Brave new world? Women and part-time employment: The impact on career prospects and employment relations

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Women and Leadership Series

Paper No. 5

Brave New World?
Women and Part-Time Employment: The Impact on Career Prospects and Employment Relations

 Leonie V. Still
July, 1996
INTRODUCTION

Part-time employment is a growing segment of the labour force, a trend that has been discernible in all OECD countries over the past thirty years (Thurman and Trah, 1990). According to Burgess, Gleisner and Rasmussen (1996, p. 95), part-time employment growth has been widespread across all sectors, occupations and demographic groups. Both Australia and New Zealand have recorded such a growth in the numbers of part-time workers and a growing part-time employment share, that nearly one quarter of the workforce in both countries is employed on a part-time basis. Among OECD countries Australia is one of the larger employers of part-time labour, but the average hours worked are lower than in other countries (OECD, 1994).

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1995), the growth in part-time work is the result of two main factors: growth in the service sector which is more suited to part-time employment, and the increased desire of women to participate in the labour force, particularly on a part-time basis. The result is that women now account for approximately 75 per cent of the part-time workforce in Australia, both at the state and national level. In February 1996 there were 1,992,000 part-time workers in Australia of whom 1,489,300 were women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996).

Details of the industry and occupational categorisation of part-time workers, both male and female, as at February 1996 are given in Tables 1 and 2, while the summary characteristics of part-time workers, as at November 1995, and trends in the numbers of males and females employed part-time over one year, over four years and over eight years are given in Tables 3 and 4.

As can be seen, women part-timers are concentrated in the retail trade, hospitality industry, property and business services, education area, health and community services and manufacturing industries.
Table 1: Industry of Part-Time Workers
February, 1996 ('000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry Division</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry &amp; Fishing</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, Gas &amp; Water Supply</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
<td>147.1</td>
<td>366.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation, Cafes, Restaurants</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>119.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Storage</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Services</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance and Insurance</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property &amp; Business Services</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>131.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Admin. &amp; Defence</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>130.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Community Services</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>259.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural &amp; Recreational Services</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal &amp; Other Services</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>502.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,489.3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


They are also overwhelmingly in semi- or unskilled jobs such as clerks, sales and personal service areas and labourers and related workers. However, there is also a sizeable number of women part-timers in the professions, suggesting that these more skilled workers have taken time out of their profession to raise a family.

Table 3 also confirms that, compared to other groups, women make up 75 per cent of part-time workers. While Table 4 appears to indicate that males in part-time employment have grown at a faster rate than females, it must be remembered that they come from a much smaller base than their gender counterpart. Women dominate the part-time workforce, a feature that is growing over time.
### Table 2: Occupational Category of Part-Time Workers
#### February 1996 (’000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers and Administrators</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>136.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para-professionals</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradespersons</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>393.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales &amp; personal service workers</td>
<td>112.2</td>
<td>512.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant &amp; machine ops, drivers</td>
<td>39.6</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers &amp; related workers</td>
<td>183.7</td>
<td>245.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>502.7</td>
<td>1,489.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 3: Part-Time Workers: Summary Characteristics
#### November 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Proportion of Part-Time Workers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>1,543,600</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School students aged 15 to 19</td>
<td>219,700</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time tertiary students aged 15-24</td>
<td>169,200</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men aged 15-24</td>
<td>236,500</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women aged 15-24</td>
<td>369,100</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife with children under 15</td>
<td>580,600</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband with children under 15</td>
<td>78,800</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lone parent with children under 15</td>
<td>78,100</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women aged 35-44</td>
<td>425,900</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Wong (1996, p2) and ABS Catalogue 6203.0)

Part-time employment, because of the way it has arisen in our economy, is often surrounded by assumptions on the part of employers, employees and the general community. For instance, one stance is that part-time employment is seen as an appropriate approach to balance work, family and leisure time, particularly for women, while employers see it as a means of achieving lower labour costs. While this is basically correct, it is also a
simplistic notion especially when one considers the way part-time work is evolving. In this paper, then, a brief examination of the more complex issues of part-time employment is undertaken, before addressing the impact on women part-time employees in particular in relation to their career prospects and employment relations.

