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The Ultimate Lousy Job?
Evaluating the Construction of Paid Household Work

by
Gabrielle Meagher

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

Faculty of Economics, The University of Sydney, March 1999

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Declaration of originality

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(Signed)........................................................................................................

Gabrielle Meagher
Abstract

This thesis presents a systematic account of the supply side of domestic services industry in Australia. Its contributions are two-fold and intertwined. Empirically, it documents and analyses the diverse experiences of service providers in the industry, based on their own accounts collected in interviews. It builds a profile of the institutional structure of the industry, and assesses the extent to which cultural and economic problems in domestic occupations can be remedied by institutional innovation. It demonstrates that the domestic services industry has a complex institutional structure, in which heterogeneous actors pursue a range of economic goals.

Methodologically, the thesis employs a meso-level analysis which emphasises the critical role of institutions in mediating action and structure. By constructing the account of the industry this way, it is able to challenge and refine several key propositions of the prevailing account of paid household work in feminist social scientific writing. In this literature, what many writers continue to call ‘domestic service’ is represented as the ultimate ‘lousy job.’ The thesis shows that the shared methodological and conceptual underpinnings of much writing on paid household work construct an account that precludes assessment and development of strategies for work life reform, despite writers’ intentions. By employing the dynamic concepts of the struggle for recognition and the politics of needs interpretation, the thesis evaluates the potential for work life reforms which comprehensively remedy the problems of domestic and quasi-domestic workers in a variety of institutional settings.

In addition to criticising existing accounts of paid household work, the thesis provides an empirical foundation for contributing to broader debates about the domestic services industry, including its place in the future of work, and whether or not commodified housework is morally undesirable. It concludes that contrary to popular opinion, employment in private homes has not been growing in Australia recent years, although current changes to the political economic framework may foster its future growth. Second, it concludes that although the practice of commodified housework may not be undesirable on the grounds that it causes unique and specific harms to domestic workers, the further commodification of private life may represent a threat to important cultural values.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Yanis Varoufakis and Dick Bryan, for their support for and interest in the writing of this thesis. Both, I'm sure, now know more than they ever wanted to about the domestic services industry.

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The respondents to the study gave both time and thought to a relative stranger. In doing so they made the thesis possible.

My family and friends have provided me with the parallel universe I retreated into at the end of every working day. My wonderful daughter Brigid kept me laughing and cooking until the day I submitted. I dedicate the result to her.
A note on spelling.

I have used Australian (British) spelling throughout. However, I have preserved United States spelling in quotations.
# Table of Contents

## Chapter 1

**INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Situating the study
   1.1.1 Domestic rationalisation and the future of work
   1.1.2 From structures to norms: evaluating the commodification of housework
   1.1.3 Women as economic actors
   1.1.4 Social hierarchy

1.2 Conceptual and methodological issues: choices and problems
   1.2.1 Defining paid household work and the domestic services industry
   1.2.2 Measuring the domestic services industry
   1.2.3 Interpreting actors’ accounts of their experience
   1.2.4 Evaluation and prediction

1.3 Thesis Structure

1.4 Conclusion

## Chapter 2

**THE DISCOVERY OF PAID HOUSEHOLD WORK**

2.1 An emergent consensus on ‘domestic service’
   2.1.1 Paid household work is ‘unique’ and ‘peculiar’
   2.1.2 Paid household work and systems of domination
   2.1.3 Domestic workers resist domination
   2.1.4 Remedies proposed or implied in feminist writings

2.2 Conclusions

## Chapter 3

**THE DOMESTIC SERVICES ‘INDUSTRY’: AN OVERVIEW IN PARTICIPANTS’ VOICES**

3.1 Supply side structure: Institutions in the industry
   3.1.1 Local networks
   3.1.2 The open market
   3.1.3 Domestic employment agencies
   3.1.4 Capitalist companies
   3.1.5 Franchise companies
   3.1.6 The Home Care Service of New South Wales

3.2 Supply side views of demand for domestic services
   3.2.1 Reasons for purchasing domestic services
   3.2.2 Disadvantages of purchasing domestic services
   3.2.3 Domestic service providers hiring domestics?

3.3 Doing paid household work
   3.3.1 The work
   3.3.2 The job experience
   3.3.3 Domestic employment relationships in brief

3.4 Conclusion
Chapter 4
THE UNIQUENESS QUESTION 62

4.1 Friend, flunkey or what?
Understanding domestic employment relationships 63
4.1.1 Case study 1: Corinne’s domestic cleaning company 64
4.1.2 Case study 2: The Home Care Service of New South Wales 70
4.2 Discussion 76
4.3 Conclusions 80

Chapter 5
‘STOP-GAP,’ ‘GHETTO’ OR WHAT?:
CAREER TRAJECTORIES IN DOMESTIC SERVICE PROVISION 82

5.1 Occupational mobility in the domestic services industry:
The theoretical context 82
5.1.1 The dominant view: a restatement 83
5.1.2 Post-industrial proletarians?
Paid domestic labour and the future of work 84
5.2 ‘Careers’ in the domestic services industry 87
5.2.1 Stop-gap for students 89
5.2.2 Stepping stone 94
5.2.3 Filler 99
5.2.4 Career 109
5.2.5 Dead-end. 113
5.3 Discussion 117
5.3.1 Distinguishing careers 117
5.3.2 Mobility within the domestic services industry 118
5.3.3 Some key public policy settings 119
5.3.4 Varieties of labour market disadvantage 120
5.4 Conclusions 122

Chapter 6
MARKET-BASED STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING PAID HOUSEHOLD WORK 125

6.1 Defining ‘problems’ 126
6.2 Fair contracting 131
6.2.1 Case Study 3: Domestic placement agencies as transaction managers 133
6.2.2 Discussion: Limits to agency support for ‘fair contracting’ 138
6.3 ‘Professionalisation:’ Market(ing)-based strategies for work improvement 143
6.3.1 Case Study 4:
Professionalisation as masculinisation: cleaners as skilled tradesmen 145
6.3.2 Case Study 5:
Between equals? The domestic worker as executive housewife 150
6.3.3 Discussion: The capacities and limits of professionalisation 153
Chapter 7
THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION:
SOLIDARITY-BASED STRATEGIES FOR WORK IMPROVEMENT 156

7.1 Collective strategies by private domestic workers:
   Examples from the United States. 159

7.2 'Social movement' unionism:
   Examples from the United States and Sweden 161
   7.2.1 The Domestic Workers Association 162
   7.2.2 The Service Employees' International Union 164
   7.2.3 Kommunal: Feminist unionism in Sweden 166

7.3 The politicisation of needs and the struggle for recognition 168

7.4 Collective action in context:
   Constraints on solidarity-based work transformation 173

7.5 Conclusions 177

Chapter 8
THE CONSENSUS CRITICISED 179

8.1 Problems with research design and reporting 180
   8.1.1 Racial-ethnic composition of study populations 181
   8.1.2 Institutional structure of the industry 183
   8.1.3 Contextual factors affecting work status and experience 185
   8.1.4 Reporting findings on the experience of domestic work. 186
   8.1.5 Some revealing comparisons. 188
   8.1.6 Discussion and some counterexamples 191

8.2 Problems with naming 193
   8.2.1 What's in a name? Domestic service and modernisation 193
   8.2.2 Discussion 196

8.3 Theorising systemic domination 197

Chapter 9
CONCLUSION:
EVALUATING THE COMMODIFICATION OF HOUSEWORK 199

   Coming Clean: A postscript 209
Appendix A
METHOD

A.1 Sampling and recruiting 211
A.2 Interviewing and transcribing 214
A.3 Data processing and analysis 216
A.4 Using fieldwork data 216

Appendix B
OFFICIAL STATISTICS
ON THE DOMESTIC SERVICES INDUSTRY 218

B.1 Employment in paid household work 218
B.2 Expenditure on domestic services: The Household Expenditure Survey 221

Appendix C
DOMESTIC LABOUR TASKS
AND DOMESTIC OCCUPATIONS 225

C.1 Characteristics of domestic labour tasks 225
C.2 Rates of pay for domestic and comparable occupations 228
C.3 Service types and institutions 228

Appendix D
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DOMESTIC WORKFORCE 232

D.1 Sex of domestic service providers 232
D.2 Ethnicity of service providers 235

Appendix E
PUBLIC POLICY AND PAID HOUSEHOLD WORK 239

E.1 Labour regulation 239
   E.1.1 An outline of the Australian industrial relations system 239
   E.1.2 Domestic workers in the industrial relations system. 241
E.2 Education, training and labour market programs 243
E.3 Immigration and citizenship 246
E.4 Social security and tax policy 249
E.5 Public social services provision 250
   E.5.1 Childcare 250
   E.5.2 Aged care 252
E.6 Discussion 253

REFERENCES 254
Chapter 1

Introduction

“Good help – it's so easy to find these days” announces the cover of a lifestyle supplement in a metropolitan daily broadsheet (Sydney Morning Herald, July 4 1996). Newspapers frequently claim that domestic employment is growing in Australia.\(^1\) Indeed, a resurgence in the employment of household workers is widely believed to be occurring around the developed world (Anderson 1997:38; Gregson and Lowe 1994:4; Gorz 1994:91; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994:50; Mackay 1993:49, Wrigley 1991:318).\(^2\)

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2. See also “At your service,” The Economist, December 14, 1996; the feature entitled “Upstairs, Downstairs” in The Irish Times of March 18, 1997; “Domestic Services: Homework,” and the leader “Jeeves Strikes It Rich” in The Economist, September 26 1998. In the United States, “nannygate” -- the political scandal in 1993 over US Attorney-General nominee Zoe Baird's confession that she employed two illegal aliens as her babysitter and driver -- put waged domestic labour into the headlines-- see for example, Pilita Clark, “Nanny trap trips more” SMH Feb 9 1993, and promoted a flurry of articles offering legal advice to domestic employers, particularly in law and tax journals.
This popular interest in paid household work is part of a broader concern about employment trends. For nearly three decades, since the end of the post war boom, social analysts have speculated about the uncertain future of work and employment. Simultaneously, debate about the relationship between gender differences in labour market opportunities and rewards, and the division of domestic labour has persisted as a central theme in feminist social science, despite the 'linguistic turn.' Paid household work is peculiarly suited as a starting point and focus for exploring some of the most pressing and interesting questions raised in these speculations and debates. It has already attracted considerable attention, censorious as well as approving, as a potential solution to the problem of persistent, high levels of unemployment, and to the disadvantages women face attempting to balance paid work and family life.³

This thesis presents the first systematic account of this contentious form of service sector employment in contemporary Australia. Until the 1970s, explaining why private household employment decreased over time occupied social analysts interested in this occupation (Coser 1973, Aubert 1956). Now, much of the anxiety expressed by critics of the contemporary domestic services industry, and the hope expressed by its champions, is based on the belief that the employment of domestic workers is increasing. However, few studies even attempt to measure the size and/or growth of this market in the relevant national context.⁴

Evaluation of theoretical and ethical arguments depends at least partly on the facts of the case. As it happens, available evidence does not support the 'growth hypothesis' in Australia. The most up-to-date information available in Australia indicates that households are increasingly 'outsourcing' domestic labour, but in the form of restaurant meals and institutional child care. The proportion of households reporting the purchase of those forms of domestic outsourcing involving the direct purchase of labour has not increased between 1984 and 1994. Across the decade, a stable four percent of households reported buying housekeeping and cleaning services. During the same period, fewer than one quarter of one percent of


⁴ Gregson and Lowe (1994) are the single exception, although their method of measurement is questionable, see Blittman, Matheson and Meagher (1999).
households spent enough on home-based childcare to warrant counting as nanny employment (see Appendix B.2, and Bittman, Matheson and Meagher 1999).

Qualitative issues, and similar misunderstandings about them, sit alongside these quantitative questions. Anxiety is evinced in qualitative analyses contending that waged domestic labour entails 'lousy jobs,' uniquely unpleasant because of peculiarities in employment relationships existing in the interstices of the market and household domains. Once again, evaluation depends in part on the facts of the case, and the way they are assembled. This thesis takes up this 'lousy job' question: what kind of job is paid household work? It presents a kind of 'economic ethnography' of waged domestic labour in Australia. It analyses the institutional structure of the domestic services industry, what kind of people work as paid household workers and why, the nature of their working relationships with the householders employing them, and their experience of paid household work as an occupation.

This study, unlike the dominant view in the literature, focuses on the gender, racial-ethnic and institutional diversity of participants in the domestic services industry, and uses comparisons 'inside' the industry to explore a range of theoretical and practical problems. Based on this analysis, I tender some criticism of the construction, and so the generalisations, made by many analogous qualitative studies of the occupation in other countries. I show that paid household work is not an inherently exploitative occupation, nor necessarily a dead-end, and that new ways of organising the work are improving its status and the pay and conditions of some workers. Moreover, historical, geographical, and geopolitical contexts as well as the prevailing national public policy framework powerfully shape both demand and supply sides of the market. This analysis challenges essentialising conceptualisations of paid household work prevalent in much writing on the domestic services industry.

1.1 Situating the study

Although the Australian domestic services industry has not expanded, at least insofar as household expenditure measures record its size, it remains an important object of analysis. Paid household workers may be (or become) the paradigm post-industrial service worker. Even if the number of private household workers are not growing, they are caught up in the struggle over the nature and future of social and consumer service work, and the distribution of this work between household, state,

5. Estimated very conservatively at A$60 per week, in 1988 prices.
and market provision. If paid household work *is* a 'lousy job,' discovering ways of making it better is a critical priority.

I have claimed that paid household work is a useful empirical reference point for intervention in some important debates in contemporary political economy. This section briefly expands on that claim, extending the reach of what might otherwise be an occupational case-study through the identification of several broad themes.

1.1.1 Domestic rationalisation and the future of work

The 'growth hypothesis' is figured through a variety of sometimes overlapping, sometimes contending, accounts of economic change. From one point of view, aspects of which are shared by both liberal and Marxist writers, the (posited) expansion of waged domestic labour is a process of market formation or 'commodification', as the previously unpaid tasks of domestic labour become objects of market exchanges. Capitalist development or modernisation has been described as involving the rationalisation of the domestic economy (Chaplin 1978, Offe 1996). Analysis of the emergence – or not – of a market for domestic labour is a means by which the reach and process of domestic rationalisation can be understood.

At a lower level of abstraction, because domestic labour *services* are under consideration, analysis of their purchase and sale has been tied to analysis of the evolving occupational and industrial structures of post-industrial labour markets. Tracing the conditions under which paid household work – generally described as a low-skill, low-paid and low status occupation – has (or has not) expanded as a form of employment is a means by which the 'present' and future of work in post-industrial Australia can be diagnosed and more accurately predicted.

Finally, although it is not adequately treated in the existing literature, institutional evolution *within* the industry may influence the path of its future development. How and why institutional change occurs within an industry can be linked back to the process of commodification, as the form and practical 'content' of commodification become objects of analysis. Simply, if domestic labour is to be bought and sold, how the buying and selling of the work is organised makes a difference.

I show how some industry participants have mobilised cultural and organisational resources to improve their economic and social status, albeit sometimes in ways which reproduce existing patterns of labour market
disadvantage. Their capacity and opportunities to do so depend significantly on the aforementioned historical, geographical and public policy contexts. Rationalisation of the domestic economy is an historically contingent process, and has become caught up in the “politics of needs formation” (Fraser 1989): conflict over allocation of social resources, immigration practices, and discriminatory labour laws as well as levels of economic development determine whether consumption goods and services are produced by households, in the market or by the state (Arat-Koç 1989:36).

1.1.2 From structures to norms: evaluating the commodification of housework

The socio-cultural implications of the extension of markets provide the second theme. From a liberal point of view, the expansion of market relations to incorporate domestic labour occurs as rational decision makers change their preferences and/or exploit market opportunities. Others are less sanguine. Does the further reach of impersonal exchange relations into that intimate realm of personal life, the home, to replace tasks otherwise performed in a framework of affective relationships, exemplify what Habermas calls the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system (Fraser 1989 Chapter 6)? Here normative considerations are paramount. Some moral claims and problems can be articulated at the level of society as a whole: the critique of commodification understands this process, in general, to alienate and degrade persons, and to be inimical to human flourishing. Should domestic labour be bought and sold? Is there something about the content and context of waged domestic labour that means it cannot be fully commodified, and so will remain a “contested commodity” (Radin 1996)? What are the possibilities and implications of state regulation and/or provision of domestic labour services?

Other moral claims and problems are more closely focused: here the questions of who will do the work, and under what practical and relational conditions emerge. As workers in a low status occupation on the margin of public (market and state) and private (domestic) domains, domestic workers are engaged in a “struggle for recognition” (Honneth 1994, 1995, 1997). Axel Honneth, working in the tradition of Critical Theory, locates in the struggle for recognition, manifest in this case in domestic workers’ desire for respect for their contribution to social labour, “a pretheoretical sphere of emancipation to which critique can refer in order to confirm its normative standpoint within social reality” (Honneth 1994:260). On this view, the purpose of social scientific and moral theorising is to help “give expression to an
existing experience of social injustice” (Honneth 1994:262). The nature of injustice is complex: Honneth, building on insights of Hegel and G. H. Mead, argues that the moral quality of social relations cannot be measured solely in terms of the fair or just distribution of material goods; rather, our notion of justice is also very closely linked to how, and as what, subjects mutually recognize each other (Honneth 1997:17).

The concept of a struggle for recognition provides a powerful, dynamic framework for analysing the condition of and possibilities for action for domestic workers. I examine both market- and solidarity-based strategies domestic service providers pursue to improve their economic and social status. I conclude that market-based strategies like ‘professionalisation,’ although significant, are partial solutions to the cultural and economic undervaluation of domestic labour.

Honneth points out that disrespect for the capabilities and contributions of particular groups “harm the feeling of being socially significant *within a concrete community*” (1997:27 emphasis added). Domestic workers’ struggle for recognition is tied up with struggles for recognition by women workers, and members of subordinated racial-ethnic groups. These concerns are reflected in the third and fourth themes, which have a strong focus on gender, and, less comprehensively, on class and race-ethnicity.

1.1.3 Women as economic actors

The third theme, prominent in feminist writing on paid household work, points to the interactions of gender, class and racial-ethnic structures in economic life, particularly in the labour market. Both the supply of and demand for waged domestic labour are tied to the standing of women as economic actors. An increasing proportion of women have undertaken paid work in recent decades, but, typically, their burden of domestic labour has declined little, and has not become more equally shared with men (Bittman and Pixley 1997, Chapter 4). Feminists have long insisted that women’s roles and opportunities inside and outside the home are shaped by their responsibility for household and caring work. Change in the distribution of household work between self and market provision would have substantial impact on the lives of the women involved, and may indicate broader changes in the social division of labour.

However, the option to replace their own labour with purchased services is not open to all. Feminist writers argue that from which side a woman is likely to
participate in the domestic services industry will depend on her class, and where she fits into the racial-ethnically segmented labour market. The point here is to examine who is involved in the market for domestic services, and why, for what this reveals about the distribution of opportunities and rewards in the labour market. I argue that writers concerned about the plight of workers corralled in the ‘occupational ghetto’ of paid household work need to pay more analytical attention to the institutions and practices underpinning some workers’ lack of alternative opportunities, rather than condemning the existence of the occupation to which these workers have easy access.

‘Care,’ ‘caring work,’ and ‘emotional labour’ have also emerged as important related, if contested, categories in feminist social science (see Folbre 1995, Graham 1991, Himmelweit 1995, Hochschild 1983, Thomas 1993, and Ungerson 1995). Indeed, taken together, the discourses of care, emotional labour and paid household work may be seen as evolutionary descendants of ‘housework,’ refining, rethinking, and extending the scope of issues raised but not satisfactorily resolved in the ‘domestic labour debates.’ Here, again, the commodification of care and housework have emerged as ethical and practical concerns (see also section 1.2.1).

Once a householder and a domestic worker enter the domestic employment relation, described by some writers as a class relationship, the labour process of paid household work comes into being. Analysis of the character of this relationship provides an important basis for evaluation of the quality of jobs in domestic service provision. This feeds back into an account of labour market stratification, and to debates about the future of work. I argue, contra the prevailing view, that domestic employment relationships take a variety of forms, partly because these relationships are formed through a variety of economic institutions, and so are not unique in the way generally argued.

1.1.4 Social hierarchy

The fourth theme returns to analysis of gender, class and race-ethnicity to the level of ‘society as a whole’. Many feminist writers link the labour process of waged domestic labour with the reproduction of pervasive and persistent gender, class and racial-ethnic hierarchies. From this point of view, paid household work is both a cause and effect of racism and sexism, mediated through class relations between women (for example Arat-Koç 1989; Rollins 1985, 1990; Romero 1992, Roberts 1997, see also Chapter 2.1.2 below). For others, a market for domestic services is a
progressive development: the commodification of housework will assist the restructuring of both housework and gender roles in ways which release women from drudgery (Bergmann 1998, Mackay 1993, Ruthven 1994). Both overstate their cases, and lack a dialectical edge. I argue that these alternatives do not exhaust possible interpretations of where paid household work fits into the division of labour.

1.2 Conceptual and methodological issues: choices and problems

Table 1.1, used to structure this section, sets out some choices and problems in the selection and collection of facts, and in the interpretation of evidence of various kinds, that must be confronted at the outset of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Micro</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>defining paid household work</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>interpreting actors’ accounts of their experience</th>
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First, I define the object of analysis: paid household work or ‘domestic services.’ Here both task-based (‘technical’) and various contextual (‘social’) factors need to be taken into account. Second, I discuss measurement: having defined the object of analysis, and given the importance of the ‘growth hypothesis,’ particularly in popular writing on the domestic services industry, some comments on measurement of the industry as a whole are in order. Third, I consider the interpretive ‘problem’ of how social analysis mediates the relationship between respondents’ self-representations and perceptions with theoretical arguments. Fourth, I reflect on the necessarily interpretive issues raised by the debate about commodification, and in attempts to predict ‘the future of work.’

1.2.1 Defining paid household work and the domestic services industry

What exactly do I mean by paid household work, or ‘domestic services’? In contemporary Australia, ‘domestic labour’ is a collection of divisible and heterogeneous tasks, generally including house cleaning, cooking, laundry,
household management, and shopping. An expanded definition takes in physical care for others, including child and aged care, and 'emotional housework': time spent managing the people, and building and managing relationships within a household. In general, these latter activities are included in this study only insofar as their purchase overlaps with the purchase of tasks from the first set. When they buy domestic services, householders purchase the labour time of others to perform one or more of these tasks, usually to replace their own, otherwise unpaid domestic labour. The market for domestic services is distinguished from markets for other household consumption goods and services (such as restaurant meals or dry cleaning), because labour time is purchased directly, and is expended in the home of the purchaser (with the obvious exception of shopping) (Meagher 1999). Appendix C.1 explains how patterns in the demand for and supply of paid household work are shaped by the different characteristics of the various tasks constituting domestic labour and their social organisation. It shows how differences between the tasks affect, but do not determine, the extent and means of their commodification, and how clusters of tasks form the occupations in which domestic workers are employed.

This definition of the market for domestic services is quasi-technical, and needs fleshing out to take into account social dimensions of its organisation. Activities fulfilling human needs, including those we call 'domestic labour,' can be performed (1) in the context of relationships of reciprocity in communities (including family groups); (2) they may be subject to market exchanges or 'commodified,' or (3) they may be 'socialised' or provided through the welfare state (after Offe 1996:135-8). Whether and how particular domestic labour tasks are commodified or socialised depends on a variety of technical and social factors (see Appendix C). Esping-Andersen (1993:24) proposes a distinction between social and consumer services. This distinction is sometimes difficult to draw, but is important in empirical and ethical debates about where waged domestic labour fits in the future of work. Esping-Andersen argues that both social and consumer services are alternatives to

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6. Outdoor work, including gardening and home maintenance can also be included in an expanded definition of domestic labour, but are excluded from this study. They are excluded because these tasks 1) are traditionally 'men's work,' 2) on average, households spend considerably less time on them compared to indoor housework and childcare combined (Bittman and Pixley 1997), and 3) their commodification has different social meanings and implications.

7. These include a task's time-intensity, economies of scale in commodity production of a task's output, and whether or not householders can use home-based 'capital goods' to increase their own 'productivity'
"household self-servicing:" social services replace social reproduction functions such as health, education and welfare, and the purchase of consumer services creates time for the pursuit of leisure, or directly supports leisure activities of various kinds. He bases his distinction primarily on service function, and uses it to think through how national institutional frameworks shape the extent of demand for these services, and how labour might be supplied, organised and remunerated. (This aspect of Esping-Andersen's work is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.)

Paid household work does not fit neatly into either 'social' or 'consumer' service categories. This is partly because the category 'household work' is itself heterogeneous, consisting of a range of different tasks as described above. But it is also because the same service can fulfil different functions, depending on context. Purchased home-based childcare can be considered a social service when it substitutes for childcare provided by the welfare state to other parents who do not 'self-service.' Housecleaning purchased by able-bodied adults to increase their leisure time is probably best understood as a private consumer service. However, housecleaning for the frail aged, provided through state-managed programs such as Australia's Home and Community Care schemes, or even through private sector market exchanges can be considered a social service. Working adults, particularly couples with children, may purchase both childcare and housecleaning so that they can take up paid work more easily, but they also enjoy the benefit of leisure time released by a domestic worker's labour. Thus, the same task can be either or both a social and consumer service.

André Gorz highlights the ethical issues behind this (sometimes elusive) distinction using a highly charged differentiation between servants' work (based on wants, and corresponding with Esping-Andersen's concept of consumer services), and community service (based on needs, and corresponding with Esping-Andersen's concept of social services). Gorz designates as "essentially servile jobs or servants' jobs" employment in those "services which do not create any use value, whilst still being the subjects of public commodity exchanges" (1989:141). When someone pays another to do their housework (or shine their shoes etc), when the buyer has both the

8. What kind of service childcare is remains hotly debated. Policy makers and interested groups have, at different times, represented childcare as 1) a business' service, required to maintain the human capital and therefore the productivity, of female workers; 2) a service provision of which socialises child care in Esping-Andersen's sense, and is not necessarily related to parents' labour market status; and 3) a consumer service which may be sought by households which 'choose' not to self-service (see Brennan 1998).
time and the physical ability to do it themselves, the buyer is “not paying for the usefulness of the service provided, but for the pleasure of having someone serving him (sic)” (1989:141). For Gorz, this holds true whether the domestic labour is purchased “directly or through service companies” (1989:141) because in both cases the private comfort of individual buyers and the servants’ giving of themselves are still involved (1989:142). A “home-help” cleaning the house of a disabled person is not a servant, on this view, because the person in receipt of services needs them (Gorz 1989:143). Thus, servitude is defined by a combination of the task content, the function of a service task in the life of the purchaser, and the relationship thereby assumed/created. Gorz (1989 Chapter 11) concludes that the non-productive activities which constitute ‘servants’ work’ should not be bought and sold.

These reflections refine and extend the parameters of debate about ‘commodification’ outlined in section 1.1.2. The implications for workers and householders of the ‘socialisation’ of domestic labour services through the welfare differ from those of commodification. Although state involvement in the oversight, organisation, funding and/or provision of services may still represent a ‘colonisation of the lifeworld by the system,’ the process and potential for democratic reform will differ from those associated with the development of more clearly market-based forms.

1.2.2 Measuring the domestic services industry

Accurate measurements of aspects of the size and composition of the domestic services industry and its workforce are not available. For a start, an unknown proportion of activity in the industry takes place in the informal sector, making official labour statistics unreliable. Moreover, data collected for the compilation of official labour statistics are not coded in ways which allow counting even of formal sector participants on the supply side (see Appendix B for details).

There is a useful measure of the size of the industry as a whole on the demand side, recorded in the Household Expenditure Survey. This survey tells us something about the composition of households purchasing domestic services, and is much less likely to be subject to delinquent reporting (see Appendix B.2). However, expenditure data tell us virtually nothing about employment in the industry. The
number of people working as domestic service providers; the precise proportions of men and women, of migrants and the native-born, and amongst migrants, of those from non-English speaking countries; and the distribution of this work force between the various institutions in the industry remain unrecorded in official statistics.

In interviews with domestic service providers, I collected a range of demographic information, in addition to qualitative data about their work experience. Appendix D sets out information on the composition of the domestic labour force I have gathered in extensive fieldwork. Thus, this study makes an important, if preliminary, contribution by mapping the demographic and institutional contours of the supply side of the domestic services industry in Australia, in addition to its primary goal of recording workers' accounts of their working lives and relationships.

1.2.3 Interpreting actors' accounts of their experience

Material collected in semi-structured interviews with service providers in domestic services industry is a principal data source of the thesis, along with documents and government reports of various kinds. Respondent recruitment strategies and interviewing and transcribing procedures are set out in detail in Appendix A.

Use of this kind of data poses some particular methodological challenges. How does a social scientist interpret the self-representation in speech of actors, in my case participants in the domestic services industry, in a way which both recognises their autonomy, and maintains the critical attitude or 'distance' required by the social scientific project?

Rational choice theory starts by assuming that actors know and do what is in their best interest, subject to information and resource constraints. This approach assumes away the problem of interpretation. Rational choice theory can be useful for explaining some kinds of choice, market behaviour, and strategic action, but is a

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9. I use the term 'service provider' rather than 'domestic worker' because although all respondents were participants on the supply side of the industry, some, typically agency and company operators, did not actually work as domestic service workers. Rather, in various ways, they organised domestic workers - matching them with householders and/or employing them in a company structure and sending them out to clean or care for service consumers. The term service provider is intended to capture both 'workers' and 'organisers.' The term also served as a bland label in interviews, to avoid my introducing more loaded words like 'worker,' or 'servant.'
cumbersome and ineffectual tool for explaining and evaluating normative and/or non-utilitarian aspects of socio-economic action.

Structural-functionalism and some variants of Marxism interpret actors' self representations through the concept of ideology, accounting for gaps between the 'objective' view of the social scientist and the 'subjective' view of actors in terms of (some variant of) 'false consciousness.' Instead of focusing on individual behaviour, these frameworks attend to those aspects of the social world actors face as relatively immutable, its 'structures.' This is to err on the side of taking too little account of actors' agency. Writers in these traditions explain poorly the relationship between human agency and 'macro' or structural features of the social order.

Giddens (1993) offers a powerful, if difficult, resolution with his description of the "double hermeneutic" at work in knowledge production in the social sciences. Theoretical schemes – including, of course, accounts of such entities as 'rational behaviour,' 'hierarchical structures' and 'institutions' – are themselves interpretive. But social science "deals with a universe which is already constituted within frames of meaning by social actors themselves, and reinterprets these in its own theoretical schemes" (Giddens 1993:170). To analyse or explain a form of life, the social scientist has to be able first to grasp the "lay concepts" through which (observed) actors understand their form of life (1993:167). In turn, the concepts of social science may be 'taken over' by lay actors who "embody them as constitutive elements in the rationalization of their own conduct" (1993:167).

Recognising the double hermeneutic introduces reflexivity into analysis, and invites the researcher to be sensitive to the interaction between social scientific and lay constructions of the social world. Interpretive social research methods offer access to a range of motivations, norms, and social interactions. This enables us to think through relationships between the macro pressures creating market structures and forms of individual and collective action shaping the meanings of work for actors involved in, in this case, the domestic services industry.¹⁰

1.2.4 Evaluation and prediction

'Hard line' rational choice theorists tend to assume away ethical problems of commodification with rationality postulates. Although Marxists recognise that
market relations can dissolve oppressive ties based on ascriptive relations, and so in some cases, enhance freedom; they generally hold that capitalism’s systemic tendency to commodification gravely impoverishes human interactions. Because employment relationships in paid household work have been understood as ‘premodern’ or ‘quasi-feudal’ (Coser 1973), the space between these possibilities – dissolution of oppressive ties, and alienation – points to the essential requirement for careful and open-minded research into emerging commodified relations.

My framework for evaluation takes as a starting point that some commodification of domestic labour has taken place, and I examine existing forms of paid household work to determine those in which domestic workers fare best. The meaning of ‘fare best’ is determined, in the tradition of Critical Theory, by building on terms introduced by domestic workers themselves (see section 1.1.2 above). Respondents identify both economic injustice and social disrespect as problems. I analyse 1) the connections, if any, between these problems, and 2) the conditions and practices which produce or remedy them.

Because I want to draw on and participate in debates about the future of work, I am drawn into the shadowy world of prediction. My intervention here is, and must be, modest. The paucity of data make rules out statistical forecasting techniques, which are, at any rate, limited because they cannot accommodate well the kinds of institutional factors and other social and economic changes which shape demand and supply in particular industries. Instead, I focus on how past, current, and projected future institutional arrangements in the Australian political economy have and may shape and alter the distribution of certain activities between market, state and community/household provision of domestic labour services.

1.3 Thesis Structure

In Chapter 2, I identify and set out the dominant view in feminist social scientific writing of the nature of paid household work as an occupation. Three themes or propositions emerge to form this dominant view in the literature: that 1) ‘domestic service’ (as it is widely called) is a uniquely exploitative occupation because of the character and location of the domestic employment relationship; 2) ‘domestic service’ reproduces hierarchical structures of class, race-ethnicity and

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10. My thinking on these methodological issues benefited enormously from conversations with Shaun Wilson, Department of Economics, University of Sydney, and Department of Sociology, University of New South Wales.
gender; and 3) domestic workers resist domination by their employers in a variety of ways. I use these themes to structure the body of the thesis. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the domestic services industry in Australia, describing the institutional structure of the supply side of the industry, and recording the diverse work experiences of domestic service providers. Chapters 4-7 take up the themes of the 'dominant view' of paid household work, challenging and refining key ideas and arguments in prevailing understandings of how the industry works, how workers fare in it, and how economic and cultural problems of paid household work are being and might further be remedied. Chapter 8 returns to articulate methodological and conceptual criticisms of feminist analyses of paid household work. It shows, in the light of both evidence and argument, how strategic options for work life reform for domestic workers are foreclosed by prevailing ways of investigating and evaluating workers' accounts of their experiences. In the concluding chapter, I consider the moral question of whether housework should be bought and sold in the light of the empirical and theoretical arguments of the thesis.

