefit. Furthermore, they are not obliged

to wear unflattering overalls and headgear. Whilst a routine office worker's lot may not always be a happy one, therefore, in the extent to which it affords opportunities for varied, interesting work, it does at least compare favourably in certain respects with the lot of the female factory operative. Were this not so, one would be unable to account for the fact that a majority of women opt for office employment at the point of entry to the labour market. Although Braverman has insisted that modern clerical work is virtually indistinguishable from factory employment, one is obliged to recognise that there are subtle differences between these two modes of employment which, from the point of view of the school-leaver at least, render them qualitatively distinct.(88)

Although one may draw a distinction between female manual workers and female clerks and office machine operators, and between the latter two groups and secretaries, it is important to recognise that clerks and operatives are themselves stratified. In his book on white-collar work, Crozier points out that there is a definite hierarchy of office staff. At the very bottom, he maintains, are the filing clerks, who represent 'the most dependent of all employees'. Contrary to what one might expect, all the filing clerks in the Parisian insurance companies which he studied were men, but this did not alter the fact that their job was accorded little status by other employees. These male filing clerks had a number of things in common - their social origins, their relative youth, physical isolation from other workers and a low salary. Crozier is inclined to regard their detachment from the rest of the office staff as something of an advantage:

'It is a closed world, but, within that world, file clerks enjoy a certain amount of autonomy. Each file clerk is assigned an area for filing; within that area the battle against disorder is his alone.'

A further advantage, in Crozier's opinion, is the fact that the file clerk stands up to do his work :

'Therein lies, in a certain sense, his glory, but also his servitude...for his work is tiring.' (89)

Having been employed on many occasions as a filing clerk myself, I would be inclined to hesitate before characterising such work as in any way glorious, although I did derive some satisfaction in one instance when I managed to put to rights a filing system which had been a spectacle of utter chaos when I first arrived. More often than not, however, filing can be backbreaking, exhausting work, particularly in the enormous record departments of hospitals, insurance companies and other organisations where there is a daily deluge of paperwork to be carefully put away. In time, no doubt, filing clerks will be replaced by the automated memory banks which do not stop for coffee and a chat, or place information in the wrong location when they are feeling bored with the job. Another technical development which threatens to make the filing clerk redundant is the microfilm system. According to one estimate, this type of system can save 98% of the space needed to accommodate conventional filing systems, and it is therefore likely to be particularly attractive to firms at a time when rents are soaring.(90)

The next group of workers which may be identified are keypunch operators, whose work involves the preparation of data for computer analysis. In Crozier's study, all the keypunch operatives were female, and Benet notes the same of English and American firms.(91) In terms of skill and training, such work represents an advance on filing, although it does not require a lengthy term of apprenticeship, and firms are often willing to train girls themselves. Crozier maintains that whereas file clerks represent the white-collar equivalent of the unskilled manual labourer, the keypunch operator is more like a semi-skilled machine operator. Accordingly, they enjoy higher rates of pay and somewhat greater status. They are annexed to the machines of the future whereas the filing clerk is being replaced by them. Since there is a high demand for their skills, which are wholly transferable, Crozier considers that the keypunch girls are less obliged to conform to the norms of the company they work for than their unskilled sisters in the enormous file. Benet, on the other hand, claims that this type of worker is 'extremely vulnerable to changes in the economic climate' and that new machines

constantly threaten her job security.

This type of worker is usually segregated from other office employees, and Benet suggests that this fact has had certain consequences for recruitment policy:

'Sequestered in the computer room, she could look how she pleased... Indeed, for the first time in office history, she could be black. Some companies even managed to tie in computerisation with 'equal opportunity' employment policies, getting credit for training and hiring underprivileged girls, and staffing their computer rooms cheaply, while not having to cope with unfamiliar notions like black receptionists. The number of non-whites in clerical employment in the U.S.A. went up by 77% between 1960 and 1967, compared to a 23% increase in white clerical workers.' (92)

No corresponding figures are available for the U.K. but the statistics furnished by Benet certainly highlight the function of routinised, mechanised office work as a source of employment for the disinherited of the American Dream. Very little appears to be known about the work attitudes of keypunch operators, although Crozier is inclined to regard them as somewhat instrumentally orientated towards their work. He also found that they, along with the typists, were the workers who seemed least interested in their jobs, yet were the ones who were least likely to complain about their position. He attributes this, in part, to their lowly status in the office hierarchy, although one could interpret this in other ways. For example, Benet suggests that this is the mode of work, par excellence, which enables the young working class girl to move 'out of the file-clerk or factory-worker class'. The work itself may not be subjectively experienced as interesting, but it does afford 'opportunities to girls who would otherwise have had a hard time making it to the office at all.' Hence the co-existence of a lack of interest in the work itself, with a lack of inclination to complain about it.

Typists, like keypunch operators, are increasingly segregated from the rest of the office staff. Typing pools first appeared in the 1920s, and, as Benet points out, this was largely the result of the development of audio-machinery, which obviated the need for bosses to be located near to their typists.(93)

They were also the result of the application of 'scientific management' to the organisation of office procedure.

Studies of typists are very few and far between, and several of those which do exist are unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is a tendency to regard typists and secretaries as a homogeneous group and thus to generate data which offers no insight into the character of jobs which are wholly based on typing, nor an understanding of the attitudes of those who perform them.(94) Secondly, the preconceptions of the researchers are sometimes allowed to prejudice the results. As an example of the latter problem, one may cite a recent study of typists working in banking. Although the authors profess an interest in the work motivations of such employees, the nature of the work itself is prejudged to be lacking in intrinsic satisfaction, and consequently, discussion turns upon a narrower range of variables thought to promote satisfaction or dissatisfaction.(95) However, there are a number of other studies which do not display these weaknesses and which suggest that there is a considerable reservoir of discontent among female typists. A study of women in typing pools by Stansfield found that there was no expectation of any satisfaction from work, and his respondents stressed the following as sources of dissatisfaction: the lack of perceived importance of their work, the lack of personal communications and the fact they rarely received any thanks for what they were doing.(96)

A study of audio-typists by the Alfred Marks organisation revealed a pattern of widespread boredom and frustration. 49% of the respondents stated that they were bored with their work, mainly due to the lack of personal contact, and there was a general feeling that their work lacked status. Nearly half the sample could not think of any ways in which their work could be made more interesting, and as many as 70% expressed a desire to become a secretary or shorthand-typist, feeling that this was the only way in which they could experience more personal contact or more variety, interest and responsibility.(97)

Speaking from personal experience, I find that this type of work has very



little to recommend it. In the typing pool, one is well and truly machine-bound, and the noise and the physical separation of girl from girl tend to inhibit all conversation when work is being processed. This is even more pronounced when the typist is wearing headphones. Typing is often very tiring, since it necessitates sitting up fairly straight all day, although electric typewriters render the incessant drumming on the keyboard rather less fatiguing, if one's firm is willing to provide them. Typing can be particularly irksome when it is all figures, such as with invoice-typing, since more time seems to be spent pulling levers and pressing margin buttons than with producing figures, and there is not even the satisfaction of having something vaguely interesting to read. The degree to which work output is monitored varies from the situation where a supervisor merely checks that the girls remain anchored to their machines all day, to the situation where a supervisor actually counts the number of invoices, index cards or whatever, that each girl produces. Even the typing pools which have certain minimum demands in terms of productivity, however, are unable to set a fixed pace to the work, in the same way that many factory-floor machines can dictate the pace of their operatives. It is this factor which permits the occasional daydream, or aside to one's neighbour, which may help to pass the time between breaks.

Since the work is almost always predictable, the things that go on when the keyboards are silent assume great importance. It is easy to become quite irrational, to see life out of all proportion, when the source of entertainment is not the work in hand, but one's co-workers or the occasional male visitor from another department. The social life of the office can generate a great deal of satisfaction, but at other times it can lead to extraordinary bitchiness over the most minor of events. There can be intense rivalries but there can also be a deep sense of solidarity which sometimes forms the basis of a restrictive practice. If girls in the pool sometimes declare, as they apparently did to Crozier, that they have no desire for a different position, this does not necessarily betoken short-term personal work goals, but may indicate their involvement in the camaraderie of the typing pool and a recognition that without

further training, an alternative position would be unlikely to represent any improvement on their current one.

One type of work which, in my opinion, represents a considerable improvement on non-stop typing, is that entailed in the position of the clerk-typist. This usually involves typing and filing, but also many other tasks which, while they are concerned with the processing of paperwork, afford some variety and change of tempo. As a temporary, I was employed on several occasions in this capacity, and always found the work itself quite interesting due to its varied nature, and the fact that it was not unusual to process work through from beginning to end, whereas typing pools afford little insight into the origins or destiny of the paperwork. As a clerk-typist, I was never housed in an all-female ghetto, far away from the management, as I was when working as a copy-typist or filing-clerk. Indeed, I was always included in the activities on special occasions which involved the senior staff, such as Christmas parties and the final toast of farewell to a departing executive. My experiences in this capacity suggested that routine white-collar work does not necessarily preclude interest and variety. The more one's job approximates to that of the traditional clerk, the more one is likely to experience its traditional satisfactions. Conversely, the more one's job is mechanised and segregated the less likely is the incumbent to experience work satisfaction and a feeling of being 'part of the management'.

Clerks are in many ways the labour aristocracy of the paper jungle. Although they are defined in the Oxford Dictionary as those who are employed to keep accounts, the range of skills which they are expected to perform is quite substantial, and in this respect they differ markedly from the copytypist or the filing clerk. They tend to occupy a rather ambiguous position in the office hierarchy, as Crozier himself noted:

'More than anything, being a clerk signifies being clearly defined as neither this nor that, but rather as belonging to a mass of multifaceted personnel who have developed a more or less large number of bureaucratic skills which are called for according to the rhythm of work and needs.' (98)

As he points out, clerks are fairly heterogeneous in terms of social and educational background and in terms of the work they do. Yet, as Crozier says, it is this group which perhaps comes closest to the 'traditional image' of the office worker - the ones who form the 'solid base' of the system. Of all the groups we have so far considered, clerks are the ones who are most likely to be drawn from either sex. There appears to be no systematic evidence which can throw any light on how different types of clerical work in a particular organisation come to be distributed between the sexes, nor on the extent to which promotion prospects vary as between male and female clerks. I gained the impression, during my own work experiences, however, that male clerks tend to be given more responsibility and authority.

While to the outsider, the work of the clerk might seem excruciatingly dull, and those who perform it exceedingly unambitious, firsthand experience may cast it in a totally different light. Objectively, it may be low-paid, lacking in prospects, and even insecure, but subjectively, it can generate all manner of satisfactions which derive both from the work and from the social life. This is most likely to be the case where she is employed to perform a variety of tasks, few of which are mechanised, and where she interacts with at least the lower levels of management. Moreover, promotion, if and when it occurs, is likely to involve the clerk in more responsible work rather than, as in the case of the secretary, the performance of the same kind of work for a higher status employer.

According to Braverman, however, not only are the traditional skills of the clerk being undermined by the growth of office mechanisation and rationalisation, but the clerk herself, like the secretary, represents yet another threatened species of the white-collar environment.(99) In his view, the introduction of computerised accounting systems renders traditional book-keeping skills redundant, with the result that the clerk will be shortly replaced by a person who simply attends a machine. Although one suspects that this development belongs to a more distant future than Braverman implies, there is

little doubt that the eclipse of the clerical function would be accompanied by the disappearance of many of the residual satisfactions found in the office environment.

The intention of this section has been to illustrate the tremendous diversity which characterises the world of the female routine office worker. Although certain broad distinctions have been made between the work situation of this group as a whole and that of the secretary, it is quite inappropriate to generalise about this group in terms of job satisfaction. In the first place, attitudes to work are likely to vary according to social background, education and training, position in the life cycle and other factors which are not directly related to the work situation. Secondly, aspects of the job situation will be an important influence on attitudes, such as, the degree of variety and/or interest, location in the office status hierarchy, levels of remuneration, social atmosphere, and opportunities for promotion and/or social mobility inherent in the work.

Yet whilst one is obliged to recognise the many sources of diversity in the outlook of the female office worker, it is possible to distil out from this examination of the more routine grades a particularly insistent theme. It would appear that the most mechanised, repetitive tasks are those which are most likely to promote disaffection. In the first place, this is because these jobs are associated with uncomfortable levels of noise and a variety of unpleasant stresses and strains on the human body. Secondly, the lack of variety entailed in such jobs is likely to induce a sense of boredom. This observation is borne out by the findings of a survey of office machine operators by the Alfred Marks organisation. Nearly half of the respondents 'yearned' for additional variety in their work routine, although a great many were resigned to the inevitability of monotony.(100) Thirdly, these are the jobs which are most likely to be physically segregated and thus to diminish the opportunities for personal contact. The experience of spatial segregation is most likely to be the fate of those involved principally with machines, since the aim of creating such phenomena as typing pools and punching rooms is partly to

minimise noise levels in the office proper. Lockwood predicted that the growth of mechanisation coupled with physical segregation would tend to generate a sense of isolation and detachment among those whom it affected, and there is evidence that his expectations were correct. The Alfred Marks study of office machine operators mentioned above found that a lack of involvement with the company was widespread. Of the respondents interviewed, as many as 41% were segregated in a special machine room or typing pool. One fifth of the respondents claimed that they did not know in detail what their company did, and 17% stated that they did not really understand the nature of their own contribution to their company's operations.(101) Although the development of open-planning may perhaps be regarded as conducive to a greater degree of involvement among some members of the office, it is evident that the pressure towards the further subdivision, mechanisation and segregation of office tasks is likely to expand the numbers of those who experience a sense of detachment and marginality, and thus to increase the overall level of work dissatisfaction among the routine grades.

#### 4. Responses to Work Dissatisfaction Among Female Office Workers

Contrary to the impression given in some earlier studies of female office workers, it appears that many of them, in all grades, are not entirely satisfied with their jobs. The reasons for this vary from grade to grade in much the same way as do the reasons for work satisfaction, but from the highest to the lowest, some aspect of the work situation is often a cause for complaint. This is not to say that the majority of such workers are wholly dissatisfied with their jobs - the evidence is to the contrary, but that many of them do not conform to the stereotyped image of workers who will put up with anything at work because their focus of interest is elsewhere. Even if it were true that all female office workers regarded their principal role as a domestically-based one, this does not preclude their having a desire for an interesting job. Indeed, an Alfred Marks survey of office workers found that 'interesting duties' was the single most important job characteristic sought by respondents.(102)

The same survey found that the second most sought after job attribute was promotion prospects and it was one which was steadily increasing in importance. Yet all the evidence suggests that the hopes of office workers in this respect are likely to be frustrated. A study of clerical workers by Elsy and Shaw reveals that the lack of promotion prospects is in fact a major source of dissatisfaction among women in white-collar employment. One is inclined to hold certain reservations about the adequacy of their research because they fail to distinguish between their respondents in terms of grade of work. However, their general findings are of considerable interest in the present context. Sixtytwo per cent of their respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the opportunities for learning new skills as a precondition for promotion. Elsy and Shaw conclude that the desire to get on in clerical work does not 'arise from feelings of relative deprivation in payment levels'. Most of the women were satisfied with their pay and felt better off in this respect than other clerks inside their own firm and with clerks working in other organisations.(103)

Another significant finding of this research is that although their female respondents were more satisfied with their existing jobs than were their male clerical respondents, dissatisfaction was quite widespread among them:

'About a third of all women responding expressed dissatisfaction with the variety and interest of their work, with the opportunities available for them to use their own initiative and with the way in which their work was organised.'

A desire for intrinsic work satisfaction was also reflected in the responses given to questions concerning future occupational choice. In this respect, the authors argue, men and women are no different:

'If we abstract from all the reasons given for choosing either a similar or different job, the need for varied and interesting work was mentioned most frequently by men and women. As a very close second came the demand for better prospects...on the whole women were looking for the same job and work characteristics as were the men.' (105)

There is a steadily accumulating body of evidence, therefore, which casts

considerable doubt on the model of the working woman as largely instrumentally motivated and/or as acquiescent in the structure of opportunities available to her. The next objective, then, is to explore the range and nature of the responses available to female clerical workers when they subjectively experience job dissatisfaction.

a. Rationalising the Situation

One response to the experience of disappointment with one or more attributes of the work situation is to rationalise this away altogether or to minimise its effect by placing importance on another attribute of the job or working environment. Thus a high wage or salary may come to be regarded as ample compensation for a monotonous job, or a pleasant social atmosphere may come to be regarded as compensation for a low pay-package, to the point where these alternative satisfactions are considered to be the most important attributes of the job and sufficient reason for not doing something positive about the situation. According to Fox, the tendency to rationalise in this manner is largely a function of a lack of freedom of mobility in the labour market.(106) Although this hypothesis may be very useful for an understanding of the work attitudes of those who are limited by their particular skills (or lack of them) or of those who are somewhat constrained by factors arising in their domestic situation, it does not explain why those who are not so restricted fail to take advantage of the favourable labour market for office workers, and seek alternative work. Clearly, a secretary who feels that she is being under-utilised is in a very good position to look for a job which will occupy more of her time. Similarly, a typist who does not like the factory-like atmosphere of the typing-pool could seek a post in a small firm which does not segregate typists. The state of the labour market is clearly of central importance, but a more comprehensive approach to the question of why many office workers rationalise away their dissatisfactions should include reference to the age of the employees, their reference groups, and subjective perceptions of the alternatives. It is possible that older women may be less sure of themselves

when it comes to finding jobs, and therefore opt for security even though the current job might leave something to be desired. Reference groups are also likely to be of considerable importance. So long as there are pronounced differences in the work situation of white-collar as opposed to blue-collar employees, even the most tedious of office jobs may be seen to have its compensations over the factory-floor job. Moreover, the office hierarchy itself presents a more immediately visible structure of reference groups, which may shape the individual's perceptions of her own job.

b. Trade Union Action

Although female office workers are not as averse to trade unions as folklore would have us believe, there are a number of reasons why most of them would not attempt to resolve their grievances through organised industrial action.

In the case of secretaries, there are a number of factors which militate against the development of a strong union consciousness, or even the will to join a union. Firstly, there is the factor of social background. Silverstone found that only 6% of her respondents came from social classes IV and V, whereas over half of them came from social classes I and II (defined in terms of their fathers' occupations).(107) The significance of this fact, namely that girls from this type of social background are over-represented as compared with their proportions in the female workforce as a whole, has been suggested by Benet. In her opinion, they are more likely to regard unions with disapproval than to perceive them as an acceptable means for improving wages or conditions of work. This would vary according to the type of organisation in which the secretary works, says Benet, so that antipathy to the unions may be more pronounced amongst business secretaries, but on the whole, they are unlikely to favour collective responses to work dissatisfaction.(108) Benet also considers that those secretaries who despite their background have come into contact with orthodox socialism or feminism, and who have accepted it, are likely to quit secretarial work altogether, thus divesting this occupational group of any



potentially 'revolutionary' elements.

A second factor which inhibits the unionisation of this sector of the workforce, is the peculiar nature of the boss-secretary relationship. Apart from the fact that most secretaries hail from similar backgrounds to those of their bosses, their relationship is itself likely to cement feelings of identification on the part of the woman with her employer. As we have seen, the role of the secretary is largely supportive - she is often characterised as the subordinate member of a team even though this concept of a working 'partnership' mystifies the crucial distinctions between employer and employee in terms of power, status and reward. These important differences notwithstanding, a secretary is unlikely to assume an oppositional stance in relation to her boss, since this would effectively make their relationship unworkable. One may assume that if her dissatisfaction reached a very high level of intensity she would be more likely to change jobs, or, if her grievances were felt in relation to secretarial work in general, rather than to one unfortunate experience of it, she would most probably seek another type of job altogether.

A third inhibiting factor is the low degree of employment concentration among secretaries. As we noted earlier, employment concentration is positively related to the propensity to unionise. It is interesting to note that while this phenomenon may have negative consequences for the pay and working conditions of many secretaries, Silverstone believes that it may sometimes have the reverse effect:

'Many secretaries work in situations where only one or two of them are employed and thus there is no need for any structural arrangement to govern their rates of pay. Partly as a consequence of this, many secretaries earn salaries far in excess of the norm.' (109)

Since most secretaries, therefore, are likely to experience work dissatisfaction, if at all, in isolation rather than in a group, they are more likely to adopt individualised responses. Their background and training all serve to reinforce this preference for personal methods of negotiation. Indeed, Silverstone found that only 6% of her respondents belonged to a union, and

nearly all of them worked for newspapers. Moreover only two secretaries out of the total of thirty-three who belonged to a union had joined voluntarily. (110)

This apparent distaste among secretarial staff for trade union organisation is not characteristic of all grades of female office workers, but then, few other types of office occupation incorporate a one-to-one relationship with the employer. As we saw earlier, women, especially in the public sector, are just as likely to join white-collar unions as men, where there is a high degree of employment concentration, and where there is some precedent for them to do so. Furthermore, while it would appear that the majority of secretaries regard union membership as inconsistent with their occupational status, the activities of the government and of employers with regard to recognition of the unions have probably made them more 'respectable' and therefore acceptable in the eyes of those employed in the more routine grades. This is one factor which has played some part in the growth of white-collar unionism during the last fifteen years, although it does not represent the complete explanation. However, union membership is one thing, militancy is another, and although one can cite examples of heightened union activity by female-dominated white-collar unions which suggests that women are just as prepared as men to fight when they feel threatened, this is not evidence that union organisation and campaigning is the most typical response to work dissatisfaction.

#### c. Professionalisation.

There have been several attempts in the past by male and female clerical workers to arrest a perceived decline in their status. Sometimes this has been manifested in the formation of a union, but on other occasions, the response has been to assert the professional status of the occupation. This has been a common response both at home and abroad. For example, in 1940, a small group of women in the U.S.A. formed the National Secretaries Association:

'dedicated to the proposition that secretaries deserved more status, recognition and responsibility. The result was a programme to convince employers that the secretary could be a professional person as much as the accountant, the draughtsman-engineer or

lawyer - if only she were given more responsible tasks than mere typing and dictation.' (111)

Similar organisations have sprung up in the U.K., the most recent of which is the Executive Secretaries Association, founded in 1970. All of these organisations have been mainly unsuccessful in their attempts to convince employers and the general public that secretaries may be considered on a par with members of the traditional or the new professions. Even though they have instituted all manner of diplomas and qualifications, these represent mere embellishments rather than prerequisites of secretarial status. The major problem appears to be the fact that secretaries cannot claim a monopoly of the body of skills and knowledge upon which their profession is based. As Young has suggested, the degree to which a body of knowledge is socially valued depends on the extent to which there is restricted access to this knowledge and opportunities for those who do have access to it to legitimise its higher status and control its availability. (112) Clearly, while schools continue to equip many of their pupils with basic shorthand and typing skills, and while it is possible to become a secretary at one of thousands of colleges around the country, executive and 'top' secretaries are in no position to assert exclusive rights to a body of marketable expertise. Silverstone maintains that many employers are not acquainted with the secretarial qualifications which are extended by the associations, and are not particularly impressed when a secretary flourishes her certificates during an interview. (113)

Since one of the expressed aims of these associations is to detach their members' status from that of the rank and file, their numerical strength is likely to be extremely limited, and it is doubtful whether they can be effective in securing the redress of any grievances felt by secretaries in relation to status or promotion prospects.

#### d. Alternative Occupations.

For the women who feel that their present state of dissatisfaction has become intolerable, there is always the possibility of obtaining a totally

different kind of job. However, the opportunities in this respect vary according to the type of office job in which one has had experience. Silverstone believes that secretarial work is a bridging occupation - 'one where the potentialities for movement to another type of work are particularly great'.(114) Secretarial work leads, in particular, to the fields of advertising, publishing and personnel work. Yet the largest single group of ex-secretaries whom she investigated had moved into occupations necessitating a fairly lengthy spell of training, for example, social work, nursing and teaching. A sizeable proportion had become air hostesses, thus moving from one supposedly glamorous job into another. Secretaries are probably much better placed than other types of female office worker when it comes to moving into alternative occupations. Their secretarial experience may open doors to certain professions, and they are more likely to have the academic prerequisites for entry to the training programmes of others. Those employed in the routine grades, however, are more likely to experience only lateral or downward mobility when changing jobs. Their jobs cannot be regarded as bridging occupations, and it may be necessary to attend evening classes at a local college before they can even begin to consider nursing or social work as alternatives. Other non-manual jobs such as waitressing, barmaiding or work as a shop assistant compare unfavourably with office work in terms of pay, fringe benefits and status. There is the option of manual work but not surprisingly, mobility of this kind among office staff is very rare, according to Barron and Norris.(115)

While the majority of Silverstone's secretarial respondents had given 'serious thought' to moving into alternative occupations, and one assumes that many of those in the routine grades would also think in these terms, there are a number of reasons why this in fact proves to be a minority response to dissatisfaction. In the first place, office work despite all its potential sources of discontent compares very well indeed with all the other traditional female occupations in terms of remuneration, status, working conditions, etc. For secretaries, there are not only these advantages, but it seems that the work

itself can be interesting and stimulating given a boss who is willing to delegate and to involve his secretary in his own round of activities.

And throughout the office hierarchy there is perhaps always something which can be found to be enjoyable in one's occupation, which may outweigh the desire to move into another. Secondly, those jobs which do not entail downward mobility usually necessitate a period of training and/or non-vocational study. This no doubt represents a major deterrent to those who lack any formal qualifications but who wish to pursue a career.

For most girls, therefore, thoughts of a fresh start in an entirely different occupation will probably never progress beyond the daydreaming stage, except perhaps for a few half-hearted enquiries at a local technical college, or a chat with a friend who made the transition successfully.

#### e. An Alternative Office Job

A common response to work dissatisfaction is to find an alternative position in the same occupational field. For those who wish to do more than to sublimate their grievances in dreams and rationalisations, this provides the most practical solution. While most female office workers may not be able to move into the occupation of their choice, there is no doubt that until very recently they have been in a sellers' market as far as their skills as clerks, typists, telephonists, secretaries, etc., are concerned. According to Fulop, writing in 1971, the total number of office jobs increases by about 100,000 every year, and the excess of demand over supply to which this gives rise is exacerbated by such factors as the tendency towards earlier marriage and the quantitative increase in the range of occupations open to young girls.(116)

Undoubtedly, the situation is rather less favourable in 1978 when even office staff have felt the pinch of economic recession. Considerable caution should be exercised when interpreting unemployment figures but they do suggest a recent downswing in the demand for clerical workers. According to the D.E., in September 1973 there were 27,659 female clerical workers registered as unemployed in the U.K. and 35,752 unfilled vacancies. In December 1975, there were 73,915 registrations and only 9,899 unfilled vacancies. In September 1973, a surplus

of unemployed over unfilled vacancies was found only in the West Midlands, North-West, North, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. In December 1975, there was no area in the country where this surplus did not exist. Since then, the numbers of unemployed female clerical workers have continued to grow. The figures rose sharply between June 1976, when 77,771 were registered unemployed, and June 1977, when as many as 97,672 were registered with the E.S.A.

However, this may simply reflect the growth of unemployed school-leavers, some of them perhaps signing on as clerks on the basis of rudimentary office skills acquired at school. Certainly, clerks represented 66% of all clerical workers registered as unemployed in March 1976, that is, 53,178 out of a total of 80,207. For those who are already in employment, the current situation probably means that there is a reduction in the choice of alternative office jobs available.

In less exceptional times, women are in a favourable position to select the firm which most closely approximates their expectations and aspirations in relation to pay, benefits, location, general working conditions and bosses. Those who do engage in an interminable round of job-hopping with a view to finding the optimum employment situation are likely, however, to encounter certain drawbacks. Firstly, even though many employers have no doubt become used to high rates of turnover among office staff, they may nevertheless be wary of hiring someone who has an excessive record of job changing. An occupational history of this nature would certainly be a cause for comment in the interview situation. Indeed, in a guide for employers involved in the hiring of employees, the author instructs her readers to 'look at the REASONS for changing jobs very carefully'.(117) Unless a boss is sensitive to the fact that work dissatisfaction can represent the root cause of the job-hopping phenomenon, he may judge the applicant before him to be basically unstable and liable to leave within a short time, with the result that the interview comes to a swift conclusion. A second drawback is that the interview and accompanying tour of the office rarely afford a genuine insight into either the work situation or the

social ambience of the prospective place of employment. It usually takes several weeks before the new employee is in a position to know whether she has found her ideal job. If her judgment turns out to be hastily conceived and she decides to leave, this will only serve to blot her copybook in the eyes of future interviewers.

The only way in which it is possible for a female office worker to overcome these difficulties is to sign on as a temporary worker with one or more employment agencies in the hope of finding a firm which meets with her requirements. According to an Alfred Marks Survey conducted during 1970, 13% of their sample of temporary workers were working in this capacity whilst looking for a permanent job. Of these, exactly half were hoping that they could find a temporary job where they would like to stay permanently.(118)

The employment agencies do at least provide a means whereby an office worker can search for a satisfying post without the stigma which normally attaches to the frequent changing of jobs. Unlike the situation which obtains when a girl applies direct to an employer, the agencies present the opportunity of a 'trial marriage' which is unusually easy to escape from should the experience prove to be less than attractive.

f. Becoming a Permanent Temporary

While some office workers respond to job dissatisfaction by using the agencies as a means of finding a better permanent position, there are others who use the agencies for an altogether different purpose. These are the girls who sign up as temps in the hope of finding the interest and variety which they feel permanent jobs cannot offer. For some girls, life as a 'permanent temporary' is the only way of relieving what is for them the utter boredom and monotony of office work. Tired, perhaps, of being servile flatterers without any hope of promotion into management, or of promotion out of the typing pool, they respond to the lure of the agencies' advertisements which indirectly promise interest and independence through continual change of environment. All too often there is a tremendous discrepancy between the promise and the practice, but the

agencies do at least offer some means of relief from the claustrophobia of the regular nine-to-five job.