Table 4: Labour Force Trends  
(percentage change in trend series)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Over one year</th>
<th>Over four years</th>
<th>Over eight years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Wong (1996, p5), ABS Catalogue 6203.0 and PC Ausstats)

DEFINITIONS

In Australia a part-time employee is a person who works less than 35 hours a week. Actual hours worked, however, are much less than this, being at present about 17 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996). This is because part-time employees form two major groups: permanent part-time and casual employees. The latter are not entitled to either annual or sick leave in their positions. People working in these employment categories are often referred to as ‘peripheral’ (Morse, 1969), ‘disposable’ (Pollack and Bernstein, 1985), ‘contingent’ (Freedman, 1986), or members of the ‘just-in-time workforce’ (Plewes, 1988).

Researchers, such as Feldman (1990,p105), reveal a number of ‘category types’ of part-time work according to the particular employment arrangements entered into. Hence, part-time work can be described as:
• **permanent/temporary**: similar to the permanent/casual delineation - permanent being those employees who work less than 35 hours a week but on a continuing basis, with temporary or casual employees being hired for limited periods of time (usually on an 'on-call' basis to deal with fluctuating workloads or short-term personnel shortages).

• **organisation-hired/agency-hired**: whether the part-time worker is recruited and hired by an organisation by whom they are paid, or whether they work for an agency that places them in a variety of organisations and pays them directly.

• **year-round/seasonal**: some part-timers hold year-round appointments; others only work during certain seasons of the year such as Christmas and other peak trading periods.

• **main-job/second-job (moonlighting)**: for some part-timers' their job is their only source of salaried income; others (the 'moonlighters') hold part-time jobs as second jobs to supplement their income. However, because of the difficulty of obtaining full-time employment today, there is a growing trend for some workers to hold several part-time jobs concurrently in their endeavours to earn a living.

• **voluntary/involuntary**: the former relates to those who work less than 35 hours by choice; the latter to those who do because of lack of full-time employment, cutbacks in hours during business downturns etc.

All of these categories are applicable to Australia. In more recent work, Duxbury and Higgins (1993, p15) have added two further ways of viewing part-time work which have special relevance to women, namely:
• career part-timers: relates to women who hold managerial and professional positions, such as in medicine and the finance industry. Also open to women who are considered to have career potential. Often referred to as retention part-time jobs (Tilly, 1992). Are special arrangements negotiated to retain or attract valued employees, typically working women with children, and have higher skill and compensation levels. These types of jobs are a fairly recent development, designed to accommodate the growing number of professional women who have stepped out of the full-time workforce to have their families. Under the ‘family-friendly’ policies being adopted by many organisations, these jobs are generally located partway up a promotion path. However, career part-time work appears to be limited by the lack of opportunities available at professional and managerial levels, while promotion beyond a certain limited span means moving back into a full-time job.

• ‘earner’ or non-career part-timers: relates to those women who hold clerical and administrative positions. Can also be lowly paid, low status jobs with few fringe benefits. Sometimes referred to as secondary part-time jobs (Tilly, 1992). Offer little opportunity for advancement and are applied to entire job categories.

Finally, Australian research conducted by Junor, Barlow and Patterson (1993,p192) for the Equal Pay Unit, Commonwealth Department of Industrial Relations, refer to the tendency to consider part-time employees as ‘non-career’ workers, or a high turnover marginal workforce, as opposed to ‘core career’ workers such as school-leavers and graduates. In the Australian finance industry, these two categories refer to the ‘unappointed’ positions and the classified/appointed positions.
These examples indicate that a simple dichotomous distinction between full-time and part-time workers on the basis of hours is too simplistic and that part-time workers do not necessarily comprise a homogeneous group - that is, there is as much within-category variation as there is between-category variation (McGinnis and Morrow, 1990).

CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES ON PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

Given that the tables on pages 2 and 3 reveal that women dominate part-time employment, what are the advantages and disadvantages for women, employers and unions in part-time employment?