1.4 Conclusion

This thesis examines the construction of paid household work. The ambiguity of the term construction is useful here, its several dimensions capturing and unifying the themes of the study. I survey how feminist writers have constructed paid domestic work as 'the ultimate lousy job' in discourse about it, and examine the effects of this, the prevailing construction of the occupation in the literature. I document how Australian domestic workers construct their own understandings of the work and their experience of it. I analyse how some service providers are constructing new institutions and discourses about their activities, thereby changing the organisation of the domestic services industry. I examine how collective actors are constructing alternatives to market-based institutions and in so doing, attempting to reconstruct the meaning and status of 'women's work.' The interplay of actions, institutions, and interpretations is crucial to understanding how this industry works, and only by critically engaging with participants can a researcher do so.
Chapter 2

The Discovery of Paid Household Work

During the 1980s and 1990s, a sizeable body of writing on contemporary paid household work in advanced capitalist countries has emerged, produced almost exclusively by feminist academics, a majority of them North American. One important motivation for renewed interest in an occupation in which employment had plummeted since World War Two was the increasing awareness amongst academic feminists of the need to acknowledge and understand differences of class and race-ethnicity between women (Graham 1991, Kaplan 1987:103, Rollins 1985:7). More specifically, the ‘discovery of paid household work’ led some to challenge the focus on unpaid household labour as a universal female experience (Glenn 1992:2). Many contend that reports of the death of ‘domestic service’ (Coser 1973, Aubert 1956) had been exaggerated: women from subordinated racial-ethnic groups have continued to work in the occupation long after white women left it. Others argue that a resurgence of employment of domestic workers has occurred in the last decade or two, as women’s labour market participation rates have increased, and the dispersal of earnings has widened. From this perspective, paid household work raises questions about the commodification of previously unpaid labour (Colen 1990, Gregson and Lowe 1994, Wrigley 1991), and ties into debates about the future of work.

1. The title of this chapter plays on the title of a paper by Susan Himmelweit, called “The Discovery of Unpaid Work” (1995), which challenges some key terms of debate in feminist political economy.

2. The literature I discuss here analyses paid household work in the English-speaking advanced capitalist countries almost exclusively. Occasional references are made to studies undertaken in east and south east Asia (Chang and Groves 1994, Tan and Devasahayam 1987). I have come across only two European studies accessible in English (Anderson 1997, and Grumiau 1998), neither of which are as detailed as most North American studies. However, although I stress the need for comparative work, North America and Britain form the universe of comparison with Australia for the purposes of this study.
in post-industrial societies (Gorz 1989, 1994, Ruthven 1994, Sassen-Koob 1984). On a more personal level, women from subordinated racial-ethnic groups have become researchers, interested in giving voice to their communities in academic discourse. At the same time, academic women are themselves members of the professional class likely to hire domestic help. Because waged domestic labour relations are, typically, “between women” (Rollins 1990), these writings are suffused with anxiety and indignation about “women using other women,” particularly women of colour (Ostrander 1987:51, see also Arat-Koç 1989:36, Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen 1988, Cohen 1991, Kaplan 1987). Thus, paid household work has taken its place alongside domestic labour as a troubling preoccupation amongst feminist social scientists.

2.1 An emergent consensus on ‘domestic service’

It is not my intention to comprehensively review the burgeoning literature on paid household work here, for which see Gregson and Lowe (1994), Romero (1992), Tilly (1991) and Wrigley (1991). Rather, in this chapter I outline an emergent consensus, a set of prevailing ideas and approaches to analysis of waged domestic labour in feminist social science. This dominant view is often asserted in pithy statements like those reproduced throughout this section. I describe it as ‘emergent’ because of the way shared political and academic agendas, and mutual citation amongst the relatively small group of scholars working on the subject of paid household work have produced a set of propositions or themes which make up the consensual intellectual framework within which almost all studies have been constructed. I present the dominant view because it provides a key to understanding how paid household work has been generally theorised by feminist social scientists; but also because some of its concepts and methods limit both understanding and strategic thinking in relation to the challenges posed by the domestic services industry. My criticisms and alternative framework are developed in the rest of the thesis. Some of the elisions and blind spots of the dominant view can be explored through critical evaluation of the literature (see Chapter 8); others need to be explored by empirical analysis (see Chapters 3-7).

The dominant view resolves into three ‘propositions.’ First, feminist accounts of paid household work stress that it is an occupation at the bottom of the social division of labour, in which middle class women exploit working class women typically from disadvantaged racial or ethnic groups, in isolated, privatised, and oppressively personalised employment relationships. They argue that private nature of domestic
employment relationships, and prevailing cultural devaluation of housework, mean that these relationships operate with rules and values different from other jobs. Second, at a macrosocial level, there is agreement that the existence of a market for private domestic services reproduces systems of gender, class, and race domination. Third, writers agree that domestic workers actively resist exploitation and domination in the attempt to improve their working conditions, and to maintain their self-respect.

2.1.1 Paid household work is ‘unique’ and ‘peculiar’

A common strategy in feminist writing on paid household work, exemplified in quotations from Rollins and Arat-Koç below, is the claim that paid household work (or ‘domestic service’ as it continues frequently to be called) is, for a range of reasons, a unique occupation.

What is unique about this labor arrangement – the personal, sometimes intimate relationship between employer and employee – is precisely what allows for a level of psychological exploitation unknown in even other low-paid occupations (Rollins 1990:78).

The specific combination of the class status of the domestic worker and the fact that domestic service takes place in the private sphere creates the potential for a very peculiar relation of domination between the employer and the domestic worker, especially if there is a live-in arrangement.

...There are social-psychological dimensions to the subordination of a domestic worker that make it different from the subordination of housewives (who also do domestic work) and workers (who also stand in an unequal class relation to their employers) (Arat-Koç 1989:42).

Many writers start with the uncontroversial proposition that domestic work, paid or unpaid is defined as a ‘women’s work.’ The tasks of the domestic worker are those of ‘reproductive labour,’ otherwise performed without pay by wives and mothers. This is the first step in conceptualising the specificity of paid household work, and thereby the specific problems workers experience in this occupation.

Arat-Koç (1989:37-8) argues that the low status of domestic labour - whether performed by housewives or servants - is caused by its physical, economic, and ideological invisibility. Its products are intangible or consumed very quickly, it is performed in private, producing only use value without profit, and its entwinement

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3. This is a non-trivial claim. All occupations are peculiar or unique in some respect - whatever that ‘respect’ is differentiates them into separate occupations. This is not the meaning given to the term ‘unique’ here.
with human relations means it is interpreted less as real work than as the "labour of love". In a similar vein, Bonnie Dill (1988:34) writes

housework both paid and unpaid is structured around the particular place of women in the family. It is considered unskilled labor because it requires no training, degrees, or licenses and because it has traditionally been assumed that any woman could do it.

Because unpaid household work is undervalued and unrecognised, so too is paid household work, and by association those who perform it. The employment of domestics allows the "women employers to overcome some aspects of gender oppression without challenging the position of men" (Ostrander 1987:51), nor the privatised nature of the socially essential work women do in the domestic arena (Ostrander 1987:52; see also Colen 1990:96; Glenn 1992:33; Romero 1992 Chapter 7; Gregson and Lowe 1994 Chapter 4).

In contrast to the housewife, the workplace of the servant is not her own private space, but the intimate space of her employer. It thus sits uncomfortably between the 'private' (home) and 'public' (work) spheres as conventionally conceived. Colen (1990:101) argues that:

Paid household labour strains the ideological constructs of separate public and private realms and of motherhood that have been dominant (but in flux) recently. When child care is done in the home for money by "others" instead of for "love" by mothers, the discord between ideological construct and reality results in stressed relations. The relations are characterized by contradiction between the worker's intimate involvement in the household, the employer's dependence on her, and her poor pay and the varieties of employers' distancing, depersonalizing and thoughtless behaviors.

The location of the work in the employer's intimate space and the nature of the tasks which involve dealing with the dirt and disorder created by the private life of a family are believed to give this employment relation a 'personal' character which is not present in other occupations (Colen 1990:101, Dill 1988:35). The domestic worker has an

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4. Note that Colen writes about childcare here, in the context of general commentary on waged domestic labour in a chapter section entitled "The Asymmetrical Relations." In my view, this tendency to mix specific and general arguments makes it harder to identify the problem areas in domestic employment.
ambiguous status...as a special type of worker who is neither a member of
the family nor an employee in the public sphere enjoying the advantages
of socialized work (Arat-Koç 1989:37).

Consequently, it is argued, the relationship between employer and employee
operates with a set of rules and values different from those of jobs in the ‘public’
arena. The abstract, instrumental relationship which (it is presumed) exists between
employers and employees in the public sphere is undermined by, for example,
employers’ expectation of deference, friendship or a quasi-familial relation, to the
detriment of the employee’s capacity to negotiate and enforce the contents of the
contract of employment. Thus, ascribed roles take the place of contractual relations,
such that personal characteristics and behaviours not directly relevant to achievement
of the practical goals for which workers are employed are sought and/or required
from them. This leads Castro (1989:122) to assert that

What is bought and sold in domestic service is not simply the labor power
of [a domestic worker] or her productive work and energy; it is her
identity as a person. This is the most specific feature of domestic service.⁵

Sanjek and Colen argue that the attempt by employers to create “a kind of
fictive kinship” by constituting domestic workers as ‘part of the family’ is a form of
“mystification” aimed at reconciling, in the employers interest, the contradictions of a
situation in which a person who may be intimately involved in their life is also at their
service and dependent on them for their livelihood (1990b:4). Problems of contract
enforcement are compounded by the spatial and regulatory isolation in which
workers and employers undertake their transactions.

The problem of ‘personalism’ in the domestic employment relationship as
described in feminist writing on paid household work, has two related aspects: 1) 
employers seek to personalise relationships with their domestic employees, as
described above; and 2) employers focus on personal traits rather than objective skills

⁵ By differentiating the sale and purchase of “labor power” from the sale and purchase of a
domestic work’s “identity as a person,” Castro (1989:122) attempts to locate the specificity of
“domestic service.” Her formulation endeavours to go beyond Marx’s theory of
alienation, which points to a kind of dehumanisation unconcerned with attributes of the
person not related to their productive capacities. Castro’s analysis differentiates the ideal-
typical ‘thin,’ arm’s length relationship between capitalist and proletarian from the
complex, ‘thick’ relationship between domestic work and householder, in which the
personality and sexuality of the worker are implicated. This is Castro’s version of the
unique ‘personalism’ of the domestic employment relationship.
of workers (Rollins 1990:78). Both these elements of domestic employers' approach to their relationships with their employees, it is argued, are oppressive. Intimacy between domestic worker and householder is generally considered to be exploitative, and pressed, unrequested and undesired, onto the worker by her employer (Arat-Koç 1989:40, Kaplan 1987:100, Romero 1992:152).

This discourse aims to establish that paid domestic workers may be particularly vulnerable to overwork, poor pay and conditions, and even abuse. Problems include employers adding tasks beyond those first agreed on (Glenn 1987:273; Romero 1992:130), overbearing direction and supervision (Kousha 1994:216), and unwanted intimacy (Rollins 1990:81). In their (Canadian) study of 50 domestics, Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen (1988:8-9) report that "contractual violations," where obligations in regard to payment, working hours, number of tasks, days off, vacations, working conditions, and tax and social security deductions are not honoured by employers, are common. Problems of contract enforcement are compounded by the spatial and regulatory isolation in which workers and employers undertake their transactions. Other documented abuses include inadequate privacy, sexual harassment, demeaning attitudes, and racist discrimination. Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen's list is corroborated and extended in other empirical studies to include more abstractly defined problems of gender oppression, alienating work arrangements, psychological exploitation, and invisibility (Cohen 1991:199), as well as "occupational ghettoisation" (Romero 1987, see also Colen 1990; Palmer 1989 and Rollins 1990).

There is occasionally some recognition that paid household work is better than available alternatives. This sometimes requires some fancy rhetorical footwork to remain consistent with the prevailing idea that this occupation is the least desirable of all. Romero (1992:12) writes that "on the one hand, cleaning houses is degrading and embarrassing; on the other, domestic service can be higher paying, more autonomous and less dehumanizing than other low-status, low-skill occupations." This, she writes, is "the paradox of domestic service."

It is necessary to note here that the term 'class' is used loosely in this literature, typically simply to signify income differences between 'middle' class employers and their 'working class' domestics, and as what might be called the 'socio-structural'

terms on which householders and workers meet. However, some writers draw more explicitly on Marxist usage of the language of class. Romero (1992:68) refers to householders’ attempts to extract from domestic workers “more labor for less pay” as the “expropriation of surplus value.” This is an obvious misuse of the term ‘surplus value.’ Strictly speaking, it is not clear that a capitalist class relationship in the classical Marxist sense comes into being with the exchange of domestic labour for money between two individuals, or a household and an individual. Householders may demand more work for the same amount of pay, and so, in a sense, appropriate surplus labour, in what I term ‘simple exploitation,’ to differentiate it from capitalist or ‘classical’ exploitation. However, householder-appropriated surplus labour does not take the value form. (That the householder-domestic worker exchange has a particular ‘content’ and ‘flavour’ in capitalist societies is another matter.) Domestic workers are ‘working class’ in the sense that they have little choice but to sell their labour if they care to eat. However, they do not, in any of the studies reviewed here, sell their labour to a capitalist who sets them to work in the homes of the capitalist’s customers for the purposes of producing surplus value. However, as I show in Chapter 4, there are domestic workers thus employed, and it is not possible to understand adequately how the industry works without recognising and distinguishing different modes of economic organisation in it, including different modes of surplus labour performance and appropriation.

2.1.2 Paid household work and systems of domination

So far the emphasis has been on the personalised employment relationship created between a domestic worker and her employer, and the ways that gendered ideologies, particularly about housework, shape this relationship to the (further) disadvantage of workers. Because the North American domestic labour force has been drawn disproportionately from subordinated racial-ethnic groups, whether native born or immigrant, racial-ethnic stratification is a third, and particularly important thread in writing on paid household work. Thus, arguments of the following kind are common:

The daily rituals and practices of domestic service reproduce the systems of gender, class, and race domination (Romero 1992:130).

7. See notes to Chapter 6.1 for a critique of this argument.
It is through the exploration of the interpersonal dynamics that we can glimpse the ideological role this occupation has played in the myriad kinds of hierarchical societies in which it has existed -- a role, I submit, fundamentally conservative and reproductive of inegalitarian social systems (Rollins 1990:78).

Whether domestic labour forces are native born or immigrant, many writers emphasise that (predominantly white) employers express a preference for domestic workers from subordinate racial-ethnic groups. In research where the study population is native born, explanations emphasise how racism is reproduced in every day interactions “between women” (Rollins 1990, see also Dill 1988, Kaplan 1987, Romero 1992), as, for example, domestic employers claim racial-ethnic supremacy by demanding deference and by patronising gift- and confidence-giving. Desirable personal attributes of the domestic (“warm,” “friendly,” “trustworthy” (Rollins 1990:78)) and the kind of relationship with her sought are those which

(1) afford the employer the ego enhancement that emanates from having an “inferior” present and (2) validate the employer’s lifestyle, her class and racial privilege, her entire social world. Most important, the performance and relationship demanded function to provide the employer with ideological justification for the economically and racially stratified system in which she lives, and from which she derives benefit (Rollins 1990:78).

Others focus on the establishment of racist hierarchy in cultural values and stereotypes. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Phyllis Palmer, for example, argues that the interaction of economic and psychological processes have led to the association of “dirtiness” (as opposed to cleanliness) with the Other side of a set of dichotomies including male/female, mistress/servant and white/black in the ideological structures which contribute to the sexual and racial segmentation of the labour market (1990 passim). In a similar vein, Kaplan points to the persistence of “the idea that black women are tough, strong and macho” and thus capable of doing backbreaking or “dirty work” (1987:93).8

Where the study population consists of immigrants, particularly those brought in as part of special migration programs for the ‘import’ of domestic labour,

8. Because this is primarily an American literature, the legacy of slavery in the continued subordination of African-Americans is generally recognised as a crucial historical precedent.
explanations emphasise how racism is (also) mediated by the state through institutional process which formally discriminate against migrant populations by means of migration and citizenship regulation (Anderson 1997, Arat-Koç 1989, Bakan and Stasiulis 1995, Macklin 1992, Tan and Devasahayam 1987). In Europe, North America, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and many countries in the Middle East, paid domestic workers frequently participate in immigration programs which deny them basic political and social rights. Macklin (1992) describes domestic workers entering Canada under special immigration programs as “indentured labour.” Colen (1990:97) documents the case of West Indian women doing “‘housekeeping’ for the greencard” in New York City. In a process which can take two to five years, and involve a separation from their families for the entire period, these women work for a minimum of two years usually as live-in domestics in order to receive employer sponsorship and the access to the American labour market a greencard brings. Through these programs, Colen (1990:110) argues, the state engineers a “partial solution” to pressures within middle- and upper-class families and on the state and industry to provide quality childcare and other support services. It ensures a vulnerable immigrant household labour force.

Illegal immigrants may congregate in this, the most private and unregulated of labour markets, with access to even fewer rights. Thus, state policy, underpinned by a racist national culture, contributes to the reproduction on a world scale of racially organised international economic inequality, as

Third World women [become] the servants of the expansion of opportunities for middle class women in the industrialised west, and victims of the politics of international debt in their own countries (Ball 1993:18).

In addition to racial-ethnic hierarchy between women in the domestic employment relationship, Rollins (1990:76) points to racial-ethnic hierarchy within the domestic labour force such that those white women recorded as private household workers are more likely to work as child carers, whereas black women are more likely to be cleaners and housekeepers. This cuts across the general argument that paid domestic labour is the preserve of subordinated racial-ethnic groups.

Influential writers like Rollins and Romero attribute to paid household work a highly significant structural role in expressing and generating social inequality. All writers emphasise the disproportionate representation of subordinated racial-ethnic
groups in paid household work, although structuralist modes of expression are not universal. There is some recognition that a lack of alternative employment opportunities drives women from subordinated racial-ethnic groups to paid household work (Dill 1988, Rollins 1985, Romero 1992). Such arguments do not square completely with those analysing the ‘role’ of ‘domestic service’ in ‘reproducing hierarchy’ in terms of the racist behaviour of employing householders, because lack of opportunity must derive in large part from discrimination against racial-ethnic minorities in other occupations (as well as in education and elsewhere). This focus on paid household work as an occupation, without adequate attention to contextual factors, leads to a lack of precision in analysis of the social position and opportunities of domestic workers, of the operation of the domestic services industry, and of how both fit into the social division of labour.

2.1.3 Domestic workers resist domination

Although domestic workers are faced with the problems catalogued above, feminist writers contend that they “actively [resist] the depersonalization of domestic work” (Dill 1988:33) in a variety of ways. Romero (1992:135) points out that many studies focus on psychological strategies in the domestic employment relationship, or in the domestic’s own community. Dill (1988:37) reports her respondents as relating “incidents in which they used confrontation, chicanery, or cajolery to establish their own limits within a particular household”. Cohen (1991:201) describes how immigrant domestics laughed at their employers amongst themselves, and created shared “weekend homes” in rented apartments to “solidify new friendships by creating family-like bonds and ties” within their own communities. Rollins (1990, Chapter 6) describes how domestics, in spite of their powerlessness, reject the criteria by which their employers and society judge them to maintain their self-respect.

Romero (1992:135) argues that in addition to analysis of the social psychology of the domestic employment relationship, it is also important to analyse it as “an instance of class struggle.” For Romero, this involves reinterpreting interactions

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9. Romero’s marxist critique of Rollins and others opposes this capitalist wage labour relation approach with another widely held idea that the domestic service employment relationship is a premodern or quasi-feudal one. I show in Chapters 4 and 8 that both sides of this dichotomy overstate the extent to which the dynamics of interpersonal relationships are eradicated by the capitalist market.
between domestics and their employers as the extraction of "emotional labor"\textsuperscript{10} from domestics. Thus, for Romero, submitting to demands for deference, by behaving 'like a maid,' expressing concern about an employer's welfare, counselling and consoling employers, and accepting gifts are all recoded as the performance of emotional labour. From this political-economic point of view, the focus in analysing domestics' resistance is recast as struggle for control of the labour process. Thus, historical shifts from live-in to day work, and then to "job work" for multiple employers, have been the most significant change in the organisation of their occupation undertaken by those domestic workers. These have sometimes been associated with efforts by some workers, individually (Kousha 1994, Romero 1992) and collectively (Salzinger 1991), to professionalise the occupation by recognising and developing their skills, and by creating a "businesslike arrangement" (Romero 1992:160). Romero (1988, 1992 Chapter 6) describes how Chicana domestics have eliminated most supervision and personal services from the job by redefining themselves as expert housekeepers who sell "labor services" rather than "labor power" in a relationship resembling a tradesperson-client rather than a mistress-servant exchange. Greater control of the work situation can be gained through the negotiation of an agreeable contract (Romero 1987:211), and the replacement of undesirable employers with more compatible ones (Dill 1988:43, Romero 1987:213). "Quitting" is the ultimate act of resistance (Dill 1988:39, Glenn 1987:274, Kousha 1994:217).


\textsuperscript{10} This term, developed by Arlie Hochschild (1983), refers to labor in which a worker a) has contact with the public; b) is required to produce a particular emotional state in the client and c) must manage their own emotional state in order to successfully perform their job. This last element "provide(s) the employer an opportunity to exert some control over the emotional activities of workers" (Wharton 1993:208). Romero is stretching the definition here, because the 'public' and the 'employer' coincide in the household for whom a domestic works.
1992:158, Salzinger 1991:156) are also important.\(^{11}\) In addition, the reported results of 'resistance' vary from survival (Cohen 1991) to self-respect in the face of domination (Rollins 1985 Chapter 6), to more satisfying work life for the individual involved (Dill 1988), to "professionalization" of the occupation (Romero 1992, Salzinger 1991).

2.1.4 Remedies proposed or implied in feminist writings

Even a reader unfamiliar with the literature on paid household work would see clearly that feminist responses to it have been overwhelmingly negative. In spite of reports of positive change in the form of resistance to domination, domination continues to be portrayed as characteristic of paid household work. Does this mean that these feminist writers believe that paid household work should not exist, that domestic labour should not be bought and sold? No writer makes explicit proscriptions in these terms. Few make prescriptions as to how waged domestic labour might be improved, beyond describing individual workers' attempts to resist maltreatment, and enjoining employers to treat workers well (Bradshaw-Camball and Cohen 1988 passim, Romero 1992:171). More rarely, writers support domestic workers efforts to professionalise and unionise (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997, Romero 1992:171). Rarer still -- indeed, 'outside' the dominant view -- are analyses of collective strategies by domestic workers to change their economic and social status (Salzinger 1991, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos 1997).

Framed as they are in terms of its unique problems and role in reproducing social hierarchies, prevailing explanations of the problems of paid domestic work seem by their very logic to preclude the possibility of work life improvement for domestic workers. With the exception of Salzinger (1991), Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994, 1997), and Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos (1997), even those writers who document how workers are successful in "professionalizing" and "modernizing domestic service" (Romero 1992, see also Romero 1988, 1990) or in "making your job good

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11. One study in particular diverges from the dominant view. Salzinger argues that "[t]he struggle over domestic work is no longer primarily a struggle to delineate the limits of the employer-employee relationship; instead it is a struggle over whether the work is to be defined as skilled or unskilled labor (1991:157). This is a statement about transformation of domestic worker-employer relationships over time -- it is an historical as much as a theoretical argument counter to the dominant focus on the unique problems of the personal relationship between domestic worker and employer. However, methodological differences between her work and that of other writers more unambiguously drawing on and constructing the dominant view are also important. In particular, Salzinger is more alert to differentiation in the demand side of the market than are many other writers."
yourself” (Dill 1988:33) seem to equivocate between emphasis on these successful challenges to domination, and on overbearing structures of oppression. This equivocation may arise out of the widespread focus on individual strategies rather than on the mobilisation of institutional resources and/or collective approaches: it is difficult to see how individual worker and/or employer action can change how the industry works, or can challenge complex social structures of oppression. In any case, the invocation of oppressive structures in the way characteristic in the literature makes strategic thinking and prescription difficult (see Chapter 8), and may explain why prescriptions and strategies are rarely articulated.

However, one can work back from analyses of the demand and supply sides of the industry for clues as to where remedies might be sought. Demand for domestic workers, when considered in the literature, is generally understood to derive from some women’s attempts to avoid having to do domestic labour themselves. Although some writers stress the (class and racial-ethnic) status-enhancing dimension of off-loading domestic work (Kaplan 1987: 92, Rollins 1985, Romero Chapter 5), most rightly point to men’s failure to take “equal responsibility for the household and children” (Romero 1992:164) and to inadequacies in the level or kind of state- or market-provided substitutes for private domestic workers, particularly child carers, and aged carers.  

Supply of workers, considered more widely, if not in those terms, is typically explained by the absence of alternatives: Dill writes with representative generality of “social inequities that unjustly consigned Black women and their daughters to this low-status, low-paid, and dirtiest of women’s jobs” (1988:51). Ball (1993, quoted above) points to economic distress in poor countries as the source of immigrant labour.

Looked at this way, if the problems producing demand for and supply of domestic labour services were rectified, the industry would be unlikely to exist in anything like its current form. On the demand side this would entail increased equality in the sexual division of domestic labour, and collective provision of

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domestic labour, again, particularly child care. On the supply side, the removal of discriminatory barriers to employment for subordinated racial-ethnic minorities, whether native born or immigrant, would be required.

This brief account of supply and demand factors has identified and recorded some useful arguments in the literature. However, changes in the distribution of activity between market, state, and household, and the removal of the discriminatory barriers faced by subordinated racial-ethnic groups are not specific remedies for the redress of paid household work’s putatively ‘unique’ problems. Nor are strategies aimed at achieving such changes analysed in the literature on paid household work. Instead, it seems most writers on the subject expect nothing less than wholesale social transformation on a global scale to remedy the problems of paid household workers.

2.2 Conclusions

Feminist writers on paid household work aim to expose the problems and celebrate the resourcefulness of socially and economically marginalised women in this occupation. This is part of academic feminism’s wider project of ‘making visible’ the lives, experiences, and plights of women who would otherwise be overlooked. In so doing, there is a sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit goal to contribute to “debate about social policy and to activism around improved working conditions and social justice for household workers in many national settings, and local settings world-wide” (Sanjek and Colen 1990b:1, see also Romero 1992 Chapter 7).

In much writing, the ‘visibility’ agenda shapes and constrains the construction of knowledge about this controversial industry in ways which are counterproductive. In particular, some methodological strategies need to be challenged, and analytical categories and concepts rethought for analysis of this industry to better contribute to social policy debate and activism. It seems clear to me after reading the literature on paid household work, and undertaking fieldwork of my own, that arguments constructed around the ‘uniqueness of domestic service ‘ and the ‘reproduction of structural domination’ constrain our understanding of commodified housework. In addition, analytical focus on individual ‘resistance’ and failure to explore the variety of institutional contexts in which paid household work takes place means that opportunities to improve the situation of domestic workers, and to promote understanding of the dynamics of the domestic services industry are lost.
However, issues raised in this literature, although not always satisfactorily resolved, remain pressing. What is bought and sold in the domestic services industry? Is it 'labour services,' 'labour power,' or the 'servant's identity as a person'? Does this vary with the content and context of the exchange of money for domestic labour services, or with the demographic characteristics of the parties to the transaction? What is the relationship between commodification of housework and the practices and institutions of racial-ethnic and gender subordination, and class exploitation? Does a personal relationship between employer and worker necessarily constitute an inappropriate intrusion of the emotions into working life? Or does this characterisation of the domestic employment relationship rely on too unreflective an acceptance of the nested dichotomies of home/work, emotional/rational, affective/instrumental, public/private which underpin much social theory, and thereby mistakenly underestimate the extent to which all work relationships are both instrumental and affective?

The next four chapters present an empirical study of paid household work in Australia. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 explore issues directly related to the three themes in the literature identified above in sections 2.1.1, 2.1.2, and 2.1.3 respectively. They constitute a new set of data which challenges aspects of the dominant view, and a methodological critique of some modes of argument common in the literature. Chapter 7 takes up the issues raised in section 2.1.4, exploring collective strategies within the domestic services and related industries. Chapter 8 returns to confront the dominant view again in detail.
Chapter 3

The Domestic Services ‘Industry’: An Overview in Participants’ Voices

This chapter serves two purposes. First, it demonstrates the structural diversity of the domestic services industry, analysis of which provides a principal basis for my critique of the prevailing framework for understanding paid household work described in Chapter 2. Second, the overview provides a background, if you will excuse a mixed metaphor, for the more detailed analysis in later chapters, in which each element of the dominant view presented in Chapter 2 will be challenged in turn. In this chapter, the reader meets the respondents, and sees institutions and practices discussed in detail later in the context of the industry ‘as a whole,’ and described in the words of participants.

There are three main sections. Section 3.1 describes the structure of the supply side of the domestic services industry in Sydney, identifying the six institutions organising it and explaining their operation. Institutional diversity in the industry goes largely unrecognised in the literature, which tends to focus exclusively on the relationship between worker and householder. Documenting this diversity is important, because institutional differences in the organisation of paid household work produce different structures of obligation and recourse between domestic workers and householders, and can profoundly affect the quality of employment in the industry. Section 3.2 presents information about the demand side of the market, including accounts of sources of demand for domestic labour services, as perceived by supply-side participants. Most feminist writers on paid household work argue that household affluence alone, or combined with an unequal intra-household division of domestic labour, generates demand for paid household workers. This view is supported by many respondents’ reports of sources of demand for their services. However, participants’ evaluations of the demand side of the industry do not so
consistently accord with prevailing understandings. In Section 3.3, industry participants describe the nature of their work, and their experience of it, as well as their working relationships. Here again, diversity emerges to challenge the dominant view of paid household work.¹

3.1 Supply side structure: Institutions in the industry

The supply side of the domestic services industry is structured by a set of occupations and a set of institutions. Domestic labour is bought and sold in ‘clusters’ of tasks: cleaning, housekeeping, and personal care. These clusters, performed alone or variously combined, form the occupations at which domestic workers work (see section 3.3.1 below and Appendix C.1).

Workers enter the industry via one, sometimes more, of six institutions. These institutions do some or all of the following activities: matching workers with householders, setting the terms of transactions (including price and job descriptions), and establishing or managing ongoing employment relationships. These institutions are ‘local networks,’ the ‘open market,’ employment agencies, capitalist companies, franchise operations, and the Homecare Service of New South Wales. With the exception of local networks and the open market, these institutions involve third parties who earn income in the industry by organising the supply of other people’s labour, rather than, or in addition to directly providing domestic labour services themselves.

Institutions and occupations are associated in particular ways, that is, not all occupations are mediated by all institutions (see Appendix C.3). At this point the only association – or lack of association – I need to note is that franchise operations do not provide any home-based personal care services.² Chapters 5-8 explore the

¹ Chapter 5, in which I explore the question of whether Sydney’s paid household workers are confined to an ‘occupational ghetto,’ demonstrates more powerfully than this overview diversity amongst participants in the industry.
² Here trade magazines and the like are useful. Welsh and Falbe (1994: 28-30), writing in the United States-based magazine Franchising World, argue that franchising in child care meets resistance for a number of reasons. System characteristics generally necessary for an industry to franchise widely are lacking: off-site management does not always work well; parents value personal involvement with their children, so economies of scale are difficult to attain, and the business has thin margins. There is major competition from non-profits and voluntary groups with close community ties, for example, day care provided by church groups.
implications of different relationships and organisational arrangements established in these occupations and by these institutions. This section describes how they work. (Appendix E details the public policy context of the domestic services industry.)

3.1.1 Local networks

Many domestic workers find work in their 'local network' – that is, through family, work contacts, friends, and 'friends of friends.' Local networks rely on the trust, information flows, and convenience of relationships among people who know each other directly or by reputation. This institution is the paradigm in the existing literature on paid household work, others are rarely mentioned and more rarely analysed (see Chapter 8.1).

Local networks may well be the most common way householders and domestic workers come into contact and conduct their relationship, but its very nature makes this conjecture at best very difficult to test. Ten respondents to this study found jobs as domestic workers via local networks. Their work loads varied from cleaning one or two houses per week, or working as a mother's help for one family on a permanent part time basis (Katrina), to cleaning full-time in a two-person team (Juyun and his wife Kim).

Janaína had cleaned houses some years before I interviewed her. I asked her how she found her jobs, and her response reflected the experience of many others:

The first [cleaning job] that I did was actually after I cracked a-sort of a joke “Oh, well, I think I'll have to clean!” You know, “How am I going to get some money?,” to go through the university. And someone said “Oh well, I know somebody who needs a cleaning lady. Would you do it?” And I didn’t really mean to get the job, but I just thought “Well, why not?” Then from that job, I got another two and it was sort of snowballing effect, I never really had to advertise, to put in the paper. Word of mouth, people I knew, friends of friends.

Katrina’s first job as a mother’s help came to her: in response to the same question, she said

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...Since it is difficult to routinize systems, and to select and monitor employees in a cost-effective manner, or to secure competitive advantage, at this time, the child care industry has not become a major area of franchise growth.