The permanent job-hopping phenomenon is not new, but the employment agencies have made it easier. They can sell the temp as an office trouble-shooter, whereas the girl who tries it on her own can become labelled as 'unstable'. Although the permanent temps represent a minority of all temporary office workers, they constitute approximately 20% of single girls who are working in this capacity.(119)

It is possible to regard these girls as those who have become alienated in their permanent work environments, but, aware of their favourable position in the labour market, have attempted to reduce the feeling of alienation by exercising some measure of control over the course of their working lives. Blauner's vision of freedom in the work situation tends to fit the position of the temp very closely:

'The non-alienated pole of the powerless dimension is freedom and control. Freedom is the state which allows the person to remove himself from those dominating situations which make him simply a reacting object. Freedom may therefore involve the possibility of movement in a physical or social sense, the ability to walk away from a coercive machine process, or the opportunity of quitting a job because of the existence of alternative employment.' (120)

Yet it is a very qualified form of freedom which the temporary experiences. Her degree of manoeuvre is circumscribed by fluctuations in demand for her labour, the conditions laid down by the agency, the nature of each job she undertakes, and also by the skills which she has to offer. The freedom is, then, something of an illusion, and perhaps it is not surprising that many of these girls return to the security of a regular job. Temporary work represents just one more way of coming to terms with the inevitable, another attempt to escape from the deadening rhythms of the enormous file. In a subsequent chapter, we examine in considerable detail the nature of this vicious circle, but before turning the spotlight on temporary work more directly, it is necessary to consider why this mode of employment should also attract a sizeable number of married women.



## 5. Married Women in the Office

The popular image of the female office worker is that of a single girl in her twenties who is filling in the time between leaving school and getting married. While this may have been the case until World War II, she is now increasingly likely to be married and aged over thirty. In fact married women now represent approximately 47% of all female clerical workers and a great many of them have children of school age.(121) In a survey conducted by the Alfred Marks Bureau, 27% of their sample of married women had children, and all but two of these had a family aged under 15.(122) The situation is rather different, however, in central London where there is a much greater preponderance of young single women in the office population. Silverstone found that only one-third of her respondents in secretarial work were married.(123)

Although married women may not be as willing to undertake office work in the central London area, when one considers the country as a whole we find that clerical work is the second most common source of employment for this group. According to the 1966 Census, 22% of economically active married women were employed in this sphere.(124) Owing to the dearth of material relating to women in white-collar work, it is extraordinarily difficult to build up a picture of the characteristics of married women in the office. One has the impression, however, that marriage as such makes little difference to the work situation of the female white-collar worker. This was not always the case it seems, for according to Muriel Wells, who was a shorthand-typist in the Thirties, marriage at that time meant the end of one's career:

'About 1930, I was lucky enough to obtain a job...in a solicitor's office. After a year or two, with much fear and trepidation, I decided to ask whether I could continue working in the office if I got married. Much to my surprise my request was granted, as it was almost unheard of for married women to do this.' (125)

Nowadays, it is motherhood rather than marriage which is likely to remove an office worker from the labour force, or at least necessitate some major alterations to her work pattern. Silverstone's research confirms that this is the case among secretaries working in central London.(126)

Contrary to the myth that employers prefer young unattached women as employees, it appears that many actually prefer married women, and only a minority regard those with domestic commitments in the form of young children as unsuitable or undesirable employees.(127) The fact is that older, married women are more likely to remain in a job, and employers are well aware of this. However, this apparent spirit of enlightenment exhibited by employers towards those with families cannot be mentioned without some qualification. Firstly, there has been, until recently at least, a tremendous shortage of labour for an ever-increasing supply of jobs. Therefore, employers have been frequently obliged to recruit from this group. Secondly, while employers are willing to hire women with domestic commitments as secretaries, it seems that they expect these women to make adjustments to the prevailing work patterns, particularly in terms of hours. Silverstone found that 35% of the employers she interviewed were willing to hire mothers 'providing that certain conditions were met'. The conditions included the specifications that mothers had to make reliable arrangements for the daytime care of their children, that their children must have attained a certain minimum age and that 'work would not be continually interrupted owing to the demands of the children'.(128) It would appear, therefore, that accommodation is required of married women with children rather than extended towards them. This is also reflected in the very tardy progress towards the introduction of flexitime in British firms.

Indeed, far from employers straining to make it easier for married women to combine employment with their domestic life, there is every indication that they make it very difficult indeed. According to an Alfred Marks Survey of married women in the office, 30% of the respondents said that they often worked overtime, and only 10% said that they never had to stay late:

'However, it's the everyday working pattern which most affects the ease with which a woman can cope with home and office, and some employers are clearly most reluctant to give any concessions.' (129)

In fact one-quarter of the sample said that their bosses were not willing to be flexible over late arrival at the office. Silverstone also found that the

majority of London secretaries worked some kind of overtime on a fairly regular basis.(130) No less than 61% of her respondents occasionally worked late at the office. It is not altogether clear from the various studies whether employers expect employees to work overtime, or whether those who do it on a regular basis are what might be called 'organisation women'. It may be that some women put in long hours, work through their lunchtimes and take work home, as a way of ingratiating themselves with their boss, perhaps hoping that promotion will be the ultimate reward. There is no way that one can provide an answer to this question, but it is undoubtedly normal for secretaries to be punctual and to be willing to work overtime. Unfortunately, no systematic figures are available for the routine grades, but one suspects that conformity to the prescribed hours of work is usually expected at these levels also. The conditions of work for such women therefore place considerable demands on those who have young children. It may be suggested, therefore, that inflexibility on the part of employers represents an important variable in the analysis of women's attitudes to work and their occupational distribution.

It is interesting to discover that whereas married women are less numerous than single women in the white-collar workforce as a whole, they represent a majority of all temporary office workers.(131) It seems that because of the inadequacy of State nursery facilities coupled with the inflexibility of employers over such matters as school holiday arrangements, it is only by becoming temps that many women with domestic commitments can continue working or return to work once they have completed their family. According to an Alfred Marks Survey in 1970, approximately 13% of all temporary workers are unable to accept permanent work because of personal or domestic commitments.(132) A more recent survey found that 69% of married female temporary office employees in the South-East were working as temps for this reason.(133) Temporary work offers all the flexibility that is lacking in the sphere of permanent work:

'While the office temporary sometimes has to contend with uncertainty, she also knows that, generally speaking, she can arrange her working days and hours so that she can be at home or free for other activities when she really needs to be. Unlike the full-timers, she can take time off when she wants.' (134)

All this is true and the agencies love to advertise their role as the saviours of housebound mothers, but it is also true that so long as agencies and temporary workers exist there is no pressure upon employers to adopt more flexible attitudes themselves. An employer who makes a concession to one permanent worker is obliged to extend this facility to all the others - let one married secretary come in at 9.30 and they will all want to. But one temporary working fewer hours is unlikely to have the same effect on the permanent staff. They may grouse and complain but the boss can always point out that she, unlike they, receives no luncheon vouchers, no sick pay, and no paid holiday. In the short term, therefore, the employment agencies are of enormous assistance to the woman who wishes to combine work with motherhood, or with the care of an aged relative. In the long-term, however, their presence siphons off the pressure on employers to rethink their provisions for working hours, or to reassess their expectations from female employees in terms of overtime.

There is very little evidence indeed relating to the work attitudes of married women in the office. Clearly any such analysis would have to make a distinction between those who had yet to start a family and those who had returned to the work force after having completed their family. The differences in terms of age and domestic commitments would be considerable. One study which has investigated the work attitudes of married women in white-collar work unfortunately makes no such distinction.(135) It is interesting to find, however, that 31% of the respondents said that they were working 'because of their dislike of domestic routine'. Although money was a reason for working, it was not regarded as the primary determinant of their decision to return to work. There is therefore at least some basis for the view that many married women return to work because of their domestic circumstances and not in spite of them.

In recent years, it has become fashionable among sociologists to eschew the study of worker attitudes, and in particular, the investigation of sources of worker satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The main reason for this, it appears, is that such studies are felt to provide knowledge which enables management to exercise a greater degree of control over their employees. Not only does this position, in my view, represent an over-optimistic view of the extent to which employers consult sociological literature in their efforts to increase efficiency and profitability, but it paves the way for sociologists to interpret the world as it suits them best. What most suits a great many sociologists at the present time is a view of the worker as determined - powerless to resist the economic forces which sweep over him or her in the era of monopoly capital. As Beechey has suggested however, it is essential that one acknowledge the capacity of workers to resist or impede such pressures.(136). If one accept this proposition, then an analysis of the factors which promote dissatisfaction and which condition responses to dissatisfaction becomes imperative. If the modern worker, whether male or female, is not to be seen as a passive, somewhat mindless being, responding like litmus paper to organisational and technological change, then it becomes essential to examine both attitudes and behaviour more directly. It is quite possible that the realities of the labour market offer very little opportunity for resistance or even for manoeuvre, but the strategies which workers adopt need to be identified and accounted for. It is this premise which has informed the foregoing account of women in clerical employment.

In this chapter I have been concerned to establish a framework of knowledge in terms of which it becomes possible to account for the decision among some women to take up work as temporary clerical employees. White-collar work in the twentieth century is a world in which women largely inhabit the lower-

paid, less prestigious territories. Many women find their jobs immensely satisfying, but there are many others for whom office work represents an occupational cul-de-sac. For the latter group, a wide range of responses are available, although it appears that discontent typically finds expression on an individual basis. I have endeavoured to show how 'permanent temping' may be regarded as one of the available strategies. It has also been shown that married women constitute a substantial proportion of the female clerical population, yet circumstances prevailing both inside and beyond the workplace present them with many practical difficulties. These can be negotiated to some extent by entering temporary employment. Having set the supply side of the temporary labour market in context, my next objective is to account for the growth of a demand for temporary clerical labour and to examine the role of the private employment agency in the alignment of supply and demand.

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CHAPTER FIVE.      MARKETS FOR TEMPORARY CLERICAL LABOUR AND THE ROLE OF THE  
PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT AGENCY

"I started temping with Alfred Marks because I always like a change... for the better." Temping suits me. Temping with Alfred Marks suits me even more. Their experience means they provide a very professional temp service - and more besides. Their people are so friendly and considerate. If I want to keep on working my temp lady can find me one job after another. She seems to know exactly what will suit me. And Alfred Marks rates, for men and women, are high enough to suit anyone. So even though I'm always ready to try something new and different, you won't find me changing my temp agency. Because I can always find something new and different at Alfred Marks. COME TEMP WITH US."

(Advertisement)

The existence of temporary workers in the white-collar sector is almost entirely dependent upon both long-term and short-term labour shortage. This chapter is concerned to identify the conditions under which these shortages arise and to examine the role of private employment agencies in channelling the supply of temporary labour. Both the state of the market for temporary clerical labour and the manner in which agencies align jobs and workers represent important variables in the study of temps' attitudes to work. Advertisements like the one quoted above seek to heighten expectations of the benefits which may follow from a temping career. It is appropriate, therefore, to examine the extent to which these promises can in practice be fulfilled.

1.      Markets for Temporary Clerical Labour

Employers have always been faced with variable work-loads, and have depended on casual or temporary labour to help meet seasonal and fluctuating demands for their goods and services. In America, for example, the presence of a large migratory labour force solves the problems of fruit-growers who find it uneconomical to hire fruit-pickers on a year-round basis. In Britain, casual labour was once a common feature of the dockyards. There used to be a large number of 'floaters' and 'drifters' who were not members of permanent gangs, either by choice or circumstance, and who remained somewhat peripheral to the processes of social control and discipline obtaining for permanent gang members. (1) Similarly, in the building industry, the system of labour sub-contracting is

based upon a supply of workers employed on a casual basis. The hotel and catering industry also employs a large number of temporary workers, because of the seasonal nature of its operations. The demand for temporary labour, however, is not confined solely to sectors of the economy which experience uneven demand for their products and services. Approximately two-fifths of all temporary workers are employed in financial, professional, scientific and miscellaneous services.(2) In the case of both nursing and clerical work, the use of temporaries is partly based upon an acute long-term shortage of labour. The source of the demand for temporary labour thus varies from industry to industry, and for this reason, it is doubtful whether the temporary workforce as a whole may usefully be regarded as a unitary phenomenon. It is tempting to try to do so, however, particularly since many temporaries would appear to qualify for membership of the industrial reserve army, or relative surplus population, as defined by Marx:

'Every worker has to be classed in this category when he is unemployed or but partially employed.' (3)

The concept of the industrial reserve army is of central importance in Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of production. He argues that its role is twofold: to act as a flexible pool of labour to meet certain specific manpower requirements, as and when they arise, and to act as a competitive force whose presence tends to undermine the material position of other workers. Not only does this army act as a 'lever' which promotes capital accumulation, but its growth is said to be an inevitable consequence of capital expansion, particularly when this entails a change in the organic composition of capital itself, towards labour-saving methods of production.

Since the period since World War II has witnessed not only a process of capital accumulation, but also a marked growth in the temporary labour force, Marx's scheme would appear to provide a valid basis from which to analyse the temporary workforce in its entirety. Of course, Marx did distinguish between three different categories of the reserve army - the floating, the latent and the stagnant, and any application of his scheme to the temporary workforce would have to take these distinctions into account. The floating variant consists of workers who are attracted and repelled by the movement of capital in the

centres of modern industry. The latent variant consists of a mobile sector of the rural population in the process of transference to the urban manufacturing proletariat. The stagnant form consists of persons who belong to the active labour force, but whose work is irregular and characterised by long hours and low pay, and whose conditions of life drop to a level below the average experienced by the working class. However, there are certain kinds of temporary workers who are not easily accommodated within these categories. The main example is that of the 'permanent temp', the person who works on a regular basis but whose place of employment is continually changing. Temporaries of this kind are often found in office work and nursing. Since their movement is not simply determined by changes in manpower requirements, but in some cases by the worker's own desire for movement, these temporaries do not clearly correspond to the floating population identified by Marx. Nor do they fit very easily into the stagnant population, since they do not necessarily experience conditions of existence which 'fall below the average conditions of the working class'.

Yet, while there are certain categories of temp labour which would appear to defy analysis in terms of this scheme, there are many other forms of temporary labour which correspond very clearly to one or other of the three main types of the industrial reserve army. Since most studies of temporary labour, however, including the present research, address themselves to its occurrence within a particular occupational or industrial category, the possibility that there may be unifying features has tended to be overlooked.

It is very difficult to derive an accurate knowledge of the size of the temporary workforce as a whole, because it is, by definition, in a perpetual state of flux. People are constantly moving in and out of temporary work and between one temporary post and another. Indeed, the task of precise definition itself represents a major problem. One study which set out to ascertain the size of the temporary workforce chose to regard work as temporary when their respondents defined it as such. However, although the investigators sought to establish why their respondents defined their work in this way, they found that a source of confusion lay in the distinction between part-time and temporary work.(4)



It seems most appropriate, in my view, to define temporary work as a form of employment where the employer/employee relationship is potentially transient, and where both parties acknowledge that tenure is not guaranteed. This definition may perhaps entail its own set of problems, but it does incorporate the important characteristic that such work is recognised as inherently impermanent by both employer and employee from the very outset. Another problem involved in the task of estimating the size of the temporary labour force is the fact that many people employed in this capacity are simply not recorded. Yet, whilst it must be recognised that any statistical representation of the temporary labour force is likely to be incomplete, one may derive some idea of its dimensions from a survey conducted by N.O.P. for the Employment Services Agency in 1975. The survey found that 7% of a sample of 4,783 people who were working at the time of the interview regarded their present jobs as temporary, and a further 4% had considered their present jobs to be on a temporary basis at some time in the past. A further 14% had been employed in a temporary capacity during the five years prior to the survey.(5) The proportion of temporaries in the labour force would therefore seem to be much larger than that suggested by earlier estimates. Fulop writing in 1971 claimed that the proportion of the British labour force employed on a temporary basis was only about 1%.(6) It is possible that this discrepancy may be accounted for in terms of differences in the criteria used for the purpose of definition. Temporaries, therefore, represent a small, but not insignificant part of the labour force and their numbers are expected to increase. As Parker and Sirker have shown, they are located in a wide range of jobs, although there are a number of occupational categories with which they are particularly associated. These include catering and bar work, cleaning and caretaking, sales work, labouring and clerical work.(7)

The development of the market for temps in office employment has been mainly due to the great expansion of white-collar work since World War II. The period 1945-70 was one of tremendous growth in the number of office jobs, reflecting changes in the structure of the national economy. The demand for labour could not be met even though it was becoming more common for married women to return

to work after completing their families. Despite the increasing application of technology to routine forms of white-collar work, the demand continued unabated. The discrepancy between supply and demand was felt acutely by both public and private organisations, especially in central London, and it became necessary to find a solution. Thus it came about that firms began to hire temporary office staff as a short-term strategy to the long-term problem of unfilled vacancies. Although private employment agencies have encouraged firms to use temporary labour as an aid to efficient staff planning, it has been found that they are most commonly hired when it is difficult to fill a vacancy or when a permanent member of staff is sick or on holiday.(8)

The view has often been expressed that a rather more sinister intention informs the use of temporary clerical workers. In 1974, N.A.L.G.O. claimed that the hire of temps to fill gaps created by staff shortage obviated the need to pay wages sufficiently high enough to attract and retain permanent staff.(9) Unions in a number of western countries have claimed that temporaries can be used as strike-breakers and that their presence is generally inimical to the interests of labour. In this way, the unions have given concrete expression to the fears which Marx indicated as likely accompaniments to the presence and growth of a reserve army of labour. However, Eric Hurst, Joint Chairman of Brook Street Bureau, one of the largest private employment organisations, has argued that the main role for temps is to supply abnormal and peripheral requirements and not to provide competition with permanent workers.(10) It is extremely difficult to resolve the competing claims, and it may be that in those cases where the hire of temps has had a depressing effect on the wages of permanent staff, this was an unintended consequence of the employers' actions. Certainly, the following results from a survey conducted amongst employers in America suggests that the desire to depress wages is not the primary intended aim at present:

See TABLE I on page 168

TABLE 1.

Reasons for Using Temporary Help

n = 3,489

%

To replace employees (illness, vacation, vacancy, etc.)	38.1
--	------

As additional aids during peak work periods	32.2
---	------

For special jobs and projects	25.3
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To avoid paying regular employees overtime	2.0
--	-----

To reduce or control labor costs, wages and benefits	2.0
--	-----

None of the above reasons	0.4
---------------------------	-----

Source: 'Quality in Temporary Services' T.K. Cobb The Office, January 1971,

Vol.73, No.1.

The widespread use of temps as holiday stand-ins and during peak work periods means that demand for their services fluctuates throughout the year. In December, 1967, for example, about 23,000 temporary office staff were working for agencies in the G.L.C. area, whereas the figure for July 1968 was 41,000.(11) More recently, economic recession has led to an overall reduction in the demand for temporary clerical workers throughout the year. It has become more common for firms to try to manage with their existing pool of staff when a vacancy remains unfilled or when an employee is ill or on holiday. In spite of the less favourable economic climate, there is still a large demand for temps, especially in central London. This is reflected in the large volume of advertisements for temporary workers which are placed in the two main London evening papers. In the summer months such advertising can occupy as much as a whole page.

Although there remains a substantial demand for office temps in some areas of the country, it is important to recognise that both short-term and long-term fluctuations in demand may have important implications for attitudes towards temporary work. For example, the financial insecurity implied not only by seasonal fluctuations, but also by a long term contraction in demand may deter people from entering this mode of employment and encourage temps themselves to return to permanent work. This observation is lent some support by the findings of the N.O.P. survey, mentioned earlier. A pilot survey of 1,936 people, some

of whom were currently working and some who were not, asked respondents if they would undertake temporary work in the future. Although 24% replied in the affirmative, the majority did not intend to do so, the main deterrent being the perceived insecurity of the work and the disadvantages with which this was associated.(12) The results of my own survey suggest that insecurity is regarded as the chief occupational hazard of temporary work by those employed in this capacity. 27% of my respondents cited this as the main disadvantage of temping.

Thus, while the agencies' advertisements often convey the impression that the temporary clerical market is an Aladdin's cave of wondrous opportunities, the reality may be very different. Whilst the fear of insecurity must inform occupational choice and job attitudes among a great many of today's working population, the direct experience of it is an almost inescapable feature of temporary/clerical employment. Consequently, the attitudes towards work held by temps in office work must in part be regarded as a function of the vagaries of the market for their labour.

## 2. The Role of the Private Employment Agency

According to the 1975 N.O.P. survey, private employment agencies play only a very minor role in the temporary labour market, considered as a whole. It found that the majority of temps were employed directly by the person or organisation for whom the work was to be performed. Only a small proportion of their respondents had obtained temporary work via a formal intermediary. As few as 10% of the women interviewed had gained their positions through private agencies.(13) However, in certain areas of the country, the role of the private employment agencies is greater than this figure suggests. For example, the survey found that the use of private agencies was much greater in the conurbations than in rural areas, and that as many as 16% of temporaries in the South-East had obtained their jobs in this manner. Moreover, whilst agencies are active in the supply of temporary labour in a wide range of occupations, they are particularly prominent in certain fields. A survey of industrial and business companies in France, for example, found that whilst agencies accounted for 71% of the overall temporary

market, they accounted for 82% of the temporary office staff market, including 91% of the temp secretary market.(14). In Britain and in the U.S.A., the majority of temporary placements made by agencies are in the field of clerical work. The N.O.P. survey found that 24% of temporary clerks and office machine operators, and 44% of temporary secretaries had obtained their posts through private agencies. The next objective, therefore, is to examine the way in which the agencies came to play this role in the sphere of white-collar work and to explore the manner in which it is currently performed.

#### a. Origins and Development

Firms have always had the task of labour recruitment to contend with, and until the middle of the present century the principal methods used were, internal promotion, newspaper and journal advertisements, vacancy notice boards situated outside the place of employment, personal introductions, direct approaches by employers, referrals made by associations on behalf of their members, and, after 1909, state employment exchanges. Although certain of these methods involved the use of an intermediary for the purpose of making contact, firms did not generally make use of private employment offices. The majority of employers, in fact, performed all their own recruitment and selection.

Ever since medieval times, however, there have existed certain organisations closely akin to the modern private employment agency. The earliest example may be seen in the hiring fairs for agricultural workers which prevailed during the middle ages. These represented a more sophisticated means of pooling farm labour than had obtained previously, when individual farmers had to depend partly on the goodwill of their neighbours for the loan of workers during harvest periods. The concept of the hiring fair developed into permanently established hiring halls where domestic staff were screened and selected for prospective employers. According to Campling, organisations known as registry offices developed in the 18th and 19th centuries which also specialised mainly in the supply of domestic personnel, although after the middle of the last century, they began to supply catering and even nursing staff.(15) Towards the end of the 19th century, private employment agencies specialising in the placement of office staff began to appear.

It is interesting to note that agencies dealt mainly in female dominated sectors of the labour market where there was an excess of demand over supply. For example, the emergence of domestic staff bureaux coincided with the decline in popularity of this type of occupation among young women, just when the middle classes felt it necessary to surround themselves with the symbols of gentility. Similarly, the development of office staff agencies coincided with the enormous growth of routine paperwork at the end of the century, for which there was a shortage of female typewriters and clerks to process it.

During the first decades of the present century, there was a considerable growth in the number of agencies, both in Britain and the U.S.A., their main role being to supply permanent workers for the expanding industries at that time. In both countries, charges of unethical practices and exploitation were levelled against the agencies, and laws were passed in America to regulate their activities. Even in Britain, the public health authorities recommended in 1909 that all agencies should be registered, but until very recently, only nursing and domestic staff agencies were actually required to do so on a nationwide basis.

Although the agencies mainly dealt in permanent placements, the practice of supplying temporary labour began prior to World War I in Britain, and, according to one spokesman for the industry, it was 'well established' by the end of the 1930s.(16) According to Moore, the origins of the temporary help industry in the United States came somewhat later:

'Virtually everyone (I) personally contacted agreed that the idea of "renting" help originated with Samuel I. Workman. Mr. Workman was employed by a calculating machine manufacturer in the late 1920s, and began hiring fellow salesmen to work for him in the evenings to take inventories. In 1928 or 1929, he began hiring women, many of whom had been discharged because of marriage, as a result of the spread-the-work movements. At about the same time, Workman resigned his regular job. In the beginning, workers were sent out to do calculating work. In "1932 or '33", Workman started dispatching women to perform typing and other general clerical work.' (17)

According to Moore, although there were many firms supplying temporary labour before World War II, it was not until the 1940s that nationwide organisations began to appear, specialising in the supply of certain types of temporary labour. In Britain and in the U.S.A., the thirties were lean years,

and firms which required temporary labour had no problem in finding staff themselves. The permanent side of the agencies' operations was very badly hit by the Depression, and subsequently, by the impact of World War II, which made it difficult to operate. During this period, many agencies closed down, never to reopen. Those which survived during the war were those which specialised in temporary placements, since there was an acute shortage of labour, and because there were many people who were not able to commit themselves to a permanent job. The agencies brought the employers and those who were seeking work together and many of them flourished on the profits. Brook Street Bureau, now one of the largest office staff employment organisations in Britain, was founded at this time on an overdraft of £50.(18)

Since World War II, there has been an enormous expansion in the number of private employment agencies supplying labour on both a temporary and permanent basis. Immediately after World War II, the number of agencies was only a fraction of what it is today, although it is impossible to state how many existed at that time due to the absence of a comprehensive system of licensing. In 1977, there were about 5,500 agencies, of which the largest single group dealt with office staff (19). Nobody knows for certain just how many people are employed by agencies in a given year, but the Federation of Personnel Services has estimated that approximately 600,000 temps worked for agencies in 1976.(20) The industry as a whole is characterised by enormous profits and enormous losses. Among the smaller agencies, that is, the single-branch firms, it has been reported that almost as many are obliged to go out of business each year as those which enter it.(21) Yet there are rich pickings to be had for the successful agencies. In 1973, for example, Brook Street Bureau reported a pre-tax profits rise of 112% on the previous year, from £849,531 to £1,810,211. During the same period, turnover rose by £5 million to £14 million. For the year ended December 1976, St. Paul's, a subsidiary of the Lex Service Group, reported a pre-tax profit of £120,000 on a turnover of £2 million. In the early seventies, the income of the larger agencies was equally divided between permanent and temporary placements. In recent years, the structure of ownership in the employment agency field has

become more international in character. St. Paul's, at one time the second largest group of agencies in the country was bought by Ecco S.A., a French temp help company, in 1977. This development occurred shortly after the Alfred Marks organisation, another very large group in the field, was purchased by the Swiss-based Adia Interim group. In the Times, dated August 27th, 1977, it was reported that yet another major combine, Brook Street Bureau, was in the process of linking up with a German agency group in order to follow a joint expansion programme.

The growth of private employment agencies operating in the field of white-collar employment was largely predicated upon the post-war conditions of near full employment and acute labour shortage in the expanding sphere of office work. The demand for labour created by these circumstances rendered it increasingly difficult and costly for firms to conduct their own recruitment for both temporary and permanent vacancies. The private agencies stepped in to fill the breach. Although they could do nothing to remedy the deficiency of supply, they could at least claim to speed up the process whereby employer and employee came together. To some extent it could be argued that the agencies have actually increased the supply of labour. In providing the option of temporary work, they enable many married women to find the flexible conditions of employment which are often lacking in permanent work. The growth of the agencies' activities in the sphere of temporary office work has therefore rested not only upon a growing demand for labour but also on their own ability to mobilise an otherwise redundant pool of labour.

Another factor which has contributed to the proliferation of agencies is the small amount of capital necessary in order to set up in business. As Fulop has pointed out, all that is required is 'a desk, a telephone, and sufficient promotional outlay to make (the firm) known'.(22) However, as many small firms have found to their cost, it is a great deal more difficult to stay in business. One of the major problems is created by the need to raise sufficient capital to cover the cost of the weekly wage bill of the temporary employees. Many small firms go bankrupt because they have insufficient finances to meet these and other costs while they are waiting for payments due from clients for services rendered. The



large multi-branch organisations are in a much better position to deal with this problem because they have much greater reserves of capital at their disposal. Unprofitable branches can be financed from the profits of the more successful ones, or simply closed down without endangering the viability of the entire operation. However, many of the most successful firms today have emerged from very modest beginnings, which suggests that it is by no means impossible to overcome the financial hazards which beset the activities of the small agency.

It has been suggested that 'agencies flourish when other channels prove unsatisfactory', and indeed, there can be little doubt that agencies are at least partly a response to the inability of the state employment service to provide either an efficient or an attractive channel for the recruitment of both permanent and temporary staff in the office sector.(23) Although the exchanges were originally intended for the purpose of bringing about a more efficient use of labour, their failure in this respect has long been manifest. It was during the period between the wars that they acquired their association with the unemployed rather than with the soon-to-be employed, and subsequently, they gained a reputation for dealing mainly with the placement of unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers. Thus, for many years after the war, their historical associations tended to make them less than attractive to those who were looking for white-collar jobs, and employers were fully aware of this, as the N.B.P.I. report noted in 1968:

'There is no doubt that British State Employment Exchanges still suffer from the 'dole queue' image inherited from the 1930's. The premises are not in general sited conveniently to attract applicants for office employment. Probably less than one half of all vacancies for office staff in London are notified to the Employment Exchanges, and in the G.L.C. area the placements they make are a small proportion of all placements.' (24)

The government has also been aware of this problem for a long time and in recent years has made strenuous attempts to modernise the image of the exchanges. In the late sixties, the Department of Employment began to encourage local experimentation in the organisation and character of employment services. In 1967, the D.E. opened an office in Manchester which dealt exclusively with the placement of full-time office staff. According to R.M. Jones, who

sought to investigate its degree of success, its external appearance had much more in common with that of the private employment agency than with the traditional Ministry exchange, and it had achieved a very favourable record of placements as compared with private agencies in the Manchester area.(25) Since the early 1970s, the principle of modernisation has been applied much more extensively by the Government. A major effort to exorcise the spectre of the dole-queue image began in 1973 with the creation of the first Jobcentre. Jobcentres, which are essentially the modern equivalent of the old labour exchanges, are virtually indistinguishable from private employment agencies in external appearance. By April 1977, 297 Jobcentres had been opened and there were plans to open new ones at the rate of approximately 100 per annum during the next five years. By all accounts, they have been very successful in achieving the aims for which they were intended. According to a report in New Society, Jobcentres are used by 20% more employers than used the old exchanges for the purposes of recruitment, and by 25% more people looking for jobs.(26) The institution of the Jobcentre concept was shortly followed by yet another innovation in the state employment service. In 1976, the government established a temporary help scheme at Canning Town Jobcentre and subsequently at other offices around the country. The government's service, however, differs in one key respect from that provided by the private firms. A temp using the public service automatically becomes the responsibility of the client firm, and is paid and administered by the client. In March 1978 I contacted the ESA in order to find out what kinds of workers were using this facility and to discover whether or not it had proved to be a success. I was informed that the main users of the temp services were women seeking jobs in shops and offices. Since the ESA had not yet attempted to systematically monitor its performance in this field, however, no statistical information concerning its degree of success or failure was available.