Women's Perspective

Australian Bureau of Statistics evidence, derived from a 1993 survey on working arrangements, reveals that the most common reasons given by women for working part-time hours were 'own choice' (24%), 'standard work arrangement' (18%), 'not enough work available' (15%), 'childcare' (14%) and 'attending an educational institution' (14%) [Wong, 1996, p4]. Other reasons include using part-time employment as a means of combining work and family, and as a re-entry mechanism back into full-time employment. The opportunity to have a flexible life-style, the ability to work and earn a partial income, maintain status with an employer and maintain and/or gain skills and experience are also important considerations. Part-time employment also provides opportunities for professionals to minimise job stress and burnout while staying in the profession (Wetzel, Soloshy and Gallagher, 1990).

However, disadvantages also apply. These include reduced benefits, low wages, lack of job security, few opportunities for advancement or on-the-job training, little or no control over working arrangements and monotonous,
repetitive work (Duffy and Pupo, 1992). Neither can it be assumed that part-time employees work part time by choice. Economic conditions mean that some are put into that employment involuntarily, resulting in underemployment.

Employers’ Perspective

According to Duxbury and Higgins (1993) and Ronen (1984), the advantages of part-time work to the employer include greater flexibility in meeting work requirements, especially during periods of peak workload; recruitment of quality staff who otherwise might not be available; reduced staff and training costs; increased interest in permanent employment; positive job attitudes and lower turnover; increased scheduling flexibility; lower absenteeism; and better service to the public.

The disadvantages include higher administrative and training costs; the opposition of full-time employees and unions to the loss of full-time positions or overtime; scheduling difficulties and communication problems (McKie, 1992; Thurman and Trah, 1989). Some managers also believe that part-time work has a negative impact on supervision, productivity, turnover and commitment (to both the job and the organisation). While this may not necessarily be so, it is known that employers resist providing the same level of fringe benefits, or benefits on a pro-rated basis, as they do for full-time employees.

Union Perspective

Part-time employees present a complex set of issues for unions (Pupo and Duffy, 1992), because they normally focus their policies on full-time workers. Hence, displacement of full-time workers by part-timers is a concern, as are possible wage dilutions, and the difficulty of organising part-time
employees for industrial purposes. Unions are also aware of the way employers can exploit the use of part-time employees: for example, increases in profits as a result of a more intense use of labour without a concurrent increase in wage rates. A related aspect is a reduction in full-time employee earnings through less overtime being available.

Duxbury and Higgins (1993, p66) suggest that unions have two alternatives: either reaffirm full-time job strategies by working to eliminate or restrict part-time work; or work towards the unionisation of part-timers, while adopting measures to safeguard full-time opportunities and options such as job-sharing. Under our present system of enterprise bargaining, it would appear that the second option is the more preferable in Australia.

This brief analysis of perspectives, then, reveals that there are many reasons for the adoption of part-time employment, but there are also some severe downsides to this growing trend.

PART-TIME WORK AND ITS EFFECT ON WOMEN: THE FINANCE INDUSTRY

Rather than attempt to analyse this in pure generalities, this part of the paper addresses the issue from the point of view of a major piece of research currently being completed within the finance industry. Over the past two years I have been examining the career prospects for women and a delineation of any career barriers. Part of this research has touched on the career prospects for part-time workers, the growing employment sector within the industry. Because of the massive restructuring recently undertaken by the larger organisations, the workforce has, over the last five years, dramatically shifted from being predominantly full-time to almost 20% part-time. Efforts are now being made to negotiate increased percentages of part-time workers through enterprise bargaining
arrangements. In fact, some large organisations have set quite high targets for part-time workers on the basis of increased flexibility. Women account for over 95 per cent of part-time workers, with the finance industry being the seventh largest employer of women in Australia (Labour Force Australia, 1996).