They write here about centre-based care, but their arguments apply equally to direct provision of home-based childcare services. However, franchising in nanny placement services is less subject to these kinds of problems: Louise Washer (1992), writing for the American magazine Working Woman, reports “A Choice Nanny” agency franchising as one of the “Best Franchises for Women” in an article of the same title.
Well because I knew the family and the mother needed someone to look after the children, so she asked me to work for her.... So I didn’t really look for the job, I was approached by her to do the work.

Katrina later sought work through an agency, partly because her local network could not provide her with adequate employment, and partly because she learned during her first job that she preferred to work for people she didn’t know (see also section 3.3.3).

Trisha worked full-time as a cleaner, but she still found a local network, in her case, that of her domestic employers, to provide her with adequate contacts:

Well, having been given this first name, I was very fortunate that it was two sisters living together working [in work places employing a large number of affluent people] so they just started to spread the word around and I started getting phone calls from both areas... So that’s really how it started, and if I’ve ever needed any work I’ve only had to ask the clients I already have and they just put the word out and within usually a day I get a phone call and that’s it as easy as that.

Local networks among workers may also be well developed and can include occasional job swapping and job sharing. Consuelo started part time cleaning when, dissatisfied with her factory job, she took over a couple of jobs from a friend going back to Portugal for an extended holiday. Janaína reported that

At one stage I was actually collaborating with two Brazilian women who had so much cleaning to do that they were not physically capable of doing it. So we used to do it, three of us, three houses in one day, and then split the loot, you know, [laughs] split the money. That was good, actually, because that was fun. We used to talk and we used really get into it you know, and turn the radio on and in one hour, we would have done perhaps three hours worth between the three of us, and still got paid three hours and did three houses. That went on for about two months, yeah, it was good, it was fun.

Once they have come into contact, the householder and domestic worker need to decide on rates of pay, hours of work, and the ‘contents’ of the job. In setting the price, one or the other of them often refers to a ‘going rate’: Janaína reported that

They asked me “How much do you charge?” I said “The going rate is $10.” I would say that and nobody would argue with me.
Typically, the transactions in local networks are unmediated agreements between parties acting as private citizens, outside the system of taxation and industrial regulation, although these transactions are not necessarily ‘off the books’.3

3.1.2 The open market

Domestic workers who find their job(s) in the ‘open market’ do so without third party involvement, and outside social and familial networks. Respondents finding work this way usually did so because their own networks could not provide them with enough work. In the open market, workers and householders place or answer advertisements in newspapers, local, rural, and metropolitan; and workers may offer domestic services on other public lists, principally the ‘Yellow Pages’ or their local equivalent. Justine found her job as a live-in housekeeper while waiting, with a newspaper, for her sister in a café:

I managed to get from the date on the front page to all the personals at the back, and finally came across this ad that two women want a live-in housekeeper, must be mature and love animals and gardening. And so I wrote them this great letter saying I was incredibly mature and LOVE animals and they said sure. Basically out of an act of annoyance with my sister and not having any money. Not having a job and my dole hadn’t come through, so I couldn’t move out of the house. So the idea of being live-in was really good at the time.

Like Justine, Lisa had come from the country. She found her job as a mother’s help answering a newspaper ad, after trying hard to find work by door-to-door canvassing of local businesses. Anwar, a migrant, relied on a Yellow Pages entry for cleaning jobs to come to him. Rosa, also a migrant, used ads in local newspapers offering a price for her cleaning services which undercut the going rate to get work to fill her full-time week.

As in ‘local networks,’ the worker’s rate of pay, job description and so on are negotiated by the parties, with or without reference to a ‘going rate.’ Transactions in

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3. This description of local networks clearly meets the definition of the ‘underground’ (Carter 1984) or ‘irregular’ (Gershuny 1983) economy and so this institutional form might be thought more suitably entitled simply the ‘informal market for domestic services’. However, the second characteristic - that transactions are unmediated and unregulated - may also be present when buyers and sellers are brought together by registered agencies or individuals trading in the ‘open market’.
the open market may take place in the ‘formal’ (Gershuny 1983) or ‘measured’ (Carter 1984) economy. This depends primarily on the practices of the worker.\(^4\)

3.1.3 Domestic employment agencies

Other workers who either chose not to, or could not find employment through local networks used domestic employment agencies. In NSW, agencies are required to be licensed under the NSW Industrial Arbitration Act (1991), but only their operation as brokers is regulated. Specifically, agencies are prohibited from charging fees to the workers they place. Agencies are significant institutions in the industry. In addition to the nine agencies participating in this study, a further six advertised in the Yellow Pages under ‘Domestic Help Services’ in 1994. Others certainly exist. It is difficult to gauge agencies’ ‘market share’ because a) total numbers of domestic workers in the industry overall are unavailable, and b) as agencies broker services on demand, they may not need - and certainly rarely keep - accurate records of the number of workers, potential and placed, on their books. The latter is true particularly of the large agencies offering a range of domestic services, who reported having no idea how many potential workers are on file. Because of their size, and their payment system (which involves an agency fee each time a regular service is provided) smaller cleaning agencies did know. Clare reported approximately eighty workers on her books at the time of interview, Jeannie seventy three.

Agencies bring householders and domestic workers together, for a fee to the householder. In Box 3.1 agency operators describe their activities. Smaller agencies - those owned by Clare, Jeannie and Catherine - are one-organiser outfits run from a home office. Owners of larger agencies - Margaret, Bob, Geraldine - employ staff principally as ‘personnel consultants’ to interview prospective workers, and match them with householders.

Interview excerpts in Box 3.1 shows that agencies may do more than bring householders and domestic workers together: they may set rates, hours and job descriptions. If not, however, householders and workers determine rates, job description and hours by negotiation or assertion and agreement. Even when pay rates and job descriptions are provided by agencies, unrecorded cash transactions

\(^{4}\) In Australia, employers do not pay unemployment and health insurance for workers in the form of social security taxes, so workers use the informal market to avoid income tax (see Appendix E.4).
may still be very common between buyers and sellers. Agency placement fees, as well as domestic service charges may also be set by reference to a 'going rate.'

Box 3.1: Agencies’ operations described

Catherine, au pair (child care with housework) agency operator:
The families contact me and say they’d like an au pair to work for them. I interview girls on their behalf and send them a girl that I think would be suitable and then they interview the girl and if they think she is suitable they employ her - or take her on. ... The girls don’t pay anything. The families pay me for my services in terms of interviewing the girls, screening the girls and then placing with them.

Deborah, agency operator:
We’re here to talk to for any problems, if they [workers] want to hand back jobs, casual but regular, that they’re not happy going to, and we’ll try and sort it out with the client for the next person into the job. As far as full-time, they’re then employed by our client, not by us, but we always work-like the nannies often ring up and say “Oh, this job’s not working out because-“ we’re always here to help them, or a client’ll ring up and say “Look I feel uncomfortable speaking to this girl. Can you do it?” even though that placement only covers three to four months, if they’re a client on our books, we’re here to sort out- sometimes in a home you need a mediator.

....I tell the client over the phone what the rate is, they tell me what service they require. I then tell the girl when I ring up to give her the job what the rate of pay is and how much the commission is for the agency and we always have minimum amounts of hours allowed in a job so she can add it all up. And she picks up the money for us as well. So they don’t send us our money and fiddling around. The girl picks up all the money on the job. It’s just over the phone, there’s nothing signed or anything.

Margaret, agency operator:
For permanent placements, there’s a placement fee payable on confirmation of the person they choose, if it is through this agency. If it’s a casual placement, it’s a daily fee, per each day they employ the worker.

Suzanne, cleaner working via an agency:
You don’t tend to have that much contact with the agency after you’ve been given the job anyway, you know, unless they’ve got something more they ring you up and say “Can you do this as well?” You know. “I’ve got a job on Thursday afternoons, can you fit that in?”

...They’re just business people basically. I mean it’s a business, it’s a way of making money. They just the procurers or the brokers, they’re the middle people.

...They have to be nice to both their clients and their workers, you know, the people who are on their books as cleaners, because they need both... it tends to be sort of like you’re together as the workers and the client’s the outsider. It’s like “Well, So and so’s complained again, we know what she’s like.”
3.1.4 Capitalist companies

Capitalist companies, like agencies, bring householders and domestic workers together. However, unlike agency operators, company proprietors take on the statutory responsibilities of an employer, and a proprietor (or her deputy) is necessarily involved in the setting of rates, hours and job descriptions. Corinne described her cleaning company's operation like this:

It's not an agency, it's a company. It's [company name] and the girls work under me and they are not sub-contractors or anything, they are my employees... they wear the company's uniform and they're covered with workers compensation and it is not like some other agencies whereby the insurance are the responsibility of the customer, where they're considered as the employer to the cleaner. So it is different altogether.

Workers may be employed on a casual or full-time basis, depending on company practice. Corinne employed all her workers on a casual basis, but Leanne had different plans for her small but growing housekeeping company:

I've got one full-time and a casual girl. The full-time one is slowly going out more and more doing jobs on her own. Eventually I hope to fill her whole week up on her own, employ another full-time girl, train her, do the same, and carry on... I'd still be the boss, and still be the runner of it, but just have full-time [workers] doing their own set of clients, day to day, three clients a day or something like that. I initially go to the client and quote the new client, and tell them that I'd be sending the girl, and who I'd be sending and I'd take her and introduce her, and I always keep close client contact. I always ring them and give them the opportunity to say something.

The creation of an employer-employee relationship between a 'third party' (the company proprietor) and domestic workers is the distinctive feature of these companies, and has important implications for both workers' experience of paid household work, and their cultural and economic status (see Chapters 4 and 6). This wage-labour relation, in combination with the for-profit provision of domestic services to consumers explains my choice of 'capitalist.' (Agency and franchise operators also make a profit from the labour of domestic workers in a variety of economic relationships, however, direct employment of workers as wage-labourers does not occur in these institutions.) Capitalist companies are a relatively new development in the industry, and seem to be growing both in number and size.
3.1.5 Franchise companies

Like capitalist companies, franchise companies are relatively new, and growing in the industry. I interviewed four of the five known franchise operations in Sydney in which a total of 131 people worked as domestic cleaners. Alan, a master franchisee at one company, claimed that an average workload is 3 ½ houses per day per worker, and typical frequency of service is fortnightly. Rounding down to 3 houses per day, we have a conservative 'industry' estimate of 3,930 homes serviced (131 franchisee workers x (5 days x 2 weeks) x 3 = 3,930).

Campbell, the owner operator of a franchise company described its organisation as follows:

We license cleaners to use our company name and our system to provide cleaning services to the domestic and small office market. We don't employ the cleaners, they're all independent owner operators trading under our company name and logo. They're all trained to clean according to our system, use chemicals specified by us, equipment specified by us. They actually provide the service in a time and motion system that we've designed and trained them in and they primarily provide cleaning services to private homes - perhaps 70% of our clients are domestic, the other 30% are small offices.

Franchisees pay an initial franchise fee and some kind of ongoing payment – either a regular flat fee or a percentage of turnover. The franchisor also sets service prices, and so franchisees' rate of pay, and specifies the scope of the service offered to householders. The franchisor supplies some jobs, but others come through word of mouth – Harry, a franchisee with Campbell's company said:

The jobs, most of the jobs came to the office and the office organised the jobs for the franchisees. [Campbell's company] is a franchise company, and we pay [Campbell's company] 12½% of our income. The office pays for advertising and organises jobs and books jobs for us. Most jobs came from the office. Sometimes a regular client would refer some friends to us. And some jobs were [one off] spring jobs - if the customer is happy with you, maybe after when they're looking for a cleaner, they'll call you.

Depending on the franchise agreement, the franchisor may undertake to ensure service quality by various means. Jack, also a franchisee with Campbell reported:

There's no direct control, it's just [Campbell] expects you to wear a uniform, he expects you to be tidily dressed, and he expects your equipment and chemicals to be in a good condition. That sort of thing. He expects you to maintain a reasonable standard of quality in your cleaning work, because some franchisees might get complaints, and
people that complain will generally ring up the head office and complain to Campbell, rather than complaining to the individual franchisee.

Franchises create a form of structured self-employment for domestic workers. What is distinctive here is the combination of self-employment with significant involvement by a third party in codifying the 'contents' of transactions with householders (see Chapter 6). In some franchise enterprises, franchisees are encouraged to employ workers to expand their business, recreating a capitalist company structure on a small scale.

3.1.6 The Home Care Service of New South Wales

The Homecare Service of New South Wales is a statutory authority providing subsidised housekeeping and personal care assistance to frail aged and disabled persons in their own homes. This institution is a very significant employer of domestic workers. As a public sector social service provider, the Home Care Service maintains detailed 'performance data.' The average number of customers receiving service in June 1997 was 31,028. The Home Care Service provided 2,960,039 service hours in the 1996-7 year (excluding assessment and co-ordination of care), of which 39.5% were housekeeping services, and personal care 11.5%. At June 30 1997, the Home Care Service employed a total of 4572 people, of whom 3928 or 86% were field staff. Each fieldworker had an average of 7.9 customers per week, and customers received an average of 1.83 hours service weekly (Home Care Service of New South Wales Annual Report, 1996-7).

The Home Care Service is the only public sector service-providing institution included in the study. I included the Home Care Service because unlike any other workers in the domestic services industry, Homecare fieldworkers are employed under an industrial award, which sets out wages and conditions of work for all staff, and brings them under the (rapidly eroding) regulatory umbrella of the state industrial relations system (see Appendix E.1). This inclusion maximised the breadth of possible comparisons of working arrangements in the domestic services industry.

Fieldworkers are assigned by Homecare Service administrators to clients after the latter are assessed on the basis of need. The award designates three grades for fieldworkers, and those progressing through the grades take on more and more complex personal care tasks, and receive pay increments (see Chapter 4 and Appendix E.1.2).
3.2 Supply side views of demand for domestic services

I asked respondents, all domestic service providers, 1) why they thought householders bought domestic services, and 2) whether they thought there were any disadvantages of doing so for householders. I also asked them 3) whether they had, did, or would in the future, buy these services themselves. Their responses were revealing.

3.2.1 Reasons for purchasing domestic services

Many respondents (although by no means all) thought that capacity to pay – sheer wealth – accounted for demand, and that the desire for prestige motivated some householders to buy their services. Janet, a cleaner with Corinne’s company said, simply, “in my eyes the home help’s a luxury really. A lot of people would probably like their houses cleaned but you know, it is quite expensive.” Justine, a live-in housekeeper, was more brutal about the lifestyle hiring her made possible for her employers:

They feel like they’ve got better things to do with their day. They go out almost every night, so I guess it would be sort of hard for them.

...I think one of the advantages that people who hire houseworkers perceive is a prestige thing, they can say “I’ll get my housekeeper to do that,” sort of thing.

Does that happen? Do [your employers] ask you to do things in front of other people?

No, but I’ll answer the phone and they’ll go “Oh, is that the housekeeper?” so all their friends know they’ve got a housekeeper. I guess in their situation it’s a big plus having a housekeeper who can look after a house that’s got a lot of precious things in it. They like to have a housekeeper for security and also just for general maintenance. It makes things a lot easier, they’ve got dogs and cats and birds and fish and so I look after all that and so they can just enjoy all the things like the garden and the animals and not have to do all the work that has to do with them.

Home-based childcare provided by nannies and mother’s helps is also, as Lisa put it “a new ‘in vogue’ thing to have.”

However, although Janaïna agrees that wealth and the desire for prestige do generate demand for domestic services, her response captures more of the complicated social character of the demand side of the domestic services industry:

Well, I think there would be different reasons. Some people- like that guy I mentioned to you [who “led a glamorous yuppy lifestyle”], they just don’t like housework, they’re not used to it, probably their mothers or
wives did housework for them all the time and it’s beyond their dignity to
do housework. Some find it boring. I think women working, they will
employ other women to do the work for them. What else? Elderly people
who can’t do it themselves. So it’s various reasons. But I think the main
one would be sort of husband and wife working and the wife not being
able to do the job herself. Because as you know, in the end, ultimately, the
women still seems to be doing much more housework than men.

A few respondents reported that ‘not liking’ housework was a reason to hire in
someone to take away what Deborah, an agency operator, called “the burden” of it.
Others put it more positively: cleaner Michael said “they’re just so happy to come
home and find the place nice and clean.”

Sarah, a housekeeping company proprietor, reported the most commonly cited
reason when she said her services made “time for other things.” Georgia, a Home
Care fieldworker, elaborated pithily: “why spend quality time cleaning the kitchen
floor? …Go for a walk in the park with your kids for two hours instead of cleaning the
bathroom.”

Campbell, a cleaning franchisor, states explicitly what Janaina implied by “the
wife not being able to do the job herself.” He interprets time-poverty as ‘need,’
thereby extending the reach of the concept beyond the physical incapacity of the
“ageing population” which forms his “second market base”:

The vast majority of [clients] live in homes that are … just ordinary three
bedroom, one bathroom average houses like any of your normal suburbs,
and Mum and Dad both work, they’ve got little kids or kids at school, and
shit, they just– they employ us because they just need the work done, it’s
not a luxury for them.

Other respondents spoke about ‘helping’ the able-bodied, middle class families they
cleaned or cared for.

Campbell also saw overall efficiency gains from the emerging new division of
labour between market and household. The cost, when shared by a working couple,
was minimal he said, and when people gain “a bit of extra time for themselves,
they’re more productive in their own workplace.” Jack, one of his franchisees,
reported that a hired cleaner like him would

5. Georgia is not speaking about her own clients here, who are elderly people unable to
perform their own domestic work. She is responding to a general question about why
people buy domestic services.
do a more thorough clean, and when you’re working to a system the way we work, you do come out with a much cleaner job than what most clients would just dabbing a bit here and doing a bit there."

Several respondents reported that paid household workers could resolve conflict over housework: Sarah said

I get a lot of calls from both men and women saying “Oh, my life’s a nightmare, my husband and I fight about this all the time,” “My wife and I fight about this,” “We can never organise,” “He never does anything,” “It’s a constant bickering point so he has said to me that he will pay for it and so we want you to do it.”

However, Sarah, like Janaína and others, recognised that inequality in the gender division of domestic labour was as much of a problem as lack of time in generating such conflicts. Nadia expressed it this way:

Women generally have the burden of the domestic work placed squarely on their shoulders and most of the women are workers that I work for. I think society expects your home and your environment to be presented in a manner that’s acceptable like what’s in Woman’s Day and what’s in House Beautiful and so forth and people can’t keep up with that.

Finally, some respondents reported that householders employed a cleaner to help the worker. One extraordinary example was Peter, a company operator, who spoke with utter contempt for the wives of company executives to whose homes his company sent cleaners as a sideline of the main businesses of large scale commercial cleaning and provision of cleaning products. These householders were “usually the dirtiest people you’ve ever laid eyes on;” for them, “it’s cleaning not for cleaning’s sake, but for society’s sake...the servant is the thing;” and the cleaner is there to “generally prop the woman up, who may or may not have had a couple of sherries.”

However, by contrast, Peter and his wife employed a cleaner because

We’re too busy, we’re very busy people as you can see. We run four companies and we employ a local woman who is in need of the money, let me tell you, she’s honest, she’s a member of the local church, she comes with references, she’s not the best cleaner in the world that’s for sure, but she does the basics.

Domestic service providers recognise and interpret demand for their services as arising for a complex range of social and economic reasons. Their responses clearly indicate that their services are not uniformly provided as consumer services to the wealthy. The same service provider may offer both ‘consumer’ and ‘social’ services to

6. Chapter 6 discusses in detail the evolution and significance of Campbell’s ‘system.’
a diverse clientele. Particularly significant is the way some respondents extend the concept of ‘need’ to include time-poor, dual earner households. Workers who interpret themselves as ‘helping’ those ‘in need,’ rather than ‘serving’ those who ‘can’t be bothered’ construct for themselves a different, and higher status position in their transactions with householders.

3.2.2 Disadvantages of purchasing domestic services

Hiring domestic workers releases householders’ time, and may be a ‘luxury,’ but the practice is not without its disadvantages. Loss of privacy is the most commonly cited. Respondents also perceived (property) “security risk,” including theft and breakage, and poor quality of work as potential disadvantages – although, of course, only from service providers other than themselves! Some mentioned simply “having to pay.” Some respondents, including nannies themselves, believed nannies to be inferior carers compared to a child’s mother, and/or that loss of time with children was a disadvantage of employing a nanny. Katrina, hired by a family friend, thought domestic workers might be “hard to sack,” but for most the reverse was true.

3.2.3 Domestic service providers hiring domestics?

On the question of hiring domestic workers themselves, participants fell into two broad camps. Many had not and would not hire domestic workers, at least as a consumer service. In many responses there was a subtle – and sometimes not so subtle – disdain for people, like those for whom they worked, who did. Justine said:

I can’t see myself being that wealthy for a start. And also it’s such an easy job to do yourself, to do your own housekeeping. You’d have to be pretty darn busy not to be able to do your own housekeeping, I think.

I can’t see myself having that sort of lifestyle where I spent so little time at home that I had to get someone else to clean it. I’d start to think maybe I should have a smaller house, maybe I should stay home once in a while.

Some cleaners and cleaning agency operators, like nannies who thought nannies did not provide the best care for children, thought themselves “too fussy” to have someone else do their cleaning work. Others assumed they would continue as Jack said, to “manage it” themselves. Fred, a Home Care fieldworker, saw himself as “fit

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7. In fact, housekeeping and cleaning services are not luxury goods as economists understand them. Analysis of the Household Expenditure Survey shows expenditure on these services rises proportionately with income (Bittman, Matheson and Meagher, 1999).
and able," and said "I don’t see why I should get anyone else to do it." Meiling, a
cleaner, also gave reasons like these, and added:

Initially I thought yes, I’d definitely have a cleaner, but I’ve become so
used to cleaning, and because I’ve been through so many people’s houses
and because I’m quite a private person, initially I would never have
thought about the amount of information that goes out, not that it’s
passed on or anything, it’s never passed on, but just observed.

Janaïna was also concerned about her privacy and about the ethics of paid household
work: “I don’t like the idea of employing another woman to do the dirty work, you
know, I don’t like that, I like to do it myself.” Clearly, some domestic service
providers, even though their work breaches the public-private divide, are not
immune to the powerful cultural forces constructing it.

Others, including most agency operators and company owners, already
employed domestic workers, typically cleaners, and gave the pressure of time and
relief from the responsibility of housework as reasons for doing so. Some present day
domestic workers, including older cleaners like Boo and Michael, had employed
cleaners themselves in the past; Michael when he had been in professional
employment, and Boo when she had been temporarily physically disabled.

Some who did not hire domestic help thought they might, when their situation
required it or made it possible. For Maria, a cleaner and supervisor in Corinne’s
cleaning company, a future increase in her paid work time would lead her to consider
seriously buying cleaning services. For Georgia, hiring a cleaner in the future might
resolve “a bone of contention” in her relationship with her partner. Jenny said,
simply, “One day when I have enough money I’m going to have a cleaner…I hate
cleaning.”

Between these two were respondents like Nadia who expressed deep
ambivalence: when she had the money, she would love the time released by a cleaner,
and “because it’s such a horrible task to do.” However,

I have this personal thing about employing other people to clean up your
own shit. Because I think if you live, if you eat, then you go to the toilet,
then you should clean your own toilet. It’s the upkeep of your person,
your personal space and so forth, so I’m not sure whether I ever would.
Although, [sighs] I’d love to have a bit of time for myself, so perhaps you
know, I probably if I can then I probably will employ somebody just to do
some vacuuming and wash the floors and things once a week you know?
In answering this question, respondents convey something of their moral evaluations of paid household work as a social practice. For some – including some current and past domestic workers – the practice is morally neutral. Others find it objectionable on grounds similar to those Gorz (1989, 1994)\(^8\) expresses: there are simply some things people should do for themselves.

### 3.3 Doing paid household work

In this section, domestic service providers talk about their work: what they actually do on the job, their perceptions and experience of the work, and their employment relationships. Again, a diversity of perceptions and experiences challenges the homogenising interpretations prevalent in the literature.

#### 3.3.1 The work

What paid household workers do on the job depends, in the first instance, on their occupation (although institutional differences are also important, see Chapters 4 and 6). This sub-section describes the tasks performed by the cleaners, housekeepers, aged carers (Home Care Service fieldworkers), nannies and mother’s helps who make up the paid domestic labour force in Sydney.

Michael is a retired teacher who works with a friend, Shirley (whom I did not interview), to clean twelve to fourteen houses a week. Like all cleaners, they work only a few hours weekly or fortnightly for each household. Full-time cleaners simply ‘do’ more houses than part timers. Michael finds work almost exclusively through word-of-mouth. Here he describes what he does at work, as well as the complicated mix of personal preference, domains of responsibility, ideas about privacy, customer expectations, practical self-interest, and rules of thumb out of which the practical ‘contents’ of his work emerge:

> Well, we vacuum, we dust, we scrub floors, we scrub the bathrooms, tiles, all the walls, the glass if there’s shower screens, toilets, sweep outside if they’ve got a courtyard, sweep outside the front door, the sinks, all round the cupboards at the front in the kitchen, the outside of the fridge, the top of the stove and the glass door on the outside.

> *How did you draw the boundaries around the kind of things you were going to do? ... If someone said ‘I want to go to the shops while you’re cleaning, can I leave the baby in the house?’*

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8. See also Chapter 1.2.1 (above) and Chapter 9.1 (below).
Oh, no. I wouldn’t take that responsibility. They’d have to take the child with them. You can’t be cleaning and looking after a child.

*What about cooking or hanging out the washing or that kind of thing?*

No.

*Do you tell people that you don’t do that?*

I’ve never been asked. A lot of them were amazed that I make their beds. They leave their linen out, I’ll make their beds. I’ll change the bed, but I won’t wash their sheets, just take them down to the laundry.

*And how did you decide in your mind what you were and weren’t going to do?*

I just sort of thought about what I do at home, when I’m cleaning at home, I suppose. You know, I’ll do this and I’ll do that. I won’t touch venetian blinds, because you could be three hours on those.

…I don’t think you should do someone else’s washing. That’s personal.

…I’ve had a couple who’ve asked me will I do ironing, and I said no, definitely not. [Because] again, that’s personal. I don’t think I’d like to be ironing ladies’ dresses and men’s shirts and things. I haven’t got time anyway, I don’t like ironing myself. I wouldn’t do it, I think it’s something somebody should do themselves. I’ll pick up their clothes, if there’s a pair of pants on the floor, I’ll hang them up. I won’t go through the cupboard, but if there’s a pair of pants on the floor, I’ll go get a coathanger and put them in the closet. That’s all I’ll do, things like that, as for washing, no!

Other cleaners, particularly those working within franchise operations, operate within institutionally-defined job descriptions. Here Jack, a cleaning franchisee, describes how his job description is defined with each householder, using ideas of ‘standard’ and ‘contract’:

We have booking forms, which are filled out for each job. And on that form there are a standard list of things to be done and you agree with the client what is to be done on that standard list. If there’s anything special to be done - if they want any paintings on the wall dusted or if they want any ornaments [or windows or venetian blinds] cleaned, then that would be a special requirement which would go down on the booking form.

…the client gets a copy of the form, and you get a copy so you both know what you’re doing.

Housekeepers, by contrast with cleaners, and by definition, do a wider range of tasks. A few work full-time for one household - Justine was the only respondent in this kind of employment. Others like Carla, Leanne, Sarah and their employees, as well as those sent out by agencies, work on hourly or daily bases for one or more households.
Justine’s description of her work indicates how employer preferences can shape the content of housekeeping more than of cleaning.

*And what does housekeeping mean? What sort of jobs?*

Women’s work. I was thinking about this the other day - all the shit things, like picking up the dog shit or something. It all depends because there’s two women already living in the house and they don’t necessarily ask me to do the same things as other people have asked me to do - like I’ve done a bit of other housekeeping, but never live-in. But other jobs I’ve sort of done everything - ironing, cleaning, bit of cooking. But this job it’s been more clearly laid out. There’s no ironing, there’s no cooking, I don’t do their shopping for them. They do a lot of the things. I vacuum, I dust, I polish a vast amount of silver ware because they’ve got a lot of valuables and things, and generally just keep an eye on things as well, the pool, do maintenance on that... It’s changed slightly in time, like a few things have come up like new dogs, or they’re just variations. Now I clean their cars and I didn’t used to clean their cars, but they’ve got posher cars now.

Sarah runs a housekeeping company, from which householders hire her or her employees by the hour. She described her business as follows:

Well, the whole idea is not to say no to anything. It’s household management. So the idea is to take on everything, if I can’t actually do it myself, I contract it out. Cleaning, ironing, cooking, washing, windows, swimming pools, lawns mowed, weeding, shopping, dinner parties catered for, the whole thing. And lots of the little - you know, from the full grocery shopping to the little things - like an earring breaks, needs to go to the jeweller, a film needs to be picked up, a prescription needs to be filled, a gift needs to be bought, a card needs to be sent, post office, paying bills, you know, if you’ve run out of gin or whatever you drink, so its all those little running around [jobs] - your husband likes that fantastic paté from the deli up the road, car servicing, car washing, dog walking, everything.

This is an elite service, expensive and highly customised (see Chapter 6 and Appendix C.) However, combine this wide range of tasks with personal care, and we are close to a description - minus the gin and paté - of the work of Home Care Service fieldworkers. Denise, a fieldworker mentioned cleaning, shopping, banking, caring for animals, laundry, and buying a birthday present for a client’s relative, as well as showering, toileting, and putting to bed some customers, in addition to just “spending time” with them. Fred spoke about his job description this way:

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9. Customer is the term used by the Home Care Service of New South Wales to describe those receiving services, and has been since the late 1980s (Home Care Service of New South Wales Annual Reports 1989/90-1996/97). However, fieldworkers tended to use the term ‘client.’
I’ve progressed on to personal care, that’s more in my way of liking. I like that, because you’re actually helping them to do something. With the housekeeping it’s lovely -- you become part of it, but your not totally there helping with what they really need. Half the time all they want is someone to talk. You go around there sometimes for an hour and a half and I work fairly well, I throw things around, move all the settees, you know, do a lot of extras for them, but nine times out of ten you’re finished [cleaning] in an hour, an hour and ten, and you sit down and have a cup of coffee and just have a chat.

Nannies and mother’s helps also combine personal care – in this case, care of children - with housework. These workers usually service only one household at a time, on either part or full-time bases. Katrina worked three mornings a week as a mother’s help. And that consists of each morning to get three girls - there’s a 7 year old, a 6 year old and a 3 year old and I get them ready for school and day care. I come in and get their breakfast, help get them ready for school, do jobs like tidying up the house. Sometimes hanging out washing, and then if there’s any time left over doing some drawing activities, or watching the kids play- ride their bikes or do some sort of play for half an hour, if there’s time.

Kelly worked as a full-time, live-out nanny looking after two children: supervising their play, eating and bathing, and transporting them to various activities. She reported also doing the employing family’s housework:

It’s a four bedroom, could be five bedroom house with four bathrooms. I do everything here - well, basically, within reason. She wanted me to mow the lawns and get out and do the gardening and I told her no, but other than that I do all the washing, I wash all the floors, I vacuum all the floors, I make all the beds, everything basically. Clean out the fridge. I make the cookies and the nibbles for the fridge and all that sort of thing, I write out the shopping list so that on the weekend she just goes and does the shopping for whatever we need. Pretty much everything.

3.3.2 The job experience

What do domestic workers like about their work? What are its disadvantages?
Here Boo, a professional woman who took up domestic cleaning when she was down on her luck, talks about aspects of her work as a cleaner:

Why out of all the things that you might have done when you came [back to Australia] did you chose cleaning?

I don’t know that I chose cleaning. It was offered to me. In a way that’s a good question because I hate cleaning my own home and I actually have a back problem which means cleaning isn’t actually an easy thing for me to
do. But it's fairly easy to get cleaning jobs by word of mouth and friends put you in touch with someone else. I didn't have to go to the CES or advertise or anything, it just came my way. I can fit it into my own hours, I can do it when it suits me, I'm my own boss.

So how does it compare with the work you do in your professional field?

It doesn't compare. Oh well it's physical so I don't have to use my mind. I don't have to relate to people. So the [cleaning] job I do at the moment I do at the end of the week on a Friday afternoon/evening and it's quite a nice way to just physically unwind at the end of a busy sort of mental-type week. And I get a certain amount of satisfaction out of making something spotless and clean. I can actually fix it and I suppose in my professional work it's my job to fix people and you're always left with unanswered questions that aren't quite resolved. At least this way I can go in clean it up from top to toe.

So there are some forms of job satisfaction that you get out of it that you don't get out of your other career?

Yes. And as I say, I'm a very physical sort of person but I spend much of my day sitting listening to people so it's an opportunity to move around a bit.

Anything you don't like about it?

Probably the thing I like about it least is if it's a house that's got a lot of furniture and I've got to do a lot of bending. I actually anyway have to clean houses on my hands and knees basically, my own as well, because of my sore back. But if you're having to bend and weave and twist and turn and hit your head on things, that I really hate. Probably I don't particularly like bathrooms and trying to clean showers simply because of trying to get it really, really clean and spotless. No, otherwise it's all right.

Joan discusses several aspects of her experience of domestic cleaning here: its easy accessibility, that it doesn't involve much mental work or human contact, that it is heavy physical labour and so both 'exercise' and 'wearing,' that she is her 'own boss' and that it is rewarding in its own way. Most cleaners mentioned at least one, usually more, of these features of their work, although not all of them interpreted them the same way.