The employment agencies strongly resist the idea that the State can, or ever will, offer a superior service to that provided by themselves, and they maintain that this is particularly true of the temporary work field. Eric Hurst,

joint-chairman of Brook Street Bureau, has defended the private service as follows:

'Just as I recognise that some activities are best carried out by public enterprise, so equally it seems to me that others can best be run by private enterprise. The criteria involved are not confined to matters of entrepreneurial skill. They involve a deep level of personal involvement and dedication which is generally only inherent in great artists and scientists. This level of dedication is hard to sustain in ordinary humankind, except by the carrot of the financial incentive, the spur of competition and the stick of financial loss. Without that constant intensity of involvement, heightened and maintained by incentive as well as by skill and personal commitment, a public service cannot hope to provide the level of particularity required. It lacks the pressures and stresses necessary to support an anxious and minute attention to detail, and the infinite resourcefulness in meeting the needs of clients and employees which this exacting service demands.' (27)

Although one is inclined to regard this statement as more than a little idealistic in tone, it does at least highlight the fact that the private operators have recognised a need for trained, motivated personnel in the employment services. This is just what the public version has traditionally lacked, as Fulop has pointed out. She claims that the state employment exchanges lack staff who are skilled enough to fit workers to the jobs, which is a reflection of 'inadequate salaries' and the failure of the DE to recognise 'the need and demand for skilled interviewing techniques'. (28) Although there have been efforts to remedy this situation on the part of the DE, it seems likely that the really skilled interviewers would still be attracted by the higher salaries and commissions offered by the private agencies.

The growth of private employment agencies dealing in the supply of labour for both temporary and permanent positions in the office sector is thus the net result of several factors - an excess of jobs over the supply of labour, the growth of married women seeking employment, the failure of the State to provide an efficient, attractive alternative, the inadequacy of direct methods of recruitment, and the relative ease with which it is possible to set up in what can often be a very profitable business. To a much lesser extent, increased manpower planning by firms may have contributed to their expansion in that this represents an increase in the demand for temporary labour, but this is more true of the American situation.

There is little evidence, as yet, to suggest that the growth of agencies in Britain has resulted from any systematic attempt by employers to use temps as a means of reducing the number of permanent staff on their payrolls.(29)

b. The Framework of Control

The private employment agencies in the U.K. have been remarkably free from State supervision as compared with those operating in the rest of Western Europe, although in recent years there have been moves to subject them to a much greater degree of control. The employment agencies have always been required in principle to conform to certain minimum standards however, since the potential for malpractice on their part was recognised almost as soon as they first appeared. Thus, when the hiring halls for catering staff were established in the middle ages, various bye-laws were passed which were designed to forestall their covert use as brothels. Subsequent bye-laws were designed to protect applicants from unscrupulous agents at a time when it was customary for the applicant rather than the future employer to pay the fee for the placement service. Then, in 1921, an act was passed which enabled local authorities in the London area to introduce a licensing system if they so wished. Although this act granted considerable powers to the authorities in theory, it seems that they rarely extended them to the point of actually revoking the licence of a disreputable agency. Moreover, the licensing system never became established nationwide, at least until 1973. Indeed, in 1971, only 30 of 144 local authorities had introduced compulsory licensing.

During the Thirties and Forties, the activities of the private employment agencies were regarded with growing apprehension by various bodies in the countries in which they had become firmly established. Before the second World War, the placement fee which was charged by the agencies was paid by the employee, which reflected the unfavourable employment situation of the period. This was the normal practice in most countries and had come to be regarded as a major abuse by the International Labour Organisation which was founded in 1919:

\*A fundamental principle of the I.L.O. is that labour should not be treated as a commodity or article of commerce or be exploited. Human

'beings' should be free to choose employment. Until the second World War, when people had to pay a fee, often just for registering, some hardship and a degree of restriction was placed on them.' (30)

As early as 1933, the I.L.O. had adopted a convention which called for the outright abolition of profit-oriented employment agencies, but this was ratified by only ten nations. According to Major Cropper, who is at the present time the Secretary-General of the Federation of Personnel Services of Great Britain, Britain did not even bother to complete the questionnaire circulated by the I.L.O. In 1949, the I.L.O. adopted another convention which advocated the abolition of the agencies, but it allowed for control of the agencies as a first step towards that end. This modified version of the original convention was subsequently ratified by 28 out of the 121 member countries of the I.L.O. At the present time, fee-charging permanent placement agencies are prohibited in most West European nations although owing to disagreements as to whether the terms of the convention apply to temporary placements, temporary hire agencies operate in most of these countries. Some countries, however, interpret the wording of the Convention as having application to both kinds of placement service. The definition used by the I.L.O. is as follows:

'employment agencies conducted with a view to profit, that is to say, any person, company, institution, agency or other organisation which acts as an intermediary for the purpose of procuring employment for a worker or supplying a worker for an employer with a view to deriving either directly or indirectly any pecuniary or other material advantage from either employer or worker.....' (31)

Thus Italy and Sweden have both abolished temporary help agencies, whereas others, including France and Germany, permit them to operate within a framework of regulations. Britain is one of the countries which has not yet ratified the Convention. When the opportunity arose for her to sign the modified convention in 1949, it had become normal for employers rather than employees to pay the placement fee, and therefore, there seemed to be no pressure on her to fall into line with the rest of Europe. In 1951, however, the Labour Government introduced a White Paper which proposed the regulation of fee-charging agencies which entailed the fixing or approval of charges. Nothing came of this, however, until 1965,

when a Private Member's Bill was introduced into Parliament which sought the regulation of the agencies through a system of licensing to be supervised by the Ministry of Labour. This was dropped in 1967, and despite an investigation into the charges and salaries of the agencies by the National Board for Prices and Incomes in 1968, the issue was not raised again until 1972. In the meantime, it was becoming clear that Britain would soon be a member of the European Economic Community, and would be in the anomalous position of being the only member nation which had not ratified the I.L.O. convention.

In 1972, another M.P. introduced a Private Member's Bill calling for the abolition of employment agencies, but this was equally as unsuccessful as its predecessor. In the same year the Employment and Social Services Sub-Committee of the House of Commons Expenditure Committee conducted an enquiry into the activities of employment agencies and the employment services generally. When it eventually reported in 1973, it made a number of recommendations which were generally in the direction of regulation rather than abolition. Many of its proposals were similar to those incorporated in the Employment Agencies Bill which had first been introduced as a Private Member's Bill and had been progressing through parliament during the same period. The Bill, which received the royal assent on 18th July, 1973, laid down certain codes of practice and sought to establish a system of local authority licensing for all private agencies, whether dealing with permanent or temporary placements. The act itself was only an enabling act in that it required the Secretary of State to make regulations in order to bring it into effect. In June 1976 the relevant statutory instruments were published, setting out the regulations according to which agencies would be licensed and regulated. Local authority licensing was abolished and agencies became subject to a centralised system of licensing and control. By November of that year, all agencies were required to be in possession of a licence, whilst other sections of the Act became operative almost immediately. The Act distinguishes between an employment agency, which is one that introduces a worker to a client for direct employment by the latter, and an employment business, which hires workers employed by the business to a third party. The regulations impose not

only the obligation to obtain a licence but also to comply with a number of specified duties and obligations. However, the Act did not make it possible for Britain to sign the I.L.O. Convention 96, because it did not include any provisions whereby a scale of fees could be laid down and enforced.

In the first year of the Act's operation, 5,541 applications for licenses were made, and 4,685 were granted. 247 applications were withdrawn and the remainder were still being considered. DE inspectors made over 6,300 visits to agencies and businesses, of which 166 were concerned with the investigation of a complaint. One agency was prosecuted for operating without a licence and other offences under the Act, resulting in fines of £400.(32) The situation at the present time is that the present government is unwilling to take any further action unless 'very grave abuses' are seen to be perpetrated by the agencies. Only then would it take steps to secure their abolition. Campling, however, believes that a threat still hangs over the agencies. This is because 'the rules of the EEC require that member states shall work towards harmonisation of social legislation', and it is possible that attempts will be made to bring Britain's policy in relation to employment services in line with other member countries.(33)

Fulop considers that it is preferable for the agencies to control their activities on a voluntary basis, and that the role of the government should be to preserve the 'diversity and flexibility' of the agencies while attempting to curb 'the malpractices of a minority of firms'.(34) She also considers that competition is good for the agencies whether it comes from the DE or from other private firms, and that the government should therefore refrain from taking steps which would make it unduly difficult to enter into the business. A heightened watchfulness on the part of clients would represent an additional check on the activities of the agencies.

With regard to the degree of voluntary control exercised by the agencies, it must be acknowledged that many firms are willing to submit themselves to some degree of self-regulation. In 1930, the Employment Agents Federation of Great Britain was established with the intention of ensuring ethical business transactions

between members and their clients. The 73 rules incorporated in its code of conduct are quite strict, as are its terms of membership. Approximately one-third of the employment agencies in Britain now belong to the Federation, the majority of which are primarily concerned with office placements. One of the major pre-occupations of the Federation has been to protect the reputation of the industry. This, it is felt, has been damaged by the activities of those who are drawn into the business by the prospect of easy profits, and who lack the expertise necessary to operate successfully and the morality to operate ethically. One of its efforts to raise standards was the foundation of the Institute of Employment Consultants in 1963. In the words of its president, this was designed to:

'provide information and to impart knowledge gained by and through the profession itself. It exists to help employers and staff alike to do their job more efficiently. It promotes good relations within its membership so that a healthy exchange of ideas can take place.' (35)

In order that these aims might be brought to fruition, the Institute created a structure of gradings and examinations for agency principals and their staff and even organised correspondence courses and week-end seminars. The Federation has not only been concerned, however, with the self-improvement of member agencies and with improved public relations generally. In recent years, it has become very much concerned with the question of the survival of the industry as a whole, in response to the escalation of efforts designed to abolish private employment agencies. The Federation has taken a very definite stand in relation to this issue:

'This Federation, like all well-balanced people, would far rather see a properly controlled and ethical agency profession with high standards of service operate in the U.K., than total abolition.' (36)

Thus while the Federation welcomes the principle of regulation as a way of strengthening and improving the industry, it is hotly opposed to the idea that agencies should disappear altogether. According to Campling, the threat of extinction dominated the promotional literature of the Federation for many years and intensified when Britain was on the point of joining the EEC:



'A federation brochure in 1971 showed a very symbolic sword poised to cut down a very profitable industry.' (37)

Since 1972, when the Federation restyled itself as the Federation of Personnel Services of Great Britain, it has evolved new strategies in the hope of persuading the world at large that the agencies have a social conscience. In 1974, Margery Hurst, the founder of Brook Street Bureau, was one of four representatives from the Federation who became involved in a joint scheme with the National Association for Mental Health. As a result of the joint discussions, a special Brook Street Bureau desk was established in the West End with an interviewer who was solely responsible for placing ex-psychiatric patients. There were also proposals to utilise the training facilities of the Federation for the training of other interviewers. The Federation has also become involved in community relations in connection with the problem of colour prejudice in employment, which is an area of particular sensitivity among the agencies, as they are sometimes accused of selective recruitment by the unions and other parties.(38) Other schemes have been evolved by various agencies, some with, some without, the backing of the Federation, and which have included help for ex-offenders and assistance for drug addicts to find employment. While one acknowledges that such schemes have no doubt played a very useful social role, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they represent responses to the fear of extinction on the part of the agencies - novel, but well-intentioned attempts to improve public relations in the face of growing hostility to their collective presence.

c. The Theory and Practice of the Private Employment Agency

Until very recently there has been hardly any reliable qualitative or even quantitative information available concerning the operations of private employment agencies. Most of the data has been furnished by the agencies themselves, for example, from the Federation of Personnel Services or from the Alfred Marks Bureau Survey unit. There have been very few independent enquiries into their activities and only one major investigation by the Government. The 1973 Employment Agencies Act should help to remedy this situation since it requires both permanent placement and temporary hire agencies to maintain detailed records of their transactions.

At the time of writing, a great deal more information was forthcoming. The Manpower Services Commission had agreed to sponsor an enquiry into the private employment services, and the results of an international survey conducted by the International Institute of Temporary Work were due to be published in May 1978. For the moment, however, it is extremely difficult to construct an adequate picture of the quality of the service which the agencies provide. The bulk of information derives from those who, whether for profit or for the sake of a principle, are anxious to see that private employment agencies survive. Consequently one has to approach material emanating from these sources with some degree of caution. Certain leading figures associated with the industry have expressed the view that independent enquiries are both welcome and necessary. For example, Eric Hurst, of Brook Street Bureau, has publicly declared that 'this service has nothing to fear from the most searching investigation of its operation.'(39) Yet one doubts whether this view is shared by all operators in the field. The present writer encountered a degree of resistance on the part of some agency personnel to the prospect of scrutiny by an outsider. Similarly, when R.M. Jones attempted to conduct a study of private agencies in the Manchester area, he found it 'impossible to win the confidence of a majority of the agency operators'.(40) In both cases, this problem led to modifications in the design of the research. Similar problems were encountered by Olesen and Katsuranis in their study of temporary workers in San Francisco.(41) Given the fact of widespread criticism of the agencies, it is perhaps not surprising that some agency personnel have adopted a rather closed attitude. A further reason why the agencies may sometimes be less than willing to become the subjects of close investigation concerns the competitive nature of the business itself. The agencies are anxious to safeguard lucrative contracts and to ensure that their charges compare favourably with those of their competitors. This inevitably means that there is a reluctance to divulge a great deal of information to outsiders.

Very little in the way of systematic data has been furnished by opponents of the agencies, although almost every aspect of their operations has been subject to critical comment during the last decade. A great many of the criticisms

are based upon personal experiences, and thus do not provide an objective basis from which to assess the agencies' activities. This is not to say that they are lacking in foundation, but only that occupational anecdotes represent an insufficient guide to the performance and conduct of these organisations. For the most part, the case against the agencies rests on matters of principle rather than on hard facts. It remains to be seen whether or not the investigations conducted under the terms of the recent legislation will vindicate the claims of their adversaries.

However, in spite of the paucity of objective information, one cannot evade the task of examining the nature of the service which they provide. One of the primary objectives of this research is to identify the factors which influence the attitudes to work of female clerical employees working in a temporary capacity. Accordingly, it is necessary to examine the extent to which the agencies are both willing and able to provide women with jobs which match their stated requirements.

The role of an employment agency or business is that of an intermediary in the labour market, bringing supply and demand together so as to achieve placements which are satisfactory to both parties. In theory, this process of selection is effected by interviewers who possess a considerable degree of expertise and knowledge of the local job market, and who are highly skilled in the central task of screening and selection. The interview is supplemented by a range of tests designed to ascertain the level of skill possessed by the applicant in relation to certain tasks. The advantages of this method of recruitment from the point of view of a prospective employer are its speed and effectiveness compared to other methods in a situation where labour is scarce and recruitment costs are high. In theory, an individual agency is able to build up a relationship with its client firms such that the interviewers develop a specific knowledge of their clients' labour requirements, their conditions of work, salary scales, etc., in order to facilitate the selection of appropriate candidates. Furthermore, the interviewer should be able to furnish the client with whatever information may be pertinent to his requirements, such as current salary or wage levels for

particular types of staff.

From the point of view of those seeking employment, whether of a permanent or temporary nature, the agencies are potentially able to offer a useful service. One of their main attractions is that they can secure a post for an applicant in rather less time than it would take by individual methods. They can at least eliminate the time-wasting process of tracking down jobs which have already been filled. The agencies are also able to extend the number of jobs from which the applicant may choose. Moreover, they should be able to provide a form of advice and consultancy service to the applicant in order to help her locate the position most suited to her skills and requirements. The service is available during normal working hours and frequently on Saturday mornings, and, unlike that provided to the client, it is free.

However, information deriving from a number of sources suggests that agencies do not always provide an optimum service for their clients and applicants. A study of the quality of temporary help services in the United States, for example, found that as many as 43% of users regarded temps as less efficient than regular employees.(42) A survey conducted in France by SOFRES, a government survey unit, found that while companies had a 'fairly positive' image of temporary agencies, the staff supplied were not always considered to be suitably qualified. When asked to comment on the proposition that 'you are sure to have qualified staff', only 34% responded in the affirmative.(43) A number of British surveys have also tapped a reservoir of discontent among employers with regard to the quality of the service provided. The NBPI survey found that only a few of the firms which it investigated were positively satisfied with the service provided, and about half registered dissatisfaction.(44) In her research conducted among London-based employers, Silverstone found that 65% of her respondents were 'unreservedly dissatisfied' with the service offered by the agencies. While the employers were less than satisfied with both the temporary and permanent staff which they had been sent, they were particularly disgruntled about the quality of temporaries. This was felt by the employers to be entirely the fault

of the agencies and they assumed that applicants were not being tested, 'otherwise they would not have sent them out, or else they chose to overlook standards':

'Even where agencies took detailed particulars of the requirements of the employer they were often said to supply staff both permanent and temporary, who in no way fulfilled the needs specified.' (45)

A small independent survey conducted by Doran in 1970/71 concluded that the agencies are more concerned to please and attract applicants than to fulfil the specific requirements of employers. He found that agencies made very little attempt to assess the reactions of employers to the applicants forwarded to them. 70% of the employers he interviewed expressed the opinion that applicants were inadequately screened by the agency interviewers, and some assumed that this was the net effect of high turnover and inexperience among agency staff. Over half the agencies investigated by Doran did not test applicants.(46) A survey of 30 London employment agencies conducted by the magazine Top Secretary in 1974 likewise found that agencies tend not to test applicants. Only two agencies were found to test for speed and accuracy and to conduct their interviews in complete privacy.(47)

Although employers frequently grumble about the cost of the agencies' services, a great deal of the discontent found among client firms appears to be based on a lack of confidence in the selection techniques used by the agencies. A survey conducted in 1973 by the Trade Journal, Index to Office Equipment and Supplies, reported an 'overwhelming vote of no confidence in the vetting that the agencies carried out.' (48) To date, there has been little formal pressure on the agencies to institute rigorous testing procedures. Those who are members of the Federation of Personnel Services are obliged to test temporary applicants, but they are not required to test permanent applicants, and some agencies maintain that it would be uneconomical for them to do so:

'We would love to be able to test permanent staff for speed and accuracy, but we are unable to do it on the fees charged now. It would be highly desirable, but just not feasible.' (49)

One is inclined to doubt whether the principle of testing is universally applied to temporary applicants, in spite of the importance attached to this

procedure by the F.P.S. Quite apart from the fact that only a minority of agencies belong to this organisation, it is clearly very difficult to enforce a rigorous standard of testing in all agencies and at all times. It is unlikely that this situation will change in the immediate future. The regulations obtaining under the Employment Agencies Act do not impose any formal obligation upon employment businesses to establish the qualifications of their employees, except where such qualifications are required by law, as in the case of heavy goods vehicles drivers.

The quality of interviewing staff is frequently a cause for complaint among users of the agencies' services, but the latter strenuously deny that staff are inadequately trained. The larger ones insist that their interviewers are very rigourously trained both in selection technique and in company philosophy. One frequently encounters these claims in the publicity material disseminated by the larger agencies:

'Brook Street interviewers have first hand business experience and many have worked on the personnel side of large companies. All prospective interviewers are sent on a special training course which they must successfully complete before they are accepted by us.'

'The Customer Service Representative selects temporary personnel for the assignment. Specially trained for this important responsibility, he combines interview data, past performance and personal knowledge to perfectly match our employee to your requirements.' (Manpower Inc.)

There seems to be very little opportunity to test the validity of such claims, although if it is true, as has been suggested by the A.S.T.M.S. that there is a high rate of turnover amongst interviewers, one could surmise that it is not always possible for new interviewers to undergo extensive periods of training, nor for agency principals to hire only the most experienced people for the job.(50) It seems most unlikely that the small single-branch firms, which are in the majority throughout the country, offer specialised training courses for their interviewers. In these companies, interviewer skills are probably learnt on the job through a process of trial and error. According to an article by Macpherson in the Financial Times, 'there are many examples' of young graduates

looking for a short spell of employment who obtain jobs as interviewers after only a couple of days 'perfunctory training'.(51) This was exactly the experience of a personal friend of the present writer. She managed to obtain an interviewer's job in a small agency in a market-town in the Home Counties without any previous experience or qualifications other than an unsuccessful attempt to obtain the H.N.D. in Business Studies. There was no systematic attempt to train her or to monitor her progress during the few months that she was employed with the agency. It could be that her experiences were highly unrepresentative, but in the absence of any firm proof of the universality of high standards of interviewer competence, one cannot help but wonder if this is a fairly widespread phenomenon. In fairness to those agencies who do seek to maintain high standards in this respect, one cannot judge all the operators by the example of those whose inferior quality has achieved publicity. Moreover, it should be remembered that the Institute of Employment Consultants was set up in 1963 with the specific intention of raising the standards of qualification and performance of agency personnel. Thus, some agencies at least recognise the problem and are prepared to take action to reduce it.

A common criticism of the agencies is that the system whereby some interviewers earn commission on the basis of the number of placements they make tends to result in hasty and ill-judged placings. This objection has been lodged by A.S.T.M.S. but again, there is no way of knowing whether commissions have this effect or whether they result in higher quality service. One would suppose that it depends very much on the level of basic earnings, the policy of the individual agency and the integrity of the individual interviewer. The agencies themselves are inclined to adopt a defensive posture when confronted with the possible abuses deriving from commission-based systems, and are apt to characterise malpractice in general as a phenomenon confined to a tiny minority of operators. In the opinion of Skeels, however, competition forces even the ethical private employment agency toward questionable activity.(52)

It is obvious that there are points to be made on both sides, and that, as Fulop has suggested, both the agencies and the employers could do more to raise

the quality of the service.(53) Employers who make regular use of agencies could increase the degree of interaction and communication of information between themselves and the agencies, and be more willing to make specific complaints which would be susceptible of investigation. The agencies could set much higher standards for their interviewing personnel and be more attentive to the specific needs of employers. They should also be more prepared to take the initiative when employers are persistently vague when detailing their requirements. The regulations prevailing under the 1973 Employment Agencies Act are in fact intended to bring about these kinds of improvement in the standard of the service provided and to eliminate the sorts of abuses and malpractices which have come to light.

However, the nature of the economic climate in the mid-seventies is likely to bring about a reduction in the quality of temporary help services, no matter what attempts are made by agencies, employers and the government to overcome existing problems. As jobs become rather more scarce, it seems likely that office staff, especially the more skilled ones, will be drawn towards the relative security of permanent work. The agencies' temporary staff will still consist largely of married women with various degrees of skill, but one would expect their ranks to be swollen by large numbers of less skilled people who simply cannot find permanent jobs. Consequently, agencies are in a difficult position when it comes to supplying firms with highly qualified, experienced, full-time temporary personnel. The quality of the service provided by the agencies to client companies, therefore, is very much contingent upon the existing demand for labour.

The service which the agencies provide to the applicants is probably no better and no worse than that extended to employers, although the person looking for a job is able to communicate her specific requirements more directly to the interviewer, and of course the service is free.(54) In the case of permanent placements, there is a very good reason why agencies probably do make serious attempts to find jobs which closely approximate applicants' specifications. If a permanent employee does not remain in her job for a certain length of time,



the agencies are obliged to refund the placement fee to the employer. The amount paid is in inverse proportion to the number of weeks worked by the employee. In London, fees are returnable in this way if the employee leaves before about 8 to 10 weeks. In the case of temporary placements, however, the financial penalties for a bad match between job and applicant are probably much less swingeing. Employers can and do withhold payment for unsatisfactory service, and in her survey of London employers, Silverstone encountered two cases where legal action had been taken in support of the refusal to pay.<sup>(55)</sup> However, the vast majority of temporary placements last less than six weeks and it may be that many employers are willing to lower their expectations when they have an urgent need for staff for a short period. Consequently, temps are much more likely to be required to adapt to the jobs available.

There are other reasons why temps may not always find themselves in the type of jobs they wish, and indeed, why they may sometimes find themselves unemployed. The ease with which an agency is able to match a girl to a suitable job is of course very much a function of the existing demand for her skills. There are both seasonal and regional variations in the demand for temporary labour, and the industry as a whole is characterised by booms and slumps. Whereas the highly-qualified secretary in London can probably find suitable temp jobs throughout the year even at a time of economic recession, the filing clerk looking for a temporary post in Newcastle during the winter is likely to be presented with Hobson's choice. During the course of my research, I interviewed five agency principals in the North-East of England. All of them agreed that it was virtually impossible to keep a temp employed all year round, unless she was very highly qualified. One of these told me that the majority of his recruits were married women seeking permanent jobs. There were single girls, but they too were anxious to gain a permanent job rather than to find year-round temporary positions. However, he felt that many of the girls would have preferred temporary jobs as an antidote to boredom, but that, given an adverse employment situation in the area, it would be impossible to find continuous work. Such temporary placements as he did make were a feature of the summer season, when students, in particular, were sent to

replace staff on holiday at various firms. The residue of temporary staff were either married women who were content to take employment when and where it became available, or else those who were filling in between permanent jobs.

The threat of insecurity, then, is the chief occupational hazard of the 'permanent' temp. In recent years, the vulnerability of the temp to periodic unemployment has been exacerbated by the flagging fortunes of the British economy. In the mid-seventies, all the major agencies reported a marked drop in demand for temporary staff, and as a result, many firms began to diversify their activities into other fields of employment.(56) According to one estimate, the unfavourable market situation was reflected by a 40% drop in the number of temporaries.(57) Although some agencies predicted that the maternity provisions of the Employment Protection Act would stimulate a new market for temps, the level of demand in 1977 was still well below that prevailing in the peak year of 1973.(58) However, in the spring of 1978, the F.P.S. reported a regeneration of the market - a trend which was regarded as indicative of a more prosperous economic climate generally.(59)

That there are variations in demand in different parts of the country, at different times of year, and for different skills, and that there are periodic recessions in the industry as a whole cannot be directly attributed to the agencies. However, it is not always clear from the agencies' promotional literature and advertising that the service which they provide to applicants is thus qualified. The job-hunter is informed in many advertisements that the agency can find her interesting work in abundance, not that the prevailing economic wind may make it necessary for her to wait for a few weeks until it can be located. Moreover, it is seldom intimated that the agency may be unable to provide continuity of employment:

'At MANPOWER we can help you. Now. With temporary office assignments tailored to your needs. With us you can work days, weeks, months, even continuously if you like.'

'SHND DON'T TAKE LESS THAN YOUR TRUE VALUE! I have a big choice of jobs in all central areas at hours to suit you. And I can keep you in regular work at realistic rates right through the summer.'

(Evening Standard 13.6.77)

'ARE YOU FREE! Exp legal temps & Sh/Audio 100/60 £2 ph. Guaranteed employment, W.1.' (Evening Standard 13.6.77)

'WE REQUIRE...Top Temp Staff (all grades) NOW. WE OFFER constant work, individual attention, bonus.....' (Evening Standard, April 1978)

It must be emphasised that the above examples are atypical of the advertisements which one normally encounters in the evening papers or interspersed between pictures of scantily clad men and women on the escalators of the London tube system. However, they do exemplify the occasional representation of temporary office work as a secure form of employment. Most agencies do not explicitly guarantee continuous work since it would be virtually impossible for them to honour such claims, especially in the case of the more routine grades of office worker. Yet it would be difficult to avoid the conclusion, from a perusal of even the more carefully worded advertisements that the agencies represent anything other than a direct means of access to an occupational horn of plenty. It could be argued, in defence of the agencies, that while their advertising displays a tendency towards hyperbole, it does not differ markedly from any other form of advertising in this respect, and that, therefore, few people are gullible enough to accept the claims at face value. Certainly, it seems likely that even if a girl were initially to entertain the belief that the agencies can fully live up to their promises, she would soon learn to modify her expectation, albeit after a baptism of fire.

It may well be that among those people who take up temping because they do not require continuous employment, or because they are unable to find permanent employment, a potential lack of jobs which closely approximate to their interests and capacities may be experienced as less of a problem. The majority of temps are married women, and for many of them, working for an agency represents an alternative to not working at all. This does not mean that they are invariably content with the jobs they get, nor, indeed, that they are quite happy to stay at home when the agency cannot find work for them. However, they may tolerate these difficulties at certain times because at other times the agencies are able to meet their broad requirements, and more importantly perhaps, because temporary work, when it is available, offers all the flexibility that is lacking in the sphere of permanent

work. This latter advantage, from the point of view of the would-be employee, is well illustrated by the experience of one of my respondents:

'I would like to go as a permanent with the insurance company where I temp, but they do not employ part-time staff, and I can only work until 3.30 p.m., so I have to stay working for the agency. It seems a short-sighted policy for the firm to take as they must have wasted hundreds of pounds during the past three years paying the agency for my services, but they won't bend the rules on part-timers.'

No matter what the quality of the service provided, there can be little doubt that the agencies provide a solution for the married woman whose desire to work is thwarted by intractable attitudes among employers. Now clearly, one's evaluation of the role of the agencies in this respect is bound to depend on how one comprehends this 'desire to work' among married women. If it is perceived as a purely economic motivation, as an expression of an acquisitive urge imposed upon them by the imperatives of capitalist commodity production, then one is likely to regard these firms as agents of a wider process of exploitation. If, on the other hand, one perceives the desire to work as a flight from domesticity, the agency is more likely to be regarded as providing an escape route for the prisoners of patriarchy, albeit an unintended consequence of what is primarily a commercial activity. It is evident, then, that a close attention to the reasons which women themselves give for their resort to temporary work is of considerable relevance to the continuing debate concerning the role of the private employment agency.