Part of research involved an examination of the composition of the workforce of the top 75 organisations within the industry, accounting for approximately 90 per cent of the industry’s employees. This information was compiled from their 1994/95 Affirmative Action Reports. The following details were revealed (Still, 1996):

- approximately 62 per cent of the workforce was female.
- of those females were in permanent full-time employment.
- of women were in permanent part-time employment.
- companies were making greater use of part-time employees than previously (figures for five years earlier were 82% full-time and 17% part-time).
- more males were now being employed part-time, but their change in employment status was not as great as for women over the five-year period.
- women part-timers were concentrated in processing jobs such as the clerical, and sales and service areas.
- of the women were under 45; the remainder were older.
- while opportunities for higher-grade part-time work had increased in recent years, there were few part-time positions, relatively speaking, in the managerial and administrative levels - an area which also holds low numbers of women (approximately 15% in the industry workforce).
• in 1995 part-time employment in four major banks was as follows: Westpac (19.5% of total staff), Commonwealth (21.3%), National (19.7%) and ANZ (27%).

• the industry was slowly beginning to recognise that women no longer solely worked part-time because of family responsibility/lifestyle but because fewer full-time positions were available.

Given the current climate in which the finance industry is operating, it is more than probable that part-time employment will be an even more significant segment of the workforce as the industry continues to restructure and downsize to meet changing competitive conditions.

IMPLICATIONS OF EMPLOYMENT PROFILE FOR WOMEN’S CAREER PROSPECTS

The research identified a number of groups of women working part-time who can be basically categorised as follows:

• women part-timers who were just content to be employed and expressed no overt ambitions to either move location or be promoted. The majority of these were young married women with children, although most mature women in the lower occupational classifications also fell into this category. These women were in the earner or non-career category identified earlier.

• young women who were undertaking tertiary studies. These women were ambitious and were using their work experience to build up ‘credits’ for later employment. They were also intending ‘careerists’.
• managerial /professional women who were using part-time work for a few years to spend time with their family. They saw part-time work as 'keeping their hand in', 'keeping their skills', 'keeping them exposed' to the organisation, networks and contacts, and having uninterrupted employment (that is, no real 'career break') while rearing a family. They expected to return full-time and continue their career. Many were almost doing full-time jobs working from home with occasional sorties into the office. These women tended to have part-time work which reflected their skills and occupational level and were in retention part-time jobs. They were in the career category.

• non-managerial women who were also using part-time work for a short while to spend time with their family. They represented a mixture of women: those who wanted to move into the first supervisory or management levels, were expecting to return full-time, were concerned about the type of position available part-time (most work they were able to access meant a diminution of skills and level), and the lack of career paths from a part-time perspective. These women bridged the non-career category and the career category. Many would become 'careerists' if conditions improved.

• non-managerial women who were also using part-time work for short periods. These women were earner part-timers, but varied from the first group in that they needed the money, would like to work longer hours or in full-time employment, but had few career aspirations. Their focus was on their job which they saw as their career. They were often disaffected by their working conditions, expected the organisation to be more sympathetic to women's needs, and were vocal about the organisation's inflexibility to accommodate those needs - such as child-care arrangements and longer hours.
Given this result, what does this type of classification mean for the women's career prospects? A number of points are relevant.

Considering the type of working conditions currently enjoyed by managerial women part-timers, they appear to have reasonable career prospects provided they return to full-time work. Most organisations in the finance industry are endeavouring, through work and family policies and enterprise bargaining arrangements, to make more positions available to 'women with career potential' on a part-time basis. Much more flexibility is permissible for these women because the institutions wish to retain good performers. However, most women know they have to return to full-time employment in order to be promoted to higher positions. Promotion is possible while on part-time employment, but is limited in nature and a rare exception.

Some disadvantages exist for managerial part-timers. Because they are not working the long hours traditionally associated with managerial jobs in the industry (that is, 7 am to 7 pm), they are often seen to be 'less committed' (however, not as severely as non-managerial women), while they are also not in the 'mainstream' of financial life. A large number also have to take part-time positions at lower levels than their substantive status or in another area away from their normal occupation. Most do not automatically revert to their higher grade on return to full-time employment. Instead, they have to re-establish their grades and careers. If a managerial or a professional woman takes several maternity leave periods, this can become quite discouraging and the woman leaves. As a result, more enlightened employers are attempting to make conditions more attractive for managerial women to maintain the organisation's equity position in respect to the number of women managers.
Younger women part-timers also have reasonable career prospects, especially those who are undertaking tertiary studies. The trend in the finance industry is for an upgrading of skills and/or qualifications, especially tertiary. Organisations are reinvesting in graduate training schemes, the occupants of which are ‘fast-tracked’ through the organisation. Although part-timers do not normally have access to these programs, they are recognised as having ‘career potential’ especially when their qualifications are completed. The main downside for these women are the career breaks they will take for travel or maternity leave.