Janaïna and Campbell both reported finding the physical work of cleaning invigorating, but as a university student (at the time) and a cleaning franchise company operator respectively, they did not look forward to long careers as domestic workers. Janaïna put it this way:

Well, for me it was actually useful, because A), I could keep fit, doing all the scrubbing, all the physical work. I wasn't doing much physical work
because I was at the university then. And B), I could THINK. I could do a
fair bit of thinking while I was cleaning because it was so mechanical. And
very often I would work with my walkman, and listening to lectures,
catching up and that sort of thing, so that was OK. But it's very
monotonous, otherwise I would have gone crazy, I think if I didn't do
these things. So it was OK. It was a means to an end. I really needed some
extra money.

For Janaïña, not having to use her mind for work left her free to use it for other
things, but without those other things she would have found the work unbearable.
Although most domestic workers reported preferring the householder to be away
from the house while they worked, boredom and isolation were problems for some.

Jenny, also university student cleaner, said that the job was "just too hard
physically, really" to continue in the long-term. And long-term domestic workers did
find the physical labour tough – including Juyun, a full-time cleaner with limited
options for moving out of the work, and Angela, a long-term Home Care fieldworker,
who suffered an injury at work which affected her earning capacity for years. Here
are Juyun and his daughter-interpreter Helen:

You just said of course you'd like to do another job. Why is that of course
you'd like to do another job?

[Juyun] Because cleaning business is- shoulder's in pain-

So it gives you pain in your arm and your shoulder?

[Helen] Because it's manual labour....you do a really hard job.

Domestic work is not just hard work: some respondents complained that it is
also dirty work. For most of these, toilet cleaning was a particularly hated task.
However, those who combined domestic with commercial cleaning complained most
on this score, citing vacant rental properties as the dirtiest work around. For others, a
pleasant working environment was deemed an attraction of the job: Corinne, a
domestic cleaning company operator said, in response to a question about the relative
merits of domestic work over other kinds of work:

Well I believe that it gives them a nice environment too, because some
customer's houses are waterfront houses and it's beautiful to look at the
water and the customer doesn't mind if they turn on the music and it's
music to work with, you know, at least there's something going on in the
house. And also because it's not polluted, you know?

More than one cleaner complained about the chemicals involved, and so Corinne's
final remark may be wrong. But what can be loosely termed the work environment
was a positive feature of the job for many workers. Some enjoyed the variety of going from house to house, and being on the road between jobs. Others expressed the attractions of the domestic work environment in negative terms - several mentioned liking not being 'stuck in an office.'

Like Boo, most cleaners mentioned on-the-job autonomy - being 'my own boss' as significant benefit of the work. Carla, a housekeeping company operator and housekeeper, put it in terms comparable with many others:

I like being out on the road during the day. You know, the going between the jobs in the sun in the car and that sort of stuff, there's a lot of freedom involved in that. If I want to - also in terms of freedom - if I'm in the middle of a job and I see a magazine that's got an interesting article, I can sit down and read it. I'm not responsible to anybody else except myself and my customer. And as long as the job's done, they don't care if I sit down and read a newspaper in the middle. So it really allows me to be free.

Consuelo, a domestic cleaner and migrant from Portugal, agreed, comparing the autonomy of paid domestic work favourably against the surveillance of her previous factory boss:

*What have you liked about these [cleaning] jobs?*

First, I like work anyway. I don't like doing nothing. And second, I like the money of course, too! [Laughs a little] And sometimes I like it because nobody tells me nothing, not like the boss around you all the time. You know, "Do this," or "The boss's coming." Like always in the factory, just at a machine working, working just look like that [head down], never like this [head up], and that's terrible. And that's why this job's - because they probably are good people, I don't know, but nobody ever tells me anything, what I have to do.

Both Janet and Nadia preferred cleaning to secretarial or shop work insofar as the latter two involved being, as Nadia put it, "at the beck and call of people." Suzanne preferred it to waitressing because

unlike waitressing you don't have to have a public persona as well, you don't have to be cheerful to people, you don't have to cope with that side of things, you work by yourself. Usually people leave the house and leave you to clean.

In addition to working largely free of immediate supervision, many cleaners and housekeepers enjoyed the flexible use of time in job scheduling. Anwar, a domestic and commercial cleaner, put it this way:

*Are there any good things about doing cleaning as a job that you don't have in other jobs?*
Actually any kind of self-employment, you know, and this- well, I'm doing it as a self-employed, and I can study-- whatever I can adjust my time for, I utilise my other time to my study and maybe sometimes I have to give time to my family, my son. So being self-employed is one of the best profession, you know?

Most cleaners found the sense of looking back at the end of the day on a job well done rewarding. Inge, a cleaner who found her jobs in her local network, spoke about the advantages of cleaning this way:

It's quick money, It's something I'm good at in a way that is satisfactory insofar if you're cleaning your own house, it seems to be messed up behind your back again, because you have kids. You know, you never clean a mess and then walk out and think "That is nice," you know, "I can leave it till next week." You don't have that satisfaction at home. And you don't have to think.

Asked to compare working in private homes with other workplaces, some respondents attributed its flexibility and freedom to the more 'friendly' and 'relaxed' nature of domestic work. Leanne, a housekeeper, and housekeeping company operator said:

I think it's more home there, it's more casual. An office is an office, a home is a home, it's more homely there, you feel more comfortable. ...You feel like you're at home all day, rather than in that office.

Although they enjoyed being free from the strictures of supervision and "office politics" on the job, some cleaners and housekeepers spoke about the rewards of the job in the quite personal terms of making happy the householders for whom they cleaned or kept house. Trisha, a domestic cleaner, put it this way:

I've met some lovely people, and they're wonderful - I mean this one job that I've had - I did it today actually, I've had them ever since I started cleaning, and they often leave me notes thanking me for my work and that's really nice. It's a motivation in itself, that you really feel that you're helping people, that they're really appreciative, and they've said that "It's because of you that we can continue what we're doing, and we really appreciate your efforts."

Meiling, a domestic cleaner who team-worked with a friend, confessed a voyeuristic pleasure in her work, a pleasure we know she has no intention of allowing to a cleaner in her own home:

There's an intimacy about domestic cleaners generally, I think, yeah. On one side of it, then on the other side of it, of course there isn't.

What do you mean by that?
Well, I mean people don’t really speak to you about— you go through their house and clean and in some houses there are so many objects around and I always piece together these imaginary lives of people, that’s like the best bit.

*When you’re working?*

Oh, yeah, all the time going through, and another letter will arrive from such and such and you think “I wonder if they’re involved with this person or that person or—”

*You have a conversation [with your working partner] while you’re there?*

Yeah, all the time about the people who live in the house, that’s the best part. So much information can be gathered while you’re cleaning somebody’s house, it’s just incredible. Really private information like if someone’s pregnant or all those kinds of things. We always find out before anyone else does quite often, because you’re emptying the bins and there are pregnancy tests or whatever, all those kinds of things which are really funny. And so there is that intimacy there, but on the same level, our clients would never speak to us about those things like relationships and family that you’re constantly observing. That’s the really interesting side of it. That’s the side that I really like. It’s just observing people and the way they function.

So far I have concentrated mainly on jobs which do not involve personal care. Although many of the problems and benefits of cleaning and housekeeping are similar for all domestic workers, occupations with a component of personal care differ in some ways from those without.

One difference is that although worker control over the organisation of time within the job may remain, the timing of the job is fixed. Thus, an element of the flexibility enjoyed by many cleaners and housekeepers is not available to many nannies and Home Care fieldworkers. Lisa, working as a mother’s help/nanny on weekday afternoons described it this way:

*What do you think are the disadvantages of doing paid household work for you?*

For me ... probably - to begin with the hours are good in that they fit in with Uni but they are also quite restrictive. It restricts my own household life... I used to cook a lot for my flatmates whereas I don’t do that any more. ... It’s cut into my time - things like friends will be going shopping of an afternoon and I just can’t do that.
Personal care work has its own pleasures and dangers. Nannies and Home Care fieldworkers alike spoke movingly about their attachment to those they cared for, as well as the complex relations of obligation they developed with their employers.

Comments on the low status of paid household work were often proffered in response to my questioning on its disadvantages. Although respondents often said they didn’t care, or that paid household work suited their purposes, regardless of what others or ‘society’ thought, they were aware that paid household work was, in Carla’s words, “a low job.” This awareness affected Carla’s recruiting practices:

I asked them some pretty searching questions when they start—“How do you feel about being a cleaner?” When your friends say what sort of work do you do and you say ‘I’m a cleaner,’ how are you going to feel in front of your friends? How will your spouse respond when their business colleagues say ‘Oh, what does your wife do?’ ‘Oh, she’s a cleaner.’ How do you feel about that?”

So you wouldn’t employ someone who wouldn’t feel happy about it.

No. Because they’re going to come to a point where they think “Oh shit, I don’t want to do this!” I mean the wage difference is very little compared with someone who works in a shop, but the perception, the social perception is different.

For Anwar, the low status of cleaning was associated with its dirtiness. Others expressed more explicitly a sense of ‘going down in the world.’ Boo felt both “grateful” and “a certain stigma:” when an affluent friend offered her cleaning work when she was unable to find professional employment, she said “I felt like I was being rescued. I felt like it was charity.” When Consuelo told her husband she was taking up cleaning work after leaving her factory job, he asked her “Why? Did you come here [from Portugal] just to do this? No, no, no, no!” Janaína, another migrant, mentioned to people in her circle that she would consider cleaning work, and when she was taken up on it she replied

“Get in touch with your friend, I’ll do some thinking in the mean time.”

Just to adjust to the idea, because of course coming from a typical middle class Brazilian family, that was almost sort of beyond my dignity. And in fact when I told my mother about that, she was horrified that I was doing

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10. Carla’s use of the term ‘cleaner’ is instructive here — her business concept and practice, described in more detail in Chapter 6, aimed to professionalise housekeeping on the model of the ‘executive wife’ — yet she seemed to be aware of the precariousness of this strategy, and that she and her employees would have to live with other interpretations of what they did.

11. Carla was right about the comparability of pay rates between domestic and non-domestic occupations – see Appendix C, Tables C.2 and C.3.
a cleaning job. They themselves have maids, people to do housework for them.

When I asked nanny-housekeeper Kelly “How does nannying compare to other kinds of work?” she replied

People look down on nannies as home help, they don’t see it as a career. People assume the children are yours, so that guys don’t come up to you. Then when they find out that they’re not, they say “Oh, you’re just a nanny!” The children get alienated because people think “This family must be loaded and don’t want to look after their children.” The nanny gets alienated because people think that she doesn’t have a career, she just wants to stay at home and watch soaps.

However, although it is culturally associated with servility, the low status of paid household work does not automatically translate into or derive from treatment by householders of domestics as servants (see also Chapter 4). Domestic employment relationships, as the next section shows, are much more variable.

What about economic aspects of paid household work? Suzanne reported that cleaning paid “very good money,” and Juyhun found his ability to work with his wife, who would otherwise be unemployed, as well as the higher hourly pay rates made cleaning full-time a better occupation that the factory work he did when he and his family first migrated from Korea. Jenny and Melling, also cleaners, cited the tax-free nature of income from domestic work as a significant attraction.

However, employment and income insecurity were problems for many workers, particularly those in local networks, or the open market. Alba, a cleaner in the open market spoke about “the feeling of being not protected.” Inge, a cleaner in a local network described a common work situation this way:

It’s very non-committal actually. And you’re very easily chucked out because with private people they say “I’d like to have somebody to clean for a week- or for a half day in the afternoon for a couple of hours in the afternoon.” It doesn’t go via any organisation or nothing. I’m not registered anywhere. I clean for a couple of bachelors and for a single woman and then they say “I’m going on holidays,” or “I’m away this Thursday and so I’ll see you the week after.” And that’s it, you know, then you lose your money for that Thursday- for that week.

Agency operator Margaret reported that underemployment, in the sense that some workers could not find enough hours of work, was also a problem:

Any disadvantages of doing paid domestic work?
Lack of it - a lot them are out of work for a long period of time. See you’d often get cleaners that have got - that are working Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning, and trying to find Tuesday and Thursday, when everyone else wants a cleaner on Fridays. It’s very difficult. ...Same with nannies, too. I mean often someone might want a nanny Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, so that girl says “Fine, I’ll take that job, but I’ve got to find a Tuesday and Thursday job.” But to find the job that fits her, fits the days, fits the family, the whole thing, is very difficult, so often they don’t find something else. They’re really only part time employees. So uncertainty I suppose.

In addition, working conditions were poor in general for many nannies, cleaners and housekeepers: Margaret recognised that although many enjoy cash income,

Big disadvantage are it’s traditional that they don’t get holiday pay, they don’t get sick leave and they don’t get loading, they don’t get super. So all those things have got to be taken into account - they’re big minuses.

Home Care workers are a significant exception here because of their industrial award (see Chapter 4 and Appendix E).

3.3.3 Domestic employment relationships in brief

I have dealt only tangentially so far with employment relationship aspects of the experience of paid household work. However, some of the greatest gratification and disagreeable drawbacks reported were related to domestic employment relationships, and in a particular form, these relationships are construed as definitive of domestic occupations in the dominant view. Subsequent chapters analyse aspects of domestic employment relationships in detail. I argue that the ‘nature’ of domestic employment relationships is strongly context dependent, and that paid household workers work in many different contexts. This section captures descriptively some of the diverse relationships they experience. It contains accounts of some happy and unhappy incidents, and some descriptions of some easy and some complicated relationships. Here perhaps more than anywhere else I face the difficulty of extracting short, stand-alone quotes from the richly textured personal documents which are the interview transcripts.

Jenny, a part time cleaner, described her employment relationships this way:

There really isn’t much of a relationship at all. I hear from them in notes and they are very sparse. Occasionally I’ll get a note that says “Do you need any other cleaning things?” and I’ll write down what I need. Once I
had to ring up because I couldn't work one week because I had something else on and so I spoke to all the people for about twenty or thirty seconds. I don't really have a relationship with them at all.

Many cleaners had this experience with most of their clients, because they typically cleaned empty houses. Nadia described one exception in her account of a struggle over her job description. In so doing, she described a problem confronted in one variant of 'bad' domestic employment relationships, and one commonly reported in the international literature as endemic in paid household work.

After negotiating a job description based on a combination of time and tasks with one employing couple whom she knew socially, Nadia reported:

They said "Oh well that's fine." And then a few weeks later they said "Oh well, but we would like you to polish the furniture." It's not good enough that I clean the furniture and everything - "We would like you to polish it." I said "If you'd like me to do that, I either have to leave some things out or you either have to pay me half an hour extra."

Nadia polished the furniture, and she did

go back and tell them that it took me a half an hour extra and they didn't pay me. And I was really shocked [because] I'm working and I expect to be paid. And when they didn't pay me then I got a bit pissed off and I thought well, I won't do it again. And then they asked me again to do it and I said "Well I'm sorry, but I don't have the time. I've got four hours and I do this and if you want me to do it, then you should pay me."

...I'm nobody's slave, so then eventually I passed that job onto somebody else because I felt that I was being abused because they kept asking me to - not only the furniture for example, I managed to incorporate the furniture every third week, so I did it somehow, I used to sweat like a dog. And then they asked me to wash the windows and they asked me to clean the blinds, and I thought to myself "Well, you know, do it yourselves!" So I just left.

Nadia found the problem of combining a personal and a working relationship difficult. She spoke at length, in angry terms, about the abuse she felt she suffered at the hands of this couple, and said that the arrangement and its denouement had "ruined the friendship." She did not suffer this way with her other employers.

However, other respondents spoke about problems negotiating the boundaries of domestic employment relationships with people they had not previously known. Rosa, a cleaner in the open market, put it this way
I have a problem with borders, with roles. I don’t know whether to act as a friend or a cleaner. So if they are too friendly, I don’t know how to act and it brings me problems.

*What does acting as a cleaner mean?*

I have to know my place if I’m just being a cleaner - I have to do my job and that’s it.

*When you say ‘know your place,’ what does that mean?*

That I’m only a cleaner - if I talk too much they might think I’m being nosy. It’s very hard. Because I have never had this kind of job before.

Bob and Geraldine, neither of whom have worked themselves as domestic workers, ran a large general domestic services agency, and had the following to say about work in private homes:

...*do you think there are any potential disadvantages that come from the difference of working in people’s private homes?*

(Bob) Familiarity breeds contempt, in other words, the more familiar the person gets with you, the more work they’ll give you to do. And the less you’re inclined to knock it back because you’re now friends.

(Geraldine) Ah, yes, and you tend to listen to all the whinging and whining [about] the horrible husband who won’t give her any money, you know, “Oh, well, just take an hour off that this week then,” you know, that sort of thing. Manipulated.

These problems arose most acutely for workers in jobs involving personal care. Nannies spoke of maternal jealousy, one nanny agency operator of a wife’s request for a plain girl to inhibit her husband’s wandering eyes. Job description boundaries also need strong negotiation skills in full-time posts, as we saw with Kelly’s refusal to take on lawn-mowing(!) in her nanning job. However, Kelly contrasted her present job with the previous one, saying

It’s very different. The only way to explain it is the other family were my life, and I loved it. I didn’t care if I got up and went to work at 3 in the morning or 10 in the morning. I didn’t care if I didn’t get home till midnight, didn’t matter. Whereas here, I come to work and it’s work, and I go home and work’s finished, and it doesn’t matter what happened at work, my time’s over.

Kelly still lived with the family which was her life, and works full-time for another: the breach of the worker-employer boundary in the first case was wonderful for her.

Most cleaners had worked with householders present at some time. Typically they explained their preference for absent employers by saying that if they were there,
householders got in the way, or talked to you and held you up. When householders are at home, both problems and rewards were reported. Janaína was sexually harassed by one householder, and dismissed by a jealous wife somewhere else. In yet another she reported that:

I used to be her cleaner and her psychologist as well! [Laughs]. I would be cleaning the kitchen or the bathroom and she would be standing there and telling me her problems, you know?

*How did you feel about that?*

Very good, actually. It was great, I felt good, I felt needed, and I felt that she didn't treat me as an inferior.

Other respondents spoke about householders relying on them for emotional contact and/or support, sometimes fondly, like Campbell, who had given up most cleaning jobs, no longer needing the money once his franchise operation was up and running:

I still have a couple of clients who I've become a household pet for, and they've become personal friends, some elderly people who probably look more forward to me going there to have a chat to them than for me to clean and I don't have the heart to say to them “I don't want to come any more.”

Katrina was ambivalent – she did not seem to be disempowered by her employer's dependence on her, but she did seem to feel oppressed by it, and later sought work with people she didn't know:

I often found that in that job I was often supporting her emotionally as well as doing my practical household chores.

*How did you feel about that?*

I think it's a bit funny sometimes, because I've known all the people I've worked for as family friends before I've worked for them so there's been some sort of relationship there anyway. And in a lot of ways I've felt responsible for her, for her sanity sometimes. Like I felt, when I knew that she was a bit depressed or not coping with the kids, that need to take over for her. And often I'd suggesting ways for her to cope better, or different things she can do with the kids ... her husband worked very long hours, he left at 7.30 in the morning and got home at 7.30 at night and he's a barrister and he earned a lot of money and a lot of the time thought of myself as the partner, sort of helping her bring up the kids, and he was paying me money to take over his role as he wasn't there very often.

Many respondents valued appreciation, and were dispirited and angered by lack of appreciation for their work, when they perceived them. Domestic workers in all occupations spoke about the development of 'loyalty,' 'obligation' and 'friendship'
in their successful employment relationships. The next chapter analyses the relationship between these ‘social’ or ‘personal’ aspects of domestic employment arrangements and their ‘economic’ dimensions.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the domestic services industry in Sydney has a diverse and complex structure. A variety of institutional forms organise workers in a range of domestic occupations on the supply side. On the demand side of the industry, as service providers report, householders purchase domestic labour services from a variety of motives. Interestingly, some service providers’ understandings of householders’ motivations are also recasting the meaning of ‘need’ for services in a way which enhances domestic workers’ status.

The final section of this chapter shows that that domestic workers in Sydney relate incidents and working relationships comparable with those reported in North American studies. We saw evidence above that householders may exploit workers by failing to pay for all work performed, and by expanding job descriptions without increasing pay. Nadia and Carla described explicitly aspects of the subordinate social status of domestic workers equivalent to those recounted in feminist writing on the occupation. Observations by Rosa, Bob, and Geraldine support the argument that working in a home is different from work in other contexts, and the source of particular difficulties, notably, ambiguity as well as inequality in the relationship between worker and householder. Many other respondents related similar experiences. Thus, the dominant view describes important problems and issues faced by paid household workers.

However, section 3.3.3 showed that individual workers experienced a variety of working relationships, and evidence presented above, and to be presented in Chapters 4 and 8, indicates that workers can feel more ‘subservient’ in jobs other than paid household work. The next chapter criticises the prevailing view that paid household work is essentially, and in unique ways, a ‘lousy job.’ Using two-studies; Corinne’s domestic cleaning company, and fieldworkers with the Home Care Service of New South Wales; I will show that it is mistaken to conclude that negative reports define the nature of paid household work. Chapters 4, 6 and 7 all show how the institutional and social context in which paid domestic labour is performed shapes worker-householder relations, worker experience, and the social status of domestic occupations.
Chapter 4

The Uniqueness Question

Chapter 2 presented what I have called the 'dominant view' of paid household work amongst feminist social scientists. This consists of a widely-shared set of propositions about the nature and significance of paid household work in contemporary western societies. The evidence presented in Chapter 3, however, signals that the experience of paid household work is diverse and contradictory in ways not well accommodated by the prevailing framework.

This chapter challenges the first element of the dominant view of paid household work. Recall that this is the argument that paid household work is a unique, and uniquely exploitative, occupation because of the personal nature of the domestic employment relationship, householders' expectation of a servile demeanour from the worker as a means of expressing their own superior status, and the occupation's intimate location and content (Chapter 2.1.1).

The critical argument supporting the prevailing characterisation of paid household work as unique turns on the coincidence of 'personal' and 'employment' in the relationship between householder and domestic worker. Householders have economic power over workers because they can hire and fire at will. The intimate location and content of paid household work fosters a personal relationship between householder and domestic worker, particularly when personal care of household members is involved. Personal and economic aspects of the relationship reinforce each other to the detriment of the worker. On one hand, the structural inequality inherent in the 'employment' aspect of the relationship precludes a 'personal' relationship of good will and mutual respect. On the other, the unequal, but intimate personal relationship leaves workers especially vulnerable to economic abuse because a clear boundary between work and non-work is difficult to establish. Thus, the argument goes, householders are in the position to abuse workers 1) economically, by
increasing workloads without increasing pay, and thereby extracting unpaid labour in a process of 'simple exploitation'; and 2) psychologically, by demanding or assuming intimacy with them, and/or by treating them with disrespect.

This chapter asks: is there something unique about paid household work? If domestic workers are obliged to perform unpaid labour and are subject to particular disrespect because of the unique configuration of personal and employment aspects of the worker-householder relationship, we would not expect these problems to arise in differently structured employment relationships. Using a comparative case method, and some important insights from political economy, I explore what happens when the 'personal' and 'economic' aspects of the householder-domestic worker relationship do not coincide the way they do in the paradigm mode of work organisation in the literature (viz. the private employment relationship between a householder and domestic worker, organised through informal networks).

4.1 Friend, flunkey or what? Understanding domestic employment relationships

This section presents two case studies, one of a capitalist firm (see also Chapter 3.1.4) and the other of the Home Care Service of New South Wales (see also Chapter 3.1.6). This method allows me to distinguish, and just as importantly to vary, particular aspects of the content and organisation of paid household work, in order to interrogate the proposition that the distinctive nature of the private domestic employment relationship is the source of a unique set of job-related problems experienced by domestic workers. In neither of the case studies is the service-receiving householder also the domestic worker's employer. Instead, third party employers, one a capitalist proprietor, the other a statutory authority, employ domestic workers and send them out to provide services to householders. Thus, both case studies involve employment relationships that differ in structure from those providing the empirical focus of existing writing on paid household work, in which the roles of householder and employer coincide.
4.1.1 Case study 1: Corinne’s domestic cleaning company

Corinne’s domestic cleaning company opened in mid-1993, and expanded rapidly. By November 1994, Corinne employed thirty cleaners, two office staff and two area managers. The entire staff is female, and includes migrants from English and non-English speaking countries as well as Australian-born women on the cleaning staff. Corinne was born in Singapore, and worked there in a five star hotel before emigrating to Australia. She articulated clear marketing, employee management, customer service, and quality control strategies, derived in part from her previous work experience in the hotel industry.

Corinne chose the domestic services industry because she believed there to be strong demand for services, and the cost of entry was low compared with other potential business ventures such as restaurants and boutiques. Like other formal sector participants in the domestic services industry (see Chapter 6), Corinne aims to provide ‘specialised,’ ‘standardised’ and ‘professional’ service, although she uses the terms in a particular way: what she calls a “personal touch” is involved, expressed in attention to detail. Cleaners are trained to make all shampoo and other bottles in the bathroom show their labels, to fluff up cushions and so on. Moreover, the tasks that her employees do for householders are often more varied than the ‘basic clean’ offered by other operations (see Chapter 6.3.1). They may hang out some washing or clean out a cupboard, in consultation with a householder. Corinne’s company does not clean offices because its speciality is domestic service provision.

Corinne’s account of the operation of her business reveals a cocktail of incorporation and surveillance of employees. Because Corinne, not the householder, employs the “girls” who provide cleaning services, her obligations to both cleaners and customers require her to be an active participant in transactions. She is directly responsible for ensuring service delivery and quality, and so is under a more onerous obligation to customers than any other form of intermediary in the industry, yet constant, direct supervision of cleaners is not practicable. Other means of maintaining worker co-operation are needed.

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1. Much of the case study as presented here appears in Meagher (1997).
2. I interviewed the owner of the company, Corinne and her administrative associate Louise, together on one occasion and two of her domestic workers, Maria and Janet, each separately, on others.
She uses the language of team, family and friendship to express the relationship she desires with her employees. Corinne organises social events for her workers, greets them for their birthdays, and presents the “employee of the month” with a $50 gift voucher. The girls are encouraged to see themselves as “a representative of the company” and not “just cleaners,” an approach which is good business – in Louise’s words:

We stress to them that they’re not just cleaners, you know how people think “Oh you’re just a cleaner, it’s just a dirty old job.” They’re actually a representative of the company and they’re doing a job that’s needed and they should feel needed. So yes ...They’re not just told they’re a cleaner, they’re housekeepers. If they feel like they’re just cleaners, they’re not going to have good self esteem within themselves and therefore, there goes their attitude out the door. So if their self esteem is built up through their work and we often encourage them by saying they’re doing a great job, etc, and they – you know, it’s good psychology, I guess!

As a result, company image and growth is supported by the staff, who benefit economically only in limited ways by their efforts. Janet and Maria express in different ways the success of Corinne’s approach. Here is Janet’s account of her relationship with Corinne:

...she’s very approachable. If I have any problems, personal or professional, she’s prepared to listen... I can’t say I’ve had any problems with her at all really. And I think it’s nice to have a female boss, as well. I’ve had a lot of male bosses to work for before and...

How are they different?

Maybe you can talk a little bit more personally with a woman. It’s easier, they understand themselves because she’s got a home herself and she knows ... sometimes if you’ve got like period problems and that, and you can say to her “That’s why I’m a bit slow or I’m a bit clumsy, sorry I’m like this today.” I mean you can say that to a woman but I don’t think you can really ever say that to a male boss, no matter liberated you are. [laughs]... I’ve known her for a year now, she’s more sort of a friend really.... It’s not sort of like a typical boss-employee relationship- I mean she is my boss and I’m aware of that, but I can mix her socially as well, so that’s nice.

And you haven’t had that experience before?

Yes, I have, I have mixed socially with my bosses before but it’s just different when it’s a young girl who’s more or less your age, I suppose, more in common and everything. She’s married and doesn’t have children same as me and so that’s all I can say. [laughs]
Janet works in the intimate setting of private homes, but it is with Corinne, rather than the householder, that she has her most direct economic and social relationship. Contrast how Janet describes her relationship with her clients with her description of her relationship with Corinne:

I'm quite happy with doing [cleaning], and at least I'm appreciated for it, whereas I think sometimes when you work in an office - I found I've gone out of my way to take work home at nights and everything and at the end of the day you're not really appreciated, so I just get a little bit tired of the whole office scene. I'm quite happy with this, I'm quite happy just to work on my own.

*How do [customers] show their appreciation for you?*

A lot of them will tell [Corinne] and say that they're happy with me and that makes me feel good. And a lot of the customers can sort of become your friend. I mean you try to not get too-y you know, give them your life story because a lot of them are very busy people, they're not interested. ... I have a customer who's in her nineties, well obviously it's more like social work going to her because you clean her house but she's a very lonely lady [and so] you spend time talking to her and everything. But another woman that may go to work and their husbands go out to work and they've got children, I mean they're not really interested in my life which is fair enough, they just want you there to do the house and that, so every customer's different.

Although Janet said that “customers can sort of become your friend,” the customer she describes as one she interacts most with she represents more as a ‘client’ or ‘patient’ than a *friend*. It is for Corinne that she expresses her strongest attachment:

*Would you think about getting this kind of work through an agency or anything like that?*

I wouldn't now, because I'm sort of as I say, I'm friends with Corinne and I feel sort of personally committed to her. I mean I know at agencies you can get a bit more money and I know that she's starting it off the ground and when she gets more customers and everything we probably will get more money.

Janet's attachment extends to forgoing income to support Corinne in establishing her business. However, although the hourly rate of pay Corinne offers may not be high, Janet reported that she was not expected to work unpaid overtime, nor expected to continue cleaning for difficult (bossy and fussy) clients.
Maria was less expansive than Janet in her comments on her employment relationship with Corinne. She was pleased that her job has “progressed” to include administrative and supervisory work in Corinne’s company office in addition to cleaning. Maria’s dual role (cleaning and administrative work) means that her position is not clearly fixed in the company structure, nor in relation to the group of customers with which she deals. Her speech slips between talking from “I” when she describes her work as a cleaner, or talks about her family, and talking from “we” and “our company” when she describes her role as a supervisor. “We screen the girls to make them [the customers] feel more comfortable,” she claims, but at the time of the interview, Maria was one of the girls.

She described Corinne as “very loyal to her company and to people, she tries to listen to everything that’s going on, and we try to create harmony more than anything.” Her speech does not distinguish Corinne’s treatment of customers, (other) workers and herself, partly, it seems, because Maria doesn’t distinguish clearly between herself and Corinne when it comes to her (Maria’s) dealings with customers in an administrative role. Maria described her employment relationship to Corinne and those she cleans for in the following terms: “I don’t see there’s much differentiation. It’s like you work for one, and you work for the other, it’s basically the same.” In neither of her current cleaning jobs were the householders home while she cleaned. The only time she used the term ‘friendship’ was when I asked her

*What makes a good client?*

A good client is one that is understanding, and respect[ful]. Respects you and the person that your working with and a good listener if there’s details to be told and also if there’s any complaints [tells] directly and quickly rather than let it build up over a period of say two or three months. So if an incident happens you find that if you’re told straight away you can keep that friendship going calmly. Whereas if it builds up after about two or three months you find that it manifests itself - you find that you can’t really go back to clarify or fix it.

Here Maria seems to use friendship as a euphemistic metaphor for business relationship – both require respect and successful communication - rather than as a description of an emotional bond. By contrast, Janet’s description of her relationship with Corinne as a friendship involved an emotional bond.

Surveillance of cleaners is also central to Corinne’s representation of the way she runs the business. She mentions several times that the girls are screened before
employment by interview and through reference checks. Workers are also checked on
the job: “I’m there to check on the girls, we always turn up at any time we want.”
Control over their appearance in the name of the company is also a feature of
Corinne’s management style. In response to a question about the qualities she values
in employees, she answered “attitude,” and “personality:”

Personality meaning that she has to be neat, doesn’t have to be beautiful
but hair neatly tied and we always say to the girls “Tie your hair up” and
“wear the uniform—well pressed uniform” you know, presenting herself
well, be presentable. I do not like my cleaners to turn up in a customer’s
house with long fingernails with red coloured polish and then when you
come in and see the customer and I say “This is [Mary]” and then she has
chipped nail polish and it looks tacky, I don’t like it— as a cleaner you have
to have your fingernails short anyway and I do check the girls on that too.
I like them to dress well, and that’s why a uniform is good, because you
know they’re not going to turn up with what they’re wearing! They may
wear really low cut tee-shirts or something and then it’s not nice if the
husband is at home. And I take this all into consideration. You have to
look professional.3

Attitude is a more business-like concern, indicating that Corinne and her
workers share an interest in avoiding pressure to do unpaid work for customers:

And some of my girls are very good - they say “Oh, [Corinne], I stayed
there for half an hour extra,” and they didn’t ask me to pay them. You
know, this is the type of good attitude that I like. I don’t encourage it, I say
“Next time stay only for three hours, don’t do more, because the customer
may take advantage of us and be having free service!” I might get $8.00
from that half an hour, if that’s money for the girl and for me too, and why
should I encourage? So I say to the girl “Don’t do it, three hours is three
hours.”

Note, however, that Corinne herself extracts unpaid labour from her girls, because she
takes a cut of the hourly service charge.