The main opponents of the agencies, of course, are the trade unions. Their attack on the agencies has been sustained and unequivocal, and at one time, public denouncements were de rigeur at the Annual Trades Union Congress. The precise nature of their objections are exemplified in the following statement issued by N.A.L.G.O. After detailing a number of objections to the permanent side of the agencies' operations, the statement declares:

'It is the operation of the temporary hire agencies however which present the greatest threat to the wages and conditions of staff employed in NALGO services. Because temporaries do not receive sick pay and holiday pay their rates are higher than permanent

'staff and they are consequently a source of friction. The agencies charge a substantial commission on top of the normal rates of pay, and thus employers become involved in unnecessary costs. The use of agency staff who are temporary, and lack job security also undermines trade union organisation. Most important, however, temporary staff from agencies obscure the problem of low pay among permanent staff. Because employers can obtain temporaries to fill gaps caused by staff shortages, they are not obliged to pay sufficiently high wages to attract and retain permanent staff. Thus the problem of agency staff has an adverse effect on the conditions of service of NALGO members.' (60).

Opinions of this nature have been widely expressed by a number of unions, and there have been some instances of industrial action in support of the demand to outlaw the agencies, or to reduce the number of temps hired within particular sectors of industry. The unions have presented a forceful case for abolition and their interpretation of the role of the agencies provides a useful corrective to the idea that they are merely benevolent organisations - something akin to a dose of salts being injected into an otherwise sluggish labour market. However, there is little evidence that they have contemplated the implications of abolition from the point of view of women themselves. The unions express a firm confidence in the ability of the government to provide an alternative to the private service. As presently conceived, however, the state scheme delivers the temp into the direct control of the employer. Yet, as I shall show, many women enjoy the degree of autonomy afforded by the system operated by the private agencies. In the case of the agency temp, the employer is situated at a distance from the place of work and the client firm is vested with very limited powers of control. Thus, the substitution of a public service for that operated by the agencies would greatly diminish the autonomy of the temp. The strategies proposed by the unions, therefore, would represent a qualitative transformation in the character of temporary work from the point of view of the employee. In the case of the woman who turns to temporary work as a means of escape from an oppressive or unsatisfying domestic environment, it is possible that the abolition of the private service would not entail any reduction in the number of opportunities to do so. However, there is little

evidence that the unions are concerned to ensure that the state service would replicate the flexibility encountered in the private service. Indeed, it could be argued that in postulating a state alternative to the private temporary schemes the unions are in effect accepting the idea that women should fit in with employers' expectations. Irrespective of whether married women work as temps out of choice or out of necessity, there can be little doubt that this entails a considerable degree of accommodation on their part. To the extent that the unions do not couple their demands with a call for measures which would diminish this burden of accommodation, the abolition of private employment agencies would represent something of a hollow victory.

In this chapter we have seen that temporary work is relatively unusual in the field of clerical employment. This is readily explained in terms of the principal disadvantage attaching to temporary employment, namely its insecurity. This problem is likely to be encountered by the temporary irrespective of whether she finds employment directly, or via the medium of the employment business. Under the most favourable market conditions there may be an occasional hiatus in the supply of jobs, and during periods of economic gloom, the experience of unemployment is likely to become more frequent and more protracted. Apart from this, it is doubtful whether temporary work carries any financial advantages in the long term. In 1968, the N.B.P.I. found that the higher rates of pay for agency temps were offset by the loss of many benefits such as paid holidays, sick leave, superannuation, bonuses and redundancy pay. Since then, many agencies, under pressure of competition, have introduced benefits for employees such as holiday pay and luncheon vouchers, but they are by no means universal and it may be necessary for a temp to work for several months before she is entitled to them. This latter proviso effectively means that it is only possible to enjoy conditions comparable to those found in permanent work if one remains with a single agency for a lengthy period. Furthermore, the earnings of temps do not always keep pace with those of permanent staff. In 1968, for example, the N.B.P.I. report found that the earnings of permanent staff had increased more than those of temporary staff during the three year period in which the survey

was carried out. Again in the winter of 1974, it was reported that temporary remuneration was not keeping pace with the levels obtaining in the permanent sector.(61)

It is not difficult, therefore, to comprehend why few clerks forsake the relative security of permanent employment in order to become permanent temps. It is also not difficult to understand why many of those who do become permanent temps eventually quit. Apart from the disadvantages so far identified, there is the additional problem that temping may fail to live up to expectations. The agency, in its capacity as occupational gatekeeper, may be unable or unwilling to effect a perfect correspondence between the employee's skills or requirements, and the nature of the assignments to which she is sent. Thus, while a dissatisfaction with permanent clerical work may cause a girl to take up 'permanent' temping, a dissatisfaction with the kinds of jobs she then obtains may cause her to abandon it.

The fact that the majority of women in clerical employment are consequently to be found in permanent jobs cannot be taken to mean, therefore, that there is a universal contentment with the conditions and character of permanent office work. As with any other occupational 'choice', a decision to enter, to remain in, or to return to permanent employment must be considered in relation to the rewards and penalties attaching to alternative courses of action.

The study of occupational choice also requires that one take account of the factors which set limits to the practical possibilities of realising a desired course of action. This observation is particularly relevant for an understanding of the strong representation of married women in temporary office work. The fact that the majority of temps are married women cannot be taken to mean that such women regard work merely as a fringe activity because they are seemingly prepared to risk unemployment. As we have seen, it is equally possible to interpret their involvement in temporary office work as an index of the difficulties they encounter when trying to locate permanent positions. Thus, patterns of occupational choice and occupational mobility cannot be

regarded as the expression of free-floating and unrestrained work aspirations. As this analysis of the role of the private employment agency has shown, it is essential that one examine the constraints upon action imposed by the vagaries of the market for labour, and by the expectations and practices of occupational gatekeepers.

In the next chapter, the reasons why women enter temporary employment and their experiences as temps will be investigated more fully. By referring directly to the attitudes of women themselves, it is possible to begin the task of sorting out fact from fantasy, and perhaps even more importantly, it permits those who are almost entirely forgotten in the verbal thrust and parry between unions, employers, and agencies, to have their own point of view represented.



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19. Based on information supplied by the Federation of Personnel Services, 7.4.78., and by the D.E. Gazette, September 1977, p.981.
20. Doran, T., op.cit. Doran notes that turnover among agencies in the USA also stands at about 50%.
21. This information was supplied to me by Major Donald Cropper, Secretary-General of the F.P.S. He stressed that it was a very rough approximation indeed. He also pointed out that since some individuals register with several agencies and since there is a great deal of mobility in and out of temporary employment this figure should not be regarded as a true reflection of the number of persons involved. This is, however, the only overall estimate available.

22. Fulop, C., op.cit. p.39.
23. Jones, R.M., 'A Market for Labour and the Office Staff Sector', BJIR, Vol.X, No.2., July 1972, pp.193-205.
24. N.B.P.I., Report No.89, op.cit., p.3.
25. Jones, R.M., op.cit., pp.193-205.
26. New Society, 11.8.77, p.293
27. From a speech delivered to the C.I.E.T.T. annual conference, Copenhagen, 4.6.71.
28. Fulop, C., op.cit., p.32
29. In an article in the New Statesman (13.8.71) Ballam argued that company managers were beginning to comprehend the "true value of the temporary agency": "Just as soon as the staff contractors have educated company managements, the only permanent employees a company will need will be the executive and senior personnel, the rest of the staff will be taken on or laid off according to the work load." (p.203)
30. Doran, T., op.cit.
31. Cited in N.A.L.G.O. discussion document, op.cit., p.11
32. D.E. Gazette, September 1977, p.981.
33. Campling, J., op.cit., p.446
34. Fulop, C., op.cit., p.111.
35. Cited in Ward, D.J., The Private Employment Agency - Its Growth and Development in Great Britain, Unpublished H.N.D. dissertation, Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education.
36. Donald Cropper, in an article entitled 'The fight to ban the bureaux', Top Secretary, October 1972, p.446.
37. Campling, J., op.cit., p.446.
38. In 1972, a complaint was made to the Race Relations Board by some men who had worked as interviewers for a London branch of Brook Street Bureau. They claimed that a number of client firms had issued racially discriminatory instructions to the company and that these had subsequently been acted upon by interviewers employed at the branch. During the next twelve months the RRB investigated the activities of the BSB and also Rand Services and the Alfred Marks Bureau, and in the summer of 1973, it privately informed all three that it had found evidence of unlawful discrimination. This finding was not accepted by the agencies, although they co-operated with the conciliation procedures designed to improve compliance with the 1968 Race Relations Act. The reactions of the three principals concerned to this finding were reported in the Sunday Times, 7.4.74. In the Times 29.5.74, the Race Relations Board was reported to have commented as follows:  

'Circumstances have a lot to do with it. If the interviewer is working on a commission basis, he's not going to waste time on people he doesn't think he can place - like old people, or blacks, or hippies.'

39. In a speech delivered to the C.I.E.T.T. annual conference, 4.6.71.
40. Jones, R.M., op.cit.
41. Olesen, V.L. and Katsuranis, F., 'Urban nomads: women in temporary clerical services' in Stromberg, A. and Harkess, S. (eds.), Women Working, (Mayfield Publishing Company: Palo Alto, California, 1978), p.323.
42. Administrative Management Society Survey, Personnel, January, 1971, Vol.11, No.7, p.6. Although many employers considered temps to be less efficient than regulars, 84% considered that they nevertheless got good value in relation to other wages and costs.
43. SOFRES, op.cit., pp.24-25
44. N.B.P.I. Report No.89, op.cit., p.4
45. Silverstone, R., The Office Secretary, (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, City University, London, 1974), pp.454-6.
46. Doran, T., op.cit.
47. Reported in the Financial Times, 19.8.74, p.6.
48. Index to Office Equipment and Supplies, 'The great agency scandal', 1.9.73., p.16.
49. Bernard Marks, head of the Alfred Marks Bureau, quoted in the Financial Times, 19.8.74, p.6.
50. Clive Jenkins, General Secretary of A.S.T.M.S. suggested that 'interviewers do not generally last long in their jobs', in Top Secretary, October 1972.
51. Financial Times, 19.8.74, p.6.
52. Skeels, J., 'Perspectives on private employment agencies', BJIR, July 1972, p.160.
53. Fulop, C., op.cit., pp.111-112
54. The fact that the service is free to the applicant does not, in the opinion of some groups, particularly the unions, exonerate the agencies. To the extent that agencies profit from the sale of the temporary's labour power, there are inevitably many organisations, including the I.L.O., which maintain a resolute opposition to their existence.
55. Silverstone, R., op.cit., p.461.
56. Riddell, P., 'Temps provide a cushion', Financial Times, 24.10.75, p.11.
57. According to Eric Hurst, speaking at the 10th C.I.E.T.T. annual conference, in May 1977, 'the number of temporaries fell at the very worst by forty percent.'
58. The Times, 27.8.77, p.17.
59. This opinion was expressed to me by Major Donald Cropper, Secretary-General of the F.P.S.

60. N.A.L.G.O. discussion document, op.cit., p.13.

61. Jerman, B., 'Temporary mums', the Guardian, 14.12.74.

## CHAPTER SIX.

## OFFICE TEMPS

The phenomenon of temporary work is where a great many historical and contemporary themes concerning women converge. This phenomenon represents the net result of the discrimination, dissatisfaction, and inflexibility, which a great many women experience because they are women in a man's world - the world of white-collar masters and white-blouse subordinates. It is the final solution for the girls who have become trapped in the female ghetto of the office by their socialisation, education and training, by the limited range of occupations available to them, and by the unfulfilled promises of the recruiting advertisements. It is also the final solution for the women who want to escape from suburban monotony but who cannot find an employer who is willing to meet their needs half way.

The phenomenon of temporary work highlights the fact that women must make all the adjustments if they wish to work in the office - adjustments to its hours, its overtime, its opportunity structure, its mechanisation, its boredom, and its traditional structure of relationships. Temping is an alternative to self-effacement.

To a considerable extent, therefore, temping may be regarded as symptomatic of the presence of patriarchy, both within the labour market and beyond. However, as we noted earlier, many writers consider that it is erroneous to perceive the occupational circumstances of women purely in terms of processes of male domination.(1) This note of caution is particularly apposite in the case of female temporary office workers. Neither the supply of, nor the demand for such employees can be accounted for simply in terms of attempts by men to maintain a position of relative advantage in the labour market, or in terms of discriminatory attitudes among employers. The resort to temporary work is at least partly explained in terms of the objective conditions of clerical work itself. Once this is recognised, it becomes necessary to look for the wider economic processes which structure the contemporary nature of white collar employment. In Braverman's view, the objective character of office work in

the twentieth century has been rapidly degraded by the dual processes of rationalisation and mechanisation in accordance with the imperatives of monopoly capitalism.(2) Similarly, the demand for temporary clerical labour has very little to do with 'male chauvinism', whereas it has a great deal to do with labour shortage in the permanent sector, and, to a lesser extent, with the efforts of employers to effect economies in their full-time permanent staff requirements.

It may be readily conceded, therefore, that it is necessary to take account of the contributions of both patriarchy and the wider economic system if one is to comprehend the phenomenon of temporary clerical labour. However, this observation brings us no nearer to an appreciation of the factors which women themselves consider to have impelled them towards temporary employment, nor does it provide a starting-point from which to generalise about women's responses to temporary clerical work. Indeed, it is only too easy to lose sight altogether of women's own perceptions of their work situation and to suppose that an acceptance of the popular stereotypes of the female temp represents a satisfactory substitute for a more direct investigation of their attitudes. In this chapter, then, I am concerned to examine temporary clerical work from the employee's point of view, and at the same time, to demonstrate the bankruptcy of a range of popular stereotypes of the temp. More importantly, perhaps, by studying directly the experiences and attitudes of those who work in this capacity, it is possible to dismantle the mythological versions of the woman at work. It is these myths - that women are invariably passive, that their aspirations are consistently attenuated, that the home or the opposite sex is their central life interest and that they always adjust to limited opportunities at work - which represent the ideological justifications for the exploitative systems of both capitalism and patriarchy.

In the popular imagination, the temp is often perceived in terms of all the favourite stereotypes of contemporary womanhood. Although fewer marriages are made in offices than are made in heaven, there is a belief that temps are primarily

motivated by the desire for a husband. The mass media have done much to promote an image of the temp as a man-hunting good-time girl, short on skill and high on unreliability. A recent example of the tendency to present a somewhat tarnished image of the temp was provided in a centre-page article in the Observer. In this article, entitled 'Everybody Loves Temps', Bernard Hollowood introduces us to 'Dorcas', who is presumably supposed to be representative of the temp workforce in general:

'Her qualifications are not too impressive. Her shorthand is rudimentary and her typing slow. But she is an attractive brunette and she would like to marry within two years, before she is 23. "If you must know," she said, when I questioned her, "I'm ready to fall in love and for preference I'd like to fall for an affluent bloke. And being a temp gives me a chance of meeting more boss types. So far I've met nobody who really matters. Oh, there's always someone who wants to take me out to dinner and afters, but nobody sufficiently interesting. Young Mr. Pollock was my last date and he was hopeless - wanted payment in kindness at the first opportunity - so I shall move on next week."' (3)

The promotional material of the agencies too, must surely have bolstered the notion that temps are just so many rolling stones, primarily motivated by the pleasure principle. Another favourite image of the temp is that of the clerical mercenary, which corresponds to the stereotype of the acquisitive female so beloved of investigators of women at work in the 1950s and 1960s. This image is popular with the unions, who have continuously characterised temps as self-interested enemies of the working class, singlemindedly bent upon the maximisation of their own wage-packets. This view of the temp remains firmly entrenched, in spite of the weight of evidence which suggests that temporary employment is less financially rewarding in the long term.

The next objective, then, is to investigate the background, experiences and attitudes to work of female temporary office employees in order to derive a more informed understanding than is provided by the popular stereotypes. The following account is based upon the responses to a postal questionnaire which I sent to a group of female office temps via the employment agencies for whom they worked. The questionnaire was distributed in 1971/72 in three areas of the country - London, Birmingham and the North-East. I received 139 replies and the regional composition of the group was as follows: London 32%, North-East 36%,

Birmingham 32%. The account presented in this chapter also incorporates the findings of a three month period of participant observation as a temporary filing clerk which I undertook at a company in the Midlands.

I have provided a discussion of the limitations and advantages of my methodology in Appendix 1, but it is appropriate at this point to make explicit any major constraints which entered into the research process. The overriding problem for the research was the inaccessibility of the type of worker being investigated. The scattered distribution of temporary clerical workers rendered a conventional random sample of the working population inappropriate, if not impossible. The only viable means by which it was possible to obtain a population of temps for questionnaire purposes was to enlist the aid of private employment agencies. Whilst this strategy might impose limitations on the kinds of questions which I could ask, it would afford a breadth of coverage which could not possibly be obtained by an independent study of a small number of workplaces. The decision to gain the co-operation of an agency was also prompted by the fact that I had been working as an agency temp while a student for many years. This meant that I was favourably placed in relation to the task of finding a firm which would assist me. It also meant that it would be relatively easy to gain a temp position myself for the purposes of participant observation.

The findings represented in this chapter, therefore, are to a great extent based upon a method which depended on chance, expediency and the good will of both temps and their employers. In fact, it seems to me that a really rigorous and systematic survey of office temps is impossible unless one has massive resources and the unqualified co-operation of a very large number of agencies and firms which hire temps. However, one may derive considerable confidence in the findings presented here from the fact that they are very much in line with the data compiled by other investigators in this field of enquiry. Moreover, the use of more than one research method may be claimed to have diminished the likelihood of unwarranted generalisations. Finally, one may hope that my own study of women for hire may draw attention to a hitherto much neglected aspect of female clerical employment and encourage others to investigate it more exhaustively.



# 1. Characteristics of Office Temps.

The female office temp is typically much younger than the average woman in employment. The relative youth of women in temporary clerical work is evident from the following comparison of my results with figures compiled by the Department of Employment:

TABLE 1. Age structure of female office temps compared with the age structure of the total female workforce.

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Temps (N = 139)</u>	<u>Total Female Workforce*</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
15 - 19	11.5	12.8
20 - 29	55.4	22.7
30 - 39	18.7	16.1
40 - 49	11.5	21.7
50 - 59	2.2	19.4
60+	-	7.2
No answer	0.7	-

\*Source: Women and Work, D.E. Manpower Paper No.9. (H.M.S.O. London 1974)  
p.47.

The relative youth of women office temps, a finding confirmed by surveys conducted by the F.P.S. and by the Alfred Marks organisation, is perhaps less remarkable when one considers that the proportion of women working in routine white-collar jobs in general, decreases with age.(4) In a recent survey of female office workers, just under half the sample were aged between 21 and 30, and only 7% were aged 41 or over.(5) To some extent, therefore, the reasons for the preponderance of young women in temporary office work are similar to those which account for the relative youth of women in clerical work generally. These include, for example, the increasing popularity of office work as an occupational choice among girl school-leavers. However, it is possible that the tone of the agencies advertising copy plays some part in attracting younger girls into temporary employment:

'Baby, are you hot enough for Manpower?'

'My granny ran off with my granny shoes,  
my mum wants to borrow my midi,  
my brother keeps pinching my maxi raincoat,  
and my big sister wants to get a job from Brook Street Bureau  
Fashion mad your lot.'

'TEMPS. Young, attractive and enthusiastic. Available  
min. 6 weeks. For immediate interview, phone now.'  
(Evening Standard, 25.7.77)

'SECRETARY £1.70! No s/h required! 45 wpm! Long booking!  
West London! Young company! (Evening Standard, 13.6.77)

Many of the larger agencies often supplement the youthful orientation of their recruitment literature with photographs of smart, bright-eyed young women in their twenties. Magazine advertisements of this nature are more typically found in such products as 'Honey' and '19' which have a young readership than in those magazines such as 'Woman' and 'Woman's Own' which are read by somewhat older women.

The age profile of office temps varied to some extent between the three regions covered by my study. Although the majority of temps in all three areas were aged under 30, there was a much greater proportion of women aged 30-39 in the North-East than elsewhere. In London and Birmingham, the proportion of temps in this age-group was 13% and 14% respectively, whereas in the North-East, the proportion was 28%. The F.P.S. survey of office temps similarly found that women in this age-range were more preponderant in this area than in both London and the Midlands.(6)

Just over half the sample were married (53%), and this degree of representation is slightly more than is found among women in clerical work generally (47% of whom are married), but rather less than the figure of 60% generated by an F.P.S. survey of office temporaries.(7) As might be expected from the regional variations in age distribution, married women formed a much greater proportion of office temps in the North-East - 68%, as compared with 44% of temps in London, and 46% of those in Birmingham. 30% of respondents were responsible for children of school age or under, and once again, such women were more common in the North-East - 40%, as compared with 27% in London and 21% in Birmingham. Of those women responsible for children, 39% had one child, 49% had two children, 10% had three and 2% had four or more. The proportion of women responsible for children of school-age or under is about the same as the proportion in the female routine white-collar workforce as a whole. As compared with women in full-time office jobs, however,

temps are much more likely to be responsible for children under 16. Hunt found that only 1.7% of full-time women in this occupational category had children under 5, and 9.8% had children aged 5-15.(8) The corresponding figures for temps were 8.6% and 23.7% respectively. Whilst the degree of responsibility for young children among temps is not as great as that found among women in part-time office jobs, this finding does highlight the importance of temporary work as a method of obtaining employment among those who would otherwise find it very difficult to do so.

Female temps originate from a wide diversity of social backgrounds, although a relatively high proportion are drawn from the middle classes.(9)

TABLE 2. The social class background of office temps

<u>Father's occupation</u>	<u>Temps (N = 139)</u> %
1. <u>White-Collar</u>	
Higher professional, managerial and other white-collar employees; large industrial or commercial employers, landed proprietors.	6
Intermediate professional, managerial and other white-collar employees; medium industrial or commercial employers, substantial farmers.	20
Lower professional, managerial and other white-collar employees; small industrial or commercial employers, small proprietors, small farmers.	20
2. <u>Intermediate</u>	
Supervisory, inspectional, minor officials and service employees; minor self-employed.	11
3. <u>Manual</u>	
Skilled manual	29
Semi-skilled manual	8
Unskilled manual	3
No answer or insufficient information	4

Table 2 shows that the single largest group were the daughters of men in skilled manual occupations, although only 40% were from a manual background. Similarly, a high proportion of married temps were the spouses of men in middle-class occupations. 30% were married to men in manual occupations; 5% to men

in intermediate occupations; 58% to men in white-collar occupations; and 7% gave no answer or insufficient information. The single largest group were married to men in intermediate white-collar occupations (38%).

Although the daughters of the middle classes and the wives of middle class husbands are greatly over-represented among my respondents as compared with the pattern found among the general female working population, it has proved impossible to ascertain whether they are more numerous among temps than among the permanent female office population. Silverstone's study of office staff did reveal a very strong over-representation of women from middle-class backgrounds, but her results related only to women in secretarial jobs.

Having considered some of the broad social characteristics of office temps, I shall now turn to an examination of their educational background and degree of training. On the basis of a study of temporary workers employed by a New York private employment agency, Gannon has proposed that the type of individual who is attracted into this industry is one with few marketable skills. He further suggests that:

'the temporary help industry may be providing a haven for those less attractive workers who would find difficulty in successfully negotiating the rigorous hiring procedure of established firms seeking a permanent workforce'. (10)

The results of my own survey do not provide support for this perception of temporary workers, at least, in the field of clerical employment. In terms of both education and training, temporary office workers compare very favourably with other women in white-collar work. It is extraordinarily difficult, however, to construct a precise comparison of the qualifications of temps and permanent employees because of the dearth of material relating to both categories of female office worker. Yet I consider the exercise a very necessary one, lest an unjustified image of the temp should prevail.

As one might expect amongst a group of women originating from predominantly middle-class and upper working-class backgrounds, a substantial minority had received a grammar-school education:

TABLE 3.

Type of School Attended

<u>Type of School</u>	<u>Temps (N = 139)</u>
	%
Private	20
Elementary	4
Secondary Modern	39
Technical	1
Grammar	32
Comprehensive	4
Other	1

In her survey of London secretaries, Silverstone found that 31% of her respondents had attended grammar school, and consequently, it may be suggested that temps compare favourably in terms of this dimension of educational achievement.(11) Although I found that secretaries, shorthand-typists and receptionists were rather more likely to have attended a private school than other temporary employees, there was no significant statistical relationship between employment status and type of school attended.(12)

Bearing in mind the fact that at the time of my study the school leaving age had not yet been raised to 16, it is instructive to consider the findings relating to patterns of school leaving among temps. Just over two-thirds had left at the age of 16 or above and as many as 8% had left at the age of 18. This pattern is consistent with Hunt's finding that women in non-manual occupations form a much greater proportion of those who left school at 16 or over.(13) In terms of this dimension of educational experience, then, temps resemble other women in white-collar employment. Terminal education age was significantly correlated both with social class background and the type of school attended. In other words, women of middle class origin, and women educated at grammar or private schools were more likely than other temps to have stayed on beyond the minimum school leaving age.

The school examination record of office temps compares well with that of the

female clerical population in general. Hunt found that amongst women employed in skilled non-manual work (a category she uses which includes almost all forms of routine clerical work), 20% had obtained G.C.E. O-level or its equivalent, 1.4% had obtained G.C.E. A or S-level or equivalent, and 14% had passed other exams, including C.S.E.(14)

TABLE 4. Examinations Passed at School

<u>Examinations Passed</u>	<u>Temps (N = 139)</u> %
G.C.E. O-level or equivalent:	
None passed	52
1 - 3	14
4 - 6	21
7+	13
G.C.E. A-level or equivalent:	
None passed	89
1 - 2	7
3 - 4+	4
C.S.E.:	
None passed	89
1 - 3	4
4 - 6	6
7+	1
Other school exams:	
None passed	71
Commercial	19
Academic	10

It is interesting to note that one-fifth of the group had already received some preparation for a future in clerical work whilst still at school. The likelihood of this destiny for many of my respondents was increased by the educational choices they made after leaving school. Over half (53%) had not pursued any full-time course of education or training since leaving school, but of those who had, no less than 87% had undertaken a training in clerical work. Over one-third of my respondents (37%) had passed a secretarial course. Very few had undertaken a course in higher education. Only two women (1%) had successfully completed an academic course at degree level or its equivalent.

There was a strong relationship between employment status and the extent

of vocational training after school. Whereas the majority of secretaries and shorthand -typists had taken a course relevant to their occupations, the majority of copy and audio-typists, clerks and filing clerks, clerk-typists, book-keepers, machine operators, telephonists and receptionists had not. Thus while the secretaries and shorthand-typists in my survey were relatively well qualified, a majority of the rest had entered clerical employment without any form of relevant training. This observation would initially seem to support the view that temps are justly characterised as the flotsam and jetsam of the labour force. However, the findings of a recent Alfred Marks survey enable one to dispense with this idea. In an investigation of women employed in office jobs having some degree of mechanisation, it was found that only 58% had received any formal training for the machines on which they were currently employed. The machines included switchboards, audio equipment, accounting machines and telex systems. Of those who had received some training, 60% had acquired this whilst actually at work, and less than one-third had received training at school or college.(15) It seems, then, that temps are not unusual in having a lack of relevant training prior to entry into the labour market. With the exception of secretaries and shorthand-typists, temps, like many other women in routine white-collar employment, tend to have acquired their skills once they are actually working. A minority learn outside the workplace, by attending evening classes, but the great majority achieve competence on the job.

Indeed, from my own experience, I have found that temporary employment affords a greater opportunity to extend the range of skills that one is capable of performing, and in this way it is possible to enhance one's market position. When I began working as a temp, my marketable skills were few indeed. I had a slight knowledge of typing and an even slighter knowledge of how to operate a switchboard. Six years later I had gained competence in audio and copy typing, filing, duplicating, clerk-typing, switchboard operating and photocopying, to name but a few activities! The fact that I was not a trained secretary promoted the opportunity to learn new skills. Since temp jobs for more routine grades were

sometimes scarce, I was often obliged to accept whatever posts became available. Even though it may happen that a temp cannot master the job to which she is sent, as was my unfortunate experience when despatched to one firm as an 'export-clerk', this mode of employment certainly enhances the opportunity to gain both competence and experience in different types of office work.

It is inappropriate, therefore, to regard temps as some kind of pariah group within the white-collar labour force.(16) Neither their educational background, nor their vocational training suggests that they are unusually deficient in marketable skills and capacities. In terms of formal academic qualifications they compare extremely favourably with women in clerical work generally. A lack of formal training for clerical work prior to entry into the labour market is commonplace among female office workers. Indeed, if it is the case that without the option of temporary work many of my respondents would have been unemployed, the reason for this lies not so much in the nature of their education and training as in their responses and those of others to their domestic circumstances.

The occupational composition of my respondents was similar to that found in other surveys of temporary office workers, although comparisons are rather difficult owing to variations in methods of classification. Table 5 shows the occupational breakdown for the temps in my survey:

TABLE 5. The occupational distribution of temps\*

<u>Job category</u>	<u>Temps (N = 139)</u>
	<u>%</u>
Secretary	23
Shorthand-typist	19
Copy/Audio typist	23
Clerk-typist	6
Book-keeper/skilled clerk	7
Junior clerk/Filing clerk	11
Machine operator	4
Telephonist	4
Receptionist	4

\*classified according to the type of job in which registered with the agency.



Both the F.P.S. survey and an Alfred Marks survey conducted in 1973 also found that secretaries and typists of various kinds tend to predominate among the temporary clerical population.(17) Since I found no significant relationship between employment status and the reasons for taking up temporary work, it may be suggested that this distribution is a function of the higher demand for temps with these particular job skills. In other words, while the inclination to become a temp may be evenly distributed throughout the female white-collar hierarchy, those with skills for which there is a high level of demand may be more disposed to actually enter the temporary field, since the likelihood of continuous employment is correspondingly greater.

A majority of my respondents had been employed in a permanent capacity at some time during the five years prior to the survey. Of the 20% who had not, most were married, and two-thirds were responsible for children of school age or under. 68% of my respondents were asked to supply more detailed information of their working lives during the five years up to and including the time of the survey. This data must be treated with some caution, however, owing to its retrospective nature. The information supplied by this smaller group of respondents suggests a fairly low level of job stability. The average length of time spent in one job varied from less than one month to over three years, but as many as 50% reported an average length of service of less than one year. Of this smaller group of respondents, 53% reported that they had spent one month or more of this 5 year period in voluntary or involuntary unemployment. Married women formed the majority of those who had experienced unemployment (58%) and were thus slightly over-represented in this group as compared with the sample as a whole.