The remainder of the women part-timers technically also have no barriers to promotion. However, such promotion requires transfer from a non-career stream to a career stream (Junor, Barlow and Patterson, 1994, p760), a mechanism which is not clear to most - especially those in the branch network of banking. The fact that the Finance Sector Union is also requesting career paths for part-timers suggests that transfers are not readily available, a fact confirmed in the attitude survey of over 3000 employees which formed part of this research (Still, 1996). Women part-timers also do not have the same access to training as full-timers. Some basic procedural training may be provided, but little in the way of training related to career progression or self-development. As Junor, Barlow and Patterson (1994, p761) explain: “while part-time work is segregated into the non-career side of a dual labour market, it would take much persuasion to convince managers that they should incur extra expense to make career-relevant training available to part-timers”.

Based on this outcome, then, it appears that some selective changes are being made in terms of career possibilities for women part-timers, but the degree of selectivity depends on whether the woman is a career part-timer and important to the future of the business.
EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

The research revealed that women employees held different views to their male counterparts on a wide range of equity issues concerning recruitment, selection, promotion and transfer; and conditions of service. Part-timers were generally considered to be 'less committed' than full-timers, and treated very much as a 'just-in-time' workforce. This was despite the fact that some large organisations were making attempts to ascertain the career potential of part-timers and were introducing more flexible working relationships to accommodate both employee and employer needs. In fact, enterprise bargaining was being used as the vehicle to effect such change. While the Financial Services Union pressed for career-paths for part-timers, the employers were negotiating successfully for the removal of 'ceilings' on part-time employment within certain organisations, and the introduction of flexible working schedules calculated over a four-week period and on an hourly basis as opposed to daily/weekly schedules (Still, 1996). Under these new arrangements there will be an even greater use of part-time employees, with no guarantee of stable working arrangements. Part-timers will become much more mobile than now, and able to be moved around. A union representative describes what is already occurring in relation to part-timers deployment:

*We get a lot of calls from part-timers at the union saying that the region or the manager has changed their hours or are sending them to another branch. It seems to me that part-timers quite often get shafted because they are easy to move around, easy to take advantage of, and because they want the flexibility they are willing to be more flexible than full-time workers. They acquiesce because they want to keep their jobs: the hours suit them. It is a little bit easier to scare them I guess.*
Normally they want to work for those particular hours, like a little hole that's just their shape to be open before you can transfer them.

Another employment relations issue concerning part-timers was the implications of going on maternity leave. Most women felt being pregnant and having children was a real career barrier, because they were not normally able to come back to work at their same substantive level. While some opportunities existed, mainly through job sharing, these arrangements were still fairly rare. Although the organisations held lists of women interested in job sharing, managers had to agree to the arrangement and women had to find their own partner. However, women did not want to lose their skills or to take a lesser grade. While they recognised that having children was their own choice, they did not want to have to re-build their careers on return. Once in a part-time job, many women found it difficult to transfer back into a mainstream job comparable to their former skills. Managers tended to think that women had 'lost' skills - that they had somehow become less 'intelligent' because of pregnancy (Still, 1995).

Organisational culture was another employment relations issue. Despite the advent of changed social conditions over the past 30 years, and the massive restructuring which has 'hollowed-out' much of middle management, many male managers were still indoctrinated with the views of a past era. The women openly and vocally resented the fact, that in some organisations, some male managers still held the stereotypical view that women would only leave and have a family. These managers were yet to be convinced that women were now in the workforce on a longer-term basis and that some were interested in building careers. Depending on the organisation, many women were pestered by constant questions as to when they were going to fall pregnant. Some were so put off by this treatment that they didn't inform management until they showed. Others were denied access to training or to transfers because 'you needed worry your pretty little head about that' or
'you will only fall pregnant and leave'. Part-timers felt that they were treated as 'second-class citizens' and as 'cannon fodder' despite the fact that many were long-serving employees.