When Janet and Maria talk about doing cleaning work, neither mentions
Corinne’s training. Both bring skills to paid household work learned and applied in
unpaid household work in their own homes. Janet, 35, was surprised that younger
girls do paid domestic work:

3. Sexual anxiety also extends to male customers. Corinne sees her role not only as protecting
male customers from the sexuality of her cleaners, but to protect her cleaners from the
sexuality of male customers. Thus, she claims to screen out single male customers, and to be
available to cleaners at all times in case of trouble on the job.
I think sometimes people see this job advertised and they think it’s easy and it isn’t, you know. And I think it’s a lot easier if you’ve run a home yourself and you know the things that are going to look nice to please the customer. Whereas when you’re young – I would have been the same myself, I used to keep my bedroom clean and tidy and help my mum with the bathroom. I didn’t do the whole house. But when you’re a housewife yourself and you’ve got your own home you know what looks nice and everything.

Maria also relies her experience as a housewife for the necessary job skills, and works “the way I’ve always worked in my own home.” She doesn’t mind customers asking her to vary her normal tasks because “it’s a normal routine, it would happen in any household, including my own.”

Both Maria and Janet said that although others may see the work as degrading, they don’t find it degrading themselves. Both emphasise the on-the-job autonomy of domestic cleaning. Janet compares it favourably to the many “subservient” tasks required of her as a secretary. Maria describes herself as “Self employed. No one tells you what to do, you do it yourself rather than having someone breathing down your back.” Domestic cleaning is compatible with their experience and understanding of femininity. Indeed, Maria claims that it is a “worthy” job, “helping people, and caring, really.” (Nevertheless, she still describes her movement into office work as “progress.”)

In 1994, Corinne’s company charged a competitive $16.00 an hour for domestic cleaning. Cleaners were paid $12 per hour, casual rates, and were taxed on this income. Corinne compared this rate favourably with that of hotel housemaids (see also Appendix C, Tables C.2 and C.3). The company office attracts and distributes jobs to workers, and maintains a customer base for each “girl,” provided her work is satisfactory and the business is there. Moreover, Corinne sets the rate of pay, and she, or a member of her administrative staff, negotiates with householders to determine the hours of work and job description, and is available to resolve conflicts that may arise. This reduces some of the insecurity and vulnerability, and much of the isolation which make paid household workers dependent on their own bargaining skills and the goodwill of the householders they work for. Benefits are available to all Corinne’s workers which include women of non-English speaking background, not only those like Maria and Janet who may experience upward mobility in the company, or be free to enjoy social gatherings. Employees’ benefits from this formalisation of paid
domestic work such as security of employment depend on the viability of the company, and pay rates and other benefits depend, to some extent, on the benevolence of the company operator. However, Corinne has some incentive to maintain pay and conditions, because the option of private employment generated through a worker's own job search continues to be available.

4.1.2 Case study 2: The Home Care Service of New South Wales.

Home Care fieldworkers are employed by a statutory authority of the state government of New South Wales to provide housekeeping services and personal care for the frail aged and disabled in the customers' own homes. Since 1993, they have worked under an industrial award, which sets down pay, conditions, and job descriptions. They are covered by the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHWMU). Thus, outside the capitalist market, their work regulated, employed by a state organisation to perform domestic labour as a 'social' rather than a 'consumer' service, and with access to union representation, Home Care fieldworkers might be expected to be better off than domestic workers selling domestic labour services through other institutions.

Fieldworkers generally work on a permanent part-time basis, and are contracted to work a certain (minimum) number of hours on a fortnightly cycle. Respondents reported that they can be, and often are asked to do overtime, in the form of hours additional to those for which they are contracted. Thus, although formally part-time workers, some workers' hours approach a full-time load. Fieldworkers are allocated a set of customers to whom they provide services on a daily, weekly or fortnightly basis, determined in the first instance by administrative assessment of need, and, if necessary, subsequent negotiation with the fieldworker and customer.

Box 4.1 indicates that fieldworkers experience a range of relationships with their clients. Fred and Denise report both very rewarding relationships with householders, tied to the intimacy of ongoing caring relationships in private homes. They also express anger at ill-use, lack of respect, and treatment like menials. Angela and Georgia made similar remarks. Albert expressed only positive aspects of his caring role. In addition to comments on their relationships with customers, these excerpts describe aspects of the role the fieldworkers' employer, the Home Care Service, plays in mediating their relationships with customers.
Box 4.1 Home Care fieldworkers on relations with their customers

Fred, Home Care fieldworker:
When we go in we see them with things everywhere and you do get very intimate with them. I love it. I class them all as my little grannies and granddads and I’m always the little grandson, or more like the son I’m getting that old. That’s the fun part for me.
If you have any hassles, or if one of the clients says “I want you to do this,” and it’s not on the sheets you get onto the office. Someone wants me to clean windows, and depending on who the client is I’ll do it for them.
What sort of client would you do it for?
One of my little friends, they have become friends. Some of them have got a bad attitude.
What do you mean by that?
They treat you as a slave. “You are here to do this.” I’ve had big arguments with a couple of them, and the people in the office stick right behind me, I’ll give them that ...
So what happens if you feel like someone is not treating you properly?
I get onto the office and I’ll talk to them and they will get me off that client and have a word with that client, and they will send someone else.

Denise, Home Care fieldworker:
If you had to say what you thought the good things about doing this work were, what would you say?
It’s very rewarding with the people, that’s what keeps me going, actually. The delights, I mean you learn so much from them, they’re very inspirational. I get a lot of enjoyment out of them. ... That part of me, my caring part. Well it’s the people’s - you do become very - you have all these families in many ways and you really become one of - you know, helping each one and sometimes you become too involved. But that is - I think that’s a natural progression really, you try and hold back a bit but you tend to become too - I suppose it is too involved.
Does that involvement just start when you’re doing personal care or when you’re doing the housework?
No, when you’re doing the housework as well. I think it depends on the people – look, some people drive me mad! I’ve thought “I couldn’t stand being here for too long!” especially in the cleaning area. Some of them think you’re just a cleaner, and that is quite often said by many of the girls, they just look down upon you, that you’re just a cleaner, and you’ve come in to do the work. Some of them are incredibly appreciative of what we do ... if someone understands you’re trying to help, you’ll try and help them as well, and perhaps you even do more for them and you put their garbage out and take more time to do things and clean up their cupboards and you seem to give them a little bit more. It’s just - some personalities.

Georgia, Home Care fieldworker:
[Georgia had just been speaking about working as a volunteer teacher of English to isolated migrant women. She said that “tutors do really become friends.”]
Do you the people you see in your Home Care fieldwork treat you like that as well?
As a friend? Yes, some do. But that’s lovely. I pick them vegies out of the garden and take them that and they give me their old New Ideas [a women’s magazine] and things [laughs]. But it’s lovely - they like saving them up for the girl sort of thing, they love getting a bunch of parsley or a cauliflower out of the garden. So definitely there’s a rapport. How many I’d actually go and visit - oh, some I do, yeah, definitely. Not all of them, but some of them.
Why some and not others?
Because some just take - just take. That’s very draining. And if you’ve got a busy life you’ve really got to pick where you spend time. And you’d love to give a little bit to everyone, but you just can’t. I guess some just aren’t very nice people. ... And I know that some of the Home Care workers have worked for the same woman for 10 years - how can you not have a friendship? You just get to know the ins and outs of each other’s lives.
Denise and Fred complain here that instead of appreciating their caring work, some clients fail to recognise their status as social service-providing fieldworkers, and instead speak to them as (if they were) 'servants' or 'slaves.' However, assuming adequate worker performance, customers have no economic power over Home Care workers. They cannot make fieldworkers do unpaid work by threatening their job security. Unlike private domestic workers working in local networks or the open market, but like Corinne's cleaners, Home Care workers can appeal to service administrators to be removed from job situations in which they suffer personal abuse from their clients. This is more than a formal right - four of five fieldworker respondents raised it when they talked about difficult customers. Because fieldworkers are contracted to work a specific number of hours, the base rate of their income does not suffer if they offload a difficult customer. Indeed, rather than this mistreatment being associated with economic exploitation in the form of the 'extraction' of unpaid labour, respondents report that unpaid labour or tasks outside the official job description are offered as a gift to those with whom the fieldworker has a close, caring relationship. In other words, the 'better' the worker-client relationship, the more likely unpaid work will be performed.

Home Care Service administrators acknowledge the potential for personal attachment between customers and fieldworkers to operate to the detriment of either party. Workers are discouraged from allowing personal attachment to clients to give rise to gifts of labour. Fieldworkers are directed not to give their home phone numbers to customers, nor to visit them at times other than those rostered. Clients are directed to contact the local administrative centre rather than 'their' fieldworker if they have any problems or require changes of schedule. Historically high staff turnover rates, and difficulty recruiting workers into the service are strong incentives to ensure that workers have satisfactory working relationships with clients.

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4. The Home Care Service's Annual Report for 1996-7 reports a reduced annual staff turnover from 24.5% in 1996 to 14.3% in 1997. Georgia, Denise, Fred and Angela all discussed 'burn-out' amongst Home Care fieldworkers. Angela, Albert and Fred were the only three 'career' fieldworkers. Angela and Alfred were the oldest interviewees in the study overall, at 51 and 47 respectively, both are migrants from non-English speaking countries. Georgia and Denise both spoke explicitly about domestic work for the Home Care Service as a temporary, "filler" job, although, as I show in Chapter 5, things turned out differently for Georgia (see Chapter 5 for an extended discussion of differences in how paid household work fits into the working lives of respondents).

5. Trish Kreig, Home Care Service of New South Wales Corporate Planning and Project Officer, and a respondent, Fred, both reported that in the event of a client being too (socially) difficult for any worker to service, their care may be contracted out to a private provider.
may also need protection. Some fieldworkers may cultivate dependence in their customers, and could use that dependence to take advantage of the customer. These kinds of problems are managed by moving around those fieldworkers considered to be at risk of engendering potentially abusive dependence, and by assigning several fieldworkers to customers with high levels of need.⁶

Yet it is not easy to regulate the blurring of ‘working’ and ‘personal’ relationships. Fred, who recognised that the Home Care Service aimed to protect fieldworkers from unjustified demands from customers, reported giving his home phone number to selected clients, and to visiting one, a disabled adolescent boy, outside work hours, to “do personal training to help him try and get fit, lose a bit of weight.” Albert routinely called in on a client the day before his rostered time, to see “if she needs something the next morning when I come in, some bread, or whatever.” He faced a terrible mess in her home when he returned to this client after some time off work, because she had refused to allow any other fieldworker to look after her. Georgia also reported visiting some clients (see Box 4.1) in addition to her rostered hours with them.

Denise spoke movingly about her emotional response and attachment to her clients. She occasionally stayed on for half an hour with clients “just to give them a bit of time, because they just haven’t got people around them. [It’s] very lonely out there.” She reported taking a particularly lonely client to the movies once, on her own time.

Indeed, all fieldworker respondents saw the capacity to build meaningful personal relationships with clients, and based on this, to make a contribution to the community, as the most significant attraction of an otherwise physically demanding and quite poorly paid job. Denise explicitly linked emotional involvement with clients to the very ability to do the job at all: “I mean it has to be emotionally involved, you’ve got to understand what that person’s wanting, they’re not just a piece of machinery.” Angela expressed the link between personal relationships and social contributions poignantly:

I like to work and provide my help. Different workers probably help people in different ways. Always when I work, I put myself in their position, and when I walk into the client’s house, I see them not only as some business, to go out and fill my timesheet – no. I see them in a

⁶ Trish Kreig, and Saviour Buhagiar, Project Officer with the Home Care Service, interview, January 1998.
different way. ...I feel like if it happened to me, to get old and sick, I want somebody to come around and help me in a good way.

...And I don’t go to work only for money – I wish I had money, and could go and help them as a volunteer. But it’s hard, because I have a family, and I have to earn a bit of money to live. Other people say "It’s very good that you do this work," and I say "It’s very good if you don’t get paid, if you do it for your soul." But still, I do it and I give a lot of time besides the hours I have, I give volunteer hours to my clients. ...Sometimes I think I don’t want to go home. Sometimes I think I would be very happy if I dropped dead out of my last client. I don’t want to be lonely at home, sick and lonely. It’s very hard, because through the experience I have, I know how people feel.

Thus, personal relationships, both ‘positive’ and ‘negative,’ shape the experience of fieldwork for Home Care workers, but negative relationships with clients are not associated with their (economic) exploitation of workers.

However, Home Care workers do experience pressure to increase the duration and/or intensity of their work, pressure not present uniformly in domestic employment through local networks, nor in the more likely suspect, Corinne’s capitalist enterprise. The recently published Independent Review of the Home Care Service of New South Wales records that

Over the period 1990/91 to 1994/95 total service levels fell by 20 per cent. Within the total service provided, the pattern of service has changed dramatically over the same period. Domestic support [housekeeping and home maintenance services] fell by 54.3 per cent, personal care [bathing, dressing, toileting] has increased by 47 per cent, respite care, mainly an adjunct to personal care increased by 16.4 per cent (Ageing and Disability Department [ADD] 1997:5).

The total number of Home Care Service employees has been reduced by 11% between June 30th 1994 and June 30th 1997 (Home Care Service Annual Report 1996-7:65). In line with developments in welfare states around the world, public sector cost-cutting and the introduction of the language of competitiveness have both affected the Home Care Service. The Service’s “Corporate Objectives” now emphasise efficiency and competitiveness alongside responsive and high quality service delivery, and the expectation that doing more with less will continue to be required is pervasive. The current enterprise agreement between the Home Care Service and the LHMWWU was negotiated in recognition of “the need for wage increases to be tied to productivity improvements” (Home Care Service Annual Report 1996-7:65). Unmet demand for
services, particularly for housekeeping services, is increasingly a problem. Ageing of the population, in addition to other "demographic and workforce changes affecting the availability of [unpaid] carer support" (DHSH 1995:13, see also ADD 1997:8), will further increase demand in the future. Yet the Independent Review notes the "resource constraint" the Home Care Service faces, as well as "the difficulties posed by attempting to meet the needs of a more demanding, vocal and often politically active group of customers, including the younger disabled and carers" (ADD 1997:6, 8).

Denise's comments indicate that fieldworkers experience these pressures, directly or indirectly:

If depression has got to [a client] then they take it out on you too, so you're like the husband or the wife, receiving that same sort of problem. I don't think it's recognised enough, just how much work, how much we actually do take on. I had a car accident the other week, and as much as it's part of my financial status, and my children, you know, living as a single parent, I was working 10 to 12 hours every day. We're short of girls. Not enough girls to do the personal care, and do all these showers, and a couple of girls away, some sick, a couple of guys away too. I mean they really had a hard time, they do not have enough girls for people to take over when we need relief work.

...They were needing girls - "Could you just do this, could you do that?"
And I know [the Service co-ordinators] mean well, and they do try and accommodate, but sometimes the co-ordinators are far too officious. They're not really realising that we need time out. A few of us have learnt to say no, but it's very - because you care so much about Mrs. So and So just needing this, or needing that you tend to go and do it because you know that there are only so many of you doing it.

...These people are human beings, you know? Perhaps there's not enough money funded. They're always saying about budget "There's just not enough money to do this," and they're cutting [customer's services] down, and we go to the poor lady who's really stressed out, she's needing that time, and you do get to know what people are really needing...

These developments have been tempered somewhat by the recent entry of a union, and the increased incorporation of the Home Care Service into the mainstream of industrial relations practice with the application of an industrial award in 1994. Union advocacy and budgetary pressures work together to improve occupational health and safety standards (to reduce injury and workers compensation insurance costs). Angela, a long-term fieldworker, considered these improvements to be a highly significant positive development in the Service. However, these gains are
fragile. New South Wales is the only state in the federation currently governed by the Australian Labor Party. Its industrial regulatory framework remains more centralised, and its commitment to public sector provision of social services is greater, than in Victoria, the state closest in size and economic structure to NSW. A recent study of contracting-out of similar services in Victoria, where a conservative government has ruled since 1992, demonstrates how attempts at more thorough-going commodification of social services undermine their capacity to fulfil their designated functions (People Together Project, 1998).

4.2 Discussion

Table 4.1 summarises some key characteristics of the organisation of paid household work in case studies presented above, and compares them with the paradigm mode of organisation in the literature, the unmediated private employment relationship between householder and domestic worker. Comparison of respondents’ reports of paid household work in the case studies with view of the domestic employment relationship prevailing in the literature sheds light on the uniqueness question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Householder is employer</th>
<th>Corinne’s domestic cleaning company</th>
<th>The Home Care Service of NSW</th>
<th>Paradigm in the literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>varies between studies</td>
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<td>consumer</td>
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<td>formal, private</td>
<td>formal, public</td>
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Most feminist writers consider any ‘extraction’ of unpaid labour from domestic workers to be exploitative, whether masked by ‘fictive kinship’ or not. The emphasis in the literature is on the combination, indeed a causal relation, between the way householder/employers position domestic workers as inferiors, and exploit them economically. However, the case studies show that exploitation and disrespect are not necessarily linked in this way. Exploitation and disrespect are not always perpetrated
by the same agent, and personal abuse is not unique to ‘personalised’ employment arrangements where the householder is the employer.

Corinne has created a capitalist class relation between herself and the domestic workers in the sense that the profitability of her business depends on productive use of their labour time. Unlike householder employers, Corinne extracts unpaid labour in the form of surplus value from the women she employs: her workers are exploited in the classical Marxian sense. That is, the difference between the amount she charges clients and the wage paid is more than sufficient to cover the costs of running the business. She is able to extract a rent from the employment of workers. This exploitation is facilitated by her friendly relations with workers, while householders tend to remain more distant. However, it is important to note that in characterising Corinne’s extraction of this rent as ‘exploitation’ there is no moral or personal implication – those workers I spoke to do not complain about it in the way that, for example, Nadia complained about her employers’ ‘simple’ exploitation in Chapter 3.3.3.

This way of organising paid household work challenges the uniqueness argument in several ways. First, classical or capitalist exploitation is associated with relatively impersonal relations with consumer-householders, by contrast with the prevailing view that exploitation in paid household work arises out of close personal relations between householder and domestic worker. Second, the class relation between Corinne and her workers means they share an interest in refusing householders’ demands for extra, unpaid work: workers because acceding to such demands means they endure increased exploitation; Corinne because she cannot appropriate a rent from unpaid labour. Third, in return for personal commitment to Corinne – and surplus labour – workers gain some protection against both disrespect and overwork in their relations with householders. In short, the capitalist nature of Corinne’s enterprise establishes an arms-length dimension in the relationship between householders and domestic workers. To the extent that Corinne’s profit depends on service charges being proportional to workers’ labour time, she also imposes a ‘structural barrier’ to simple exploitation by householders (see Chapter 2.1.2). To the extent that the domestic employment relationship is depersonalised by the arms-length relations established by this mode of organisation, domestic work is put on a footing more akin to service sector work in the public (market) domain. Of course capitalist exploitation is generalised in the wider labour market, so Corinne’s
exploitation of her workers is unremarkable, and certainly not a 'unique' problem for them.

However, the study of Corinne's company does throw into sharp focus what might be the truly unique characteristic of paid household work. Although a class relation is established, Corinne's company is not completely integrated into the capitalist economy. Because of the nature of the service involved, and, related to this, the (current) social and demographic profile of the paid domestic labour force, competitive pressures characteristic of capitalist markets are underdeveloped.

Specifically, the overweening imperatives to increase productivity of workers (or the rate of exploitation) present in competitive capitalist markets are (partially) absent. House cleaning provided by Corinne's company is a consumer service. Only householders' utility, not their economic viability, suffers if workers do not do the best possible cleaning work in their home. This holds regardless of the institution through which the work is organised - company, agency or local network. Of course, other factors such as the worker's alternative income and/or employment opportunities may affect the extent to which a householder attempts to 'maximise her utility' by using authoritarian or livelihood-threatening means to 'extract' optimal performance. But the emergence of, at best, friendship, and, at least, relations of basic trust and convenience, is likely in an ongoing relationship between a householder and a domestic worker, and this may cut across 'value for money' as an economic imperative.

Householder utility from purchased domestic services is determined by both the quality of the job done, and the quality of the relationship with the worker, and these are likely to be interdependent. Worker satisfaction is also dependent on the quality of the relationship with the householder. Evidence from interviews suggests that a positive - but not necessarily close - relationship; in particular, a sense of being appreciated by the householder, is associated with greater worker commitment to doing a good job, and providing an ongoing service. Workers do compete for jobs to some extent (there is a lower limit to the acceptable quality of jobs), and competition in the service sector labour market, as well as public policy factors affecting the floor on wages (see Appendices C and E), influence the going rate of pay. The 'parallel market' for domestic services in the informal sector, in which the mostly female participants enter and leave easily, and draw on their pre-existing skills typically developed in 'self-servicing' in their own homes, is crucial to maintaining the partial
commodification of domestic labour. So too, is, of course, the (consumer) household self-servicing option.  

Thus, there is no ‘structural’ imperative within the householder-worker relationship for continually increasing worker productivity, or otherwise poorly treating workers providing domestic labour as a consumer service. Disrespect and/or exploitation are possible, but the domestic employment relationship is not “essentially one of psychological as well as material exploitation” (Rollins 1990:78 emphasis added).

Like cleaners for Corinne’s company, Home Care Service fieldworkers, as state employees, are not hired directly by those to whom they provide services. However, the economic status of the Home Care Service of NSW differs from Corinne’s operation in some interesting, and perhaps surprising ways: it is the state-run rather than the capitalist organisation which most pursues increased worker efficiency and productivity. Home Care Service administrators both squeeze fieldworkers to do more work, and protect them from personal abuse.

In Corinne’s company, the profit incentive constrained the performance of unpaid labour in the form of simple exploitation by householders. But because the Home Care Service is not profit-oriented and only partially funded by householder payments, it has little economic incentive to restrict the labour of its employees to the terms of their contracts. It is clear that personal relationships develop between workers and clients and may mean that workers do more work than is required in their contract, that is, they may perform voluntary unpaid labour. Indeed, the Home Care Service is subject to economic pressures which may make it difficult for workers to perform their jobs to their own and their clients’ satisfaction without gifts of unpaid labour. As gifts, fieldworkers’ unpaid labour is not appropriated in a process of simple exploitation by service recipients, nor does the Home Care Service ‘profit’ in

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7. These characteristics differentiate paid household work from other consumer services, such as dry cleaning or specialised carpet cleaning, which involve a degree of capital intensity and specific skills, and for which product market competition is thus well-developed and stiff. Dry cleaning and carpet cleaning services are not easily provided by households for themselves, and, related to this, there is not a large potential pool of informal sector workers offering these services in parallel to formal sector providers.

8. It is not clear what these findings might imply for those predominantly young women employed as nannies in private homes. Relationship dynamics in that situation, where it is the child(ren) to whom strong attachments are most likely to be formed, and parents (that is, others) who employ workers, are likely to differ markedly from those associated with the Home Care Service. For further discussion see Chapter 6.
any conventional sense. However, Home Care Service fieldworkers also report being stressed by requests to perform paid work beyond their contracted hours, because the Service cannot afford to employ additional staff. While not strictly speaking 'exploitation,' pressure to work long hours can tax workers badly.

Regarding the 'personal' dimension of worker-householder relations, despite these 'economic' problems for fieldworkers, the Home Care Service does not expect them to suffer personal abuse, in the form of disrespectful treatment (like a 'servant' or 'slave'), from customers. I pointed out above that any abuse is meted out by service recipients who do not have economic power over workers, unlike the paradigm in the literature. Moreover, interestingly, Home Care Service recipients need services so one might expect them to be relatively disempowered in their dealings with service providers. Fieldworkers are probably not too far off the mark when they put this regrettable behaviour down to 'personality.' However, as writers within the dominant view rightly argue, the intimacy of domestic and caring labour, as well as its cultural devaluation are also likely to be important. On the other hand, recall that fieldworkers report that good personal relationships with clients – also associated with the intimacy of domestic and caring labour – are the most satisfying aspect of their work.

4.3 Conclusions

This chapter's case studies have shown that domestic workers can experience injustice in the form of disrespect by a householder who has no economic power over them, and (capitalist) exploitation by a friendly, non-householder employer. Contra the prevailing view, some problems in the experience of paid household work emerge regardless of whether it is organised through quasi-capitalist enterprises in the industry, through the state, or in the private arrangements between individuals; other things being equal. Research discussed in Chapter 8 shows that workers in non-domestic occupations can also be subject to disrespect in employment relations, and to employers' abuse of personal relationships to extract surplus labour. At the same time, the problems of simple exploitation and disrespect are neither ubiquitous nor essential in any mode of organising paid household work. This means the social position and economic status (and the relationship between these two aspects) of paid household workers as a group are underdetermined by the householder-domestic worker relationship.
However, in one important respect, the consensual view of paid household work is right: the private location of the performance of paid domestic labour does make domestic occupations unique, albeit in ways not well-captured in feminist analyses hitherto. The privacy of paid housework is both an opportunity for particular rewards, pecuniary (for example, tax free income) and non-pecuniary (for example, satisfying personal relationships), and, when circumstances are configured in particular ways, for the existence and potential misuse of structural economic power by householder-employers. These circumstances include householder control over the hiring, firing and remuneration of domestic workers, and just as importantly, the latter's lack of alternative employment opportunities, which has little to do with the householder. The relative economic status of buyers and sellers in the market for domestic services depends on a range of social, historical, geographical and political-economic factors (see Chapter 5 and Appendix E). In addition, institutional innovation in the industry can significantly and systematically alter the extent to which householders control economic aspects of transactions, even as the 'content' of the work remains the same, as case studies above and in Chapters 6 and 7 show.

Paid household work presents a refuge from competitive pressures of the market, although it can entail increased risk of harm by personal caprice. For many domestic workers, the ambiguity in their role - at least insofar as it is ambiguity between 'worker' and 'friend' or 'family member' as opposed to ambiguity between 'worker' and 'slave' or 'servant' - is a benefit of the job, and a source of pleasure. Depersonalising these relationships by making them more business-like would entail, at least in some cases, a loss.
Chapter 5

‘Stop-gap,’ ‘Ghetto’ or What?: Career trajectories in domestic service provision

This chapter challenges the second proposition of the prevailing view of paid household work I distilled in Chapter 2. This is the argument that ‘domestic service’ as an occupation has a highly significant structural role in expressing and generating social inequality (Chapter 2.2.2). I do so by exploring occupational mobility as an important aspect of the relationship between paid household work and the reproduction of hierarchy, using the concept of careers in domestic service provision. In addition, I situate analysis of paid household work in broader debates about the future work (Chapter 1.1.1), assessing the extent to which Australian paid household workers are part of what Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1993) calls a “post-industrial service proletariat.”

5.1 Occupational mobility in the domestic services industry: The theoretical context

This section provides the theoretical background for empirical investigations in sections 5.2 to 5.4. First, it briefly restates pertinent aspects of the consensual view of where paid household work fits into the occupational structure, and its relationship to social hierarchy. Second, it sets out an analytical framework developed by Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1993) which focuses attention on the broader economic and institutional factors determining 1) the development of industries like the domestic services industry, and 2) occupational mobility for service workers. The issues raised in these sections point to the need for detailed investigation of how domestic service providers enter, and where applicable, leave the industry, in the context of both their life chances and the political-economic framework of the society in which they live.
5.1.1 The dominant view: a restatement

Some historians of ‘domestic service’ have argued that domestic service has been a ‘bridging occupation’ at the personal level, as some domestic servants used their work experience to move from service into private enterprise (Broom and Smith 1963), and/or at the social level, as domestic service provides employment during the transition from rural to urban-industrial life (McBride 1976).

However, feminist writers on contemporary waged domestic labour argue that domestic workers take up the occupation for want of something better. The dominant view is that domestic service may have been a bridging occupation for white women during industrialisation, but racial and sexual discrimination in the labour market continue to consign immigrant and native-born ‘women of color’ to domestic service (Arat-Koç 1989:36, Kousha 1992:213, Rollins 1985:55).

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994:51) notes that domestic work “is generally viewed as a stigmatized, second class job,” such that mobility out of the occupation - or the lack thereof - is an important preoccupation amongst writers on it. Thus, the consensual view is that instead of a bridge, paid household work is an “occupational ghetto” (Romero 1992:27): domestic workers take up the occupation in the absence of alternatives,¹ and are trapped in it as a ‘dead-end.’

I show that this is true for some participants – notably, and concordant with the dominant view, those with racial ethnically determined labour market disadvantages. However, it is not true for all participants: a variety of people work in the domestic services industry in Australia, for a variety of reasons. This challenges the argument that paid household work as an occupation reproduces social hierarchies. By attending to contextual factors both in workers’ lives and in the broader social matrix through which they move, a more powerful account of how paid household work is implicated in processes of labour market stratification emerges.

¹ Romero found that many Chicana women prefer domestic service to “other low-status, low-skilled occupations” particularly because of the autonomy and flexibility it offers (1992:12). However, Glenn (1992:23) finds the reverse - racial-ethnic “service workers, especially those who have worked as domestics are convinced that ‘public jobs’ are preferable to domestic service”. At any rate, the dominant view is that these women’s choices are largely constrained to the tweedledum and tweedledee of reproductive labour in either private or institutional contexts (Glenn 1992 passim). So, on the face of it, the point still stands: people enter domestic service provision only in the absence of alternatives.
In addition, although rarely recognised in the literature, mobility within the ‘industry’ rather than the ‘occupation’ can take place, associated with the emergence of new ways of organising paid household work. Some service providers have been able to construct themselves as small business capitalists, and in so doing can alter the economic status of workers and the social meanings of paid household work as an occupation, as case studies in Chapters 4 and 6 show.

5.1.2 Post-industrial proletarians? Paid domestic labour and the future of work.

The extent to which workers achieve mobility out of paid household work is of interest beyond analysis of the domestic services industry as a case study. Writers trying to understand the future of work in general, and the reconstitution of the class structure with economic change in particular, have been investigating the formation and growth of a “post-industrial service proletariat” composed of unskilled service workers such as “cleaners, waitresses, bartenders, baggage porters etc.” (Esping-Andersen 1993:25).

Gösta Esping-Andersen constructs an analytical framework to answer the question “is a new class dualism emerging with, at the top, a closed professional elite stratum, and at the bottom, a new servant class, a new post-industrial proletariat, whose chances for mobility are closed?” His framework contrasts with many theories of post-industrial society which posit cross-national convergence in employment and income structures, based on “adherence to technological or growth-based explanations of change” (1993:8). Although Esping-Andersen recognises that technological change is significant, he emphasises

the importance of institutional forces in reshaping our employment structure: the role of the welfare state, education and industrial relations systems. The way in which these function have powerful repercussions on the transformation of the family and on the relationship between self-servicing, consumption and paid employment (1993:26).

As a consequence of differences in institutional arrangements, employment structures and the dynamics of their change may differ strongly between nations. Thus, in addition to providing a framework for analysing where paid household work fits now, and might fit in the future into the Australian occupational structure, Esping-Andersen’s framework can be used to think about why the nature and experience of domestic employment in Australia may differ from North American accounts.
Esping-Andersen's project grounds Gorz' (1989, 1994) ethical critique of labour market structure of post-industrial societies. Esping-Andersen investigates the economic and institutional (policy framework) conditions under which particular tasks will be provided by householders themselves; performed as 'junk jobs' in a private consumer service sector by the economically disadvantaged and socially marginalised; or carried out as part of social service provision in an inclusive and generous welfare state. This implies that universal propositions about where paid household workers fit into the employment structure are misguided. Nation-specific, and institutionally aware industry case studies (such as this thesis) are required.

Because he is interested in class closure, Esping-Andersen's question is only partly answered by analysis of national political-economic frameworks. He points out the importance of understanding occupational mobility for making both value judgements about the nature of work in post-industrial societies and empirical assessment of the future of work and employment: "if virtually no one remains in unskilled service jobs for longer periods ... they are best understood as stop-gap jobs, as an interim within alternative life-cycle trajectories" (1993:14). Thus, knowing who is in the industry, why and for how long is as important as institutional analysis for understanding and evaluating class structures and employment types in new configurations of work. These are the issues addressed throughout this chapter.

Consolidation of the 'new class' depends on whether or not "the labor market disadvantages among the service proletariat act cumulatively in a negative manner to suppress upward mobility" (Mayer and Carroll 1987:18 cited in Esping-Andersen 1993:28). Such a process could be characterised as 'sectoral ghettoisation.' Whether or not paid household workers are part of such a class depends on the extent to which they are able to move out of domestic employment into higher paid and more skilled jobs. Esping-Andersen hypothesises that if unskilled service jobs are primarily in private sector consumer service provision (rather than, for example, in welfare state

2. Some optimistic writers expect paid household work and other labour intensive personal services to 'soak up' workers and herald in a new 'Golden Age' of full employment. Others - André Gorz among them, are pessimistic - poor quality jobs in such occupations will be left to those victims of technological change in post-industrial societies (see Bittman, Matheson and Meagher 1999)
service jobs; something determined by the society in question's political-economic framework), the jobs are more likely to exist in low wage economies, and are unlikely to be viewed by their incumbents as more than temporary. Whether or not they remain 'stop-gap' jobs will very much depend on overall unemployment levels and the educational profile of the occupants. It is very possible that this [private sector consumer services] kind of service proletariat will be internally divided between a core of permanent proletarians (perhaps circling between unskilled service jobs and unemployment) and mobile transients. In the latter case we may identify two types: those who are bridging school and careers, and women who are bridging school and marriage/motherhood (1993:29).

If the unskilled, private consumer service labour force (which includes paid household workers) is composed of "mobile transients" using service work as a bridge between school and career, then anxiety about the social position of these workers would be little warranted, particularly so if this work is a 'stop-gap' during higher education. However, women using unskilled service work as a stop-gap between school and marriage and/or motherhood do not build any labour market advantage during this time. Given current rates of labour force participation amongst married women with children, these women may return again (and again) to this kind of work after marriage and during motherhood. This intermittent pattern of labour force participation, combined with prevailing norms which do not value the social and domestic skills women develop as wives and mothers, limits mobility, but also places these women outside conventional conceptualisations of class membership. Moreover, marriage typically gives women at least some access to their husbands' economic resources, and alters profoundly the role paid work plays in their economic survival, while they remain married at least. Work history and entry pathway information about participants, placed in the context of the public policy framework set out in Appendix E allows modest interpretation of the Australian case in the light of Esping-Andersen's ideas.