Temps are not characteristically mobile between agencies. Nearly two-thirds of all respondents had worked for only one agency during the five years up to and including the time of the survey. 25% had worked for two agencies, 9% for three and 4% for four or more. Mobility was much more likely to have taken the form of movement between temporary and permanent jobs. The widespread pattern of attachment to a single agency probably results from the fact that certain advantages follow from the development of a good relationship with a particular firm. A temp

having a history of company loyalty is not only more likely than others to be given jobs when these are scarce, but she is also in a better position to negotiate for jobs having the conditions she requires. This was very much my own experience when I worked as a temp during summer vacations. For example, on one occasion when I returned to my old agency looking for work at the beginning of the holiday I was initially told by a new member of staff that they would be unable to employ me. It was explained to me that they 'already had enough students' looking for temporary jobs. When I protested that I had worked for them for many years and that I was well known to the agency principal, there was a great flurry of telephoning followed by a profusion of apologies. Within twenty-four hours they had found me a job. I also found that as the length of my service with the agency increased, the personnel responsible for placements grew more receptive to my stated preferences in terms of job location and job type. This is not to say that I always obtained my ideal job but I certainly felt that there was some attempt to accommodate my wishes. In fact, it was only when the agency began to show a marked reluctance to indulge my requirements (due in part to the appointment of a principal who believed that the requirements of client firms came first) that I even considered working for another agency.

My experiences may not be typical but they do throw some light on the circumstances which may bind a temp to a particular agency. Evidently, an accommodative posture on the part of agency personnel is likely to be greater when jobs are plentiful and when competition between agencies for labour is keen, but it may also result from a temp's willingness to display company loyalty. Thus a relationship of reciprocity develops which may inhibit experimentation on the part of the temp with a larger number of agencies.

At the time of my survey, almost half my respondents had been working for their present agency for less than six months. As one would expect amongst a group of temporary workers, length of service in the present job is typically much shorter than that found amongst the female workforce generally. Hunt found that 50% of working women had been in their present job for more than three years.(18) However,

as with the female labour force in general, length of service amongst temps is related to age, as Table 6 shows:

**TABLE 6.** The length of time spent working for the present agency among different age groups.

<u>Length of service</u>	<u>All Temps</u>	<u>15-19</u>	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40-49</u>	<u>50-59</u>
	N = 138*	16	77	26	16	3
	%	%	%	%	%	%
less than 6 months	49	88	52	42	19	-
6 months up to 1 year	18	6	19	27	13	-
1 year up to 2 years	13	-	14	19	6	33
2 years up to 5 years	14	6	9	12	44	67
5 years and over	2	-	-	-	13	-
No answer	4	-	5	-	6	-

\* One respondent did not give her age.

These findings, in conjunction with those produced by other surveys of temporary office workers, suggest that very few women become established as 'permanent' temps. A survey conducted by the Alfred Marks Bureau in 1970 found that the average period of total annual employment for a temp was 6 weeks.(19) The F.P.S. informed me that this was still the case in 1978. In the U.S.A., Cannon and Brainin found that the median number of days worked by a temporary clerical employee before termination was only 19 days, although the range was from 1 to 192 days.(20) It is possible that these figures underestimate the average duration of employment as a temp. Both surveys relate only to the length of service with a single agency, and thus their findings obscure the possibility that a more lengthy involvement in temp work is achieved by movement from agency to agency. At least two American studies of temporary employment have claimed that many temporaries register with more than one agency.(21) However, neither study furnished precise information concerning the extent of this practice, nor do they state whether multiple registration actually leads to a more protracted involvement in temporary work. My own findings suggest that this practice of occupational polygamy is atypical, and the weight of evidence leads strongly towards the conclusion that temping is usually a short-term mode of employment.

Yet there are grounds for supposing that a substantial minority of temps begin this type of work with the intention of remaining in it. The Alfred Marks survey mentioned above, found that in the winter of 1970, whilst 32% of temps intended to work for only a few weeks, 27% said that they would be working for several months and as many as 41% intended to work as temps on a regular basis with breaks.(22) Those intending to work on a very short-term basis were somewhat more preponderant in the summer months of 1970, but those defining themselves as long-term temps still represented 38% of the total. Given the discrepancy between intention and practice, one must conclude that the circumstances of temporary work are such as to sway a considerable number of women from their original intentions.

In this account of the social, educational and employment characteristics of women in temporary office work, I have tried to identify some of the factors which are relevant for an understanding of their reasons for entering, and current attitudes towards, this type of employment. In many respects, they are not markedly different from other women in routine white-collar jobs. They are a group of relatively youthful women, originating from predominantly middle class, and upper working class backgrounds. However, their educational record is rather better than that of other women in similar jobs. The information supplied in relation to recent working history suggests a rather poorer record of job stability. They are also more likely than women in full-time office work to be responsible for children below the statutory school-leaving age. Whilst I have endeavoured to show that they possess certain characteristics which differentiate them from other women in routine white-collar work, it is also necessary to emphasise that there is no such thing as the typical temp. The only attribute which is common to all is that of gender. This observation underlines the redundancy of attempts to speak of temps as though they shared a common history and a common set of motivations. It also means that the task of examining their orientations to work must incorporate an awareness of the diversity which characterises their domestic circumstances and their previous work experience.

## 2. Reasons for Doing Temporary Work

"Look, Kathy, everyone of us is looking for a way to beat the nine to five

'routine, the TGIF and Blue Monday drill. Right?" I nodded. "OK. Lots of girls become stewardesses because of that. And models, and lots of other things. Well, working as a temp secretary gives you the same freedom. If Monday morning bugs you, don't work on Monday mornings. Maybe that's what it's all about. No more Mondays!"

(from Girlpower by Kathy Cole and Donna Bain)

The role of temporary work as a solution to certain difficulties and problems encountered by women both inside and beyond the workplace is very much apparent when one analyses the reasons why females become temporary clerical employees.

Table 7 sets out the responses to an open-ended question concerning the decision to enter temporary employment. Unlike some other studies of temporary office workers, I have not assumed that a single motivation informs this decision.

Those who responded often gave several reasons for becoming temps. Consequently, Table 7 shows the proportions responding under different categories of motivation:

See Table 7 on page 219.

TABLE 7. Reasons for becoming a temporary office worker (responses given by all temps and also according to variations in domestic circumstances).

Reasons for becoming a temp	All temps	Single temps	Married temps	Temps without dependent children	Temps with dependent children
	N = 139	65	74	78	41
	%	%	%	%	%
Prefer the varied routine of temping	27	34	20	31	17
Do not require or cannot accept permanent work due to personal or domestic commitments	18	2	32	5	49
Doing temporary work while looking for permanent job	17	23	11	21	5
Temping provides opportunity to work when you want	17	12	20	21	5
About to move or go abroad	9	20	0	13	0
Pay reasons	9	11	8	10	7
To meet people	7	11	4	10	0
To gain experience	7	11	4	8	5
Difficulty obtaining permanent work because of need for special hours	6	0	11	0	20
Difficulty obtaining ideal permanent job	5	6	4	6	2
Filling in between employment in other fields	3	6	0	4	0
On working holiday from abroad or elsewhere in the U.K.	2	5	0	3	0
No answer	1	2	1	1	2

Although there is a great diversity of reasons for doing temporary work, they may be grouped into three broad categories. Firstly, it has been chosen in preference to permanent work because it is expected to provide greater rewards in terms of such criteria as job satisfaction, pay, and the opportunity to meet people. Secondly, it is a strategy adopted by those who do not require or who cannot accept employment on a continuous or full-time basis. Thirdly, it has

been chosen as an interim measure by those looking for a permanent job or who are passing the time before taking up a permanent job that they have already been offered. Of the three major categories of motivation, it is the second which is most frequently cited. The same finding has emerged from other surveys of temporary office workers.(23)

The reasons for entering temporary work, therefore, can be broadly distinguished although in the case of the individual temp, there is frequently an overlapping of motivations. It may be suggested that the various reasons given could also be organised in terms of whether they denote a positive, negative or indifferent orientation to temporary work. Thus, a gravitation towards temporary employment because of an expectation of higher pay could be construed as a positive orientation; the decision to temp because of an inability to procure alternative employment could be regarded as a negative orientation; whilst the decision to temp as a way of passing time before the occurrence of a known or anticipated change of circumstances could be regarded as an indifferent orientation. However, in my opinion, the use of such a classification would be misleading and unhelpful. This is because many seemingly positive reasons are themselves generated by constraints and impositions experienced in other contexts. Accordingly, I shall examine the various reasons cited in terms of the less evaluative distinctions suggested above.

Firstly, then, there are certain aspects of temporary employment which in themselves represent a major reason for entering this type of work. There are some respondents for whom a real choice exists between temporary and permanent employment, but they have chosen the former because they consider it more desirable. In fact, the single most common reason for doing temping among my respondents was the desire for a more varied routine of work. The following comments exemplify the way in which temping is perceived as a preferred alternative to permanent office work:

'Working in a permanent job can often cause a girl to get in a rut, unless the job is absolutely super with opportunities to be promoted.'

'I get restless in one place too long because the work gets very monotonous.'

'I get claustrophobia in permanent jobs.'

'It is more varied and interesting. You meet new people, you don't get stuck in a rut and it's therefore less inclined to become boring.'

Thus, for many women, temping is expected to be a panacea for all the ills found in permanent employment. No matter how misplaced their expectations may turn out to be, they sign on with the agencies in the hope of finding the interest and variety which eludes them in secure but predictable permanent jobs. Great Expectations, in terms of the nature of work, was also a prominent theme in the discussions I held with the temps I worked with. Time and time again, they described their previous jobs as boring, monotonous, and lacking in variety. If the routines of office work had to be their destiny, then it was better to experience a varied routine through the continual change of jobs, than to become more disillusioned in the same old position.

Although single women and women without dependent children were much more likely to cite this factor, it was also an important secondary motivation amongst those with more pressing domestic and personal circumstances. This suggests that a desire for job satisfaction is not such an unlikely characteristic of married women as modern mythology would lead us to suppose.

It is interesting to note the relative insignificance of a desire for better pay as a reason for doing temporary work. As compared with the desire for greater variety in work, the pecuniary motive plays little part in propelling women towards this mode of employment. Women do not, on the whole, perceive temping as a means towards the enhancement of wages, although the desire for more money has been found to be an important reason for changing jobs among permanent office workers.(24) The theme of excellent pay prospects is very common in the agencies' advertising, but potential temps often recognise that the benefits of good hourly rates are likely to be offset by the lack of fringe benefits, holiday pay and so forth. Consequently, those intending to work as temps on a regular basis are unlikely to be motivated by purely financial considerations. However, in spite of the financial disadvantages, temping can sometimes offer better levels of remuneration for younger women. One nineteen year old I spoke to claimed that temping paid better than permanent work for girls of her age:



'I'm only nineteen, but I'm separated from my husband and I've got a child of two. I left school without any qualifications in order to be a wife and mother but now I'm going out to work because he left me suddenly without any offer of financial assistance. I've had three permanent jobs since he went but not only were they boring but they paid peanuts. I became a temp mainly because this sort of job is paid by the hour, not by age. At 19 a clerical job without typing involved pays only £10 gross. After deductions, rent, nursery fee, electricity bills, this would leave only £1 a week for food and clothes.'

These comments not only illustrate the conditions under which temping may be regarded as a financially attractive alternative, but also highlight the implications of inferior pay for 'women's work' for female breadwinners.

In the same workplace I met another girl who stressed pay as a reason for becoming a temp, and once again, this appeared to be related to her age. Since the rates offered by agencies are frequently paid according to skill rather than to age, there are obvious attractions in temping for those who would otherwise be paid according to their junior status. This advantage was also stressed by an ex-temp whom I interviewed more recently:

'I was 19 and most companies I'd worked for paid wages to suit your age. But when you were a temp you got the same money as everyone else, whether you were 18, 25 or whatever. It didn't make any difference.'

However, this initial advantage is likely to be steadily eroded as the temp grows older, and of course it would be further undermined by a more favourable movement of permanent earnings in comparison to temporary earnings generally - as happened in the late sixties.

It is also interesting to find that a desire to meet people does not figure prominently as a motivation for entering temporary employment. This reason is somewhat more common amongst single women and those having no dependent children, but the findings here do not suggest that temps are unduly concerned to extend their range of acquaintances. Since meeting people is an inevitable feature of temporary work, it might be supposed that this would constitute the primary reason for doing it, especially if one subscribes to the idea that young women flock into those situations which afford the greatest opportunities for meeting the maximum number of males. However, the evidence here suggests that if some women become temps because they regard variety as the spice of life, the variety sought does not typically take a human, exclusively masculine form.

Secondly, temporary work has been chosen by many women because they require flexible conditions of employment. 18% of my respondents specifically stated that this was because of the pressure of certain domestic or other personal commitments. The following comments are typical:

'I have two children and do not like to leave them to fend for themselves during holidays, after school hours or through illness. Being a temp I can choose my own hours.'

'The hours I work are more convenient for the children and my husband. I do not work during school holidays.'

'As a mother I prefer to be free to take time off if necessary.'

'Because I have children - they can be ill at any time - one needs time off for dental appointments, etc., and I only want to work during school hours.'

'With two children this type of work suits my purpose as I finish at 4.00 p.m. and do not work school holidays.'

'It enables me to take time off during school holiday periods when I have no-one to look after the children.'

Whereas the importance of the desire for variety in work highlights the crucial significance of previous work experience as a factor governing occupational choice, these comments illustrate the influence of domestic commitments on decisions about jobs. In fact, half of all the respondents with dependent children gave this as a reason for becoming a temp. In the case of several temps, the nature of the commitment mentioned was not young children, but the special demands of the husband's or fiance's job.

17% of my respondents said that they had become temps because of the opportunity it afforded to work when they wanted. A few of the single temps qualified this point by saying that they were thereby enabled to have longer holidays and/or holidays whenever they felt like it. The majority of those mentioning this reason, however, did not give any very clear indication as to why they sought either short hours or only intermittent spells of employment. Since many of them were married women, although not typically responsible for dependent children, it may be surmised that domestic circumstances were often of central relevance.

Despite the fact that a large proportion of temps appear to have chosen this type of work because they consider it to be in harmony with the pressure of circum-

stances beyond the workplace, it is important to consider whether or not their decision is really just a matter of personal preference. To put it another way, is it possible to make sense of their responses simply in terms of their domestic circumstances? It could be argued that this 'choice' results not simply from personal convictions about the relationship between marriage, motherhood and work, but also from the unwillingness of many employers to provide flexible conditions in the sphere of permanent work. Temping was made necessary by the conditions of work in modern offices. My respondents made repeated reference to the importance of flexible working hours as a reason for their resort to temporary employment. They wanted to be able to take time off for school holidays, when their children were ill, or had to visit the dentist, and they wanted to work school hours. They took it for granted that their needs in these and other respects were incompatible with the normal requirements of the office. In saying that they had chosen to work in a temporary capacity because of their domestic circumstances, they implicitly acknowledged the fact of inflexibility in the organisation of contemporary office work.

Thus, it may be said that many women prefer to do temporary office work because many employers prefer not to accommodate them on any other basis. On the whole, however, my respondents tended not to characterise their decision in these terms. Temping was seen as something which suited them - as a convenient way of reconciling the dual demands of home and workplace. To the extent that they felt in any way constrained into this type of work, the constraints were seen to derive from their domestic circumstances. Such a perception of the situation is of course perfectly consistent with the cultural maxim that the nature of a woman's work participation should be contingent upon the requirements of her family. These observations might seem to add fuel to the argument that women are essentially acquiescent creatures when it comes to the structure of work opportunities. It should not be forgotten, however, that many women felt that in becoming temps they had taken positive action to extricate themselves from an unsatisfying domestic environment:

'As the children were all at school I became bored at home and felt I could relieve this by doing something useful - temp work is convenient for school holidays and for getting home in time for school to be out.'

The mere fact of going out to work was for many women a form of escape, even though circumstances prevailing both within and beyond the workplace restricted their range of occupational choice. The same observation is made by Olesen and Katsuramis in their survey of office temps in California:

'Temporary work relieved them of the drudgery, dehumanisation and alienating features of housework.' (25)

General speaking, when temporary work had been chosen because continuous, full-time employment was not required, this was mainly because of the implications of certain domestic commitments. A small number of respondents, however, did not want permanent jobs because they were about to move or go abroad (9%) or because they were on a working holiday from overseas or elsewhere in the U.K. (2%). All of the women mentioning these reasons were single:

'I arrived in the U.K. from Australia and found I could not travel the continent if I had a permanent job, so I applied with my agency for temp work.'

'I'm here from Australia on a working holiday and only intend working until April when I will begin touring the continent.'

'I only spend on average three months in the country when I return, and so I cannot really take on a permanent position.'

It is worth noting that the F.P.S. survey found that there had been a progressive decline in the proportion of temporaries who were on working holidays since the beginning of the 1970s. The report suggested that this might have resulted from the deterrent effect of 'stories of inflation' appearing in the press of Canada, New Zealand and Australia. If this is true, then this trend does seem to exemplify the way in which the resort to temporary work is very much a function of the prevailing economic climate.

Finally, temporary work can be regarded as a purely transitional mode of employment for women who are seeking, or who are shortly to take up a permanent position. 17% of my respondents said that they were doing temporary work whilst looking for a permanent post:

'It's the easiest way of looking for permanent employment while still being employed.'

'Temporary work for me was just a fill-in between jobs.'

'I'm doing it until I can find suitable permanent employment.'

While some women made it clear that they were merely filling in time, others stated that they hoped that temporary work would provide direct access to a desirable permanent position. One former temp whom I interviewed explained this function of temporary employment as follows:

'If you're looking for permanent employment you can go into these temp jobs and see if you like the work, and if you do then you can enquire if they need anyone permanent. Which is good because you've got an insight. There's some jobs I went to that I thought, well, it wouldn't be bad working permanently here, but then you hear about the wages - they were no good.'

A small number of temps expressly stated that they had experienced difficulty in finding the kind of office job they wanted and had therefore taken up temping (5%). 3% were filling in between permanent posts in other fields, such as acting or nursing.

Yet another group claimed that they had been unable to find permanent jobs because of their need for special hours. This group consisted entirely of women who were married and who had responsibility for dependent children. For these women, temping was not something to be preferred, but a mode of employment imposed upon them by inflexible attitudes in the workplace. Unlike those who tended to characterise their reasons for temping as determined purely by domestic constraint these women were acutely aware that the assumptions of employers and personnel officers imposed severe limitations to their freedom of manoeuvre. They had been obliged to accept, if somewhat reluctantly, the fact that temping might be the only alternative to unemployment. It may be suggested that while some women with domestic commitments maintain that they have voluntarily chosen temporary work and others with similar domestic circumstances claim that they have been forced into it, their different reasons represent varying subjective interpretations of the same objective situation. Some women feel that the demands of the home dictate what is possible, while others consider that expectations in the world of work set limits to their freedom. At the very root of all their motivations, however, is the inescapable fact that employers are insufficiently willing to introduce flexibility into their terms of employment. Exactly why women should disagree as to where the onus of adjustment should fall is an issue which I am unable to resolve at the present time

but it is evidently an area worthy of further investigation.

7% of my respondents were temping in order to gain experience before looking for a permanent job. One married respondent stated:

'I'm doing temporary work to get a return to office work and up-date experience as at interviews prospective employers think one is deficient in some way because I've been away from the relevant type of work for some time.'

This type of comment illustrates the way in which temping can increase job experience so as to elevate chances of employment. It also shows how the onus of renewing competence in office skills among women on the point of re-entry to the labour market often lies with women themselves rather than with their employers.

The reasons that women gave for becoming temps clearly varied according to their domestic circumstances. Age was another source of variation in the reasons mentioned, and Table 8 shows the replies arranged according to age-group.

See Table 8 on page 228.

TABLE 8. Reasons for becoming a temp (by different age-groups)

Reasons for becoming a temp.	% giving a response in each age-group				
	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
N =	16	77	26	16	3
	%	%	%	%	%
Prefer the varied routine of temping	38	30	19	13	-
Do not require or cannot accept permanent work due to personal or domestic commitments	-	12	31	50	-
Doing temporary work while looking for permanent work	13	25	8	-	-
Temping provides opportunity to work when you want	25	14	4	31	100
About to move or go abroad	25	10	4	-	-
Pay reasons	19	10	4	6	-
To meet people	13	9	-	-	33
To gain experience	19	8	4	-	-
Difficulty obtaining permanent work because of need for special hours	-	3	23	-	-
Difficulty obtaining ideal permanent job	-	7	4	6	-
Filling in between employment in other fields	19	1	-	-	-
On working holiday from abroad or elsewhere in the U.K.	6	1	4	-	-
No answer	-	1	-	6	-

It is evident from the above table that the desire for certain specific rewards from temporary work is more common among younger women. Both financial considerations and the desire to meet people are reasons mentioned more frequently by those under 30. It is also clear that the most important reason for temping among women of this age is the desire for a more varied work routine. This finding lends support to the proposition that work dissatisfaction is a major source of

labour turnover among the younger age-groups. Employers who believe that turnover can be reduced simply by offering higher levels of pay are apparently incorrect.

Among women of all ages, temporary work was often chosen because it enabled them to work when it suited them. In the case of older women, however, this flexibility was usually sought because of the pressure of domestic commitments, whereas younger women, especially those aged 15-19, were planning to take long holidays abroad and/or more days off work than would be possible in a permanent job.

The resort to temporary work as a purely interim measure between permanent jobs was also more common among younger women. Women aged 20-29 were rather more likely to be just filling in the time between office jobs or hoping for direct access to a permanent job, whilst those aged 15-19 were more likely to be attempting to gain experience or filling in time between employment in a different field altogether.

Thus far, it can be seen that the age and domestic circumstances of my respondents were related to the reasons given for doing temporary work. However, since location was yet another source of variation it cannot be supposed that differences in the reasons mentioned are adequately accounted for simply in terms of the female life-cycle. Women in the North-East were more likely than those elsewhere to be temping because domestic commitments prevented them from accepting permanent work or deterred them from seeking it. Conversely, they were much less likely to be temping because of a desire for a more varied routine of work. Only 14% mentioned this factor, whereas 24% of those in London, and as many as 43% of those in Birmingham cited this aspect. The relatively greater importance of temping as a solution to the home/work dilemma among women in the North-East does, of course, reflect the fact that women in this area were dissimilar from women elsewhere in terms of age, marital status and degree of responsibility for children. They were heavily concentrated in the 20-40 age-range, more likely to be married than women in other areas, and also more likely to be responsible for a child of school age or below. However, this observation begs the question of why women who were older, married, and responsible for children were disproportionately represented in this region. It may be suggested



that the nature of local employment opportunities provides the answer. Job scarcity in the North-East renders the opportunity to work all year round as a temp in preference to permanent employment extremely limited. The proportion of young, single temps in this region is correspondingly diminished. Job scarcity also means that there is little or no pressure on employers to provide flexible working conditions for women with young children. Keen competition for the available pool of jobs may render it very difficult for women with domestic commitments to find work. The option of temporary work thus assumes a particular importance for such women in the North-East. In sum, local employment conditions mean that temping is much more a matter of simple expediency than elsewhere. The proposition that the state of the local labour market has a strong bearing on occupational choice is further supported by my finding that women in this region were more likely than elsewhere to be doing temporary work as a purely interim measure. 24% were temping whilst looking for a permanent office job, as compared with 16% of those in Birmingham, and 9% of those in London. They were also more likely to have experienced difficulty in obtaining the type of office job they most desired. Thus, an awareness of regional variations in employment opportunities would seem to be of central relevance for an understanding of the reasons why women enter different types of jobs, and indeed, for an understanding of why they work or do not work at all. As a 1974 government survey has stated:

'Part of the variation (in activity rates) between regions is the result of differences in the structure of the regional populations by age, marital status and employment status, but a detailed study by J.K. Bowers concluded that variations in female activity rates by region were more closely connected with differences in industrial structure and employment opportunities.' (26)

Educational background was yet another source of variation in the reasons for doing temporary work. Although the reasons mentioned were not associated with school leaving age, they did vary according to levels of educational achievement. For example, of those who had not passed any 'O' levels or equivalent examinations, only 18% mentioned the desire for a more varied work routine. Conversely, this reason was cited by 36% of those who had passed one or more 'O' levels. Amongst this latter group, this was by far the most important motivation. Amongst those

lacking this level of educational attainment, the main reason for temping was the desire for flexible conditions of employment, either due to domestic circumstances or because of some other unspecified reason. This finding should not be taken to mean that educational achievement is the ultimate determinant of women's attitudes towards work. The desire for greater work satisfaction was by no means exclusive to those with 'O' levels. It does suggest, however, that it may be appropriate to take educational experience into account when examining women's work motivations.

This account of the reasons why women enter temporary clerical employment underlines the importance of an eclectic approach to the analysis of occupational choice. In particular, it testifies to the inadequacy of any attempt to account for variations in job choice purely in terms of the life-cycle. Whilst age and domestic circumstances are evidently related to the reasons for temping, it is clear that previous work experience plays an important role. A disenchantment with permanent office work has led many women into temporary work, in the hope that greater interest may be found in a succession of different jobs. It is also clear that local employment conditions have some bearing on occupational choice. Where these are unfavourable, women are forced into a position of compromise such that preferences about the nature of work may have to be suspended or suppressed. The decision to do temporary work is also a function of intransigency on the part of employers. No matter how women choose to represent the circumstances leading to their entry into this type of work, it is essential to recognise that the widespread unwillingness of firms to provide flexible conditions of employment renders temping Hobson's Choice for many married women.

### 3. The Experience of Temporary Work

#### a. A general survey

Central to this thesis has been the proposition that attitudes towards work are inextricably bound up with the experience of work. They are not fixed, like some quantum of energy, but capable of modification by the circumstances of a single job, or by the accumulated experience of a succession of jobs. The priorities which a woman possesses when looking for a job may be reinforced when

she actually obtains a position, but they may also be amended, suppressed or forgotten. Were it not for the fact that this potential for mutability in women's work attitudes has been neglected by investigators, it would not be necessary to state these truisms. Since this is the case, however, it is important to give this point special emphasis. My next concern, therefore, is to give an account of the views which women express about their experiences as temporary workers. So far, I have only considered the factors which propel them into this type of work, and to this extent I have only examined the question of occupational choice. The next task is to explore the sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in temporary work itself.

#### i) General findings

From Table 9, it can be seen that the majority of temps are prepared to nominate at least one aspect of temping which appealed to them.

TABLE 9. What do you like most about being a temp? (responses for all items and for temps with varying domestic circumstances)

<u>Aspect of temporary work mentioned</u>	<u>All temps</u>	<u>Single temps</u>	<u>Married temps</u>	<u>Temps without dependent children</u>	<u>Temps. with dependent children</u>
N =	139	65	74	78	41
	%	%	%	%	%
Variety of work	42	51	34	48	27
Flexible hours/oppor- tunity to work when desired	28	22	34	21	44
Sense of freedom/being own boss/no ties	24	32	15	28	15
Meeting people	13	14	12	16	5
Pay	6	2	9	5	7
You are appreciated more	2	2	3	2	2
Opportunity to earn money while looking for a perm- anent job	1	2	1	2	-
It gives you confidence	1	2	1	1	2
Jobs are found for you	1	-	3	2	-
Nothing	4	3	3	3	5
No answer	5	8	3	6	2

It is evident that among temps as a whole, the most appealing aspect of

this type of employment is felt to be the opportunity which it affords for varied work. Variety is encountered in two principal ways, and a high premium is placed on both. Firstly, it derives from the continuous change of workplace. The temp inevitably finds herself working in a great diversity of organisations. The firms to which she is sent are differentiated in terms of size, ownership, and function and this means there is infinite variety in the context, if not the substance of her work:

'I do get much more variety of jobs, from architects' offices to record companies.'

'I like the opportunity to work in different types of office.'

'...the opportunity of seeing the different kinds of work firms do.'

Secondly, and to a lesser extent, variety derives from the fact that the temp may be required to perform a succession of different kinds of work tasks. The degree to which this is the case is to some extent a function of agency policy and the flexibility of the temp herself, but in the normal course of events, the nature of the work at hand is subject to some variation. The differences between one job and another are often very subtle but real enough to allay the feeling of boredom which may arise when one performs the same routine in the same workplace for an extended period:

'I like the fact that I keep changing jobs and so don't get bored with the usual routine.'

'It's the varied work. You don't get a chance of being bored with one subject.'

'You meet different people and do different types of work and you don't get a chance to become bored.'

'I like the challenge of learning a new job each time.'

My own experience testifies to the fact that variety is a characteristic feature of temporary office work. In my first summer alone I was despatched to work as a clerk with a company which provided an advisory service to local industry, as an invoice typist with a firm which supplied scientific equipment to educational organisations, and as a checker of competition entries with a local newspaper. In subsequent years, my experience was no less varied. I

discovered that whilst one is often required to perform the most monotonous of jobs, the continual change of environment and worktask mitigated the sense of boredom. Variety, both of job content and of workplace is inherent in temping, and if circumstances are favourable, it is possible to accelerate the rate of change simply by requesting a transfer. Herein lies one of its main sources of satisfaction, and one of its principal advantages over permanent work. The old adage, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose has little application to the sphere of temporary employment.

The second most attractive feature of temporary work cited by my respondents was the flexibility of working conditions. That is, a particularly appealing aspect of temping was felt to be the opportunity which it afforded to determine for oneself the number of hours, weeks or months worked. The importance attached to this characteristic of temporary employment clearly varied according to domestic circumstances, but it is interesting to note that it was given high priority by those who were single and those who had no dependent children. The appeal of flexible working conditions to those whose domestic situation does not render them absolutely necessary is not surprising when one takes stock of the implications of regular nine-to-five employment. A sudden impulse to take a day off cannot be freely indulged, the claims of family, friends and lovers must be subordinated to the obligation to adhere to office hours, and annual holidays begin to assume the status of a trip to Mecca. For the single girl with a gypsy in her soul, temp work can be a godsend, as one ex-temp explained to me:

'I liked the casualness of temp work. I used to love travelling and if I'd got the travelling bug, the next day I'd phone the agency and say, "I'm off now. I'll see you again soon." And I'd just go. And I've often done that - just make up my mind in one day, put a back-pack on, and go.'