Allied to this treatment was the resentment of the full-time workers towards part-timers. Because of the changed conditions in the finance industry, no relief staff existed as in former times. Instead, part-timers were brought in to service peak periods, and to cover only some absences, such as extended sick leave, of full-timers. This meant extra pressure on full-time staff who complained that they had to do two jobs: their own, plus the additional work the part-timer had not completed by the time they had worked their hours. In banking, few branches had budgets which would cover overtime. Hence, part-timers left at the appointed time leaving whatever work was in progress to the full-time staff. The full-timer then worked longer hours, with no additional compensation, to complete the task. This added to the stress levels currently felt by staff through downsizing and restructuring. Management did not appear to be addressing these issues, and given the lack of training which now exists in the industry in comparison to former times, it suggests some potential employment relations problems in the future.

Part-time work was also seen as a 'dead-end' job because of the lack of a career structure. Over many years various women’s groups have agitated about women being provided jobs within the secondary labour market (that market which covers mainly unskilled or semi-skilled jobs with little job security, no career futures, low pay and few opportunities for training or promotion). The growth in part-time work has primarily been in the secondary labour market. Moreover, the new attempts by the large organisations to increase the numbers of part-timers will concentrate even more women in this segment. This goes against the other trend of getting more women into management and other forms of decision making.
structures. There is a long-term danger that two groups of women employees will evolve. The first is a small, elite and ‘privileged’ group of managerial and professional-type women: highly educated and highly skilled with access to career structures, career development and progression. The other is a large group of unskilled or semi-skilled women employees who will have no career futures, only limited access to full-time employment, and ever-diminishing opportunities to earn a reasonable income unless they work several part-time jobs concurrently. Although the union has been attempting to get management to focus on career structures for part-timers, actual reality, and the advent of technological developments, suggests that part-timers will become even more ‘peripheral’ in the future and could work even less hours than at present. Career structures are difficult to develop for people if they are only employed 2 hours a week or 2 hours a day. Such is the trend in the finance industry, suggesting another employment relations issue for the future.

Again, the trend to expand the working day/working week to accommodate the need of organisations to be more competitive and flexible in business operations will also impact on part-timers. More jobs will be created, but at less convenient times than previously - for instance, weekends (which will become part of the working week), and the midnight shift. The removal of penalty rates affecting these hours/days, and the deployment of part-timers to cover these times, will result in enormous savings for organisations. However, equity considerations could become paramount. Given that organisations’ have ‘family-friendly’ policies, this trend seems to be contradictory as it will be mainly women who will be working these odd hours to the traditional ‘normal’ working week.

Finally, the Federal Government’s proposed changes to the current industrial and arbitration arrangements has further relevance to women part-timers and employment relations. Some 35 women’s groups have
recently forged a coalition to fight the new federal industrial relations laws which are seen to have some severe implications for women. For part-timers, the proposed removal of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission's powers to set maximum and minimum hours for part-time employees is felt to disadvantage women employees with families who need certainty about hours and income (Long, 1996). Coupled with employer moves under enterprise bargaining, this would certainly seem to be so. Junor et al (1994, pp756-757), in their study of the finance industry, point out that some enterprise agreements have already led to a blurring of the boundaries between full-time, part-time and casual work. Some arrangements now require permanent part-time workers to work for somewhere between 12 hours and 24 hours per week and to be called on to work up to 29 hours. Pro-rata benefits are paid only on the agreed minimum hours. In some cases a 25% loading is paid on time worked about the contract hours, in lieu of pro-rata benefits. In other agreements, where the gap between permanent part-time hours and hours actually worked is not so great, the extra hours are paid simply at normal hourly rates. Others, again, have changed the 29 hour per week maximum for part-timers into 116 hours per 4-weekly cycle, allowing what amounts to unpaid overtime in periods of peak demand, and reducing wage costs in non-peak periods. The current moves to de-restrict the upper and lower limits on part-time hours per 4-week cycle potentially has the effect that there could be months where a part-timer works the equivalent of full-time hours in 2 or 3 weeks with a light fourth week. Alternatively, part-timers will be given even less hours than now, and at odd times i.e. more like casual employees. On the other hand, some part-timers 'voluntarily' agree to work longer hours, unpaid, if they can leave earlier or arrive later on other days. What this does is extend the work hours for part-timers above the maximum and saves wage costs for the employer. It also blurs the distinction between full-time and part-time work.
CONCLUSION