Taken together, these comments indicate that 'service-proletariat' status in domestic service provision is not automatic, but rather is determined by personal

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3. Esping-Andersen uses the distinction between social and consumer services (see my Chapter 1) to separate public sector or 'welfare state' employment of unskilled service workers from private sector employment in consumer service provision. Using Scandinavian examples, he argues that public sector workers are likely to enjoy security of employment and working conditions which deliver them from post-industrial proletarian membership as he defines it.
characteristics of workers, prevailing economic conditions, and the society’s political-economic institutional framework. I argue that until recently, the institutional framework of the Australian political economy has not fostered the emergence of a post-industrial service proletariat, but that recent changes to industrial relations and education policy in particular may mean it will do so in the future.

5.2 ‘Careers’ in the domestic services industry

A complex array of factors internal and external to the domestic services industry shapes the opportunities and constraints individual workers confront. In some cases, occupational ghettoisation results. However, others experience successful upward mobility within, or movement out of domestic service provision. I have identified five different careers in domestic service provision: a stop-gap for students, a stepping-stone, career, a filler, or a dead-end. Of these, a ‘dead-end’ career in paid household work most closely resembles what feminist writers on the occupation mean by ‘occupational ghetto,’ but some workers in the ‘filler’ career could also be considered to be in such a ‘ghetto.’ The ‘careers’ are not ideal types based on logical deduction, but are broad categories derived from sifting through cases comparing and contrasting individuals’ patterns of participation. I use the term career in two of the three senses Hughes identifies: first, “in the broad modern sense of a person’s course through life and especially through that portion of his life in which he works” and second, and more specifically, “a profession offering opportunities for advancement” (1997:389). (See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the professionalisation of paid household work.) Careers in domestic service provision are implicated in the process of domestic labour market segmentation.

The five careers form a kind of continuum, with some overlap between them. They are distinguished, in the first instance, by the length of stay in paid household work and the potential for mobility out of the occupation. Each is defined by a particular configuration of factors including 1) where domestic service provision fits into an individual’s work history; 2) service providers’ accounts of how and why they came to be working in the industry, that is, their ‘entry pathway;’ 3) the role of income generated in domestic service provision in personal and household economies; and 4) their plans and, critically, their opportunities for the future. Table 5.1 lists these factors
Table 5.1: Factors used in constructing ‘careers’ in the domestic services industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Describes:</th>
<th>Range (where applicable):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work history</strong></td>
<td>Respondents' jobs before entering domestic service provision, and where applicable, those taken up after leaving it</td>
<td>➢ no other employment available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ easy entry 1) english not required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2) minimal skill needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3) little or no money needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4) knew the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ chosen over alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ working arrangements for paid household work fit other needs, especially study or family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ positive attributes of the work itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ business opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entry Pathway</strong></td>
<td>How respondents came to be domestic service providers.</td>
<td>➢ sole source for self/family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ one partner’s contribution in a two-income household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ supplement to other income from paid work in a different occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ supplement to other income from government benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ supplement for household extras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ personal 'pocket money'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of income</strong></td>
<td>Contribution of income from domestic service provision in personal and household economies.</td>
<td>➢ maintain current level of participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ expand current level of participation (new services or more work/business)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ move out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>➢ already moved out of paid household work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Footnote: These ‘values’ are derived directly from responses recorded in interviews. They are empirical rather than logical.
and describes in more detail the information they record. Work histories record whether paid household work is undertaken at the beginning, in the middle or towards the end of a working life. Entry pathways document the extent and character of constraints on respondents’ choice to enter paid household work. Information on whether income from paid household work is a primary or minor source of personal or household income gives insight into the extent of dependence on work in this industry for survival. In addition to these factors, elements of respondent self-definition are important, as is the match – or mismatch – between their intentions about the purpose and duration of participation in the industry, and outcomes.

These careers are described below, and by linking the demographic characteristics of respondents with their patterns of participation in the domestic services industry, I will describe the complex pattern of market segmentation. (Appendix D contains a demographic profile of Sydney’s domestic workforce.)

5.2.1 Stop-gap for students

Five respondents took jobs in paid household work during their time at university: Janaïna, Nadia, and Jenny worked part-time as house cleaners, and Katrina and Lisa worked as mother’s helps or nannies. Table 5.2 summarises information for these respondents on the factors set out in Table 5.1. This career is distinctive because of the combination of 1) the strong likelihood of its clearly defined and short duration; 2) because paid household work is not the only employment option open to these workers, who often reject other jobs in favour of it, typically for practical reasons; and 3) because these workers are very likely to use income from this kind of work to supplement other income sources.

Janaïna stopped housecleaning when she graduated, and took up advanced clerical work, later to return to postgraduate study and professional employment. Although Katrina, Jenny, Nadia and Lisa were all working in domestic occupations at the time of interview, none planned to continue after they had completed their

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4. Singly these factors are of limited use in explaining and making judgements about jobs and employment in domestic service provision. For example, long-term participation in the industry is definitive of a ‘career’ for some participants, a stepping-stone for others, and a dead-end for still other domestic workers. Without the context provided by other information, information on any single factor cannot reveal much about what kind of jobs make up the domestic services industry from the workers’ point of view.
degrees. Katrina, capturing views put by all four undergraduate respondents, described her future plans thus:

*What sort of job will you do in the future? How do you think that the work you’re doing now relates to what you’ll do in your future work?*

Doing this sort of work now has made me decide that— it’s good— it’s convenient while I’m a student but it’s not the sort of work that I would make a career out of.

*Why’s that?*

I think mainly because of the physical side of having to actually do the work would get really draining after a while. And it’s not the sort of thing that stimulates me intellectually at all and I see that as something quite important for my career. I see a lot of the work in domestic work as unrewarding, so I don’t think I would be satisfied making a career of that sort of work.

*Right. So what sort of career do you think you want to make?*

Well I’d like to continue studying at Uni for a while, do postgraduate work maybe or— eventually maybe I’d like to get into politics and maybe into policy or some sort of area like that which is quite different to domestic work.

Lisa, studying social sciences and law; Nadia, psychology; and Jenny, medicine have every reason to expect to be able to move out this work when they finish their university education.

Although these respondents found aspects of their work “very monotonous” and “isolated” (Lisa), “too hard physically” (Jenny), “repetitive and unrewarding” (Katrina) and although they experienced many of the problems and dilemmas characteristic of poor domestic employment relationships, they did not take up paid household work because other kinds of work were unavailable. Nadia, the respondent from this group who expressed most strongly her grasp of the negative side of paid household work (see Chapter 3) described her choice of paid household work in the following way:

*How did you choose domestic work?*

As opposed to other work?

*Yes.*

Well before I separated [from my husband], I used to work as a secretary three days a week and I’d get the same amount of money as I would this
way - being on the [supporting parent’s] pension and working two half days a week. And I can’t go to work normally because I’ve got to study and because the hours are not satisfactory for me. I don’t want my son to go to after [school] care and before care.

I don’t have the adequate finances to dress myself properly, you know, to have those particular pair of shoes and have this suit and that, to present myself properly so I can get a job that- that ah ... Well, I don’t want to work in a shop for example. I’ve worked in a shop when I was younger and the pay is just not enough and I refuse to be at the beck and call of people.

I’m 33 years old, I’ve had enough, you know, I want to live my own life. And with this type of work, I choose the days, the hours so every semester I can change as my study pattern- as my university timetable changes and I do it while my son is at school and sometimes I can take my son with me so I don’t have to have him in day care or after care and that’s important.

Katrina and Lisa also found the availability of part-time work and flexible scheduling, and the freedom associated with the less structured nature of the work reactive. After “doing waitressing and absolutely hat[ing] it” Lisa “was looking for something different.” She sought “a nanny type job,” because

I’d had some babysitting work last year as well [as waitressing]...It was just so much more relaxed, and I don’t know, more you’re deciding for yourself what you’re doing, it’s not so much an ordered kind of job.

Once she found work, Lisa remarked that although the work was “monotonous,”

It fits in well with Uni, and it’s also very different from Uni in the respect that I can go and switch off. I don’t have to think a lot about what I’m doing, its not mentally demanding type work. So it’s good because it’s the exact opposite from Uni, it’s an escape from all the pressures of Uni, and getting away from that.

In answer to the question “Why did you go into this kind of work?”, Jenny raised a third benefit of paid domestic work:

I needed some money and I didn’t want to have to pay tax on it. If I had to pay tax on it, it wouldn’t be enough for me to go through the hassle of doing it.

Four of these five respondents entered the industry through local networks, with work finding them as much as they it. Nor did they rely solely on paid household work for their income. Jenny supplemented her income from domestic
Table 5.2: Profile of respondents for whom paid household work is a ‘stop-gap’ while they were/are (university) students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship with parents</th>
<th>Work history</th>
<th>Entry Pathway</th>
<th>Role of income</th>
<th>Future plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Katrina, mother’s help/nanny</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td>21 years old</td>
<td>lives with parents</td>
<td>(at university) paid household work, and, intermittently kitchen maid</td>
<td>fits other needs</td>
<td>personal ‘pocket money’</td>
<td>move out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lisa, mother’s help/nanny</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td>21 years old</td>
<td>sharing with sibling and unrelated others</td>
<td>(at university) babysitting, waitressing, paid household work</td>
<td>chosen over alternatives (waitressing)</td>
<td>supplement to income provided by parents</td>
<td>move out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Janaína, cleaner</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Migrant, Brazil, NESB</td>
<td>41 years old</td>
<td>lone parent, child &gt; 15</td>
<td>(premigration) secretarial work (post migration) factory work, secretarial work, (at university) paid household work, (after graduation) advanced clerical work (return to graduate school) professional work</td>
<td>chosen over alternatives, fits other needs</td>
<td>personal ‘pocket money’ (Janaína lived in a de facto marriage at the time she worked as a cleaner)</td>
<td>already out (several years before the interview)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nadia, cleaner</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Child migrant, Eastern Europe</td>
<td>33 years old</td>
<td>lone parent, child &lt; 15</td>
<td>a range of service sector jobs, including home nursing, secretarial work, (at university) paid household work</td>
<td>chosen over alternatives (shop assistant, secretarial work), fits other needs</td>
<td>supplement to other income from government benefits</td>
<td>move out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jenny, cleaner</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td>27 years old</td>
<td>sharing with unrelated others</td>
<td>unskilled service sector work, clerical work, (at university) paid household work, concurrently with casual clerical work.</td>
<td>fits other needs, positive attributes of job itself (tax-free income)</td>
<td>supplement to other income from paid work in a different occupation</td>
<td>move out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I use this expression to describe white, English-speaking Australian-born persons of Australian- or overseas-born parents. NESB refers to respondents who did not speak English when they came to Australia, but who spoke it, albeit not always fluently, by the time of interview. Those who did not speak English are designated NES.
work with other paid work in a library. Lisa’s parents paid her rent, and her work as a mother’s help covered her other living expenses. Katrina lived at home with her parents, and paid household work provided only for her personal and incidental education costs. At the time Janaïna was a student, she received financial support from her live-in partner. Nadia received income support from the state as a student and single parent.

Although these women share very similar entry pathways into, defined periods of participation in, and mobility out of paid domestic work, they are not an internally homogeneous group. Lisa and Katrina are prototypical upwardly mobile paid household workers: young, Euro-Australian middle class girls in their first jobs on their way to professional careers (see Power and Rosenberg 1995:53). However, Nadia, Janaïna, and Jenny do not fit quite so neatly into this stereotype. Jenny was born into a poor, itinerant, working class family and had worked in more jobs than she could enumerate before she came to university in her mid twenties. Nadia and Janainna were both parents when they entered tertiary education. Janainna came to Australia as a young woman unable to speak English, but ten years later was at university. As a child migrant, Nadia’s English language proficiency was no barrier to university entrance, but her single parenthood made tertiary education and labour market participation more difficult. Nadia took several years to complete her degree part-time, although she moved out of paid household work long before she graduated, citing, in a follow-up interview some four years later, that its physical demands were too onerous. She found a variety of administrative jobs, and, having graduated, now works part-time in community mediation. She plans further study to underpin her chosen profession of alternative dispute resolution when her son reaches high school.

Nadia, Jenny, and Janaïna each had had higher status, ‘pink’ collar jobs before they entered university and paid household work – Janaïna and Nadia as secretaries, and Jenny as a clerical assistant in the public service. However, a critical determinant of their ability to attain mobility beyond their pre-university jobs was state policy, on education and social security in particular. All three entered under special entry programs for mature age students into the (then) heavily state-subsidised public universities, and the availability of income support for sole parents enabled Nadia to attend.
5.2.2 Stepping-stone

For six respondents: Kelly and Michelle, nanny-housekeepers; Carla, a housekeeping company operator; Georgia, a Home Care fieldworker; Rosa, a domestic cleaner; and Harry, a franchisee then organiser in Campbell's cleaning company; paid household work of various kinds was planned to be, or became a 'stepping-stone' to other kinds of work. Table 5.3 records their profiles.

Domestic work can be a 'stepping-stone' in two ways: either its 'contents' are preparation for related work in the future, or it provides an economic stepping-stone in the form of an income stream or business experience compatible with the pursuit of future goals. The stepping-stone career in paid household work is similar to the 'stop-gap for students' in that participants with this career plan to move 'upwards' out of domestic work, although within a time-frame not determined by the length of a university degree. Nor, like student domestics, did any of the stepping-stone respondents enter paid household work because they had no other options.

However, unlike domestic workers at university, those in a stepping-stone career are more fully involved in paid household work. These participants typically work full-time at paid household work and derive all their personal income from it. Four of six stepping-stone respondents actively chose the occupation because of some perceived positive attributes (as opposed to the less enthusiastic preference for domestic work over some other possible options expressed by student domestics). In addition, in contrast with those domestic workers using the occupation as a stop-gap during education, two of these respondents, Harry and Carla, both organised others' performance of paid household work, further indicating 'deeper' if not longer involvement in the domestic services industry, and some upward mobility within it.

Although she had no definite plans for her immediate future, for Kelly the nature of work itself, particularly the potential for personal relationships associated with childcare, was very important, both as an attraction into the job in the first place, and as preparation for the kind of work she sought to move into in the longer term in social welfare provision. Kelly entered nannying because she "enjoys children" and because she came from "a divorced family." She went on:

With nannying I can enjoy close family contact. I get to spend time with a whole family, it brings the happy family situation into my own life. However, she sought to do more than meet her needs for family life:
When you said that you’re serious about it as a profession, what do you mean? What are your own future plans for your work?

Well, I’ve done full-time live-in, I’m going to try and stick this one [full-time live-out] out for at least a year, maybe two, and then eventually move on... I’ve dealt with newborns. The oldest child I’ve looked after is about 8 or 9, so I want to move through until I get teenagers as well... and then maybe one day down the track, I don’t know, I want to get involved in social welfare somewhere.

Kelly was considering tertiary education to fulfil this goal.

For Georgia, paid household work was a stepping-stone into a related, but more skilled, occupation. At the time of the first interview, Georgia described her job with the Home Care Service as “a filler” (Georgia coined this term; see also section 5.2.3) With her partner, she ran an import business, selling their wares at local markets. Some time before the first interview, they had recently decided to supplement their business income from some part-time waged work, and Georgia, who already did some voluntary work with a couple of community organisations, had applied successfully to the Home Care Service some six months before. We saw in Chapter 4 that Georgia found the personal relationships with her clients very rewarding. When we spoke again three and a half years later, Georgia had just completed training as an enrolled nurse, and spoke movingly about how her work for the Home Care Service led her to realise that her working future lay in a practical, caring profession. She has no definite plan for the future now, but is exploring several possibilities, including training as a registered nurse, working as a health care worker for a development agency, or continuing as an enrolled nurse in either a hospital setting or in private situations through an agency. She retains contact with some of her Home Care clients three years after leaving the Service.

Michelle and Harry both planned to go into business after their stint in paid household work. Michelle explains herself this way:

Tell me about why you got into doing this kind of work?

I worked in television for years...And it was just really stressful, ...very pretentious. I didn’t like the pretentious side of it, so I thought if I nannied, it would sort of be a bit more genuine, a bit more real. And also because I wanted to travel, so it worked well if I temped [worked as a temporary nanny]. And I don’t think I could ever go back to office work again!
Table 5.3: Profile of respondents for whom paid household work is a 'stepping-stone.'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work history</th>
<th>Entry Pathway</th>
<th>Role of income</th>
<th>Future plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, nanny-housekeeper</td>
<td>female, migrant, English speaking country, 23 years old, shares with unrelated others</td>
<td>(migration) retailing, waitressing (return to NZ) receptionist (nanny training, re-migration) paid household work</td>
<td>chosen for positive attributes of the work itself, easy entry (training compatible with paid work)</td>
<td>sole source, move out into related non-domestic job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle, nanny-housekeeper</td>
<td>female, Euro-Australian, 24 years old, shares with unrelated others</td>
<td>(secretarial training) receptionist, computer work, sales in television industry, (travel) paid household work (concurrent with intermittent small business work).</td>
<td>chosen for positive attributes of the work itself, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>primary source (some income from small business), move out into small business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia, Home Care fieldworker</td>
<td>female, Euro-Australian, 33 yrs old (first interview), married, without children</td>
<td>paralegal, (travel) English teaching while travelling, paid household work, personal care assistant (hostel), enrolled nurse.</td>
<td>chosen for positive attributes of the work itself, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>moved out to train as enrolled nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry, cleaner (dom&amp;commercial)</td>
<td>male, migrant, China, NESB, 33 years old, shares with unrelated others</td>
<td>(university education) university teaching (migration) commercial cleaning, paid household work (worker then organiser)</td>
<td>chosen over alternatives (employment as commercial cleaner), easy entry</td>
<td>sole source, moved out into business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla, housekeeper</td>
<td>female, Euro-Australian, 30 years old, married, without children</td>
<td>(university) business executive, paid household work (worker/organiser, concurrent with retraining for a new professional occupation)</td>
<td>chosen for positive attributes of the work itself, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>sole personal source, contribution to two income household, move out into new profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa, cleaner</td>
<td>female, migrant, Brazil, non-English speaking, 34 years old, shares with unrelated other</td>
<td>(premigration) receptionist, student (migration) paid household work</td>
<td>chosen over alternatives (NES-receptionist), easy entry (English not needed)</td>
<td>sole source, move out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


...I was on about $38,000 when I left. So it’s a big drop in money, a big drop, but I’m happier. And the money doesn’t really mean a lot to me.

...So when you look into your future, to the sort of things you’d like to do in the future with your work, what have you got in mind?

OK. I’ll be nannying probably for another two years. By that time I’ll be 27 (I’m nearly 25 now) and I want to - because I spent so much time in Asia, especially Thailand, I speak the language and I’ve got a lot of friends there - I want to start a shop up, with stuff from Asia, and that’ll be MY business. So I’m nannying to save the money up. And I go to Thailand now, once every six months and get stock and sell it at the markets to make money as well.

You’re doing that now?

Yeah. So that’s my dream. I’ve always wanted a shop even when I was a kid... And now I’ve got the opportunity, I’m going to do it. And I want to do it without borrowing money from the bank, because that’s the way a lot of businesses fail, because they’ve got this huge loan to pay back.

Harry is a university-educated Chinese migrant whose wife and child, at the time of interview, still lived in China. His professional qualifications were unrecognised in Australia and his English language proficiency still being developed. Three years before the interview, he had bought a domestic cleaning franchise in order to save money and get some business experience. Before this he had worked at the bottom of a sub-contracting chain in commercial cleaning, and found the work paid too little (at $12 per hour). He had worked very hard in his franchise, earning upwards of $1000 per week from regular clients, and the more lucrative “spring jobs” where he cleaned rental premises between tenants. At the time of interview, he was “working in the office ...organising jobs for franchisees.” I asked him

Would you like to stick with the cleaning business?

No, I don’t think so. Our boss wants me to stay in the office - but I’m just trying it for three months, I didn’t want to say yes or no, I want to make the decision after I come back from China. If I can find some better business in China, I would prefer it.

When I followed Harry up a year later, he had returned to China to begin an international network marketing business.

For Carla, domestic service provision started as a way ‘out of the rat race’ (see section 5.2.4 below) and became a ‘stepping-stone.’ Like Michelle and others apparently downwardly mobile into paid household work, Carla moved into paid
household work because she "hated the corporate scene and ... wanted to provide a service that was a genuine personal service that would help people." With a friend, she established a business originally intended to take on all aspects of "organising of people's lives" like "a wife" would. This very broadly defined business offered most conceivable domestic and personal services, with the notable exclusion of childcare, but did not find a market. Its activities reduced to those more humdrum housekeeping activities of cleaning, laundry, shopping and basic household errands, and Carla's friend and partner departed, for financial reasons, and because "she had a real problem with being a cleaner." Carla decided to train part-time as an alternative health practitioner, and continued the housekeeping business with a single employee. The element of practical, personal service linked her present and planned occupations.

For Brazilian immigrant Rosa, a domestic cleaner, full-time domestic work provided a means for her to save for her planned entry into higher education in the year following our conversation. She rejected a job as a receptionist in her native language in favour of the independence and higher rate of pay she could achieve working as a domestic cleaner on her own account. I was not able to contact Rosa to find out whether she had been successful in achieving her plans. However, her drive, age, life course stage, and the public policy context of the time lead me to be optimistic about Rosa's chances of successful mobility 'upwards' out of paid household work via education, perhaps with a transition from 'stepping-stone' to 'stop-gap' before she finally moves on.

The profiles of these 'stepping-stone' participants indicate a measure of choice, strategic thinking, and clear potential for mobility not compatible with accounts of the occupation as an employment backwater to which workers are 'consigned.' For some the path out of paid household work will be easier than for others. When we consider entry pathways in the light of 'stepping-stone' participants' ethnicity, migrants from non-English speaking countries are more likely choose paid household work from a more limited pool of options than those of English-speaking background for whom

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5. Rosa's career in paid household work is perhaps most akin to the 'bridging' process described in the historical literature. Paid household work gave her entry into the Australian labour market.
entry into paid household work appears to be a more full-bodied choice. In addition, discrimination and lack of English language skills may constrain or delay upward mobility of NESB participants.

5.2.3 Filler

At the time of interview, ten respondents were using paid household work as a ‘filler’ (see Table 5.4) Although these are not a majority of respondents, the ‘filler’ is likely to be the most common career in paid household work (see Box 5.1). Examination of the ‘filler’ career shows up clearly some of continuing dilemmas for understanding and evaluating patterns of women’s labour market participation, notably in part-time and/or intermittent employment. It also shows why paid household work might be uniquely attractive to people in certain situations, precisely because it is neither clearly ‘public’ nor ‘private.’

Box 5.1: Evidence of the filler’s predominance: participants and patterns of participation in paid household work

Deborah, general domestic agency operator:
We’ve got a lot of casual workers with us, that go to uni, do another job, work in a nursing home, mothers that have kids, grandmothers that don’t want to exert themselves.

Denise, Home Care fieldworker:
I’m a single parent, a lot of the girls are studying, they’re doing uni and part-time courses. A lot of them have got a husband that supports too, they’re just doing it as a part-time job, you know, just for the extra money. And this is where this type of job situation you know, attracts all different types of people, incredibly diverse people.

Jeannie, cleaning agency operator:
It ideally suits people with young school children who can drop them off at school at 9 o’clock, go onto their job at 9.30, they’re finished at 12.30-1.00 then they’ve got an hour or so then they can pick them up from school. Or we get older ladies perhaps in their fifties where the family has grown up and left home but they don’t want a full-time job but they’d just like a little bit extra and you know, that suits them quite nicely. We do have a fairly high proportion of single mothers to - because they’re allowed to earn a certain amount on top of their pension.

Sarah, housekeeping company operator:
What are the advantages to a person of doing paid domestic work over other forms of paid work?
I think it allows them to be a bit flexible. ...A lot of people don’t want to get back into an office. [Why’s that?]

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6. Of course even the more ‘full-bodied choices’ are conditioned – only women seem to enter nannying because they like children and know the work.
The excerpts in Box 5.1 include reference to participants I have labelled as pursuing the career ‘stop-gap for students;’ indeed, the ‘stop-gap’ might be thought to be simply a particular kind of ‘filler’. Student participants’ involvement in paid household work is of clearly limited duration, and upward/outward mobility is generally assured. The distinctiveness of the ‘filler’ career, and the usefulness of distinguishing it from the ‘stop-gap for students’ emerges when we look more closely at how and why these women – and some men – enter paid household work, and under what conditions they leave it, if indeed they do. For this reason, it is necessary to look at the ‘filler’ category in greater detail than the previous two.

Table 5.4 shows that ‘filler’ participants from the study population generally enter paid household work because they lack alternative work opportunities, entry is comparatively easy, and/or domestic work fits other needs, in particular, family obligations. Apart from this, patterns in the profile table are not as easy to see as with other careers. Respondents’ mobility plans and prospects are divergent, as are the roles income from paid household work plays in their personal and household

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7. Some respondents, for whom paid household work started as a filler, found as time went on that work in this industry became a stepping-stone (Georgia, Michelle) or a career (Sarah, Jeannie, Margaret).
economies. What ‘filler’ participants share in these areas is their finding paid household work a more or less readily available source of income in the absence of suitable others, into which it is easy to enter. Unlike ‘stepping-stone’ participants, these domestic service providers use paid household work simply as an accessible income source.

Paid household work can be a filler in different ways. Some ‘filler’ participants work as domestics, often full-time, while waiting out a recession for more desirable job opportunities (Boo, Denise, Jack, Suzanne, see Box 5.2), or as a ‘break’ from another occupation (Margaret, see Table 5.5 below). Others use part-time paid household work to supplement other income sources (see Box 5.1), including single mothers ‘topping up’ state income support, married mothers working part-time, and workers in other jobs seeking a few extra hours work. (These three sub-groups are not mutually exclusive – some single mothers in receipt of income support used paid household work alongside other casual work to generate additional income etc.)

Box 5.2: ‘Filling’ in time during a recession with paid household work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Jack, cleaning company franchisee:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m a quantity surveyor by occupation and qualifications, but I was retrenched from my job three years ago, due to the recession in the building industry and I’ve been using the cleaning business as an income provider whilst trying to ride the recession out prior to getting back into the building industry again. That’s what I’m trying to do at the moment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Suzanne, cleaner, agency:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I left college, there was no work. It was sort of middle of recession, and the summer that I left there was just nothing, there was no office work. Usually I supported myself all the time I was a student by doing office temp work and there was nothing. There wasn’t even any cleaning or nannying or anything, you know, nothing even basic for the first six to eight weeks. I think it took me about two months to get a cleaning job, and then I think after also after studying - especially fashion’s a fairly frantic subject - after studying for those years, it was nice to have a rest and do something completely different.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Denise, Home Care fieldworker:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *When did you start working for the Home Care Service?*

That was about 2½ years ago. I was only going to be there for about a month or so, that was just a fill-in job [laughs a little]. It was the time of recession when things were really very bad, there was no jobs, or very few jobs available, there were jobs [at Home Care]. I thought, right, I can clean, I can do all that. I love the elderly, I’ve always been able to deal with the elderly and disabled and people like that. I find that no problem. So, yes, I applied for the job.
Table 5.4: Profile of respondents for whom paid household work is a ‘filler’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Meiling, cleaner</strong></th>
<th><strong>Work history</strong></th>
<th><strong>Entry Pathway</strong></th>
<th><strong>Role of income</strong></th>
<th><strong>Future plans</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>retail management, retail stock control computing, paid household work (concurrently with postgraduate study and practising as an artist)</td>
<td>chosen for positive attributes of the work itself, fits other needs, easy entry</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
<td>continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian born</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>married, expecting first child</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Denise, Home Care fieldworker</strong></th>
<th><strong>Work history</strong></th>
<th><strong>Entry Pathway</strong></th>
<th><strong>Role of income</strong></th>
<th><strong>Future plans</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>hairdresser, hotel cleaning, courier, voluntary work in a hospital/ secretarial work, paid household work (with hairdressing “on the side”), receptionist</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>primary source</td>
<td>move out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sole parent, youngest child &lt;15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Maria, cleaning company employee</strong></th>
<th><strong>Work history</strong></th>
<th><strong>Entry Pathway</strong></th>
<th><strong>Role of income</strong></th>
<th><strong>Future plans</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>“office work” in private and public sectors (child-rearing), paid household work (worker, then worker/organiser)</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, fits other needs, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>supplement for household extras</td>
<td>continue, become organiser full-time (not successful)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian born, NESB parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>37 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married, youngest child &lt;15</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Alba, domestic cleaner</strong></th>
<th><strong>Work history</strong></th>
<th><strong>Entry Pathway</strong></th>
<th><strong>Role of income</strong></th>
<th><strong>Future plans</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>(teacher training, marriage, parenthood, migration), factory, receptionist (divorce), “so many jobs” not specified, caterer (accident at work) paid household work, small business</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>supplement to social security income</td>
<td>already out of paid household work, now in small business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migrant, Latin America</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sole parent, youngest child &gt;15</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Boo, domestic cleaner</strong></th>
<th><strong>Work history</strong></th>
<th><strong>Entry Pathway</strong></th>
<th><strong>Role of income</strong></th>
<th><strong>Future plans</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>(university) professional work (travel) paid household work, professional work (concurrently with a little paid household work)</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>sole source, then supplement</td>
<td>move out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migrant, UK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>living alone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inge, domestic cleaner</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Secretarial work/translator (migration) community centre cleaner/refuge worker/exam supervisor concurrently with paid household work, voluntary community work, (babysitting continued)</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, fits other needs, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>supplement to social security income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack, cleaner, (dom&amp;commercial)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>(university) professional work (retrenchment) paid household work</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry (minimal skill needed)</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzanne, domestic cleaner</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>(travelling) paid household work (au pair while travelling) office temping (migration) (trade study, continued office work) paid household work (at first solely, then combined with entry-level employment in trade)</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consuelo, domestic cleaner</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Shop assistant, clothing trade, (marriage, migration, parenthood) factory, paid household work (concurrently with network marketing business, and some business and office training)</td>
<td>easy entry</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justine, live-in housekeeper</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Office &quot;dogsbody&quot; (university) paid household work and factory work while studying, paid household work (concurrently with writing)</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, paid household work job offered accommodation.</td>
<td>while studying: supplement to income support; at time of interview, sole source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine, au pair agency operator</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Receptionist, paid household work (organiser only, concurrent with part-time waged work as receptionist)</td>
<td>fits other needs, business opportunity</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those respondents waiting out a recession planned to leave paid household work, but did not always find this easy to do. Denise, Jack and Suzanne worked full-time as domestics, and continued in the job longer than they wanted to. Jack was looking for work in the building industry at the time of interview, and I was not able to find out if he successfully re-entered his profession. Denise worked for the Home Care Service for some three years, despite her intentions. At the time of interview, Suzanne had returned to her trade, but continued cleaning and ironing for one of the many householders for whom she had worked over four years as a cleaner. Boo, too, had returned to her preferred (professional) employment, but still retained a cleaning job:

A few years ago when I came back from overseas and I was unemployed I was cleaning a house for a friend who put me in touch with another friend and one of those I’m still doing. I’ve been cleaning their house now for about three years. Since then I’ve got full-time employment in my professional field but I’ve kept on the cleaning, partly out of a sense of loyalty to the people concerned and also because I need the money.

For these workers, cyclical downturn eroded alternative employment opportunities, rather than their opportunities being foreclosed by a mismatch between their personal characteristics and responsibilities and what, in general, is on offer in the labour market.

Margaret, however, was able to leave paid household work as soon as she decided to, only to return to the industry as a career agency operator many years later:

I finished my nursing training, I didn’t want to be a nurse any more, I worked for [an agency] for maybe three or four months. Then I decided I couldn’t make any money doing that, that I had to go back to nursing! [laughs]. The only other time I’ve done domestic work is when I was in London, I worked as a nanny for 8 months as the travelling holiday routine, purely for those reasons. Not because I wanted to work as an nanny, I just wanted somewhere to live for the winter! [laughs]. …I just needed a break from my nursing and I thought I’d just mark time doing that, but it was never going to be a career path so to speak.

Those in the second group, overwhelmingly women, entered paid household work to fill less well-defined temporal and income gaps. Some, like Meiling, have the education and cultural capital which would support labour market success, but
choose paid household work as an income ‘filler’ to support other activities. Meiling described her choice to take up domestic work as follows:

And how does cleaning compare with those other kinds of jobs shop assistant etc?

For me it’s better. I really hate working for other people, so the best side of cleaning is working for oneself. I like to organise my time around the way I like it to be. I suppose the difference is I sort of see work as something that’s generally not pleasurable because the things that I’m interested in—painting and drawing and taking photographs and doing sculptures—[it] is so difficult to make a living out of. I’ve sort of resigned myself to the fact that I’ll always have to do something else on the side that is less important to me. So although I can earn money very easily doing those other kinds of things like working in bookstores or—I’m never going to have a career in something else— it’s always going to be kind of menial work, that part of my life. So if I’m going to do that kind of work, I’d rather be self-employed, that’s my attitude. And with cleaning the money is the other thing too, because it’s generally cash-in-hand and we earn about $15 an hour, so that’s OK. I can work with someone, work two and a half days and it works well.