This girl also pointed out that frequent job change, for whatever reason, does not entail the same negative consequences for the temp as are likely to be encountered by the mobile permanent worker:

'I know people who've been at companies for seven years as a temp. They prefer to be temps because they can take time off when they like. You

'see, there's different rules for temps. When you're permanent you can get fired and that's not a good reference when you go for another job. You know, "what happened at your last employment?" "Oh. I got fired." But if you're a temp, "Oh, I've been temping all the time." It doesn't go against your character you see. Whether you're a good temp or a bad temp doesn't come into it at all. It's not like if you've got a permanent job and you're lousy at your job and you get fired for lateness or anything like that. That goes against your character you see. When you go for an interview they always say, "Where were you last employed", and if you say, "I was employed at such and such, I was only there a few months," you're a no-no. But if you say, "I was a temp for a few months to fill in, to feel out the ground." ... that's the good thing about it.'

The third most attractive feature of temporary office work is felt to be the peculiar sense of freedom and control which it generates. Movement from job to job means that the temp can remain aloof from the pressure to conform to prevailing norms concerning output and behaviour. Failure to conform to existing standards in any work situation carries no swingeing penalties for the temp, since her immediate boss is not vested with the normal prerogative of hiring and firing. The more subtle pressures towards conformity which often prevail in the office, such as gossip, or ostracism by co-workers, lose their potency when applied to someone who is only a temporary member of the group. Temping thus affords a much greater degree of freedom from the traditional sanctions of the office environment and appears to generate the feeling that one has more control over the work situation:

'...Not having to please people above me and remember that I'm to obey orders as I would in a permanent position.'

'Freedom. Being able to 'hold your own' against unscrupulous bosses.'

'The independent feeling that you can ask for a transfer if you aren't happy.'

'Peculiar sense of freedom. Not being tied down by regulations.'

The extent to which temporary employment affords a heightened sense of control is an important theme in Olesen and Katsuranis' analysis of American temporary employees. In their view, temps experience a heightened sense of autonomy and control not simply because of their marginality at the place of work but because they are able to influence the assignments offered to them:

'The fact that they could and did say no to certain assignments gave them a feeling of greater control than many other workers have. Permanent employees who refuse work assignments risk dismissal, censure, or at least their supervisor's displeasure. Temporaries could say no with less risk.' (27)

Olesen and Katsuranis point out, however, that the degree of autonomy and control is heavily circumscribed. Firstly, a persistent refusal to accept undesirable assignments on the part of the temp may result in agency displeasure and a consequent hiatus in the supply of jobs. Secondly, the temp often lacks the knowledge necessary for an informed appraisal of an assignment prior to its commencement. Thirdly, where a job proves to be less than satisfying, the temp is obliged to enter into negotiations with the agency for a transfer, and there is no guarantee that the request will be accommodated. Fourthly, temps may sometimes feel constrained to accept undesirable jobs in order that they can refuse jobs or demand ones more suited to them at other times. It may also be observed that the opportunities to bargain for favourable assignments are subject to the prevailing demand for temporary labour. Thus, the temp is not so much in control of her work situation as in a relatively well-placed position to negotiate for the conditions of work which she most desires. Notwithstanding these qualifications, Olesen and Katsuranis are moved to comment:

'In our analysis these women emerged not as creatures adrift in a rapacious business world, but as individuals exercising critical judgments for themselves and for the industry they made possible.' (29)

On the basis of my own research I am inclined to support these conclusions. As Table 10 shows, my respondents were by no means mistresses of their own destinies, but they evidently felt able to influence the course of their working lives:

See Table 10 on page 237.

TABLE 10. When it comes to being sent out on a new assignment, which of the following best describes your position in the matter?

	<u>Temps</u> (N = 139)
	<u>%</u>
I have no choice at all and have to go where I'm sent	7
I go where I'm sent, but if I really didn't like the job the agency would probably find me something better	48
The agency knows me well and tries to find jobs that suit me and that I would like	44
No answer	2

In comparison to the importance attached to the three factors so far considered, namely, variety, flexibility and freedom and control, the weight given to other characteristics of temporary work pales into insignificance. The opportunity to meet people holds some residual appeal, but apart from this such factors as pay, and the feeling of being appreciated carry minimal importance. This may be taken to mean, on the one hand, that the range of gratifications provided by temporary employment is fairly narrow, but on the other hand, that there is considerable agreement as to what these gratifications actually are. The importance placed on these three characteristics is undoubtedly related to domestic circumstances but it would be unwise to neglect the fact that variety constitutes an important secondary attraction for women with dependent children and ranks equally with flexible conditions among married women. One may suggest, therefore, that the differences in attitudes between women with dissimilar domestic circumstances are less significant than the similarities in attitudes among them. The notion that marriage and children preclude any desire for a satisfying work situation is thus greatly undermined by the findings presented here.

Another point to emerge from these findings is that the aspects of a job which generate satisfaction are not necessarily the same as those which govern occupational choice. When one compares the data concerning the reasons for doing temporary work with those in Table 9, it is clear that variety looms larger as a source of gratification than as a reason for becoming a temp. This



underlines the multi-dimensional nature of work attitudes and also their susceptibility to change or modification.

Turning next to the unattractive aspects of temporary employment, it is evident from the data presented in Table 11 that there is less agreement than one finds in relation to its attractions:

**TABLE 11.** What do you like least as a temp? (responses for all temps and for temps with varying domestic circumstances)

<u>Aspect of temporary work mentioned</u>	<u>All temps</u>	<u>Single temps</u>	<u>Married temps</u>	<u>Temps without dependent children</u>	<u>Temps with dependent children</u>
N	= 139	65	74	78	41
	%	%	%	%	%
Insecurity	27	22	31	27	27
Negative aspects of change	19	15	22	14	29
Boring jobs/lack of responsibility	18	29	8	20	12
Temps don't fit in	18	18	18	17	20
Lack of fringe benefits	18	25	12	20	12
Low pay	10	11	9	12	5
Travel problems	4	3	5	3	7
Nothing disliked	3	-	5	3	2
Method of pay	2	5	-	3	-
Treatment by the agency	1	2	1	1	2
No answer	6	5	7	5	7

The single most common source of dissatisfaction is job insecurity. The uncertainty of regular employment constitutes the chief occupational hazard of this type of work, and it is likely to be particularly acute during the winter months. I asked my respondents whether they had ever been out of work for longer than a week because the agency was unable to find work for them. Exactly one-third said that this had happened to them. Since the majority of my respondents had not had a lengthy experience of temporary work, this finding probably underestimates the degree of vulnerability to periodic unemployment.

Of course, insecurity is not only an objective condition but a state of mind. One does not need to have experienced it in the former sense before it is felt to be a threat. Indeed, my own experience leads me to suppose that

it is the fear of insecurity rather than the direct experience of involuntary unemployment which colours the attitudes of temporary workers. More often than not, one cannot be sure that there will be a continuous supply of jobs from week to week. Normally details of one's next assignment are not available until only a couple of days before it is due to begin. In many cases, such details are sent by post. A postal delay can greatly exacerbate anxieties and what is worse, it can mean that a whole morning's pay may be lost due to the necessity to wait until the requisite information can be obtained. It is this kind of experience and the ever-present fear of unemployment, especially for the less well-qualified, which renders temping less than attractive for many women:

'...The insecurity. There is no guarantee that there will be work from one week to the next.'

'The possibility of there being no work.'

'The insecurity of the lack of work in winter.'

'Having to wait before knowing if and where I am working next week.'

'You could be out of work when you need the money most.'

The feeling of insecurity is not only promoted by the uncertain state of the market, but also by the possible implications of ill-health. As one ex-temp explained:

'You've got to be an optimist that you're going to get work the following week. You've got to be very optimistic and very healthy because if you suffer - if you're going to be ill every month - don't be a temp. Because you're going to lose all that money and eventually you'll step out of the job and someone else is going to be in there the next day.'

It is ironic to find that whereas the variety encountered in temporary work constitutes one of its major attractions, a substantial minority of temps cite change as a source of dissatisfaction. The following comments illustrate this point of view:

'It has an unsettling effect in that it is almost impossible to organise yourself or your life properly as you never really know where you will be from one week's end to the next and how long it is going to take you to get to and from work, etc. It encourages irresponsibility and a 'don't care' attitude.'

'Monday morning - arriving at a new place and feeling slightly nervous, wondering if you can manage the work satisfactorily.'

'Not knowing from one week to the next where one will be working, and, more important, not being able to get involved in one's work.'

The continuous change of working environment, and possibly work task as well, does place unusual strains on even the most adaptable of employees. The temp is constantly obliged to familiarise herself with the prevailing office procedure, and to establish some sort of relationship with co-workers and employers, in short, to display an unusually high degree of personal flexibility. What at first seems to be an enjoyable way of working may prove in the long term to be highly disagreeable. I asked my respondents to state how many different assignments they had been sent to by their present agency. Table 12 shows the resulting distribution:

TABLE 12. Number of assignments with the present agency

<u>Number of assignments</u>	<u>All temps (N = 139)</u>
	%
1 - 4	48
5 - 9	17
10 - 14	14
15 - 19	2
20 - 24	2
25+	14
No answer	3

When one relates these figures to available estimates of median length of tenure in temporary employment, it is apparent that the rate of change is considerable. Cannon and Brainin found that the median number of days worked was 19, whilst Moore found that the median length of tenure before termination was three months.(19) Even if one accepts the more generous estimate, it is clear that frequent change of location is a fact of life for the average temp. Evidently, this is a source of dissatisfaction for many of them. It is useful to cite in this context the conclusions reached by Cannon and Brainin concerning the outcome of frequent job change:

'If the changes in assignment are so quick that the individual is unable to cope with the environment, it is probable that he will quit...Although further research in this area is needed, the present

'analysis suggests that job rotation is associated with positive outcomes only when the method of implementation does not create an uncertain environment in which the individual cannot function effectively.' (30)

Another source of dissatisfaction was the nature of work temps are required to do. 18% of my respondents said that the aspect of temping which they liked least was the fact that jobs were often boring and/or lacked responsibility:

'Being asked to do inferior jobs with no responsibility.'

'Bosses keep the interesting jobs for permanent staff and don't like to show you anything new.'

'The jobs like typing long lists or just envelopes - a 'nothing' job, that, although important, doesn't take much ability.'

'Some establishments take on the involved duties themselves, thinking that really a half week stay by the temp is not worth explaining the 'ins and outs' to, and therefore you are left with the telephone calls and simple correspondence.'

'Not given sufficient responsibility sometimes.'

Indeed, as Table 13 shows, over half of my respondents considered that their skills were not being fully utilised.

TABLE 13. 'In general, how would you say that the jobs you get as a temp match your skills?' (fixed-choice question)

<u>Response</u>	<u>Temps (N = 139)</u> %
The jobs I get are too specialised for my skills	-
The jobs I get are right for my skills	44
The jobs I get do not require me to use my skills fully	54
No answer	2

My respondents did not feel, on the whole, that they were being under-utilised in the sense of having insufficient work to occupy one's time, as Table 14 shows.

See Table 14 on page 242.

TABLE 14. 'How do you feel about the amount of work you have to do on temporary jobs?' (fixed-choice question)

Response	Temps (N = 139) %
I am often given little or nothing to do, and am told to work slowly or look busy	11
Working at a reasonable rate, I usually find I am kept occupied most of the time	78
Bosses seem to have little idea of the amount of work that one person can do, and I am often very overworked	9
No answer	2

The experience of having too little work to occupy the time available thus emerges as unusual. However, being busy is by no means an insurance against monotony. Many of my respondents found that even a rapid succession of jobs was insufficient to prevent a strong sense of boredom from surfacing.

This finding may seem surprising since many of my respondents had chosen temping in order to escape from boredom in the permanent job and since so many felt that variety had proved to be one of the most appealing aspects of temporary work. Yet these comments draw attention to what is possibly the chief irony of temporary employment, namely, that it is more, rather than less likely to consist of jobs which are highly routine and repetitive, and which require little specialist knowledge. This conclusion was reached by Doran in his survey of private employment agencies:

'Temps usually do routine jobs which do not require much individual initiative and jobs which are not peculiar to any one employer.' (31)

The essence of the temp's market value is that her skills are immediately transferable. She is rarely required to stay at any one firm for a lengthy period and she is frequently sent to jobs that cannot be filled by any other means. Taken together, these circumstances militate against the possibility that individual assignments will be skilled, varied or responsible.

A substantial minority of my respondents mentioned the feeling of 'not fitting in' or of 'not belonging' as a cause for dissatisfaction:

'Sometimes feeling left out because I am in strange surroundings.'

'Not belonging, and knowing that you are regarded as temporary only.'

'Never belonging anywhere.'

'Some people will not accept strangers, especially temps.'

The feeling of detachment mentioned by many of my respondents is inherent in a mode of employment which is characterised by continuous change of location, and indeed, some agencies have turned it into a selling point:

'It is frequently more economical for a company to use - temporary help services than to call back former employees ...His or her skills are at maximum level. He or she is familiar with the new equipment currently in use in an office, and does not become a part of the social organisation of the office.' (32)

Whether or not the claims of agencies that social detachment promotes higher productivity on the part of the temp are justified, it is evident that some temps, at least, are not happy with this situation. Olesen and Katsuranis found a sense of isolation to be a common experience among their temporary respondents:

'Many interviewees reported that they found their work sites isolating and lonely. They were not welcomed into groups of permanent employees, and the attitudes of those employees were sometimes corrosive of the temporary's self-esteem.' (33)

Similar findings emerged from a survey conducted by a Danish temporary hire firm. It found that temps had a low opinion of themselves and suffered from a sense of not belonging.(34) Olesen and Katsuranis point out that these negative feelings may be balanced by a sense of pride in one's capabilities - a definition of self as an occupational troubleshooter - but they argue that the temp is nevertheless highly vulnerable to feelings of inferiority, not least because permanent staff distance themselves from, and devalue temps as a way of enhancing their own sense of worth.

Although this may well be true in certain instances, my own results do not suggest that temps are invariably met by a hostile reaction from an 'in-group' of permanent staff. As Table 15 shows, it is often the permanent staff who make friendly overtures:

TABLE 15. In getting to know the permanent people you work with, do you find.....? (fixed-choice question)

	<u>Temps</u> (N = 139) %
The permanents are friendly and make the approach to you	63
You have to make most of the effort in getting to know them	32
Neither you nor they are particularly interested in getting to know each other	5
No answer	1

Again, the majority of my respondents reported an accommodative posture on the part of permanent staff with regard to the execution of the work itself:

TABLE 16. Which of the following best describes your experiences when you first begin a new temporary assignment? (fixed-choice question)

	<u>Temps</u> (N = 139) %
You are expected to get on with the job and work things out for yourself	7
You are expected to be able to do the job, but if you need advice, people will help you out	54
Employers and co-workers are very helpful in showing you how the work is done	38
No answer	1

Undoubtedly, there are a great many temps who are made to feel like outcasts, but even in their case, the passage of time may soften the negative attitudes of permanent staff towards them. The response of permanent staff to the temporary is not standardised, but is likely to be coloured by such factors as, previous experience of temporary workers, the numbers of temps employed, the reasons why temps are hired by the employer, and the level of pay that the temp receives.

Equally dissatisfying was the lack of fringe benefits. In relation to this aspect, my own findings are at odds with those of a survey of temps conducted in 1970 by the Alfred Marks Organisation.(35) According to this survey, this was by far the greatest cause for dissatisfaction amongst temps. No less than 66% of the Marks' respondents cited this as the greatest single disadvantage attaching to temporary work. Insecurity was mentioned by only 18%. I feel that it is worth mentioning this point, since the Marks survey is the only one

I have been able to locate which actually asked office temps what they disliked about their work, and it is the area on which our findings differ most. It is very difficult indeed to account for this discrepancy, and, given the general lack of information in this field, one is reluctant to claim that one's own findings represent a closer approximation to reality. However, there is one body of data which would seem to lend greater support to the findings of the present research. Parker and Sirker asked a sample of persons to state what they considered to be the disadvantages attaching to temporary employment. The sample consisted of people who had had a temporary job, or had seriously considered taking one, or who considered that they might take one in the future, and the question related to all forms of temporary work. They found that the most frequently cited disadvantage was the lack of security. The second disadvantage, which came 'a long way behind', was not enough money. However, the lack of fringe benefits was felt to be a disadvantage by only a small minority.(36) These findings are, of course, not strictly comparable with data relating to agency temps in office work, but they certainly conflict sharply with the findings produced by the Marks survey. Whilst my own data suggests that the lack of fringe benefits is undoubtedly a prominent source of grievance among office temps, I consider that the Marks findings present a somewhat exaggerated impression of the extent to which financial considerations inform women's assessments of this method of employment.

Having said this, it is only fair to point out that 10% of my respondents cited low pay as a cause for complaint. If one considers this finding in conjunction with the previous one, then it is apparent that extrinsic characteristics of the job are perceived as important. One can even argue that the fear of insecurity is at base the fear of loss of earnings. However, it is important to recognise that certain intrinsic characteristics of temporary work are as much a cause for dissatisfaction as those which may be considered extrinsic.

As with the sources of satisfaction, an examination of the causes for dis-



satisfaction reveals certain variations according to domestic circumstances. Single women were much more likely to cite boredom and lack of responsibility as a cause for complaint than married women and women with dependent children. This is consistent with the earlier finding that single women are more likely to have entered temping precisely in order to escape these problems. To the extent that this expectation is not met we would expect this consideration to loom large in the catalogue of complaints cited by single women. Married women and those with dependent children appear to be more concerned about the problems of insecurity and the negative consequences of continuous change. This finding is consistent with the fact that these women are more likely to have entered temporary employment simply because they want to work. Temping has not been chosen mainly because of its special characteristic of continuous job rotation, but because it is a solution to the problem of reconciling home and work demands. The setback to one's intentions to escape the home environment represented by a hiatus in the supply of jobs must surely be experienced as something of a disappointment by these women.

It is worth noting that there is considerably less agreement among temps as to what constitutes its chief disadvantages than there is over the matter of its attractions. Given the fact that the disagreeable side of temporary work is so multi-faceted, it is perhaps not surprising that so few women become permanent temps.

Finally, it is appropriate to examine the impact of the experience of temping on my respondents' preferred mode of employment. As Table 17 shows, there was a fairly even split between those who preferred temporary work and those who preferred permanent work, although once again, some variation is evident according to domestic circumstances.

See Table 17 on page 246.

TABLE 17. On the whole which do you prefer -- permanent work or temporary work?

<u>Response</u>	<u>All temps</u>	<u>Single temps</u>	<u>Married temps</u>	<u>Temps without dependent children</u>	<u>Temps with dependent children</u>
N =	139	65	74	78	41
	%	%	%	%	%
Permanent	49	46	51	44	61
Temporary	47	46	47	52	34
Like both	3	5	1	3	2
No answer	2	3	-	1	2

Among those who said that they preferred permanent work, the three most frequently cited reasons for their choice were as follows: greater job security and a regular pay packet, mentioned by 37%; a preference for being more involved with one's work and being able to progress, 37%; and a desire to be settled, 31%. No other single reason came anywhere near to approaching these factors in importance. The importance of fringe benefits in fourth position, mentioned by 13%, was very much an also-ran in the hierarchy of preference.

Among those who said that they preferred temporary work, the three main reasons were as follows: variety and change, 57%; flexible conditions, 45%; the opportunity to meet more people, 37%. Again, these three reasons far outweighed any others in importance. A preference for having no ties and a feeling of freedom was mentioned by 18%. It is interesting to note that the feature of meeting people appears in this context despite the fact that it does not constitute an important reason for going into temporary work, nor does it rank as a major satisfaction. It does appear to have a fairly strong bearing, however, on one's assessment of the relative advantages of the two modes of employment. This finding draws attention once again to the fact that the priorities attached to work should not be regarded either as static or uni-dimensional.

b. The experience of temporary work - participant observation

In the following section I am concerned to illustrate and elaborate some of the general findings noted above by offering an account of my own experiences of temporary work during a three month period of participant observation. Before

doing so, I wish to emphasise very strongly that I am confident that the particular assignment that I undertook was more representative of the disadvantages of temping than the advantages. Having had a great deal of experience as a temp, albeit in a student capacity, I am very much aware of the potential for satisfaction in temporary work. One hopes that this side of the coin has been fairly represented in the foregoing discussion. In fairness to myself, I should point out that it was not my original intention to spend the whole period in one firm. Unfortunately, my proposed strategy to spend some time in several jobs was thwarted by my agency's sudden and belated refusal to assist in its realisation. Consequently, I was obliged to make the best of the opportunities available, which meant spending the entire time in one location. What follows, therefore, should not be regarded necessarily as a typical experience, but rather as one person's encounter with some of the experiences which promote discontent and most probably, a decision to return to permanent work.

Three days after I enrolled at the agency, an assistant telephoned to say that they had found me work as a clerk. Thus it was that I found myself at the offices of the XYZ Credit Company, located a short distance from the centre of Middletown, one of the largest cities in the country. Since the office was situated very conveniently on the main bus route to Middletown from my home, I assumed that the agency had attempted to accommodate me with respect to travelling. However, I was obliged to question this assumption later, when several temps grumbled to me about the impossible journeys which they had to make from their homes, some of them having to get up at 6.30 a.m. in order to arrive at work by 9.00 a.m. Perhaps I had just been lucky.

The firm occupied eight floors of a large, modern office block. The resemblance between one floor and another, however, extended only to the shape. The locus of higher management was adorned by wall-to-wall carpets and elegant furnishings, that of lower management by fairly stylish fittings and bright paintwork, whereas the filing department, where I was to be employed, was a barren

wasteland of rickety chairs and tables, with not so much as a calendar to grace the fading, dirty walls. This enormous room was dominated by tall, musty filing cabinets which effectively prevented the sunshine from entering. Although much recent sociology has discredited the view held by early occupational psychologists that work environment plays an important part in determining work attitudes, it is hard, in retrospect, to dismiss that drab, dingy office as an irrelevance.

I arrived in this department after having been given directions by the receptionist, and was quite surprised to find that my presence went completely unacknowledged. After standing about in front of the supervisor's desk for several minutes without being able to attract her attention, I finally decided to take the initiative and informed one of the clerks that I had arrived. At last I was introduced to the supervisor, who gave me a very brief description of the work, which was to sort pieces of paper (correspondence) into some kind of order ready for filing into 'bays' or open filing cabinets. The filing system was, in fact, highly complicated, and, unknown to myself at the time, I proceeded to sort the correspondence quite incorrectly. Being used to a measure of explanation when first beginning a temporary job, I was very surprised at the whole attitude - a total lack of interest in who I was, and an equally noticeable lack of interest in showing me how to do the work. When employers fail to give temporary employees an adequate understanding of the work routine, it may be because they assume familiarity with the type of work. They do not expect to have to give lengthy training programmes, and in any case, instruction is an expensive commodity. In this case, it eventually became clear to me that the indifferent attitude had arisen because of the massive turnover of temps in the office, and all had grown weary of explaining the office system over and over again. For the same reason, a new face in the workplace was no source of interest but a commonplace. At this stage I was unable to distinguish between temps and permanents, but all were equally uninterested in my presence. Whilst it is easy, and indeed, only fair to sympathise with this attitude, it was then very hard to settle down during those first few days, when nobody spoke to you, or even

acknowledged your presence with a blank stare. Even the sociologist, in her capacity as a participant-observer, is not immune to the chill and loneliness of an indifferent environment.

Since the element of socialising was completely absent from my first week in the office, there was little else to do but concentrate on the work in hand. Rather than consider the nature of this particular work in isolation, I feel it is necessary to mention some aspects of filing in general, lest the reader feel that I am painting an unduly depressing picture of this one situation. Filing can be thought of as the office equivalent of unskilled manual labour. Apart from literacy and a degree of numeracy, no qualification is necessary for the post of filing clerk. Usually, however, filing is one part of a wider field of activity in an office, so that the personal secretary may be found filing away the boss's correspondence before arranging his appointments, or the clerk-typist may file invoices in a small cabinet before typing orders. Presumably the degree to which filing is the sole occupation of an employee is a function of the size of the organisation. In the case of a small or medium-sized office, filing is one of many tasks, and frequently affords the opportunity to inject a little of one's own personality into the system, but in the case of the large, complex organisation such as the one where I now found myself, the division of labour is such that filing becomes a total occupation, and time-and-motion experts have rigidly excluded the possibility of personalising the system. From the employer's point of view, the latter situation is ideal for the employment of temporary staff, since the work is standardised and requires no special knowledge, nor any idea of how the firm works as a whole.

In the small office, even though it means spending some time in getting to know the complexities of the firm as a total system, and in finding out who its personnel are, at least the clerk may ultimately gain a conception of how her work fits into the whole. In the case under study, however, I am tempted to use the term 'alienation' to describe a situation where the worker was but a cog in a wheel, performing a standardised task, and lacking any understanding

of how that task meshed with the rest of the organisation.

Thus, with minimal understanding of the filing system, and no idea whatsoever of the nature or functioning of the company, I struggled to master the process of filing into bays. This bleak situation was not helped by the fact that the filing system contained many anomalies which led to a great deal of misfiling, and consequently made the task even more difficult. Physically, the work was very tiring since it involved reaching up to very high shelves and crouching very low in order to reach the bottom ones. Had I not been very tall, it could have been much worse, for many girls had to make use of the solitary stool in order to file in the top shelves. Sitting on the floor proved to be one of the least tedious ways of performing the job, though at great peril to one's tights, and on one occasion resulted in my having to have a number of large splinters removed from my bottom by a nurse. It would be hard to overstate the dreadful conditions of the work - dirt, splinters, laddered tights, aching backs and feet - all were part and parcel of this tedious occupation. On top of all this, there was not even the customary satisfaction of getting through the work because not only was there no end to the backlog of filing, but in addition, it was impossible to file a great deal of it on account of the chaos and disorder in the bays.

In view of the picture painted above, it is perhaps not surprising that most of the other temps with whom I worked were anxious to find alternative employment with the agency. Of the total of seven temps who were employed by this firm when I began the period of participant observation, only two made no attempt to secure a transfer, and both were students. While both of them did not think that the job was very interesting and would have preferred to move, they told me that they were more concerned to have a job for the duration of the summer in order to save some money. Among the other temps, however, there was a general desire for a different assignment. The degree of consensus regarding the unsatisfying nature of the work in hand is particularly interesting when one considers

that these temps were highly diversified in terms of social background, domestic circumstances and previous work experience.

Pat, for example, was the most outgoing of all the temps. She was 22, single, and had worked for the agency for four months. She had obtained R.S.A. qualifications at school and had subsequently undertaken training as a G.P.O. telephonist. She told me that she was very disillusioned with temporary work. She had given up a permanent job as a telephonist/receptionist in the hope of finding, as she put it, 'a more fulfilling job', and one which provided the chance to meet a greater variety of people. As it had turned out, she had been placed in what she considered to be very boring jobs, none of which matched her qualifications. She had had four placements altogether, three of which involved routine clerical work, and on one occasion, she had even been sent to man the turnstiles at the city zoo. It had also been impossible to form lasting friendships. Consequently, she had requested a transfer from the agency on each assignment. Her attitude to work ('I find out how much the permanents are getting paid then I evaluate how much I should do') was light years away from the image of the temp presented by the agency in its 'Brochure for Business Executives':

'Temporary employee productivity is higher than average. In any analysis of the economics of using temporary workers, it is necessary to take into account the productivity of (our) employees versus the permanent staff. It is difficult to formulate any overall conclusions on this subject because of variations in the degree of performance. However, under measurable workloads, (our) employees generally will have higher productivity. The reason for this can be found in the fact that (our) employees approach work as 'project specialists', with instructions to complete the job as quickly as possible. This is enhanced by the fact that (our) employee is not subject to the accumulated distractions that affect the permanent staff.' (37)

As far as the present job was concerned, Pat was extremely dissatisfied, but thought that she might as well stay there since she had made arrangements to emigrate in three months' time. Twice, however, out of desperation, she rang the agency in the hope that she might find work as a telephonist.

Susan who was 21 and single, had been doing temporary work for only one week. She had become a temp so that she could look around for a more interesting permanent job than she had formerly been used to. One of her difficulties was

that she had no formal qualifications and so the field was 'rather limited'.

She believed that temp work might prove to be rather interesting since it implied a variety of places to work, but apart from this, she could see no real advantages. Permanent work, she felt, was far more secure, and there was the additional benefit of paid holidays. She thought that the present job was very boring but expressed the view that it might improve. As the time passed, however, this was not to be, and she grew increasingly concerned to find an alternative assignment.

Jean, who was 19, was married with a very young child. She had abandoned a permanent job because it had been so boring and monotonous, and hoped that temping would offer greater variety and a larger pay-packet. In addition, her child was going to a day-nursery, and she told me that temporary work meant that she could work to suit her domestic commitments. The only disadvantage she could think of was the insecurity. Notwithstanding the premium placed on secure employment, she, too, asked the agency to move her.

Although, as these three examples illustrate, the temps had very diverse pre-histories before coming to this company, as well as differing expectations from temporary work, a common attitude prevailed. This was a profoundly negative orientation to this particular job, which found expression in numerous calls to the agency requesting a transfer. In every case, it was not so much the nature of the social relationships at work (or rather, the lack of them) which prompted this action, but the nature of the actual work. For myself, I know that had I not been engaged in research, student or not, I would undoubtedly have asked for a transfer at the end of the very first week.

During the first month of the study, I learnt for certain of at least seven individuals who had sought alternative employment from the agency. Transfers, however, were not forthcoming. All those who applied for a different job were initially told that it was impossible and that they should try again after a week. Of those who asked for a transfer, two had no success at all, two had to wait three weeks, and three found their own means of escape. In this workplace, therefore, the 'freedom' of the temp was very much attenuated. As the



temp season (which runs from early May to late September, coinciding with the holiday period) drew to a close, the hopes of a transfer grew slimmer and slimmer, and the agency informed us that the only alternative to remaining there was unemployment.