Two issues arise from this examination of part-time employment in the finance industry. The first relates essentially to equity considerations; and the second to what is meant by a ‘career’ in our modern post-industrial world.

There is no doubt that part-timers do not receive the same equitable treatment as full-timers in relation to promotion and transfer and conditions of service. Because they are considered essentially to be a ‘just-in-time’ workforce, there is little investment in their training while few career structures exist for them. Part of this is exacerbated by the employees (women) themselves. Because they wish to work only certain hours, and close to home, employers have both accommodated, and taken advantage of, their needs. However, like all aspects of our society, part-time work is undergoing change. Where once it was targeted more towards those who wished to accommodate work and family, it is now becoming the ‘career’ choice of many as organisations downsize and restructure. Hence, the recent moves to formally and informally differentiate working conditions between ‘career’ and ‘non-career’ part-timers. However, generally speaking, part-time workers are still considered to be the ‘other’ workforce which is peripheral or marginal to the full-time workforce (Jnor et al, 1994). As women form the greater majority of this workforce, they are being subject to non-equitable working conditions, a feature which is likely to exacerbate in the future in enterprise agreements. They are also becoming more and more entrenched in the secondary labour market despite other equity programs designed to encourage more women into management.

The second issue concerns the meaning of a ‘career’ in today’s working environment. Once it meant leaving school, working full-time, joining one or two organisations, and moving upwards in the hierarchy before retirement.
Today it means something different. Hall and Richter (1990), in a seminal article, described the career paths of the future for employees:

'functional specialist (growth within a discipline), consultant, local generalist (rotational, lateral movement, while remaining in one location), fast-track or slow-track into management, project management, permanent part-timer, job specialist (career development within a specific job position), and multi-path option (the freedom to move from one of the paths to another).

Employees will also have to face the demise of the single, long-term career path, and learn to cope with interleaving periods of employment with unemployment, full-time work with part-time work, permanent work with casual employment and voluntary work. The sense of a career is altering radically and moving away from an organisation’s responsibility to provide, to the individual assuming responsibility for a self-directed and more differentiated career path. “Managing Your Own Career”, “Your Career, Your Move” are catch-cries in the finance industry which will become more prevalent in a wide range of industries. While these developments have been aimed primarily at the full-time workforce, they relate also to part-timers, that growing segment of the employment market. Part-timers are beginning to demand career paths. The industry’s response is to put the onus back on the part-timer thereby saving costs once again in training and development. In some ways, then, part-timers are in the forefront of this career-type change: in others, they are sliding back into the dark days of the industrial revolution where workers were exploited and had few conditions.

Thus, as Burgess, Gleisner, Rasmussen (1996, p97) point out, part-time employment for women still continues to be associated with casual employment conditions, a narrow band of occupations, low trade union densities, low pay and a limited career path. The question for the future then
is: will this scenario continue to develop? Or will the fact that both genders, male and female, now find themselves in the part-time workforce lead to a new transformation in working arrangements? The former path seems more likely, given that the advent of men into part-time employment is only recent and of small numbers.

Finally, my own research, like that of Junor et al (1993, 1994), indicates that the work performed by part-time women workers in the finance industry is dogged by stereotypes which undervalues and understates the true nature of the work being undertaken. This suggests that women need to re-think the value and validity of part-time employment if they wish to be accepted as full and equitable members of the workforce in the future. This may take some time as the implications of the trends that are occurring in part-time employment, and their impact on employees, are only now becoming discernible. However, as women make up the overwhelming majority of part-time employees, some re-assessment seems necessary if women are to prevent being channelled into the 'other' or 'just-in-time' workforce with few benefits and diminishing working conditions.

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