...[with cleaning] there’s more of a freedom, like you can daydream while you’re vacuuming. ... But working in retail or whatever, you’re constantly concentrating on dealing with a different person whose always coming to the counter, or plugging things into a computer and you never really have time to yourself in a sense. ...one lecturer said to me once “You’ve got to do those kinds of jobs to have any sort of creative thing, you’ve got to things that you do physically where your mind goes off on a tangent.”

Justine’s story is similar in some respects. A young graduate disillusioned during an internship with the profession for which she was trained, at 22 years old she took up a job as a live-in housekeeper when she couldn’t find work in a field related to her profession, and because the accommodation provided solved her temporary housing problem. She received paid holidays, and has travelled overseas twice since starting the housekeeping job. Perhaps most importantly, the job left her time to write, which removed any urgent need to move into a ‘better’ occupation. However, at the time of interview, Justine was beginning to think about moving out of paid household work, perhaps in the next year or so. She was very likely to be able to when she chose to.

Catherine took over an agency which she herself had used to find au pairs in the past. It was a small and lucrative business which she could run from home, in
addition to working as a part-time receptionist. Both the business and her paid work fitted in with her family responsibilities and she had no plans to expand either. Catherine was the only ‘organiser’ for whom participation in the domestic services industry was not a full-time job. She had never worked herself as a paid domestic worker of any kind.

For many participants the choice to take up paid household work is less ‘full-bodied’ than it was for Meiling, Justine and others. Paid household work gave Inge, Consuelo, and Alba access to labour market income compatible with their needs, but at considerable cost. All three found the isolation of domestic cleaning difficult. At the time of interview, Consuelo had been cleaning part-time for seven years, after leaving a factory job. She had attempted to improve her labour market status by engaging in party-plan selling, and by attending computer and office management courses in the state-run technical education system. In addition to the emotional costs of isolation, she highlighted the lack of learning opportunities in paid household work:

*And how do you find your paid domestic work?*

Sometimes boring. Sometimes it’s OK, you know, depending on the days, sometimes I’m happy, sometimes I’m not. Especially the days when I don’t talk, nothing, just stay by myself in a house. Some days I feel upset, you know, nobody talks with me, nothing...

*So when you go to somebody’s house to clean it, you like it better if they’re there or better if they’re not there?*

Well, for me it doesn’t matter really much. But if I have to spend all the time just by myself, I don’t like it because I like to talk. Even if I don’t talk, I like to listen to others, because that’s the way to learn something. And if I spend my time all the time never talking, never listening, I never learn. That’s why I think maybe I’ll change jobs. I don’t know, I want to change but I don’t have energy enough to tell I want to give up this, because they are [such] good persons.

Inge directly linked the isolation of domestic work clearly with problems finding other kinds of work. She described herself as “just falling back on it” because she “found to keep up with like more interesting work you have to have the connections and the time.” Once she took up (easily accessible) paid household work, making and maintaining these “connections” was hard.

At the time they took up paid household work, Alba, Consuelo, and Inge had few job options. Alba was in receipt of sickness benefit, awaiting the outcome of workers compensation proceedings related to an injury she received as a caterer.
About to be evicted for non-payment of rent, she required ‘hidden’ jobs paying cash-in-hand, and so the isolation of paid household work was both a necessity and a burden for her. Consuelo left her clothing factory job because of conflict between different sub-groups of her ethnic community at work. By the time we spoke, declining factory employment in clothing manufacture made it unlikely she could have found work in a clothing factory again, if she had wanted to. Inge, a single parent, eventually moved out of domestic cleaning for health reasons, but continued babysitting in addition to other casual work she had had over the years supervising exams at a local technical college. These three women entered paid household work through local networks (Inge, Consuelo) and the open market (Alba). Particularly disadvantaged women like Inge and Alba are unlikely to use agencies, partly because, as Inge put it, in local networks “it’s all black, you know, it’s money in the hand.”

Like Alba, as a migrant from a non-English speaking country, Consuelo was disadvantaged in the labour market. But she is married to a man with a steady and reasonably well-paid job as a cook, and agency operators attest that women like her do use agencies to get employment. Consuelo’s labour market disadvantage does not translate (as it does for some paid household workers) into obvious economic disadvantage. She and her husband own their own home and car, and had recently bought a flat as an investment property. She is like the many married “young mums” and “older ladies” doing part-time paid household work whose present standard of living does not depend on their own earnings or earnings ability.

Such women find paid household work accessible in several respects. There is continuity between the content of their paid and unpaid household work, and so whether we (or ‘the market’ or householders) consider it to be skilled or not, these participants know the work. Cleaning and housekeeping work is generally available in amounts and at times which make it compatible with women’s domestic responsibilities in their own homes. Because only a small minority of paid household workers are constituted as ‘employees’ of companies, and when they are, they are typically casually employed, entry into and out of the industry has few transaction costs. Thus, provided there is demand for paid domestic workers, movement into and out of work is easy. Part-time participation and correspondence between the content of paid and unpaid work are common to most female participants in the domestic services industry, but they are particularly important when considering what might
be one of the most significant populations 'supplying' domestic workers: married women.

This group is under-represented in this study. One case, which does not appear in Box 5.4, may capture the experience and expectations of some of them. Janet, a British immigrant whom we met in Chapter 4, took up paid household work part-time as a low pressure job which kept her busy during part of the day, and left time for her to take care of her own home and the dogs which kept her company while her husband was overseas doing a very highly paid job. She liked the nature of the work, and her relationship with Corinne, the cleaning company operator who employed her. Janet and her husband had no children, but she thought paid household work would be a good job if and when she did:

...mostly I think it's a good job for women with children because it's so flexible you know, you can collect your children from school and another reason I thought it would be good for me to get started off because if I have any children myself by that time my mother'll be here [as an British immigrant] and I can still go out and do this job a few hours a week and have a little bit of money coming in. I think the best part of it is the flexibility of the hours... But it's a job as well that I enjoy. I wouldn't like to have to do it and not enjoy it.

Janet chose, for its positive attributes, paid household work over a job she knew was more prestigious. For her paid employment itself was a 'filler,' in contrast with Denise, Jack, and many others for whom employment in paid household work was the filler. She did not plan a career (in the narrower sense of the word). Domestic workers like Janet are, as Ann Curthoys puts it, "incomplete[ly] proletarianiz[ed]" (1986:337) in a particular way, and their economic fortunes are not necessarily linked to their labour market status. This makes the question of (lack of) mobility out of paid household work seem, at first sight, less pressing. However, because choices are eroded, the distinction between this kind of 'filler' career and the 'dead-end' is blurred (see sections 5.2.5, and 5.3 below).

To reiterate, 'filler' participants use paid household work as a source of labour market income in the temporary or permanent absence of suitable alternatives, and

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8. Strictly speaking, this is also true of participants like Inge and Alba who received state income support. However, I use Curthoys' term here to focus on the character of married women's economic status.
may do so intermittently over long periods of time. Many of these domestic service providers use income from paid household work to supplement other sources.

5.2.4 Career

Eleven respondents saw domestic service provision as a ‘career,’ as an industry in which they could flourish both personally and economically into the future. Their profiles are presented in Table 5.5.  

There are three groups of career participants: 1) domestic workers choosing to work full-time in this occupation as a ‘way out of the rat race;’ 2) women who started out as domestic workers (for a variety of reasons) and became upwardly mobile within the industry, to organise other workers in small businesses providing domestic services; and 3) men and women who move directly into organising paid household work as agency and company operators.

Like stepping-stone participants, career domestic workers are more likely to enter the domestic services industry because of perceived positive attributes of the work, not because other options are not available to them. Career organisers of paid household workers enter the industry because they discern a business opportunity. (Career organisers in the domestic services industry are not domestic workers, and so, it might be argued, should be excluded from an analysis of paid household work. I include them because many career organisers have been domestic workers themselves at some time during their work history; and because a clearer picture of the structure of the domestic services industry emerges from including all supply side participants.) Both career workers and organisers plan to stay in paid household work, and do not represent themselves as ‘consigned’ to the industry.

Trisha and Michael, cleaners, particularly the enjoyed the freedom of being their own boss, and both found the income generated in this work to be adequate to their

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9. This respondent group is larger than others because ‘organisers’ (agency and company operators) are over-represented in the study population because their names were available from public lists (most obviously telephone directories) and because as respondents they were able to give information unavailable from individual workers about the market for domestic services overall. Some company operators and franchisors to whom I spoke relatively briefly over the phone are not included as ‘respondents’ here.

10. Some cells in the table remain blank. I did not collect ‘complete sets’ of personal information from many agency operators. These were some of my first respondents, and at the time of interview I did not gather personal information from them because my plan for the shape of
Table 5.5: Profile of respondents for whom paid household work is a ‘career’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name, Job role</th>
<th>Work history</th>
<th>Entry Pathway</th>
<th>Role of income</th>
<th>Future plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trisha, domestic cleaner</td>
<td>receptionist, retail manager, computer work, clerical work, musician, paid household work (concurrently with musician for some time, then solely)</td>
<td>chosen for positive attributes of the work itself, easy entry</td>
<td>sole source</td>
<td>continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shares with unrelated others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael, domestic cleaner</td>
<td>waiter, (migration, university), teacher, paid household work</td>
<td>chosen for positive attributes of job, easy entry</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
<td>continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>migrant, English speaking country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gay “marriage”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred, Home Care fieldworker</td>
<td>engineer, commercial cleaning company manager, carpenter’s helper, paid household work, (last two concurrent with voluntary disabled care work), executive, paid household work</td>
<td>chosen for positive attributes of the work itself, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>sole source</td>
<td>continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>migrant, English speaking country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shares with unrelated others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah, housekeeping co. operator</td>
<td>personnel consultant, paid household work (worker, then worker/organiser)</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry (knew the work), then recognised business opportunity</td>
<td>expand, restructure business, move out of direct service provision</td>
<td>expand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>late twenties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leanne, housekeeping co. operator</td>
<td>secretary, paid household work(worker, then worker/organiser)</td>
<td>chosen for positive attributes of the work itself, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>sole source</td>
<td>expand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corinne, cleaning company operator</th>
<th>female</th>
<th>migrant, SE Asia, english-speaking</th>
<th>early thirties married, no children</th>
<th>waitressing, butler (marriage, migration) paid household work (organiser only)</th>
<th>business opportunity, easy entry (low cost, knew the work)</th>
<th>expand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeannie, cleaning agency operator</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td>married with children, youngest &gt;15</td>
<td>public service, (child rearing) paid household work (worker, then organiser)</td>
<td>easy entry (knew the work), then business opportunity</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob, agency operator</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td>married, middle-aged</td>
<td>military service, corporate management, paid household work (organiser only)</td>
<td>return to manage family business after successful career elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan, general domestic agency operator</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td>living alone, under retirement age</td>
<td>welfare worker, paid household work (nanny while overseas, then nanny locally, then agency organiser as employee, then established own agency)</td>
<td>business opportunity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret, gen. dom. agency operator</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td>married, under 45 yrs, no children</td>
<td>registered nurse, paid household work (worker) nurse, paid household work (nanny while overseas), nurse, paid household work (organiser only)</td>
<td>business opportunity</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare, cleaning agency operator</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td>married with children, youngest &lt;15</td>
<td>manager in a religious organisation, paid household work (organiser only)</td>
<td>business opportunity, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Key Challenges/Reasons for Change</td>
<td>Business Impact</td>
<td>Actions or Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corinne</strong>, cleaning company operator</td>
<td>waitressing, butler (marriage, migration) paid household work (organiser only)</td>
<td>business opportunity, easy entry (low cost, knew the work)</td>
<td></td>
<td>expand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migrant, SE Asia, English-speaking</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>early thirties</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married, no children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jeannie</strong>, cleaning agency operator</td>
<td>public service, (child rearing) paid household work (worker, then organiser)</td>
<td>easy entry (knew the work), then business opportunity</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
<td>continue at same size and range of services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>married with children, youngest &gt;15</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bob</strong>, agency operator</td>
<td>military service, corporate management, paid household work (organiser only)</td>
<td>return to manage family business after successful career elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
<td>continue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>married, middle-aged</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joan</strong>, general domestic agency operator</td>
<td>welfare worker, paid household work (nanny while overseas, then nanny locally, then agency organiser as employee, then established own agency)</td>
<td>business opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td>(business) expand service offerings, esp. aged care, (self) retire, pass business on to partner daughter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>living alone, under retirement age</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Margaret</strong>, gen. dom. agency operator</td>
<td>registered nurse, paid household work (worker) nurse, paid household work (nanny while overseas), nurse, paid household work (organiser only)</td>
<td>business opportunity</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
<td>expand services, internationalise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>married, under 45 yrs, no children</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Clare</strong>, cleaning agency operator</td>
<td>manager in a religious organisation, paid household work (organiser only)</td>
<td>business opportunity, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
<td>continue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-Australian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married with children, youngest &lt;15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
needs. Michael found school teaching increasingly stressful, and with a well-paid partner and a superannuation pay out, he was financially secure enough to pursue housecleaning as a "more pleasant" occupation. Fred, as we saw in Chapter 4.1.2, was attracted to paid household work for the Home Care Service as a caring occupation. I spoke to Fred four years after our first interview. He had left Home Care fieldworking for some time after being "head-hunted" back into a job as an executive, which he accepted because of the "big money, company car, mobile phone and all that," only to return to the Home Care Service because that was where he "wanted to be." He planned to continue in this work, perhaps moving to a private agency, which he thought might offer "less security, but better money, and more flexible hours." These participants chose to leave higher status occupations to take up paid household work. For them, paid household work was a way 'out of the rat race.'

Not so for the more ambitious housekeeping company operators, Leanne and Sarah. Leanne moved into paid household work because she liked the work, and as demand for her services grew, she employed others to assist and became a worker/organiser. She planned to expand her business to employ up to ten full-time 'housekeepers.' Sarah started housekeeping after losing her job in personnel during a recession, and so for lack of alternatives. But she discovered – perhaps made is a better
term – a business opportunity after the fact. At the time of interview she employed eight 'housekeepers,' and two years later, sixteen. Sarah was exploring ways of both expanding and reorganising her business, perhaps using a franchise structure (see Chapter 6.3.2 for more detailed analysis of Sarah and Leanne's companies).

It is not surprising that 'career' participants in paid household work are more likely to be organisers than workers. Moreover, with the exception of Corinne, all career participants are Anglo-Australian or migrants from English-speaking countries. Those domestic workers who move into organising other workers are upwardly mobile within the domestic services industry. As small business people, organisers of paid household workers – agency operators, and company proprietors – do not share the low status of direct service providers. Women's path to a career in organising paid household work often involves some experience as a direct provider. Some still continue as domestic workers while organising others, and worker-organisers like Carla and Sarah report that some stigma still attaches to their market position.
Others move out of direct provision completely when they begin organising others – Joan, and Jeannie are examples here. Margaret had worked as a nanny some years before buying her agency, and this, as well as her nursing background made the general domestic agency an ideal business for her. Corinne had worked in the closely related non-domestic setting of the hotel industry before opening her business. However, men involved in organising paid household workers – agency operators such as Barry and Bob, and company operator Peter moved directly into organising paid household work.11

5.2.5 Dead-end.

For three respondents, Angela, Juyhun, and Miguel, paid household work was a clear ‘dead-end’ (see Table 5.6). These three domestic workers did not make full-bodied choices to enter into paid household work as some career participants did. They have all been paid household workers for some years, and despite their preference for other kinds of work, are unable to get out of the occupation into something better. Anwar, an incomplete profile of whom is also included in Table 5.6, appeared to be unable to move out of paid household work at the time of interview. However, his opportunities for outward mobility may be greater.

Even mobility within the broad domestic services industry is not possible for Miguel, Angela or Juyhun. Miguel joined the Home Care Service after losing the bus driving job he held for nine years. Most of Miguel’s work for the Home Care Service is personal care for disabled people because of the physical strength required, and because he had previous experience working in a nursing home. Although he performed a range of skilled tasks such as giving injections in his nursing home job more than a decade before, he cannot become a nurse because he would not be able to acquire the university education now required. He expects to end his working life with the Home Care Service.

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11 Barry and Peter are not included here as ‘career’ participants in the domestic services industry for various reasons. Barry entered the industry after the bank for which he was a branch manager retrenched him. He had big plans for his agency, but sold up within a couple of years of purchase, not having realised them. I was not able to find out what he moved on to. Peter’s company offered domestic cleaning only as a necessary minor side-line of his main business in commercial cleaning and cleaning product retailing. He did not seek or promote business in this area, but offered housecleaning services to a handful of executives of large corporate clients of his commercial cleaning business.
In response to a question about whether she would like to work in the office of the Home Care Service, Angela said:

I’d really like it, but I’m sorry for myself because my English is too poor...I didn’t go to school for very many years, just primary school, I’m not very educated in my own language, that’s why I find it hard. But still I’ve got hopes because Home Care said they’re going to put on lessons for people who don’t speak English...I’ve been here a long time, and I don’t have much excuse. I should learn much more. But I have worked so much of the time. There have been times where I have not slept much more than four hours.

At 51 years of age, after a working life of nearly 35 years, Angela does not have the necessary language and literacy skills to move out of manual service work. A follow-up interview two years after the first found her a Home Care fieldworker still, and planning to retire as one. At the time of first interview, Angela’s husband had been unemployed for two years. He had had many jobs in a variety of blue collar occupations since migration. After his severance pay was spent, Angela’s wage had supported the family. Their two daughters, one nineteen, the other twenty one, studied at university.

After migrating to Australia in their early forties, with four children, Juyhun and his wife Kim took up cleaning within a year, because factory employment for Juyhun alone did not provide enough income for the family. Juyhun’s brother secured him the factory job, and helped the couple move into cleaning by sharing his customers with them. Juyhun and Kim also took over the cleaning customers of friends of this brother’s: an elderly couple retiring after cleaning for more than ten years. Their older children help them with some of their jobs during school and university holidays. Juyhun and Kim reported that many of their Korean friends work as cleaners, forming a network of Korean migrant cleaners servicing the affluent northern suburbs of Sydney amongst whom work is passed. Some successfully move into other small businesses, particularly in retail trade, but Juyhun was not optimistic about his and Kim’s prospects for mobility. I asked him

*Would you like to get another job in the future?*

(Juyhun) Of course, but I’m around 50 years old, maybe ... ten [more] years I have to work.

(Helen, his daughter, and our sometime translator, added) Yes, more of this work, because Dad’s already too old to look for another job. He’s
saying that because he’s 50 years old now, he might as well end the career with this job. I mean there won’t be any jobs available for him, so...

...You said before that you’d like to get a shop. Is that something you are planning to do?

(Juyhun) Ah!! Of course, it’s easier for-

(Helen) It’s easier work.

(Juyhun) You need too much money.

Juyhun has a university education, but his age, life cycle stage, and lack of English language skills limit his employment and further educational opportunities. His wife speaks no English, and did not do paid work before they emigrated. They are unable to raise enough money to move into a different kind of small business, and will remain in paid household work until they retire. However, their children will not be disadvantaged in the same way. Two of the four have finished school and are at university in prestigious professional degree programs.

Anwar’s evocation of his situation was even more painful, perhaps because he was younger, and his expectations higher. Unlike Miguel, Angela, Juyhun, and Kim, all of whom made a living from paid household work, Anwar was effectively unemployed. He used the Yellow Pages to advertise the cleaning business he had started some five years before we spoke, as well as his services as a fork lift driver, and he also claimed to be a painter. However, he had had little work. In response to the question “Why did you go into the cleaning business?” he replied:

In Australia the cleaning business is one of the major businesses, ..[it is] a multi-million dollar business... they are making billions. And if you see all over Australia there is all major and small, all companies together, they are- there is so many – big circulation amount of money there in cleaning.

So you thought it was a good business to go into because there’s money to be made there?

Ah! In my point of view it is not very good business, because [laughs a little] nobody likes to be a cleaner, you know? For myself, I don’t want to be a cleaner, I don’t want to do the dirty things, but this is the only business you can start without money. ...That’s why I choose, but otherwise by birth everyone want- I don’t want [to be a] cleaner, I don’t want my children [to] become cleaner, I don’t want myself. If I get another opportunity, I will leave it there.
Table 5.6: Profile of respondents for whom paid household work is a ‘dead-end’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work history</th>
<th>Entry Pathway</th>
<th>Role of income</th>
<th>Future plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela, Home Care fieldworker</td>
<td>farm work (migration) factory work, (marriage, motherhood) factory work, small business, clothing outwork, food service work, commercial cleaning, paid household work</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry</td>
<td>primary source of household income</td>
<td>continue, retire from this job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anwar, domestic and commercial cleaner</td>
<td>reported travelling widely before emigrating to Australia, working as a travel agent and in big hotels, and selling ideas to business people. After coming to Australia, worked for a commercial cleaning company, before starting his own domestic and commercial cleaning business.</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry (no money required)</td>
<td>not clear</td>
<td>move out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juyhun and Kim, domestic and commercial cleaners</td>
<td>Juyhun: (university) public servant, (migration), factory, paid household work Kim: home duties, paid household work</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry (neither money nor English required)</td>
<td>cleaning business sole source of household income</td>
<td>continue, retire from this job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miguel, Home Care fieldworker</td>
<td>student (marriage, migration), factory, nursing home work, bus driving, cleaning sub-contractor with public housing authority, paid household work</td>
<td>lack of alternatives, easy entry (knew the work)</td>
<td>contribution to two income household</td>
<td>continue, retire from this job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I was unable to contact Anwar for a follow-up interview. It is not clear what his prospects are. He talked about studying, and about his self-taught qualification as a psychologist. I did not find out his age, but he was considerably younger than Miguel, Angela, and Juyhun. He seems more likely than other respondents to be able to use education as a means of upward mobility, but had been in straitened circumstances for years, and felt his position acutely.

5.3 Discussion

5.3.1 Distinguishing careers

The literature on paid household work assumes the ‘dead-end’ to be the paradigm career. Because occupational ghettoisation is one of the most criticised aspects of ‘domestic service’ in the literature, the extent to which other careers can be distinguished clearly from the dead-end is of particular importance for evaluating the occupation. Two alternative careers need to be reconsidered here: the ‘filler,’ and the ‘career.’

For participants for whom paid household work is a short to medium term ‘temporal’ filler (Denise, Suzanne, and Jack, for example), the distinction between ‘filler’ and ‘dead-end’ is clear. Not so for those for whom continuous or intermittent part-time paid household work may be a main source of labour market income for many years, particularly married women, whom I have characterised as incompletely proletarianised. Female sole parent domestic workers are also typically incompletely proletarianised. State income support provides them with an extremely modest income, and their rates of labour force participation are lower than those of married women (Edwards and Magarey 1995:266). To the extent that the future labour market opportunities of women in both these groups are constrained by their participation in this occupation in which there is little scope for (additional) skill formation, few promotion prospects, and, particularly for those in the informal sector, poor job security, paid household work is a kind of ‘dead-end.’ However, like the concentration of racial-ethnic minorities in paid household work emphasised in the literature, and partly supported in this study, this reflects the paucity of adequate and appropriate alternative work opportunities for women with family responsibilities at least as much as problems in the nature of paid household work as an occupation.

The distinction between ‘dead-end’ and ‘career’ may also be blurred. Franchise operator Alan reported that the typical franchisee (apart from a few women “looking
for a job they can 'buy' after time out of the workforce") is "a middle executive looking for a change" - someone who "always wanted to be self-employed, but is looking for a secure form of self-employment." Most franchisees "coming in have not been self-employed, and they leave [other jobs] into [Alan's franchise company] to move into self-employment." However, Campbell and Tom, both franchise operators with different companies said that many former 'middle executive' franchisees were retrenched from their jobs. This makes Alan's characterisation of franchisees' motives as "looking for a change" look like it may be, in some cases at least, a euphemism. It also has implications for interpreting the direction of occupational mobility: retrenches buying into small businesses as a 'career-move' (in the narrower sense of career used in section 5.2.4) may be entering an occupational dead-end. However, this plausible conjecture is countered by the extent to which institutional innovations like franchising structures mitigate the problems of paid household work as described in the literature, a point to which I return in Chapter 6. Moreover, the men and married couples who go into domestic franchises are not typically from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Thus, the demographic profile of 'dead-end' participants may be more diverse than is reflected in the study population.

Campbell, a franchise company operator, does not fit clearly into any category developed above, although he has much in common with the career participant industry innovators Corinne and Sarah. A detailed account of his business, which is both distinctive and significant in the industry, is given in Chapter 6.3.1. He entered the industry to develop a business opportunity, and made the transition from worker to organiser. However, when the franchising business was well established, Campbell returned to his lucrative mainstream professional occupation, leaving the operation of the franchise company in the hands of full-time managers. Campbell was unique in the study population, but if the domestic services industry were to become substantially more formalised, this kind of participation might become a little more common.

5.3.2 Mobility within the domestic services industry

Upward mobility for domestic workers is generally understood as movement out of the industry into higher status occupations with better pay and conditions. Recent institutional evolution in the domestic services 'industry' has introduced a second kind of upward mobility within the industry into jobs with good earnings, secure employment and career satisfaction. The increased presence of what might be
called 'formal sector' forms of organisation such as franchise operations and capitalist firms, creates new positions in the industry for organisers of domestic workers in the consumer services market. Some of these offer expensive, specialised services in which rates of pay and working conditions for domestic workers are better than those in the informal sector (see Chapter 6.3). Thus, there are some opportunities for upward mobility within the industry, but these are limited by (low) ratio of workers to organisers, and by demand for these 'elite' services.

5.3.3 *Some key public policy settings*\(^{12}\)

Two features of Australian public policy shape mobility opportunities significantly and directly: education and training policy, and social service provision. For approximately two decades from the early 1970s until the mid 1990s, higher education was more accessible than it has ever been. Younger, more recent migrants like Janaïna and Nadia benefited directly from this, achieving upward mobility through education that older non-English speaking migrants like Juyhun, Kim, Miguel and Angela could only expect for their children. The availability of state income support to sole parents was also very important to Nadia's capacity to attend university (although the extreme modesty of benefit levels, combined with a significant poverty trap in the taper provisions for labour market earnings may make 'filler' participation in paid household work more common in this group of women than others). Training programs for migrants are also important, particularly English-language training – or lack of it - for those from non-English speaking backgrounds. Angela, for example, had been in Australia for more than thirty years, yet had not achieved English language fluency nor literacy.

Second, some domestic workers are employed by the public sector Home Care Service, which introduced training and a three-tiered grading system for fieldworkers during the 1990s. These innovations give opportunities for mobility within the fieldworker category. In addition, the organisation encourages fieldworkers to apply for administrative positions within the organisation. Fieldworkers are offered training in office procedures, and can be employed as relief workers when administrative staff are on leave. Marie-Anne Hawes, an Employee Services Officer with the Home Care Service, reported that principles of workplace fairness and equity underpinned this

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\(^{12}\)See Appendix E for more extensive discussion of the public policy framework in which the domestic services industry operates.
approach. She estimated that one in eight workers in the administration of the Home Care Service were once fieldworkers (personal communication, June 1998). However, the ratio of administrative staff to fieldworkers is small, and decreasing, and job enrichment practices conflict with escalating pressure to increase efficiency and cut costs in public sector organisations (see Chapter 4.1.2). A survey of fieldworkers conducted recently by the Home Care Service as part of the negotiation of a new enterprise agreement, asked questions about their perceptions of the opportunities for career advancement in the Service. Although 80% of fieldworkers\textsuperscript{13} agreed with their current grade and 68% believed the grading process to be fair, 58% thought it difficult to advance to a higher grade, and 58% answered no to a question about whether the grading system had given them a career path (Marie-Anne Hawes, personal communication, June 1998).

5.3.4 Varieties of labour market disadvantage

Alternative employment opportunities were foreclosed in many ways for respondents. Recession ‘pushed’ some respondents into paid household work, including Denise, Suzanne, Sarah, and Jack (as well as other mid-career male professional and managerial employees retrenched or made redundant). These respondents did not experience labour market disadvantage primarily because of their personal characteristics, but because of poor labour market conditions. Their disadvantage was often temporary: some moved out of paid household work successfully, and others were upwardly mobile in the industry.

For others, including Juyhun, Angela, Consuelo, and Rosa, an apparent lack of skills, particularly poor spoken and written English language, pushed them into this work. Here, personal characteristics of the workers are implicated in their labour market disadvantage. Angela had only a primary school education in Greece, and is not fully literate in Greek, nor English. She has a work history of blue collar employment in manufacturing and service sectors. However, Juyhun has a university degree and had a white collar job in Korea before he emigrated. The other named respondents have education levels between these two. Lack of English skill can be understood a ‘deficit’ at the individual level which reflects past human capital investment ‘choices.’ However, this approach ignores the context of choices,

\textsuperscript{13}These are state averages – data were collected at the branch level, and there was some variation in results between branches. More detailed statistics were not available to me.
particularly the failure of governments and employers to ensure that overseas qualifications are recognised, and English language proficiency is achieved by non-English speaking migrants through culturally appropriate and financially accessible education programs.

Employer discrimination against members of subordinated racial-ethnic groups for reasons not related to their capacity to perform the work may also push members of certain groups into paid household work. My interview data do not provide information about the extent of discrimination against paid household workers from non-English speaking backgrounds in the wider labour market. However, evidence from labour market studies of NESB immigrants suggests that discrimination of various kinds is a factor in the downward occupational mobility experienced by many on migration (Flatau et al 1995:11). Flatau, Petrides, and Wood found “significant levels of invisible underemployment” amongst NESB immigrants, particularly males. They argue that

such immigrants are employed in occupations where levels of education and qualifications typically required by employers are less than those [they] possessed... This is symptomatic of impediments to labour market assimilation which prevent full utilisation of skills and expertise... this mismatch underemployment depresses returns to the human capital possessed by NESB immigrants (1995:44).

Juyhun and Harry, both with university degrees, and Consuelo with trade skills are ‘underemployed’ in this way in paid household work.

Householder ‘discrimination’ in the form of preference for workers from subordinated racial-ethnic groups is emphasised in the literature over employer discrimination in other occupations. Some respondents reported racial-ethnic and sex discrimination of this kind by householders. Margaret, a general domestic agency operator, answered my question “What’s the typical nanny like, what’s a typical cleaner like?” in the following way:

Typical cleaner’s South American. Hispanic. Not Australian.

-Men or women?

Women, nearly all women. Same as nannies. Women don’t like men in their house, I know we’ve got a real problem with it. I can’t seem to employ male nannies. So typical cleaner’s Hispanic, hardworking, never Australian, no one ever wants an Australian cleaner, we’re hopeless at it.
People don't want an Australian cleaner? Do they tell you that on the job description?

Yeah.

What do they say?

They don't want them because we're bad at it. We don't clean like Europeans. South Americans or Malaysians. They like anything from the East. People like any sort of domestic cleaning help other than us. Other than white Caucasian basically.

Why do they think white Caucasians don't do well?

I think Australians- we are such a slap happy race and I think it sort of comes out in our cleaning. And it does, they'll say “OK, I'll give an Australian a go.” And they always ring up and say “Well, she cleaned what she saw, but she didn’t clean the grouting in the bathroom.”

Many female respondents had family responsibilities which, however willingly taken on, meant that many had truncated labour force participation and occupational advancement. Tam (1997:243) points out that “because of the low-skill nature of part-time work, it has a channelling effect on women’s lifetime employment prospects....it constitutes a trap which lowers women’s lifetime employment prospects and earnings.” Here, too, economy-wide factors, particularly the organisation of much paid work, reduce women's opportunities in ways which go beyond explanations in terms of individual choices. The domestic division of labour remains remarkably stable, with women performing almost three quarters of all unpaid domestic work (Bittman and Pixley 1997). Part-time and casual work arrangements compatible with women’s place in the domestic division of labour are most common in jobs at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy.

5.4 Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates the complex and fragmented nature of the supply side of the domestic services industry. What it means to say domestic service is a 'lousy job' depends to some extent on who is doing it and why, for how long, and under what circumstances. Patterns in modes of participation, or 'careers,' in domestic service provision are linked to segmentation of the domestic labour market by gender, ethnicity and life-course stage in ways consonant with the dominant view described in Chapter 2. However, historical, demographic and public policy differences between nations also shape the extent to which paid household workers can use the occupation as a stop-gap, or can find themselves unable to move into
better paid, higher skilled jobs. Differences between nations’ political-economic frameworks are also critical in determining the distribution of workers between private, consumer service provision and social service work in the welfare state.

Older, migrant workers from non-English speaking countries are those most likely to find it difficult to move out of paid household work, although some find employment with somewhat better conditions in the public sector. However, for many domestic workers, the occupation is not a ‘ghetto.’ Evidence presented above shows that patterns of decision-making and of the differentiation of opportunities are complex and diverse, and that paid household work fits into the economic lives and work history of participants in a variety of ways.

My findings confirm that paid household work is an occupation in which disadvantaged workers can find themselves trapped, and to that extent, they confirm broadly those of the consensual view outlined in Chapter 2. However, my findings also form the basis of the challenge, presented in Chapter 8, to the logic, structure, and evidential bases of arguments in the literature about how paid household work is “reproductive of inegalitarian social systems” (Rollins 1990:78).