However bad the actual market situation might really have been, all were united in the belief that there were jobs, but that the agency was not really interested in our 'welfare'. Several commented that when they had first enrolled they had been impressed by the warm reception and the optimistic forecasts of interesting work, but that this apparent concern had seemed to disappear very rapidly.

It was mainly the common discontent with the work and with the agency that brought the temps together. It was at least food for conversation in a situation which otherwise hindered our chances of communication. We came together at last mainly through the efforts of Pat to promote conversation about our misfortunes. Having once identified with each other in our mutual loathing of the work, we gradually became more friendly, but we nevertheless continued to pursue escape strategies on an individual basis.

In fact, when I questioned them in a general way about their views concerning the ways in which workers might effect improvements in their wages and working conditions, they all tended to adopt the traditional white-collar line that individual negotiation with employers was the most appropriate strategy. Their confidence in the efficacy of this method was apparently not shaken by the realities of the present situation.

It might seem from the above account that the temporary office worker, at least in the lower grades of this type of employment, is easily dissatisfied and unwilling to give a job a chance. Apart from the fact that the present study is far too limited to warrant generalisations of this kind, such a judgment would be unsatisfactory on the grounds that it bordered on the psychologistic. It seems more likely that the total preoccupation with obtaining a transfer among these girls was due to the particularly unpleasant nature of the work at this

company. For even those who were merely filling in before going abroad or before taking up a permanent position made some attempt to escape. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that their discontent was the product of frustrated expectations from temporary work as the key to freedom, interest and variety, and indeed, from office work in general. The discrepancy between what a girl is sometimes led to expect from her education and what she may actually find in the way of employment opportunities was all too clearly highlighted in the dusty environs of the XYZ company's filing department.

The fifteen permanent staff who were employed in the filing department were a much more homogeneous collectivity than the temporary staff. The average age was approximately eighteen, and for many this had been their only job since leaving school. Within this group, however, it was possible to identify one clear-cut division. Although everyone performed more or less the same tasks, namely, sorting and filing, some girls had been charged with the responsibility of filing correspondence relating to particular customers. These girls sat at their own desk while most of the others sat at another desk a few feet away. The permanent staff, therefore, fell into two work groupings and it was apparent that this division extended beyond the mere arrangement of work duties and seating facilities. For, throughout my period of observation, it was clear that the girls were very friendly towards those sitting at their own table and somewhat hostile towards those sitting elsewhere. This social division was curiously demonstrated when two of the girls got married in the same week, one from each group. It is normal practice in offices of this kind for a number of festivities to be held on the afternoon preceding the great event, and which include, festooning the future bride's coat with toilet rolls and newspaper cuttings selected for their relevance to post-nuptial activities; giving cards and presents; and seeing the week out with a glass or two of sherry. These various celebrations were held as usual in this office, but although one might have supposed that all the permanent staff would get together and toast the two brides-to-be as one collectivity, this was not to be. Separated by a distance

of only six feet, the two groups sat resolutely at their respective tables and held two different 'stag parties'. The only occasion on which a sense of unity was generated amongst the permanent staff was when news was received one morning that one of their number had sustained some minor injuries in a car accident and had been detained in hospital. Great concern was expressed by all the girls, irrespective of where they sat.

All the permanent girls were united in their expressed dislike of their work and frequently complained aloud with such comments as 'I'm screaming with boredom' and 'Why do I do it?'. At the end of the day there was always a stampede towards the lifts and they very seldom worked overtime. On one occasion, the supervisor announced that she required volunteers for overtime on Saturday mornings. The response was a loud chorus of groans, and one girl shouted out to the supervisor:

'If you spent seven hours at this all day, would you want to do any more?'

Given this widespread dissatisfaction with the job, it was quite puzzling to me that they nevertheless remained with the firm and did not make any serious attempts to find alternative employment. When it is considered that many of them had been with the firm for a number of years, one, indeed, having been there for nine years, one is obliged to consider what it was that kept them there, especially since they were unequivocal in the dislike of the work. One of the reasons appeared to be that they had some interest in maintaining their social relationships at work. Whereas the temps were bound together by nothing more than a mutual distaste for the job, the permanent staff had clearly formed friendships amongst themselves, and lest it should be supposed that I am merely imposing categories upon the relationships which I observed, it should be pointed out that this was the reason which they themselves gave for remaining with the firm. One of the permanent staff told me that she 'didn't think you would find a friendlier place'. Although this attitude could be regarded as a rationalisation, a product of an inability to obtain alternative work, the importance of the social ambience of the workplace, albeit bifurcated, did appear to be quite

marked. Nearly all the girls went out with others from the office in the evenings either to discotheques, parties or pubs, whereas none of the temps mingled after hours. The permanent staff wore all their new clothes to the office, despite the hazards of dirt and sharp edges on the filing cabinets. Since there were no men in the office, it was only possible to conclude that either the permanent staff were exceptionally concerned about their appearance, or that they were seeking the approbation of those who constituted the focus of their work and social life.

Whereas for most of the permanent girls, social life was the office, the temporaries, with the exception of the young girl who had to care for a small child, all led active social lives beyond, and divorced from, the workplace. To some extent, work was viewed rather instrumentally as a means of financing a full social calendar. Social life at work was regarded as little more than a fringe benefit. Given this attitude, and the fact that in any case, friendships formed at work tend to be highly transitory for the temp due to the constant change of workplace, it is perhaps not surprising that the nature of the work tended to assume a more central importance in the minds of the temps at the XYZ company.

Apart from the apparent concern to maintain their friendships, another reason for staying among permanents was the limited field of opportunities available to them. None of the girls had typing or secretarial qualifications, and none had any 'O' levels. Consequently, the only jobs for which they could apply were likely to be much the same as the present one, and possibly lacking the 'friendly atmosphere'. One girl who made the loudest noises when it came to criticising the work told me that she would like to change but that there were never any jobs in the paper.

A comparison of the attitudes and responses towards the nature of this job among the permanent and temporary staff points strongly towards the conclusion that a lack of marketable skills is decisive in governing responses to an unsatisfying work situation. In contrast to the permanent staff, all but two of the

temps had some educational qualifications, ranging from C.S.E. to 'A' level. In addition, they had had more experience of different types of office work. In objective terms, then, and also in terms of their own subjective assessments, the temps were not trapped by circumstance. Their immediate concern was to extricate themselves from this situation. In contrast, the permanent staff had resigned themselves to their lot and looked towards their companions to provide interest and enjoyment.

Over the course of several weeks, those temporaries who had not sought, or who had failed to secure a transfer, became something of a clique within the office, setting themselves apart from the permanent staff and, to some extent, newly arrived temps. In fact, the arrival of a new temp was not greeted with any enthusiasm or even comment. Whereas I had once felt so badly about this very indifference, I now found that I was displaying it myself - the feeling that one had seen it all before. The news of a transfer was received with a mixture of jealousy and that type of cautious congratulation that must have accompanied an escapee from a P.O.W. camp during the war. Out of the frying pan...?

The detachment from the permanents was to a large extent a product of the hostility which they expressed towards us. Not only were individual temps the butt of contemptuous and often bitchy remarks made by the permanents, but the whole group of us were sometimes subject to generalised insults and cool behaviour. Temps were often discussed by the permanent staff. This usually happened when all the temps had left at 4.30 p.m. I alone always stayed on until 5.00 p.m. as this suited me better than working a half-hour lunch and leaving early. On one occasion a discussion centred on the issue of temps' ability to enjoy flexible hours, and considerable disapproval was expressed. On another occasion, the view was put forward that temps did not bother to clear up their desks, and that they, the permanent staff, got all the blame. If these views were openly expressed in my presence, one wonders what was said when no temps at all were present.

I do not consider that antagonism is a necessary feature of the relationships between permanent staff and temporaries, and indeed, the results of my survey suggest that mutual adjustment is more typical. In the XYZ filing department, however, the expression of ill-feeling towards temps most probably acted as a safety valve for the accumulated discontent among the permanents. In the social situation of the office, temps functioned as convenient scapegoats. I found however that hostility towards oneself as an individual tended to diminish with the passage of time. In my early relations with the permanent staff I had to make practically all the effort in engineering any communication. Only one or two initiated conversations with me, while most of them confined their communications with me to suspicious stares. By the time I left, however, I felt that I knew them almost as well as the temps - the distinction having been considerably blurred by time and familiarity. However, it took many weeks before the ice began to thaw in our communications, and in the normal course of events time is not on the side of the temp. She is usually despatched to another assignment before the process of adjustment can begin.

A description of the office would not be complete without reference to the supervisor. Her authoritative manner only served to exacerbate our discontent with the work. She was particularly displeased with the temps' level of productivity. All work had to be recorded on work-sheets - not only the number of files removed or replaced, or the pieces of paper filed away, but even the number of times one answered the telephone, in addition to a host of other minor duties. Most of the permanent staff admitted to me that they misrepresented their entries by anything up to 200%. This was possible because there was no way of actually checking the returns. The temps, however, either did not bother to misrepresent their productivity, or the thought had not occurred to them. Consequently, our productivity appeared to fall far short of that of the permanent staff. The supervisor did not fail to bring this to our attention. This circumstance exemplifies the problems temps experience in negotiating the prevailing work norms of the office. Although, as we have seen, the opportunity to remain relatively

detached from existing work routines appeals to many temps, this lack of integration can lead to confusion and ill-feeling.

In view of the supervisor's dissatisfaction with the work output of the temps and the uneasy relationship between permanents and temporaries, it is perhaps surprising that this firm was disposed to hire temps at all. During my stay at the XYZ company, the number of temps never fell below five, and at one stage, there was a total of ten. After making some discreet enquiries among the permanents I learnt that the hire of temps was part of a strategy to reduce the number of permanent staff without making anyone redundant. However, the volume of work greatly exceeded the combined productivity of temps and permanents and one is at a loss to decide why there should have been a desire to reduce an already inadequate staff.

To summarise, the filing department of the XYZ company affords some insight into the nature of temporary work, and in particular, its less appealing characteristics. The intolerable nature of the work was made worse by the unpleasant relationships with the permanent staff. The constantly changing composition of the temporary force prevented lasting relationships among them from developing, and thus sociability was at a minimum. Only those temps who had remained at the office for a period of over four weeks or so could be described as relatively 'integrated'. This meant, that in spite of the interpretation placed upon the work sheet returns, the productivity of the temps was high - there being no social life to distract one from the work at hand. In the case of the temps at this company the claims of the agencies concerning their staff's productivity were justified, but at the expense of any feeling of companionship. High turnover among temps was the inevitable consequence of this nexus of circumstances, and this in turn only served to promote ill-feeling towards the temps and a marked reluctance to spend time in familiarising them with either the routines of the office or its personnel. My observations also throw some light on the reasons why some girls seek to escape from an oppressive work situation and others become resigned. In this case, an important determinant of attitudes was one's actual

or believed capacity to obtain something better.

#### 4. Attitudes Towards Future Employment

In the previous two sections I have endeavoured to present an insight into the characteristics of temporary office workers, their reasons for entering this type of employment and the experience of temping. Finally, I shall present some of the findings concerning my respondents' priorities for the future. I am unable to give any account of the future path taken by my respondents since I did not follow up the original questionnaire. However, I am able to show that a desire for interesting and varied work remains a most important consideration.

I asked my respondents to state the relative importance of a number of job characteristics in governing decisions about future employment.

Table 18 shows the pattern of responses.

TABLE 18. If you were looking for a job, how important would the following be to you?

<u>Job characteristic</u>	<u>All Temps (N = 139)</u>			
	<u>Very important</u>	<u>Important</u>	<u>Not Important</u>	<u>N.A.</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Varied and interesting work	70	25	2	4
Pleasant people to work with	56	41	-	3
Good bosses	54	41	3	2
Personal freedom	39	45	12	5
Pay	35	58	4	4
Being given responsibility	33	42	23	2
General working conditions	26	65	6	4
Meeting people through work	24	40	35	2
Good holidays	22	56	18	4
Chances of promotion	22	36	39	4
Secure employment	21	35	40	5
Being part of a team	15	32	49	4

The responses have to be looked at as a whole because there are a number of job characteristics which, although ranking low in terms of being very important, nevertheless emerge as important secondary considerations. This applies in particular to pay, holidays and general working conditions. It is interesting to find that the nature of work relationships, both with colleagues and with



bosses was considered to be important by everyone who was prepared to comment. However, since I found no significant relation between marital status and the importance attached to relationships at work, this finding discredits the idea that married women differ from other female workers in the emphasis placed on sociability. In fact, married women differed very little from other respondents in terms of their attitudes towards future employment. There was a significant difference between married and single women in their evaluation of varied and interesting work. Whereas 80% of the latter rated this as very important, only 60% of the former did so. Nevertheless, for both groups this characteristic was the one most frequently named as very important. Married and single women also differed significantly in terms of the importance placed on personal freedom and chances of promotion. In relation to both factors, a higher proportion of single women than married women named these as important or very important. Just over half of the married women considered that chances of promotion were not important, whilst only a quarter of single women shared this view. Personal freedom was rated not important by only 3% of single temps, but by 19% of married temps. The overall picture, however, does more to confirm the similarities rather than the dissimilarities of attitudes between married and single women. Such differences as did exist were ones of degree rather than of sharp polarisation.

An interesting finding is the relatively low importance placed on secure employment especially in view of the fact that this consideration weighed so heavily in my respondents' assessment of temporary work. It may be suggested that this factor is not a major determinant of job choice since it can normally be taken for granted in the field of office work. It is only temporary office work which renders women vulnerable to periodic unemployment and thus more aware of the problem of insecurity. Conversely, such factors as varied and interesting work, pleasant workmates and good employers and pay cannot be assumed to characterise any future job. Consequently, these characteristics emerge as the principal criteria according to which women discriminate between the jobs available.

Apart from the differences of emphasis between married and single women noted above, there were very few items in relation to which a woman's social circumstances were predictive of attitudes. Neither age nor responsibility for dependent children were significantly correlated with the importance attached to the various job attributes. Women in the North-East were less inclined than those elsewhere to place importance on personal freedom, but this probably reflects the fact that they were more likely to be married and, perhaps, that this would be considered something of a luxury in the more unfavourable economic situation of this area. The emphasis placed on secure employment was significantly associated both with terminal education age and social class. Those rating this factor very important were more likely to come from middle-class backgrounds and to have left school beyond the minimum leaving age. It is possible to interpret this as indicative of a heightened degree of career-mindedness amongst those with this type of background. However, I am reluctant to place too much stress on the influence of class origins and educational experience in view of the relative unimportance of these factors in governing attitudes towards the other aspects of employment.

The finding which does deserve special emphasis, in my opinion, is the remarkable consensus about the importance of varied and interesting work. Although a woman may be obliged to compromise her preferences because of the nature of her domestic circumstances and the intransigency of employers, there can be little doubt that a desire for intrinsic job satisfaction informs the attitudes of a great many women, irrespective of their out-of-work circumstances.

Finally, it remains to be said that the vast majority of my respondents declared a preference for a working life rather than a purely domestic existence. I asked them to state what they would do if they inherited an income which was sufficiently large to enable them to stop working altogether. Table 19 shows the pattern of replies.

See Table 19 on page 264.

TABLE 19. If you inherited some money and had enough to live on without working, would you want to work anyway?

<u>Nature of responses</u>	<u>All temps</u> (N = 139)
	%
Yes, because I would be dissatisfied/ bored otherwise	68
Yes, but I would do voluntary work	8
Yes - no reason given	3
No - I would travel/spend my money	9
No - I would enjoy my leisure	5
No - because I would prefer to be at home with my family	2
No - no reason given	4

A number of writers have asserted that women, especially married ones, do not regard work as an important focus of their existence. In their view, single women tolerate it until they have achieved their main ambition of securing a marriage partner, while married women return to work mainly in order to materially enhance their domestic environment. In view of the dispiriting nature of the broad range of economic opportunities available to women, such responses are certainly credible. However, the findings shown above demonstrate that such attitudes are neither universal nor inevitable. It should also be noted that marital status was not predictive of the anticipated response to an inheritance. The responses of women with dependent children did differ significantly from those of other women, but this was mainly in terms of the likelihood of doing voluntary work. They were no more likely to cease work altogether than women without dependent children.

From the replies given to my question it was evident that the majority of married women and single women alike viewed a purely domestic existence as unsatisfying:

'Having been at home with two children for some years one gets rather closed in, and your life tends to revolve round home and children. Going out to work helps your outlook on things to broaden, as well as the financial gains. So anything that helps your life brighten can only be passed on to your immediate family.'

'Life would be so boring just sitting or even doing the household chores and you would miss the company terribly.'

'As I am a widow and my two children are away at boarding school for 36 weeks of the year, I need a job to give life some purpose and in order to get out and meet people.'

'Work relieves boredom - keeps one on their toes with regard to things going on around the world and keeps your brain active.'

Most of those who stated that they would give up work intended to make full use of the opportunities afforded by a combination of wealth and leisure:

'After having gone out to work for the last 22 years I can't think of anything more wonderful than staying at home and having time to do all the things I should like to do.'

'I'd much rather travel the world, learn as much as possible about other cultures, and perhaps even write a book. I have already done a bit of travelling and the 'bug' has bitten deep.'

'There are so many things I want to do and I begrudge any time spent at work.'

Those who stated that they would give up work in order to concentrate on a more conventional domestic lifestyle were very few and far between:

'Having achieved quite a good position with a very good salary, my only ambition now is to be a full-time wife and mother.'

'I prefer being home, looking after my husband and baby.'

Since this question was of course entirely hypothetical, perhaps one should be cautious in attaching too much significance to the replies. Moreover, one must remember that the group included a large number of women who had sought work in spite of certain domestic commitments. To this extent, the majority preference for a continuing working life is not altogether surprising. At the same time, one is obliged to recognise that financial considerations do not appear to be the most fundamental determinant of whether or not a woman seeks gainful employment. A more important consideration is the relative satisfactions thought to derive from domesticity or from work.

The findings deriving from my questionnaire and participant observation enable one to form a picture of the type of person who enters temporary office employment, the reasons for doing so, and the nature of temporary employment itself. It is evident that the popular assumptions about office temps bear little relation to the facts. There is no reason to suppose that they are mainly women, who, because of sheer incompetence, would be unable to find work by any other means. In the case of my respondents, problems in finding alternative employment were more clearly related to difficulties associated with domestic responsibilities than to any discernible lack of skill. Nor are temps primarily motivated by a desire for wage maximisation. In the long term the economic situation of the temp is likely to be worse than that of the permanent office worker. Even in the short term, the advantage of high hourly rates may be offset by short spells of unemployment. In view of these circumstances, plus the fact that few temps state that the desire for better pay is of major significance, it seems quite legitimate to discard the notion that the temp is simply a woman possessed by the demon of avarice. Nor is there any support here for the idea that temping attracts women who wish to increase the number of their acquaintances, male or otherwise. My respondents placed importance on good working relationships and some felt that temporary work was to be preferred to permanent work because of the greater opportunities to meet people, but on the whole, the social spin-off from temporary work is at most only a secondary consideration.

I have also shown that the work situation of the temp is characterised by many paradoxes. Firstly, while the work is likely to offer more variety than permanent employment, it is likely to consist of tasks which are more repetitive. Secondly, while the temp is less bound by prevailing work norms in the place of employment, this very detachment may promote an uncomfortable sense of isolation. Thirdly, while the opportunities for mobility foster a heightened sense of control over the work situation, the unpredictable character of these opportunities and the possibility of unemployment

promote feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. Thus, while in certain respects the temp appears to have broken free from the constraints encountered in the permanent sector, her own work situation presents an alternative set of limiting features. The paradoxical character of temporary work is also emphasised in Olesen and Katsuranis' study of temps. The authors conclude that:

'The means of establishing a sense of self as a worker was both enhanced and stunted in the temporary world.' (38)

My results also suggest that the image of temporary work propagated by agency advertising does not always conform to the reality of temping. Whilst the themes of varied and interesting work; work matched to the skills of the temp; and a constant supply of suitable and attractive jobs are those most frequently found in the advertisements, many of my respondents' expectations in these respects had not been fulfilled. Even when some expectations had been met, there remained residual sources of grievance.

It is a matter for conjecture as to whether or not the agencies themselves could take steps to remove the many sources of dissatisfaction, thus reducing the numbers of women who quit temping in favour of permanent work. Certainly, they would appear to have little control over the major source of dissatisfaction, insecurity. This derives in the main from fluctuations in the demand for temporary office workers and to a lesser extent from the sheer number of agencies. Agencies could of course alleviate this problem by the provision of compensation for unemployment, but few choose to do so. The rarity of such provision is quite easily explained. The cost of compensation would almost certainly have to be passed on to the client firm, in the form of higher rates for temp hire. This provision would thus render the temp a very expensive commodity indeed and in all probability, would lead to a major reduction in demand. However, some firms in this country do provide compensation for unemployment, usually after a qualifying period of 13 weeks or thereabouts. Compensation is actually obligatory in a number of European

countries, including France. In some countries, financial security is effected through an assurance scheme to which both temps and temporary hire firms contribute. Yet, even if it were possible to guarantee financial security for the temp it is doubtful whether this would be sufficient to eliminate the feelings of uncertainty experienced by many temporary workers. For those who view work as something more than a source of income, the knowledge that one is financially secure is unlikely to compensate for the uncertainty of employment itself. It is this latter attribute of temporary work which is likely to remain, irrespective of the steps taken by agencies to improve the material situation of their employees. The agencies can also do little to remove the dissatisfaction which is sometimes felt as a result of continuous change. This, and the widespread discontentment with the job content of temporary assignments derive from the inherent characteristics of temporary employment rather than from any action or lack of it on the part of the agencies. It may be surmised, however, that the frequent short-fall between expectations from temporary work and the actual experience of temporary work could be reduced if the agencies were less prone to over-advertise and over-glamourise the options available.

Finally, I wish to identify some of the more general issues arising from this account of women in temporary clerical employment. Firstly, it is evident that domestic circumstances represent only part of the explanation for a woman's occupational choice and responses to her work situation. Given the current lack of state nursery facilities, creches at the workplace, and the slow introduction of flexitime, a woman's domestic responsibilities inevitably set limits to the range of jobs to which she may reasonably aspire. Similarly, it is also evident that a great many women accept that their involvement in the world of gainful employment should be geared to the needs of children and husbands. Consequently, it would be quite erroneous to dismiss domestic circumstances as irrelevant to the study of women's attitudes to employment. However, while out-of-work circumstances do have a bearing

on occupational choice, and while they may continue to colour responses to the experience of work itself, it must be recognised that the objective conditions of the work in hand represent an autonomous influence on job attitudes. This is suggested by the lack of any sharp discontinuities between married and single women in their assessment of both the advantages and disadvantages of temporary office employment. Secondly, it is evident that the study of women's occupational choices and responses to work must take into account the market situation of the women concerned. The totality of one's marketable skills, including education, training and experience, plus the demand for those skills, have an important bearing on whether or not an occupational choice is merely a compromise, or represents a positive attempt to indulge one's preferences. The issue of market situation is also relevant for an understanding of the way women respond to their jobs. As we have seen, whilst a buoyant demand for white-collar labour makes temporary employment possible, fluctuations in that demand render it inherently insecure. The fear of periodic unemployment may be so great that women feel obliged to leave an otherwise enjoyable mode of work. In this way, shifts in the priorities attached to work may be necessitated by an unfavourable market situation.

Taken together, these two propositions suggest that the study of women's attitudes towards work should be both eclectic and longitudinal. The present study has endeavoured to meet the first criterion, although it falls short of the second requirement since changes in my respondents' attitudes were only ascertained by the device of retrospective questions included in the questionnaire. Ideally, the sociologist should investigate and chart shifts in the priorities attached to work as they actually occur. Nevertheless, the use of the more limited technique has served to illustrate the importance of a diachronic approach.

The empirical foundations upon which my conclusions are based are unlikely to satisfy those who believe that scientific rigour should be the guiding



principle for sociological research. However, it is not always the case that the most interesting areas for investigation are amenable to the application of this principle. Furthermore, it may happen that unexpected contingencies can oblige the sociologist to compromise his or her research strategies, no matter how rigorous in their initial design. The present research was beset by a great many procedural problems, one of which was the inaccessibility of the type of worker being studied, and another was the difficulty of securing the unqualified co-operation of certain agencies. These circumstances meant that the methods adopted were ones which depended on the operation of chance, expediency and the good will of temps and their employers. However, in my view, the value of much sociological research to date lies not so much in its methodological precision as in the challenge which it has presented to contemporary prejudices, myths and ignorance. One hopes that the findings presented in this chapter will generate a more questioning approach to popular conceptions about women's attitudes towards work.

CHAPTER SIX.References

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15. Alfred Marks Bureau, Machine Age Girls, (London, October, 1974), p.19.

16. According to Olesen and Katsuranis, in their study of American temporary clerical workers, there are indeed certain categories of persons who may turn to temporary employment because of an inability to procure or to cope with permanent work. These are people who are handicapped not by any lack of skill, but by physical disabilities or emotional problems. Such people, according to the authors, 'found temporary work tolerable in a work force that does not easily accept disabilities'. ('Urban nomads: women in temporary clerical services' in Stromberg, A. and Harkess, S. (eds), Women Working (Mayfield Publishing Company: Palo Alto, California, 1978) pp.332-333.
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32. Taken from a brochure for business executives distributed by a leading temp help organisation.
33. Olesen, V. and Katsuranis, F., op.cit., p.326.
34. Cited in the report of the tenth C.I.E.T.T. annual conference, (1977), pp.39-40.
35. Alfred Marks Bureau, A Profile of the Office Temp, (London, January 1971), p.27.

36. Parker, S. and Sinker, A., Temporary Workers, (Social Survey Division, O.P.C.S.: London 1976), pp.37-38.
37. See note 30 above.
38. Olesen, V. and Katsuranis, F., op.cit., p.329.

CHAPTER SEVEN.CONCLUSIONS

The original stimulus for this research was a deep sense of personal dissatisfaction with the way in which women had been represented in the literature of industrial sociology. I was dissatisfied not only with the evident neglect of female participation in the labour market, but also with the simplistic way in which it was customary to interpret their work behaviour. The area of study in which both weaknesses were particularly manifest was the sociology of clerical occupations. Firstly, women clerical workers appeared as a residual category in the relevant literature, despite the fact that they constituted a numerical majority of clerical employees. Secondly, their inferior rewards and status were held to be the inevitable outcome of an attenuated ambition, imposed by socialisation, and later reinforced by domesticity. This assumption seemed highly questionable since one was informed elsewhere that depressed levels of pay and prestige among male workers should be examined in relation to prevailing structures of power. It also seemed to be at odds with the important principle, established by studies of orientations to work among male employees, that work attitudes should be regarded as mutable. It seemed appropriate, therefore, that one should attempt to redress the balance in favour of those who constituted the majority of persons working in this sector of the labour force, and that in so doing, one should utilise those theoretical frameworks which had proved to be useful in the study of male employment.

Since my research was partly designed to compensate for the prevailing neglect of a particular group of female workers, it is appropriate to begin this concluding section with a discussion of the sources of this sociological myopia. Clearly it is important not only to identify and to remedy absences in the literature, but also to account for them. In my view, the neglect of women in clerical occupations cannot usefully be accounted for simply in terms of a sexist orientation among male industrial sociologists. This is a seductive explanation, but it overlooks the existence of a lack of interest in routine white-collar workers more generally. If sociologists have not shown much interest in women clerks,

then it must be said that they have not been particularly intrigued by their male counterparts either. It is only possible to speculate upon the reasons for this general neglect, however, since members of the discipline rarely offer any insight into those factors which attract them towards particular fields of study and which divert them from others.

In my opinion, the neglect derives, in part, from a tendency to prejudge clerical work as a bastion of monotony and mediocrity. The Dickensian caricature of the clerk as a plodding, humble servant, experiencing neither disaster nor excitement, appears to have impressed itself upon the minds of sociologists and caused them to divert their attention elsewhere. Their imaginations have been more readily captured by those occupations which are thought to be more bizarre, more colourful, more degraded and more privileged, and which lend themselves more readily to the conceptual cliches which form the stock-in-trade of industrial sociology. To the extent that women inhabit what are felt to be the most mediocre of these mediocre occupations, they have accordingly received the minimum of an already minimal attention. The tendency to shun the office as a field for investigation has probably been reinforced by the view that its inhabitants represent a major buttress of capitalist society. For those sociologists who are interested in locating the vanguard of revolutionary change, the office must have been regarded as unfruitful territory, whilst providing an uncomfortable reminder of the resilience of a firm commitment to the status quo.

It is of course possible that a soupçon of male chauvinism has played its part in rendering female clerks an under-researched group, and it is also plausible that the limited representation of women in research posts has not been conducive to the development of research in this area. However, the invisibility of the female office worker is at least partly a consequence of the failure of this entire occupational category to capture the hearts and minds of contemporary investigators.

It is evident that any research which is prompted by a concern to remedy absences in the literature does not necessarily make a theoretical contribution.

Feminist research of this kind may certainly increase the total stock of information in a particular field of enquiry. There is no guarantee, however, that it will lead to a more sophisticated level of understanding in the area of study concerned. On the other hand, it is possible that by widening the field of enquiry in this way, one may discover information which challenges the adequacy of existing models, concepts and theories. The study of women in particular situations may generate data which cannot readily be accommodated within the prevailing sociological terms of reference. This observation leads me to a discussion of the implications of the material presented in Chapter 4 for the sociology of clerical occupations.

My analysis of women in routine white-collar work suggests that there is a dimension to office life which has been greatly overlooked by sociological studies of this mode of employment, namely, sexual interaction. Once it is recognised that employers and employees are typically differentiated by gender, it becomes necessary to question whether their relationships can be adequately accounted for purely in terms of such factors as size of workplace, the organisation of work, levels of pay and job security, and status consciousness. Once one has discovered the existence of women in the office, so to speak, it becomes possible to conceive of employer/employee relationships as forms of interaction which are influenced by assumptions about appropriate gender behaviour. Thus, from the point of view of an employer, a secretary may come to be regarded as unsatisfactory not simply because she fails to achieve a certain level of output, or because of bad timekeeping, but because she fails to conform to expectations concerning appropriate female behaviour. Similarly, it is at least possible that some women derive job satisfaction not simply from levels of remuneration, or from the character of work itself, but also from the rewards which may attach to a conspicuous deference to masculine authority. A woman's femininity is frequently exploited by employers in the office environment, but it can also represent an important power resource with which to manipulate the boss. His superordinate status, after all, depends partly on the woman's

willingness to adopt a posture of submissiveness. In this way, whilst one's femininity may impose the necessity for a public display of subordination, it may promote the private feeling that one is actually the power behind the throne.

The opportunity to deploy one's femininity to material or psychological advantage is not equally available to all categories of female clerical workers, but it is most certainly unavailable to their male counterparts. For this reason, a sociology of clerical occupations which concentrates solely on the male workforce leads to a neglect of an important source of differentiation within the workforce as a whole. Furthermore, if one ignores gender-based interaction in the office, one is likely to overlook the possible significance of sexual liaisons. There can be little doubt that members of the office do enter into sexual relationships with each other, ranging from mild flirtations to alliances of a more adulterous nature. My analysis has barely touched upon this dimension of office dynamics but I am nevertheless convinced that it is of considerable relevance for an understanding of many of the antipathies, frustrations, and commitments that are found there. It is also possible that sexuality is an important component of other occupational environments. However, sociologists have tended to assume that we inhabit a world where sex is something which only occurs in bedrooms. It may be that an attention to heterosexual and even homosexual liaisons in the world of work would constitute a useful point of reference in future studies of occupations.

My argument, therefore, is not that gender is the principal or sole determinant of social interaction in the office, but only that a failure to recognise its possible significance may lead to a misrepresentation of the factors governing employee attitudes and behaviour, patterns of promotion and demotion, and relationships between employers and employees. To this extent, it is hoped that the present research exemplifies the need for further empirical research of a feminist nature in the field of industrial sociology. Such studies are required, not simply in order to compensate for the long-standing



neglect of working women, but in order that we may re-appraise the adequacy of the traditional terms of reference in the sociology of occupations.

The principal concern of this research, however, was to develop a more satisfactory understanding of the factors governing women's work attitudes than had been provided by sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s. My particular interest lay in the field of female clerical employment, and it was within this context that I hoped to demonstrate the utility of an eclectic approach to the study of work attitudes, as had already been exemplified in studies of male employment in industry and in the white-collar world. My next objective, therefore, is to rehearse some of the original problems in the literature and to consider the implications of the present study for the sociology of women in white-collar work and of women in employment more generally.

When I began this research in 1970, there was a widespread predilection for untested assumptions about women as a basis for discussion of their work attitudes. In spite of the growth of economic activity rates among women, especially married women, since the war, there was still a tendency to view economic activity amongst all but the poorest women as a social aberration. The attempt to breach the gap of understanding led some sociologists to dust off the oldest remnants of early industrial sociology and to apply them to the sphere of women's employment. Some chose to view the rising economic activity rates among married women in terms of a revamped version of the Economic Man model of worker attitudes. The growth in activity rates was held to be symptomatic of post-war consumerism, and women were assumed to be primarily motivated by a desire for the means with which to purchase little extras for the home. Others chose to base their explanations on the Parsonian distinction between expressive and instrumental sex-role orientations. While the primary pre-occupations of the male worker were held to be money, power and status, the woman worker was held to be drawn to the workplace by a quest for congenial social relationships. This model was also used as a basis for discussion of the economic behaviour of single women. More than one writer suggested that the atten-

uated ambitions of young, unattached females reflected a preoccupation with social intercourse.(1) It was these assumptions, plus the notion that a woman's chief attachment was unreservedly to the home, which one felt to be unsatisfactory, partly because they were assumptions, and partly because they were gradually being challenged by feminist writers.

Another source of dissatisfaction with the prevailing literature was the deterministic view of women as economic actors, and, relatedly, the total disregard for the dimension of meaning in the study of women's work behaviour. This perspective was in marked contrast to that adopted by Goldthorpe et al, and Daniel, and canvassed especially by Silverman in his book, The Theory of Organisations.(2) These writers collectively emphasised the contingent nature of work attitudes, the interaction between work attitudes and work experience, and an action approach which examined the meaning of work from the actor's point of view. The prevailing emphasis, therefore, on subjective perceptions of work and the factors which modified or sustained those perceptions, conflicted sharply with the ready acceptance of the idea that women's attitudes were unproblematic, determined by non-work circumstances, and fixed for life in a state of uncomplaining acquiescence. Those who were prepared to concede that there might be more than one standardised attitude to work among female employees, nevertheless tended to concentrate implicitly or explicitly on the impact of a single variable, such as the life-cycle or employment status.

The present study, therefore, has been concerned to substitute investigation for assumption, and to explore the interaction between work attitudes and work experience in the sphere of white-collar employment. The choice of temporary workers for these purposes was dictated partly by a curiosity based on personal experience, but more importantly, by a belief that the attitudes of women employed in this capacity presented a serious challenge to the conventional wisdom of sociological literature. Furthermore, since I was concerned to highlight the contingent nature of work attitudes, and to identify the factors governing changes in perceptions of work, it seemed appropriate to investigate a group of people whose work situation was characterised by continuous change.

My analysis of women in temporary clerical employment suggests that women's occupational choices and responses to work are influenced by a very wide range of variables. These variables may be divided into three groups. Firstly, there are a number of what may be termed non-work factors. These include age, marital status, responsibility for dependants, educational history, location, responses to domesticity, the occupational mobility of the spouse, and the cumulative impact of primary and secondary socialisation. This is not an exhaustive list, but it does incorporate some of the principal factors impinging upon work attitudes which may be said to derive 'beyond the factory gates'. Secondly, there are a number of influences which derive more directly from the work situation itself. These include the objective character of worktasks, levels of pay and prospects for promotion, relationships with co-workers and employers, the policies of employers with regard to recruitment and conditions of work, the activities of occupational gatekeepers such as private or public employment agents, previous work experience, and the level of information concerning occupational alternatives. Again, the list is not comprehensive, but it does serve to illustrate the very considerable range of factors which may have a bearing upon both occupational choice and responses to work. The third group of variables concern the character of the market for labour. Job choice and job mobility are likely to be influenced by temporal changes in the demand for one's own skills and for labour more generally. They are also likely to be influenced by regional variations in labour demand. Although it is possible to distinguish the three clusters of variables in this way, it is evident that they are interconnected. For example, a firm's recruitment policies towards married women are likely to be influenced by the character of local labour markets and by assumptions about the impact of domestic commitments upon employee reliability.

The observation that female attitudes to work are contingent upon such an enormous range of circumstances is unlikely to provide much comfort to those who would wish to establish an all-embracing theory of the determinants of worker

attitudes. Indeed, one suspects that it is the very impossibility of constructing such a theory which has prompted a heightened interest in other aspects of the sociology of work, such as patterns of accommodation and conflict in industrial relations. Yet, while my research does not resolve the problem of identifying the key determinants of employee attitudes, it does serve to illustrate the redundancy of monocausal approaches to the study of women's orientations towards work.

My analysis of women in temporary clerical employment also suggests that it is wrong to suppose that women consistently display a passive orientation to the situation in which they currently find themselves. Temporary workers exemplify, par excellence, women's capacity to actively negotiate the limiting structures which confront them. The vast majority of female temps are engaged in strategies which enable them to counter or to overcome a wide range of constraints. In some cases, these strategies involve a flight from the oppressive features of domesticity. In other cases, they involve an attempt to establish a sense of control over the work situation. It cannot be denied that these strategies frequently end in frustration or resignation, but they do at least remind us of the lesson learnt from history, that women are capable of resisting structures of oppression.

This observation leads me to register certain reservations concerning current orientations in feminist writing. It is perhaps appropriate to conclude with a discussion of the recent contribution of feminist literature since it is likely to have a considerable impact upon the future direction of research into female employment. Yet, there are grounds for supposing that it is likely to reproduce some of the deficiencies which characterised the sociology of female employment in the 1950s and 1960s.

After the initial discovery that women had been ill-served by sociologists in the past, there arose a major preoccupation with the development of a Marxist interpretation of the structural location of women in capitalist society. At first, the analysis turned mainly upon a discussion of the articulation between

domestic labour and capitalism, but more recently, there has been a heightened interest in the role of female wage labour as a variant of the industrial reserve army. Contributors to both fields have urged that it is necessary to examine the inter-relationships between patriarchy and capitalism if one is to develop an adequate theory of the sources of female subordination.

While this theoretical spring-cleaning has represented a most welcome and important corrective to the traditional perceptions of women held by sociologists, it has generated a far more deterministic model of women at work. Since it involves an effort to locate female wage-labour in terms of an over-arching theory of the imperatives of monopoly capitalism, there is a tendency to represent women as passively fulfilling the 'needs' of a particular economic system. Thus, the growth of female economic activity rates in the post-war period is seen, not so much as a collective escape from the confines of domesticity, but as a development necessitated by the expansion and diversification of capitalist commodity production. According to this view, capitalism initiates the process of determination, and patriarchy cements it:

'In these jobs where women are not doing 'women's work' as such (although it comes to be defined as that) women still, inevitably, live within their femininity at work. It is in the way they are treated by men at work (particular sexist incidents: for flirting with; as strike breakers and/or as workers not to be supported over equal pay strikes); the way they themselves see their work and its role in their lives (secondary to home, its convenience to home in terms of travel, little attention to the interest of the work, temporary, 'nice people', etc.).'

(3)

My objection to statements such as these is not that they are necessarily invalid, but rather that they present an over-socialised, or over-determined view of woman. Morgan has identified the same problem in the literature concerning the role of women as domestic labourers. He points out that the Marxist-feminist approach is extraordinarily reminiscent of functionalism in so far as it seeks to account for social phenomena in terms of a relatively fixed wider economic and social system, and glosses over the possibilities for change, experimentation, and manipulation.(4) It may be suggested that this is because

these feminists, like so many writers of the fifties and sixties, have ignored the dimension of subjective meaning. The concept of false consciousness can all too easily provide a handy justification for the neglect of this dimension, just as a firm belief in the utility of popular stereotypes promoted a similar neglect among an earlier generation of sociologists. If one subscribes to the view that workers are unable to comprehend the true nature of their exploitation, then it follows that there is no real need to examine subjective attitudes towards work. Instead, one is obliged to concentrate on the structural determinants of worker attitudes and behaviour. As a result, one may overlook the extent to which these forces are countered or resisted. Since it is possible, therefore, that a continuing neglect of women's own attitudes is likely to follow from the current orientation of feminist thought, one is inclined to greet this writing with qualified approval.

I would like to conclude by suggesting that future research concerning women's employment might usefully be guided by Rowbotham's proposition that 'human beings are more than the services they perform for capital'.(5) A perspective which ignores the way in which women perceive and respond to their work situation is one which treats women as occupational robots. It is also a perspective which is more, rather than less likely to perpetuate the belief that women are indifferent to the character of their work, and that they passively accept the fact of limited occupational alternatives. If we are to overcome these conservative assumptions, we must address ourselves more wholeheartedly to the concrete experiences of working women. Furthermore, if we are genuinely concerned to advance the cause of women's liberation, then we must point towards the ways in which they rattle the chains of their captivity and seek to throw off the shackles imposed by the cultural assumption of female passivity. Unless such potentialities are demonstrated, sociologists will continue to bolster, by default, the fetters of female subjugation.

# REFERENCES

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2. See note 86, Chapter 2, and also Silverman, D., The Theory of Organisations, Heinemann, London, 1970).
3. Women's Studies Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Women Take Issue (Hutchinson: London 1978), pp.65-66.
4. Morgan, D., Social Theory and the Family (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1975), p.168.
5. Rowbotham, S., New Society, Vol.44, No.813, 4.5.78, p.267.

APPENDIX 1.RESEARCH METHODS

Almost every independent researcher of private employment agencies has commented on the many procedural problems encountered. The principal problem concerns the difficulty of gaining access to temporary workers for the purposes of investigation. The most expedient method of establishing contact with a group of temps is to secure the co-operation of one or more private employment agencies, but this is not always easy, and it may generate certain constraints upon the way in which the research is conducted. Moreover, whilst some agencies may prove willing to collaborate in a questionnaire survey or programme of interviews, there may be some reluctance to hire the researcher herself in order that she can undertake participant observation. Understandably, an agency is only likely to agree to this strategy if the researcher meets certain standards of clerical competence. The agency, after all, has to take account of the requirements of a third party - the client firm. In this field of study, therefore, the problems of access are particularly great, not only because of the physical dispersal of the relevant population, but also because of the need to evolve research strategies which are acceptable to the agencies, and which are in harmony with their normal commercial operations.

The second major problem in this field concerns the mobile character of the temporary clerical workforce. As Olesen and Katsuranis have observed, this mobility presents immense sampling difficulties for the researcher. For example, if one wished to conduct a series of interviews with a representative group of temps, one could use conventional sampling techniques in order to obtain an appropriate sample. However, owing to the high degree of movement in and out of temporary employment, it is possible that many of the sample obtained in this way will have quit temping by the time that one is in a position to interview them. Even if one employs the more limited technique of the postal questionnaire, the typically short-term character of the involvement with temporary work is likely to be reflected in a poor response rate.

The researcher in this field, therefore, is likely to encounter considerable difficulties concerning access and sampling. It is not surprising, perhaps,



that so few independent studies have been undertaken, and that the existing studies have been fairly modest in scope. I mention these difficulties because they have also been encountered in the present research, and because they are relevant to an assessment of its design and findings. It would be quite wrong to give the impression that the research proceeded with textbook simplicity. Yet, within the constraints of limited time and limited funds, I endeavoured so far as was possible to conform to the basic principles of sociological research.

I should mention that access was not such a major problem in my own case, as I had already been a vacation temp with one agency for several years when I started the research, and I was thus favourably placed to request co-operation for my project. Moreover, as I had already demonstrated a degree of clerical competence, there were no objections, initially, to my combining employment with participant observation. The task of securing the co-operation of other agencies for the questionnaire proved to be rather more difficult. This was because it was usually necessary to obtain the agreement of a large number of people before a particular branch could be involved.

#### a. The Questionnaire

The main questionnaire survey was preceded by a small pilot survey which I conducted among both permanent and temporary staff in three firms in the Midlands. A pilot questionnaire was issued directly to 17 employees, and was designed to yield experience of questionnaire construction and distribution as much as to test the viability of certain questions for the schedule proper.

It was initially decided that the questionnaire survey should be conducted in two areas of the country - Birmingham and the North-East. Accordingly, I approached a number of agencies in both areas in order to secure agreement in principle to the distribution of a questionnaire among their employees. The questionnaire schedule which I subsequently devised was fairly lengthy, and my intention was to issue it directly to temps either at their places of employment, or, if this was not possible, at the offices of the agency. Unfortunately,

the proposed plan of action had to be abandoned at a fairly early stage of the research. The first agency I approached was one for whom I had worked for several years. The principal agreed to employ me throughout the summer vacation, not only for the purpose of completing my questionnaire schedules, but also in order that I might carry out observation of temporary employment in a range of occupational locations. However, the agency withdrew its co-operation shortly after I began the research. When I requested a transfer after two-weeks employment, the agency refused to move me. This change of attitude coincided with a change of personnel at the agency. The new supervisor informed me that their first obligation was to their client firms, and that consequently, a transfer would not be forthcoming. I was also told that, in any case, there was no alternative work.

Although this setback to my plans was, to say the least, disappointing, my subsequently lengthy stay at this one firm did afford a depth of insight into many aspects of temporary employment. In particular, I was able to observe the way in which the relationships between permanent and temporary staff might be modified by the passage of time. However, this experience suggested that it would be extremely difficult to pursue my original strategy of direct interviewing, and I decided to issue a modified schedule as a postal questionnaire.

As a result of an approach to one of the largest employment businesses in the country, it became possible to widen the geographical scope of the survey to include the London area. All of the agencies who offered their co-operation vetted the questionnaire, and only one asked for a modification to be made. This involved the excision of questions relating to trade unions. It was agreed that the schedules should be returned directly to me rather than to the agency, as I felt very strongly that this would be more conducive to the free expression of views. The schedules were then distributed via a total of five organisations in Birmingham, the North-East and London.

In view of the geographical spread of the survey, it proved impossible to exercise direct control over the distribution of the schedules. Consequently,

I am unable to furnish precise information concerning the response rate. A total of 400 questionnaires were given to agency principals and 132 were returned. Of these, five were from male temps and one was from a student, and because of my primary interest in women who were normally available for full-time or part-time employment, all six were eliminated from the results. There were marked regional variations in the proportion of schedules returned. In the North-East, 100 schedules were issued to agencies, and 50 were returned; in the Midlands, 100 schedules were issued, and 31 were returned, in London, 200 schedules were issued, and 45 were returned. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing whether the poor rate of response from the London area reflected a localised apathy to the subject of temporary employment, or whether it reflected the distribution policies of individual branches. Apart from the 126 questionnaires obtained by this method, a further 13 schedules were completed by my fellow temps at the XYZ company, in their own time, yielding a total of 139 completed questionnaires.

The disadvantages of the postal questionnaire have been widely documented. The main problems concern the notoriously low response rate, and the possibility of self-selection among respondents. On the other hand, the impersonal character of this method may be said to constitute its principal advantage over other research techniques. The often-noted bias arising from interviewer-interviewee interaction in face-to-face methods is eliminated, and it is also possible to preserve complete anonymity. With regard to the present research, the problem of low response has already been noted, although the extent to which the resultant sample reflects a process of self-selection remains a matter for speculation. There is no evidence that my respondents were exclusively hostile or exclusively favourable towards the character of their employment. Both negative and positive views were equally represented, not only between respondents, but often within an individual questionnaire. This is consistent with the ambivalent character of temporary employment, noted not only by myself, but also by Olesen and Katsuranis. It is possible that the relatively high levels of educational attainment among my respondents reflected a process of self-selection. It may be

that 'educated' women are more disposed to express themselves through the medium of the questionnaire. However, in lieu of any information concerning the characteristics of the non-respondents, it is impossible to reach any firm conclusions on this matter. Moreover, it is doubtful whether educational background is really of such crucial significance, especially in the case of those women whose educational experience belongs to the very distant past.

The questionnaire schedule is presented below. It contained a mixture of open-ended and fixed choice questions and provided the opportunity for respondents to comment on any aspects of temporary work which had not been covered in the schedule.

UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM,  
 DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY & SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION,  
 14 OLD ELVET, DURHAM.

QUESTIONNAIRE

SERIAL NO: \_\_\_\_\_

The University of Durham is carrying out a survey amongst temporary office staff. The survey is designed to find out why people work as temps, who these people are, and how they feel about their work. The results will be of the greatest interest in helping us to understand what it is about temporary work that has made it so popular. We would like you to help us by giving your opinion about certain things related to temporary work. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers. The success of the inquiry depends on the number of people who fill in the questionnaire. All your replies will be treated as confidential, and the separate identity of individuals will be lost when the data is put through a computer.

How to complete the questionnaire:

Please answer the questions by placing a tick in the appropriate box or boxes; or where necessary, by writing the answer in the space provided. If you cannot give an exact answer, please give the best estimate you can.

A stamped addressed envelope is provided for your reply.

Thank you very much.

1. Sex.

Female	
--------	--

Male	
------	--

2. What was your age at your last birthday?

15 - 19	
20 - 29	
30 - 39	
40 - 49	
50 - 59	
60 +	

3. What is your marital status?

Single
Married
Widowed

4. How many children do you have?

None	
1	
2	
3	
4 or over	

Please could you write here the age of each child:-

--	--	--	--	--	--

5. What is your father's occupation or what was it at the time of his death or retirement? (Please give full details - e.g. not just 'engineer', but 'fitter', 'engineering draughtsman' or 'consulting engineer', etc.).

.....

6. What is your husband's occupation or what was it at the time of his death or retirement? (Please give full details.)

.....

7. What kind of school did you go to?

Private	
Elementary	
Sec. Modern	
Technical	

Grammar	
Comprehensive	
Other (please state type of school)	

8. How old were you when you left school? .....

9. Examinations taken at school:

	If taken	Number of subjects passed
School Certificate or G.C.E. 'O' Level		
Higher School Certificate or G.C.E. 'A' Level		
C.S.E.		
Other (please state)		

10. Please could you give details of your secretarial training and any other education or training you have had since leaving school:

Type of Institution	Type of Course	Full or Part-time	Length of Course	Qualifications gained (if any)

1. What is the name of your job with the agency?

.....

2. How many agencies, including your present one, have you worked for?

One	
Two	
Three	
Four	
Five	
Six or over	





16. If you were looking for a job, how important would the following things be to you?

	Not Important	Important	Very Important
Pay			
Interesting & Varied Work			
Pleasant people to work with			
Secure employment			
Good holidays			
General working conditions			
Chances of promotion			
Personal freedom			
Being given responsibility			
Good bosses			
Meeting people through work			
Being part of a team			

17. What do you like most about being a temp?

.....  
.....

18. What do you like least about being a temp?

.....  
.....

19. When it comes to being sent out on a new assignment, which of the following best describes your position in the matter?

I have no choice at all and have to go where I'm sent	
I go where I'm sent, but if I really didn't like the job the agency would probably find me something better	
The agency knows me well and tries to find jobs that suit me and that I would like	

20. About how many jobs have you had with this agency?

1 - 4	
5 - 9	
10 - 14	
15 - 19	
20 - 24	
25+	

21. Have you ever been unemployed for longer than a week because the agency couldn't find work for you?

Yes	
No	

if YES, about how many times has this happened?

.....

22. How do you feel about the amount of work you have to do on temporary jobs?

I am often given little or nothing to do, and am told to work slowly or 'look busy'.	
Working at a reasonable rate, I usually find I am kept occupied most of the time	
Bosses seem to have little idea of the amount of work that one person can do, and I am very often overworked.	

23. In general, how would you say that the jobs you get as a temp match your skills?

The jobs I get are too specialised for my skills	
The jobs I get are right for my skills	
The jobs I get do not require me to use my skills fully	

24. Which of the following best describes your experiences when you first begin a new temporary assignment?

You are expected to get on with the job and work things out for yourself	
You are expected to be able to do the job, but if you need advice, people with help you out	
Employers and co-workers are very helpful in showing you how the job is done	

In getting to know the permanent people you work with, do you find:

The permanents are friendly and make the approach to you	
You have to make most of the effort in getting to know them	
Neither you nor they are particularly interested in getting to know each other	

When you are working as a temp, who do you really feel you are working for?

The Agency	
The Firm you are sent to	

Concerning the friends you have made as a temp, are they:-

Mostly people from other agencies	
Mostly people from the same agency	
Mostly people who work permanently	
I don't make any friends at work	
Other (please state)	

Are you a member of a trade union?

Yes	
No	

In relation to your work as a temp, which do you think is more effective in altering conditions?

Activity by the unions	
Talking things over with the boss of your agency	
Talking things over with the boss at the place where you work	

30. Apart from receiving your time-sheet and sending it in, do you have any other contact with the agency?

Yes	
No	

If YES, what other contact do you have with the agency?

.....

31. If you inherited some money and had enough to live on without working, would you want to work anyway?

Yes -	
No	

Please could you give your reasons?

.....

.....

Thank you very much for completing the questionnaire. If there is anything that you would like to add or any other comments that you'd like to make on the questions, please would you write them here.

.....

.....

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## b. Participant observation

As Cicourel has pointed out, the use of participant observation requires an evaluation of the investigator's position relative to the group being studied. The researcher should engage in 'introspection', that is, an examination of the meanings which she brings to the situation and a consideration of the possible impact of her presence on the persons who are being investigated. A failure to engage in such a process is likely to engender the mistaken belief that one has remained a detached and neutral observer of a particular set of social relationships. My next task, therefore, is to consider some of the factors which may have had a bearing upon the conduct and character of my own participant observation.

One of the aims of this method is that it should generate a much deeper and more direct appreciation of a particular field of social behaviour than is likely to be obtained by quantitative methods. Since participant observation usually extends over a considerable period of time, the investigator is likely to obtain much richer data than could ever be derived by a simple questionnaire. This method is also more likely to yield an accurate appreciation of changes in the character of a social situation over time. It does not involve a dependence upon imperfect memories and nostalgic reminiscences, unlike the interview or the questionnaire. In addition, the sociologist is much more likely to perceive a particular social world not only in terms of her own common-sense understandings and sociological assumptions, but also in terms of the subjective meanings of the actors concerned.

However, despite all the best will in the world, it is often very difficult for the sociologist to identify with her subjects, and to really come to terms with their point of view. Those who are working within the constraints of small budgets and limited time scales may never be able to achieve the protracted and total immersion in a field of study which is necessary for this purpose. Even without these constraints, it is naive to suppose that one's identity as a sociologist can be so easily discarded. A prior or continuing association with this remote band of intellectuals is likely to have a profound influence on the way

in which one perceives other social worlds, and upon the way in which others respond to oneself. Unless the sociologist is prepared to conceal the nature of her true identity, the chances of developing a total identification with one's subjects must be regarded as somewhat remote.

As far as the present research was concerned, this problem was reversed. Since I had had considerable experience of temporary employment before I began the project, the problem was not so much one of coming to terms with my subjects' world, but rather one of how to reappraise this world sociologically. I had worked in a total of twelve establishments during a period of five years before coming to the XYZ company, and consequently, I had already formed opinions about both the advantages and disadvantages of temporary work. However, I believe that this prior experience was of considerable value for the present research, as it meant that I was able to ground my generalisations on a broader base of first-hand knowledge than was yielded by my stay at the XYZ company. Indeed, it was this very experience, in conjunction with the findings of the questionnaire, which led me to the conclusion that this company tended to illustrate the more negative aspects of temping.

Admittedly, as a student doing vacation work, I had never really experienced the full impact of periodic unemployment, or the lack of fringe benefits. In addition, it was perhaps easier to tolerate the more unpleasant assignments since money was the primary objective for working, and since one could anticipate a return to the more congenial surroundings of the student campus. In spite of these qualifications, however, the point remains that when I began my observation, I was not now entering an unfamiliar world. Indeed, my very close involvement with it had been the one of the original motivations for doing the research.

When I returned to office work in the capacity of a research worker, a certain modification of my outlook did take place. This took the form of a greater interest in, and awareness of, the attitudes and behaviour of co-workers, as opposed to my former pre-occupation with making money, doing the work and trying to get on with other people in the office. However, it must be stressed

that the balancing of roles was weighted towards that of being a temp, since the self-consciousness which often accompanies the researcher in her pose as part of the field of observation was in my case dissolved by habituation to the occupation. This had important consequences for my relationships with other temps. For, although I made no secret of the fact that I was studying them, and was therefore regarded to some extent as a student, there was a greater tendency to regard me as one of their number. This was due to the fact that my lengthy association with the agency had equipped me with a detailed knowledge of the history of the agency, its personnel, and methods of negotiation. Consequently, not only was I able to exchange occupational anecdotes with other long-serving members of the agency, but I was also able to offer practical advice to those who had joined more recently. The potential disadvantages of such a position should perhaps be noted. There may be a tendency to over-identify with the group and to lose sight of the purposes of the study. On balance, however, the fact of previous experience in the field is likely to be advantageous, in so far as it facilitates the process of establishing a role within the group, and diminishes the likelihood of unwarranted generalisations.

The conduct of my participant-observation is best described as 'low-profile'. As an employee, I had certain obligations not only towards my agency, but also towards the client firm. Consequently, my interviews with both permanent and temporary staff were held during breaks, and my notes were compiled after the day's work was over. The interviews, especially with permanent staff, were as informal as possible, and were mainly intended to elicit information about previous working experience, attitudes towards the present job, and leisure patterns. Ideally, I would have liked to conduct a series of more formal, highly structured interviews, but it was clear that this would prove unacceptable to the agency. The collection of data, therefore, tended to take second place to the main business of performing the work in hand. For this reason, it is doubtful whether my presence as a research worker had much impact upon the field of study. The unobtrusive character of the research, plus the fact of my long involvement with temporary work, tended to diminish my colleagues' awareness of,

and interest in, my specific sociological aims.

### c. Interviews

During the last eight years I have held a considerable number of interviews with people who are in some way related to my field of study. The lack of published information concerning temporary employment rendered such interviews highly necessary, and they proved to be invaluable for the purpose of acquiring a more rounded understanding of the field of enquiry. The interviews which I held more recently have also been intended to update my existing knowledge. The employment situation has changed very markedly since I first began this research, and legislation has been introduced which is of direct relevance to the temporary workforce. Whilst the empirical data presented in Chapter 6 is therefore firmly located in the early nineteen-seventies, it has been possible to update the remainder of the research on the basis of information acquired during the intervening years. I would point out that whilst there have been a number of changes in the context of temporary work since I first began the research, it is doubtful whether the everyday experiences of the temporary employee have changed significantly. As far as one can gather, the main alteration in the work situation of the temp since the early seventies is an improvement in the level of fringe benefits offered by some, but not all, agencies. It is likely also that job insecurity became more acute when the demand for temps slumped in the mid-seventies, although in 1978, there were several indications that the agencies were moving towards a phase of prosperity. Yet, despite a number of changes in the context and conditions of temporary employment, the constant shifting of workplace, and the continual problems of adaptation to new tasks and new people, appear to be perennial features of the temporary experience.

The interviews which I have conducted during these years have involved four categories of organisations or individuals. Firstly, I have held extensive discussions with agency principals in the three areas reflected in the research. These included interviews with the heads of two of the largest groups of agencies in the country. In addition, I visited the head of the agencies' representative



organisation, the Federation of Personnel Services, on three separate occasions, the most recent of which occurred in the spring of 1978. Secondly, in order to obtain the views of the agencies chief protagonists, I visited the head offices of one of the main white-collar unions. This information was supplemented by written replies to my enquiries from another leading white-collar union and from the T.U.C. headquarters. Thirdly, in order to obtain the views of the agencies' chief competitors, I interviewed officials working for the Department of Employment in the North-East and in Birmingham. Finally, I have held countless discussions, ranging from the highly formal to the highly informal, with women who have had direct experience of temporary employment. Taken together, these diverse sources of data represented the final pieces in what has proved to be a very complicated sociological jigsaw. More importantly, perhaps, they have enabled me to retain what is, I hope, a reasonably balanced perspective in relation to an area of deep and enduring controversy.

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