On the question of post-industrial service-proletarian status for Australian paid household workers, evidence supports Esping-Andersen’s picture of a ‘core’ of service workers in unskilled occupations, in addition to the participation of ‘mobile transients.’ Women with family responsibilities and migrants from non-English speaking countries appear to be disproportionately represented amongst ‘core’ workers, though in both cases, the ‘class structural’ consequences are complicated. At least some of these women, although individually disadvantaged, secure access to further economic and social resources through marriage. Amongst NESB migrants, severe mobility problems prevail in only a single generation in many families, although this may vary between ethnic groups.¹⁴

With the exception of differential treatment for Aboriginal people and some migrant groups, the institutional structure of the Australian welfare state (see Appendix E) has not provided a context in which a low-waged, low-skilled market for consumer services, including waged domestic labour could flourish as it has in the United States. However, recent changes to the industrial structure, industrial relations

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¹⁴ For evidence on differential rates of participation in higher education amongst various NESB migrant groups, see Dobson, Birrell and Rapson 1996)
regulation and the level and organisation of publicly-funded social services may mean that the so far unsubstantiated claim that households will increasingly buy in domestic labour may be verified in future Household Expenditure Surveys (see Appendix B.2). The floor on wages may be falling, reducing the relative price of service labour which may have previously constrained consumer service sector growth. As education becomes increasingly accessible, public sector social service employment declines, labour regulations are redrawn in capital’s favour, and globalisation takes its toll on the industrial structure, the ‘core’ of unskilled service workers may grow, and private domestic employment increase.
Chapter 6

Market-based Strategies for Improving Paid Household Work

The third element of the dominant view of paid household work is that domestic workers 'resist domination' by various means (Chapter 2.2.3). Most studies focus on the psychological and practical strategies of individual domestic workers to manage both their working relationships and their own responses to how they are treated at work, to reduce the incidence and effects of economic and cultural maltreatment. Certainly, some respondents to this study told of personal strategies similar to those described in the literature, including quitting jobs in which they were poorly treated, and refusing to accept householders' positioning them as servants (see Chapters 3 and 4). However, sometimes in addition to these strategies, and sometimes instead of them, in ways not immediately visible when one looks for signs of worker 'resistance,' some workers¹ have access to organisational resources, both norms and practices, mobilised in institutions which improve their economic and social status to varying degrees.²

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1. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries organised attempts to improve domestic service were pursued primarily by domestic employers seeking to solve the 'servant problem.' See Sutherland (1981 Chapters 7 & 8) and Dudden (1986) on the United States, and Kingston (1975 Chapter 3) on Australia. Attempts at unionisation by workers themselves were a twentieth century phenomenon (see Appendix E.1.2, Box E.1, and Van Raaphorst 1988).

2. Romero describes some Chicana domestics' attempts to restructure their work to make employment relationships more "business like" and "professional" (1992 Chapter 6). She notes briefly that informal networks among both employers and domestic workers are important in changing industry norms (1992:159), but her focus, her 'unit of analysis,' remains individual workers. Despite evidence of their existence (see Chapter 8.1.2), analysis of more conventional formal sector organisations is absent. Bakan and Stasiulis (1995) do analyse domestic placement agencies in Canada, but their aim is to show how these agencies "facilitate structural inequities between predominantly white female citizens and predominantly noncitizen women of color" (1995:331).
This chapter and Chapter 7 do not challenge the empirical proposition that
domestic workers resist. Rather, I show that there are remedies to the problems
workers experience that extend beyond the interpersonal, informal, and typically
individualised ‘resistance’ on which the dominant framework focuses attention. This
chapter deals with market-based remedies; Chapter 7 with remedies which challenge
the ‘rule of markets.’ If alternative remedies, both market-based and extra-market are
not explored, the consensual characterisation of paid household work as a ‘uniquely
lousy job’ is likely to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In Chapter 4, I distinguished disrespect and exploitation as problems, in order
to explore – and disentangle – ‘personal’ and ‘employment’ aspects of domestic
employment relationships. Although not the primary focus of that chapter, the
exposition of the case studies showed that aspects of domestic workers’ economic and
social status were improved by the formalisation of their work situation through
institutions such as Corinne’s company and the Home Care Service of NSW. This
chapter takes these institutional processes as its focus, and discusses these and other
models of formalisation. To do so requires relating institutional norms and practices
to the problems experienced by domestic workers, as identified in the literature (see
Chapters 2.2.1, 2.2.2) and reported by respondents to this study (see Chapters 3-5).

I begin by setting out a theoretical framework for further defining and
distinguishing the problems paid household workers may experience. I then use case
studies to explore the extent to which some significant institutions in the domestic
services industry in Sydney are able to overcome these problems. I conclude that
market-based approaches including 1) agencies, which aim to establish what I call
‘fair contracting,’ and 2) more wide-ranging strategies attempting
‘professionalisation’ through franchise and company structures, are able to resolve
some, but not all, identified problems.

6.1 Defining ‘problems’

This section establishes the framework within which I evaluate institutional
means of improving job quality in the domestic services industry. In particular, I
draw on some recent developments in the theory of justice as well as insights from
political economy to order and explore problems raised in the literature and by
respondents.
Two distinctions are useful for ordering the problems (reported by respondents
to this study and/or recorded in the literature) potentially or actually experienced by
paid household workers. One has been developed by Nancy Fraser (1995) who, in
attempting to construct “a critical-theoretical framework that is adequate to the
demands of our age” (1995:70), distinguishes analytically between those injustices
which are remedied by redistribution – called ‘economic injustices’; and those, called
‘cultural injustices,’ which are remedied by (moral) recognition. 3

The other distinction cuts across Fraser’s, differentiating first order or
interpersonal instances of injustice arising out of the behaviour of actors involved in
transactions, from second order instances of injustice which arise at the level of
‘society as a whole,’ such that individual actors confront them as structural features of
the social order. The two ‘levels’ are related: individuals interact (only) in social
contexts. Cultural stereotypes, for example, do influence many, perhaps most,
people’s perceptions of and behaviour towards group members to which particular
stereotypes attach. However, neither level can be ‘read off’ from the other. These
distinctions assist in avoiding conflation of social and interpersonal aspects of paid
household work, and allow investigation of, rather than assumption about, causal
relationships between economic and cultural problems in domestic occupations. 4

Making the distinctions is important, but so is understanding the relationships
they problematise (rather than assume). The way institutions mediate individual

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3. Fraser draws on Axel Honneth’s work (see Chapter 1.1.2) to elaborate the concept of
recognition. However, unlike (Hegelian) Honneth, who privileges recognition as the key
category of moral theory, Fraser attempts to keep both redistribution and recognition in the
centre of her moral vision. She recognises that “in the real world... culture and political
economy are always imbricated with one another; and virtually every struggle against
injustice, when properly understood, implies demands for both redistribution and
recognition” (1995:70). However, she points to the analytical usefulness of distinguishing
these injustices and of “exposing their distinctive logics” (1995:70).

4. These insights can also be used to unravel what I noted somewhat disparagingly in
Chapter 2.1.1 that Mary Romero describes as “the paradox of domestic service;” “cleaning
houses is degrading and embarrassing” but “domestic service can be higher paying, more
autonomous and less dehumanizing than other low-status, low-skill occupations”
(1992:12). This is not a paradox at all, and confusion can be resolved by use of the two
analytical distinctions described above. It is not contradictory to say that Home Care
workers, for example, collectively suffer injustice because the occupation, stereotyped as
‘women’s work’ is undervalued and underpaid (and so subject to intertwined cultural and
economic injustice ‘at the level of society as a whole’), while at the same time, in their
interpersonal relations with some, perhaps most, of their clients, individual workers may
find respect, recognition, and great personal fulfilment (see Chapter 4). Similarly, Romero’s
domestic workers – and ‘mine’ for that matter – who find themselves better off
economically than they would be in other available jobs may be feeling cultural injustice
more acutely than economic.
action and interpersonal interactions on one hand, and social structures on the other, is critically important here. Institutions are both the context of individual and/or collective action, and the 'object' of such action. Understanding how institutions work can avoid the characteristic blind spots of explanations prosecuted solely at either the 'level' of individual action and interpersonal relationships, or the 'level' of social structures, while assisting in understanding the complex and dynamic relationships between them (Connell 1987, Chapter 6).

Table 6.1 sets out the distinctions outlined above, and shows how they capture the problems of paid household work.

Table 6.1: Defining problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic injustice</th>
<th>Cultural injustice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First order</strong> (interpersonal)</td>
<td>paid less than promised, expected to do extra unpaid work, income insecurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second order</strong> (societal)</td>
<td>skills undervalued and occupation underpaid, capitalist exploitation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the worker's point of view, first order 'economic' problems arise when individual householders force employment agreements below market pay and workload norms, or make reasonable agreements but do not stick to them, instead, for example, increasing workloads beyond those first agreed upon without increasing pay. What I have termed 'simple exploitation' is a clear example of a first order economic problem. Income insecurity is also a first order economic problem for domestic workers because specification of contract duration may be infrequent, and summary dismissal common. Thus, first order economic outcomes for individual domestic workers depend on the content of agreements they enter into with householders regarding job description, hours of work, pay, conditions, and duration; and on ongoing householder fulfilment of the terms of their agreement. First order economic problems, therefore, can be understood as problems with contracting.

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5. My use of the term 'institution' is somewhat narrower than Connell's – he explores the institutions of the family, the state, and the street in Gender and Power (1987), whereas I take different organisational forms within a particular industry. However, the argument about mediation of individual action and social structure still stands.
First order cultural problems include disrespect, lack of appreciation, and overbearing supervision, or householder expectations of and/or demands for the domestic employment relationship to have a particular flavour which the worker may find oppressive or demeaning. These are not well characterised as contracting problems, although poor contracts (from the worker's point of view) may be associated with them. Positive first order 'cultural' outcomes - respect, appreciation, and appropriate autonomy - for individual domestic workers depend on the attitude a householder takes and the way she or he behaves towards a worker in the employment relationship. Respondents indicated that personal disrespect from householders was often associated with the low status of domestic work (they perceived that householders were treating them as 'just a cleaner' etc). Hence, a relationship between first and second order cultural problems, while not automatic, is evident.

Second order problems can persist even when workers are able to negotiate contracts consonant with market norms, when such contracts are honoured in full, and when individual workers are treated respectfully by their employers. Capitalist exploitation is an 'economic' problem for some domestic workers beyond the simple exploitation discussed above as an interpersonal or first order economic injustice. We saw in Chapter 4 that workers can be exploited by a capitalist company proprietor while at the same time being protected from simple exploitation by householders. However, it is also important to note that Corinne's workers are exploited in the way workers in general are exploited in capitalist enterprises across the political economy.

Another second order economic problem facing domestic workers is the undervaluation of their work, that is, the difficulty of achieving market-wide rates of pay and working conditions in domestic occupations that reflect their 'comparable worth.' This problem is inextricably tied up with the second order cultural problem of the low status of paid household work. As the consensual view rightly recognises, domestic labour is disparagingly naturalised and devalued as 'women's work.' Of course, feminist analysts have argued convincingly that wages and conditions in all 'women's jobs' are depressed by pervasive masculine bias in the institutions and practices of the labour market (for example, Game and Pringle 1983, Steinberg 1990). In this respect, paid household work is simply one of the many occupations within which women are over-represented and materially disadvantaged.
However, there may be some more distinctive second order cultural problems in paid household work. The radically incomplete commodification of housework 'interferes' with market valuations of domestic labour through the hegemonic cultural association of housework and childcare with femininity. This pervasive cultural complex, in which domestic labour, domesticity and femininity mutually define each other, is also complicated by contradictory moral claims about the meaning and nature of domestic and caring work that foster unease about housework's commodification. On one hand many writers express concern about the purchase of services that persons should, if able, provide for themselves, because it demeans the service provider to take over this 'dirty work' (for example Gorz 1989, 1994; Romero 1992). On the other, what Beasley (1994) calls “women's private labour” has been valorised as having special and precious moral value because of the relationships within which it is usually provided (see Silbaugh 1997).  

It is likely that these cultural constructions both reflect and maintain the incomplete commodification of domestic labour, with significant economic effects. Moreover, the extent to which domestic labour remains uncommodified may itself depress wages and conditions for paid household workers. In Australia for example, more than 96% of households provide all required housekeeping and cleaning services for themselves (see Appendix B.2), and this work continues to be primarily performed by women (Bittman and Pixley 1997, Chapter 4). A vicious circle may be in operation in which depressed women's wages hold down both the opportunity cost of domestic self-servicing and the relative price of paid household work. It is difficult to see how robust norms challenging the ideology of natural feminine domesticity can thrive in this context. From this point of view, the market for domestic services may be(com)e a 'vanguard': if the opportunity cost of self-servicing was to rise for a significant proportion of households, or if a challenge within this industry to the ideology of feminine domesticity were to succeed, the effects on women's social status might be far-reaching (see Chapter 7.3).

6. I raise these issues only here, in order to flesh out the category of second order problems in the domestic services industry – I explore the question of the moral evaluation of the industry itself in Chapter 9.

7. Although compatible with it, this is not necessarily an argument for what Bergmann (1998) calls "high commodification." Rather, it is an open-ended speculation that economic revaluation and/or recognition of women's contribution to social labour would change the dynamics of the gender order.
This section has concentrated largely on defining problems. The rest of the chapter uses analysis of case studies to explore solutions to some of these problems arising out of institutional arrangements in which householder-domestic worker relationships are mediated by third parties in various ways.

6.2 Fair contracting

Remedies for first order economic problems in paid household work can be sought through institutional arrangements that support fair contracting. This section explores domestic employment agencies as institutions that do so, albeit with some significant potential limitations (see section 6.2.2).

By ‘fair contracting’ I mean the striking and honouring of contracts between householders and workers within prevailing market norms, specifically, at going rates of pay, with conventional job descriptions. Fair contracting also entails “opt-out opportunities” (Varoufakis 1998:179): that is, the relative bargaining power of buyers and sellers needs to be taken into account in defining and remedying contracting problems. Thus, if they are to make fair contracts, domestic workers must be able to 1) turn down the job offer of a householder seeking to contract below the going rate etc., and/or 2) enforce honouring of a contract struck at market norms, or 3) terminate an agreement not so honoured, without significant loss of income.

Note that in the context of examining first order economic problems, I have defined ‘opt-out opportunity’ relatively narrowly. Workers should have a credible option not to take up any particular contract, but there is no implication that they also have the option to leave the domestic services industry altogether. My definition of fair is also limited by the caveat of ‘prevailing market norms,’ which means that the problems of comparable worth and capitalist exploitation are, in the first instance, bracketed. In addition, prevailing market norms are such that the purchase and sale of domestic services of various kinds are clearly sanctioned. Thus, the issue of whether any contract for the purchase and sale of domestic services is fair is also set aside, to be taken up in the concluding chapter.

Income security presents a different kind of contracting problem from pay rates and job descriptions. For workers, the risk of summary dismissal (with the loss of income that entails) is related to householder discretion over the duration of domestic service contracts. However, fairness with respect to the duration of contracts is more difficult to define than for pay rates and job descriptions. One problem is ambiguity
in the nature of many domestic service contracts: are they a contract for service
(between a purchaser and service provider), or a contract of service (between an
employer and employee)? If the former, then it is not clear that a householder
behaves unfairly when they terminate a contract, even though the worker is likely to
be disadvantaged. Indeed, under the assumption of ‘prevailing norms,’ it is difficult
to see how householders might be expected to continue contracts for service (or
contracts of service) for longer than they desire to.

In current practice, as I will show, the remedy for this problem lies in reducing
the cost to a worker of any particular householder’s discretion over the duration of a
contract, rather than in attempting to enforce contract prolongation. In order not to
suffer loss of income when householders suspend or terminate contracts, workers
need to be able to find alternative jobs cheaply and quickly. Importantly, any strategy
or practice which assists workers this way also increases their bargaining power, by
reducing the cost of worker termination of an unsatisfactory agreement.

Transaction formulation and management falls entirely to worker and
householder when they meet as individuals in local networks or the open market.
Householders have ‘hire and fire’ powers; workers have negotiate, tolerate, or quit
options. In unmediated arrangements, a range of factors affect bargaining power on
each side, including search costs for householders in addition to those factors
discussed in Chapter 4.3. By contrast, institutions involving third party mediation in
the domestic services industry manage the formulation and continuation of the
householder-worker relationship to varying degrees. In the process, they alter, again
to varying degrees, the (power) structure of bargains between householders and
workers.

Third party mediators can minimise contracting problems in ways individual
workers cannot by taking over 1) negotiating or specifying initial job descriptions
(including occupational demarcations), 2) recommending or dictating rates of pay,
and 3) resolving subsequent conflicts over job ‘size’ and content, and worker
performance standards. Success in these three tasks can ensure market norms are not
breached, and simple exploitation is avoided. In addition, third party mediators’
search and placement functions can 4) considerably reduce costs to workers of
quitting unsatisfactory jobs and summary dismissal by householders, and so remedy

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8. Appendix E.1.2 considers legal interpretations of this distinction as it applies to the
domestic services industry.
the problem of income insecurity. Unsatisfactory jobs may include those in which householders treat workers disrespectfully or otherwise unacceptably, and so in this way third party mediators can help remedy first order cultural problems.

It is not difficult to identify how third party mediators change the structure of householder-worker bargains, and why both householders and workers seek mediated transactions. The next section looks at how and when domestic placement agencies, whose primary task is to broker domestic employment relationships between householders and domestic workers, are able to do so. (The remaining institutions involving third party mediation fulfil all the functions agencies do, and more – see section 6.3.)

6.2.1 Case Study 3: Domestic placement agencies as transaction managers.

We saw in Chapter 3.1 that agencies' first task is to screen workers and match them with householders. Agencies operate as clearing houses for information about the availability and quality of jobs (to workers) and workers (to householders). Householders may face considerable costs advertising for and screening workers, as well as lack of information about the quality and qualities of potential workers. Agents described their screening process as combining the establishment of workers' reputations through reference checking, and use of their own skilled judgement in assessing workers' characters and capacities in interviews. Ideally, agencies screen out all 'bad' workers, and achieve economies of scale, making it rational for householders to pay an agency to find them an honest and reliable worker. Agency operators derive a rent from this process: typically charging either an agency commission on each hour of service provided by a domestic worker they place, or a lump sum placement fee. This explains their interest in mediating householder-worker transactions.

Workers can also face job search costs. They report that agencies find work for them, both reducing job search costs and the cost of the quit option in unsatisfactory

9. Both household preferences and worker qualities (in both senses – how good (productive) they are, and what kind of person (quiet, English-speaking, sporty, female) they are) vary. Thus, when agencies screen a large number of workers, and list a large number of jobs, it is plausible to argue that the total effort expended is less than would be the summed efforts of the individual householders searching and screening themselves. Agents also reported that they developed expertise in judging the quality of domestic workers, from which further efficiencies might flow.

10. Some householders presumably prefer to spend money than time on searching and screening as well.
jobs. Indeed, reports from workers and agency operators suggest that agencies undertake low-level screening of householders, because bad jobs (householders), as much as bad workers, are a business liability. Thus, in the first instance, an (albeit) low-level and imperfect process selects out ‘bad’ contractors and facilitates contact between ‘good’ ones.

Placement agencies’ second function is to facilitate negotiation of a mutually satisfactory agreement between householder and worker. Agency operators’ explanations of what they did and how showed that practices differ with domestic occupations. The principal division is between part-time, multi-household jobs like cleaning and much housekeeping, and predominantly full-time or ‘fractional’ single-household occupations like nanny-housekeeper and mother’s help.

When placing cleaners, most agencies specify a minimum number of hours of work (usually three), and an hourly rate (in the case of agencies working on the commission system, a higher rate to the household than to the worker). Agency-placed cleaners’ job descriptions are defined by a combination of the hours for which householders are prepared to pay, the tasks making up the market norm ‘basic clean’ and some marginal negotiation between householders and workers. Bob and Geraldine, general domestic agency operators, describe a typical process by which a cleaner’s job description is determined, using time paid for to limit the task load:

*How is the precise job description decided upon?*

(Bob) The client.

(Geraldine) The client will give us a rundown of what they require.

*Is it always just determined by what the client wants and finding someone to do the job?*

(Geraldine) Yes.

(Bob) Or we might have to say “You’ve set your goals too high, we don’t have anyone who can meet all the criteria.”

(Geraldine) Some’ll say “I want the house cleaned, the bathrooms cleaned, the floors cleaned, and the ironing done, and I want a person for four hours, once a week.” Well now, how can you possibly do all that? So what’s achievable.

This kind of discussion is the principle means by which agencies screen ‘bad’ householders, refusing to place workers with those who did not revise unrealistic expectations, or with recidivists. It appears to have been particularly important in
nanny placement, where much more alarming examples of householder depredation were reported.)

Jeannie, a cleaning agency operator, makes sure that householders know what kind of services her workers don’t provide:

I explain that [the girls] don’t do what we call ‘commercial cleaning’ – up ladders and chairs cleaning windows and shampooing carpets, washing venetian blinds, things like that – but they’re happy to do the other jobs ironing and perhaps defrost a fridge, put the washing out and that sort of thing.

Within the boundaries she established, she works with a general idea of a ‘basic clean,’ but that too, she said was “quite flexible”:

...How’s the precise job description decided upon? What the tasks are going to be done in the house?

As a general rule I would think always, 100%, people want a good job done on the bathrooms and the floors. So I tell the girls to do the bathrooms first and then the floors and then the dusting last the first time so they can work out that they’ve got enough time to do the whole house. If they don’t finish dusting two of the children’s bedrooms the first time that doesn’t matter too much because the floors and the bathrooms have been done. ... I do have some very organised clients who might change a list and they will write a list just saying “I prefer if whoever comes if they could work off my list.” That’s fine - you know exactly what she wants done and you just do that. But as a general rule it’s floors, bathrooms and you know.

Note that Jeannie ‘gives permission’ to workers to prioritise and leave some jobs undone, if they run out of time.

Agencies’ role in defining the terms of arrangements between householders and nannies differs in one significant way from arrangements covering cleaners. Rather than set rates for nannies as they do for cleaners, the majority of agency operators recommend pay rates. Only one of the six agency operators offering nanny services I spoke to claimed to set the nannies’ rate of pay. The remainder of operators left it up to the nanny and the householder to agree on hours, wages and conditions, in the light of their recommendations. This is largely because householders and nannies enter unambiguously into a contract of service, that is, an employer-employee relationship, giving householders discretion in this unregulated market (see Appendix E.1). In addition, much larger sums of money are involved, and much more
variability in both capacity to pay and worker requirements prevails in the 'nanny sector,' making rate setting more difficult.

However, although agencies lack or relinquish control over nanny wages, long-term nannies placed by agencies reported receiving higher rates of pay than they would have received in the open market, the other institution through which they are most likely to find employment. The open market for nanny labour appears to be 'thin' and agencies' roles as information brokers, particularly in screening out inexperienced or otherwise undesirable workers, and in engendering reasonable pay and workload expectations with householders are crucial to enabling these higher wages.

Once an agreement has been reached, domestic agencies' third function is to be, as several operators put it, "mediators" or "arbitrators" in the ongoing relationship their screening and agreement-defining activities have established. 'Contract enforcement' captures, if overstating somewhat, this aspect of what agencies do. Differences by occupation are again evident; this time because cleaning is just a much less complicated job than nannying, which puts a worker right inside the family life of the employing householders. However, these differences are cut across by the incentive structure embodied in typical agencies' fee systems (as well as less easily captured and judged differences in agents' disposition to get involved.) Cleaners are typically placed on the commission system described above, and so make regular remittances to the agent. Ongoing relationships between agents, householders and workers provide agents with a steady stream of income for the duration. Such arrangements are an incentive to agency operators to maintain successful relationships between all parties. In this respect the economic structure of the triangle formed by the agency, the worker and the householder is similar to that formed in Corinne's company (see Chapter 4.2): the agency receives a cut of work paid for only, and so has an incentive to prevent simple exploitation of workers by householders.

Nannies, by contrast, are typically placed for a one-off fee. After the expiration of a 'trial period,' usually one to three months, an agent's formal involvement ceases. Potential rewards in the form of repeat business or referrals are possible for agents who continue to make themselves available, but no further income necessarily derives from ongoing contact, and time costs are incurred. However, charges for nanny placement are steep (upwards of A$500), and most agency operators report assisting with inquiries from either householders or nannies.
As asked about her role after she has assigned a cleaner to a householder satisfactorily, Clare, a cleaning agency operator said, "Hopefully not much after that." However, Clare recognised that she was "there for a service," and listed various circumstances (holidays, sickness etc) under which she might need to replace a cleaner for a householder. However, others had a more generous vision. Asked if his general domestic agency was obliged to take the role of "arbitrator," as he called it, Bob replied "Morally we are. Legally we aren't, but morally we are." Joan, another general domestic agency operator, reported that "If a [nanny] comes back and says 'Look, she's not paying what she said, and the hours are longer,' I'll talk to the client."

Geraldine, a third, spoke more strongly:

With regards to the purchaser meeting the terms of their agreement, they're clearly given the terms verbally - over the phone. They are advised of the cost and we have the job specification of what is required. Now if they don't meet their side of it, either by non-payment or short payment or giving more jobs than they've actually specified, they've asked for a nanny and on the sly said "Look there's a bundle of ironing there, when the baby's asleep, will you do that?" Now that is not in the job spec and that is not what they're paying for. So we'll get the feedback from the provider of the service and those people will be reprimanded and if they continue to do that sort of thing, they're on a "do not use" list. Don't provide a service for them.

Several agency operators reported contacting householders after a worker had started. Jeannie, who placed only cleaners, emphasised the quality control aspect of this practice. In response to my question about her post-placement role, she said

Just to be here if there's any queries, or any need for a change. I usually - not always, it depends who I've sent. If I've sent somebody who I know is very good, I don't expect the client to ring and say "Look she's - you know, could I have a change." But if I'm not sure I might ring up after a week or two and say 'Is it going alright? Are you happy with it?' and if she says "Yes," that's fine, that's all right.

[Jeannie went on to describe replacing holidaying workers etc].

Margaret routinely called households in which she had recently placed nannies. She described her purpose as ensuring that both worker and householder were happy with the arrangement.

Agency-placed workers corroborated operators' accounts of assistance to workers. Indeed, several workers and agents spoke as if the agency was, when it came down to it, on the workers side (recall Suzanne's comments in Box 3.1), and both Joan and Jeannie (independently) likened their role to that of a "union" for the workers.
they placed. Given the costs of gathering information about workers, and the potential for lost business if workers are not effective and reliable, agency operators have an incentive to treat 'good workers' well.

Agencies' activities are largely limited to brokerage and transaction management, and so their potential, in the first instance, is confined to redress of first order economic problems in paid household work. However, remedies for disrespect of workers (particularly part-time cleaners and housekeepers) by householders – that is, remedies for first order cultural problems – can also be addressed by agencies in a number of ways. By replacing the job for a worker experiencing disrespectful treatment by a particular householder, agencies reduce the cost to the worker of the 'quit' option. Second, agencies can use the threat of service withdrawal tout court to 'discipline' disrespectful as well as exploitative householders. Deborah, a large general domestic agency operator, said

We always [tell] them “If you ever have a problem on the job, ring us.” If, for instance, it's a weekly clean for three hours and the cleaners aren’t happy because the lady, for example, follows them around the house and criticises – they’ll come in here and say “I can’t go to this woman because—” Forget that, we’ll send someone else along. But if it looks like on the file it’s a repeat, we’ll ring up the client and say “Look, we feel this is happening at your house, and if you want somebody to stay with you, you’d better not follow them around, because they’re professional cleaners, and they’re getting upset.” So we’re here to talk to for any problems....sometimes in a home you need a mediator.

Indeed, the very existence of a third party may 'de-privatise' the householder-worker interaction in a way which makes disrespectful householders' treatment of workers observable (by worker report to the third party), and so less likely. This may be a result of strategic behaviour on the householder's part (he or she curbs their tongue in order to protect their reputation, and so their access to services) or it may be an 'unconscious' response to a participating in a more formal interaction.

6.2.2 Discussion: Limits to agency support for 'fair contracting'

My discussion so far has been optimistic about the ways agencies can support fair contracting, and so remedy first order economic problems in the domestic services industry. However, their capacity to, and interest in, doing so may be limited in various ways. This section draws on political economic critiques of the paradigm of fair contracting to analyse these limitations.
Political economists have long emphasised problems in labour contracts from the worker's side, arising from differences in economic power between capital and labour. In Chapter 4, I argued that the competitive pressures of the capitalist market are attenuated in domestic employment. Nevertheless, a range of problems remain, because transactions in the domestic services industry involve what Bowles and Gintis (1988, 1993) aptly call "contested exchanges." Bowles and Gintis (1993:85) define these exchanges as follows:

Where some aspect of the good or service supplied is both valuable to the buyer and costly to provide, the absence of third-party enforcement of claims gives rise to endogenous enforcement strategies. We refer to this relationship as a "contested exchange" because, unlike the transactions of Walrasian economics, the benefit the parties derive from the transactions depends on their own capacity to enforce competing claims.

Several aspects of Bowles' and Gintis' approach to understanding transactions are useful for analysing how different institutions shape workers' fortunes in the domestic services industry. These aspects include being alert 1) to conflicts of interest between transacting parties; 2) to the extent and bases of any economic power differentials between them; and 3) to how the durable and personal nature of exchanges shapes both agreements and the parties to them over time.

Within the paradigm of 'fair contracting,' five hindrances to agency-based remedies for first order economic problems can be discerned. First, agencies may not be able to establish arms length arrangements between all categories of domestic workers and householders. Because, unlike capitalist companies (like Corinne's and those discussed in section 6.3.2) and the Home Care Service, agencies do not employ workers, the extent to which they 'triangulate' the householder-worker dyad can be limited, leaving householders and workers to pursue what Bowles and Gintis (1993:85) call "endogenous enforcement strategies." This is a particular problem in nanny placement, where a legal (albeit minimally state-regulated) employer-employee relationship is established between worker and householder. Agency operators express the intention to support fair contracting. However, their capacity to do so is limited when their role is restricted to the formal function of placement brokerage between workers and householders.

Second, problems in nanny jobs might emerge after expiration of trial period. With time, the personal relationship between householder and nanny, or, more likely, between a nanny and the children she cares for, deepens. Shifts in the employment
relationship's structure and meaning can lead householders to expect more from nannies, or nannies to give more to the family, as the boundaries between work and personal obligation blur. Regardless of how the parties themselves view the evolving relationship, looking at the nanny as a worker, such blurring may result in the nanny working more with no increase in pay (that is, simple exploitation). It might be argued that a nanny's extra work is compensated by non-monetary means, implying a (perhaps unspoken) renegotiation of the contract. However, this kind of argument cannot explain all cases. Some nannies speak of how their own sense of obligation to the children they care for is not honoured by parents, who 'take advantage' of the mutual attachment of the nanny and her charges. Thus, nannies trade off their hourly wage rate against maintaining their perceived moral responsibility to the children. This attachment also precluded many nannies leaving jobs in which they suffered such exploitation. Nannies' additional labour of this kind is better interpreted as a gift to the children they care for (albeit one extracted under duress) and so, practically and theoretically, exceeds the contracting framework. Thus, agencies' capacity to support fair contracting can be limited by the nature of their role in transactions, but also by the failure of the practice and metaphors of 'contracting' and 'contract enforcement' to capture the structure and evolution of relationships transactions can bring into being.

Third, again despite placement agents' stated intentions, incentives to support fair contracting may be limited by the cost and benefit framework in which agents' support takes place, in ways described above. To summarise: contract enforcement on workers' behalf takes time, and so costs agencies. If workers are placed for a one-off fee, agencies' incentive to provide bargaining support may be diminished. In nanny

11. One model for this kind of argument can be developed from Akerlof's (1982) theory of implicit contracts in which the labour contract involves a "gift exchange" between employer and employee. On this view, nannies offer extra labour as a gift in exchange for the utility gained from emotional ties with the (employing) family. The family's reciprocal gift is its willingness to open itself to the nanny, and to return her emotional attachment. A second model, devised, interestingly, from the example of the nanny-parent/employer relationship, emphasises how the exchange of gifts between employer and employee establishes a trust relationship which constitutes an implicit contract not to harm each other (Wieiers 1997). Wieiers argues that parents, depending on their time price, will offer a long term relationship and either higher wages or social exchange to nannies as a gift in exchange for the nanny's long term services, good work effort (which conceivably includes extra time), and restraint from inflicting harm to their children or property.

12. In Akerlof's gift exchange model, norms determining workers' efforts are endogenous to the employment relationship. However, in cases where nannies' attachment is to children,
placement, where this fee structure predominates, the sheer size of the fee may counter this effect to some extent, but as we saw above, other problems can emerge. The commission system, prevailing amongst part-time cleaner and housekeeper placements, offers more incentive for agencies to provide bargaining support.

Fourth, agencies practice statistical discrimination (see Aigner and Cain 1977; Akerlof 1970) against some categories of worker. Agency operatives use age, gender, racial-ethnic and other personal characteristics as signals for skill, reliability, and other desirable attributes of potential workers in the screening and selection process. Jeannie, a cleaning agency operator, for example, listed reliability, trustworthiness, and cleaning ability as the qualities she looked for in prospective workers. I asked her:

_How do you evaluate these qualities when you’re thinking of putting a particular person on your books?_

You can usually tell by experience - usually if you’ve got a lady in her mid thirties or forties who has children and a busy household to run is usually pretty good and knows what to do. I don’t employ sixteen and seventeen year old girls straight out from school. I have got some younger girls in their early twenties who are very good, but I don’t like employing anybody under twenty because I just don’t - I mean there obviously are some out there who are good, but I tend to equate them a bit with my daughter. And when I was nineteen I didn’t know the first thing about housework - never did any, didn’t cook, couldn’t boil an egg. So I just don’t think that -it’s just not what people want. They want someone whose experienced and knows what to look for in the cleaning side of it you know - and you find generally people who’re married and their children have grown up a bit they’re the best.

In this response, Jeannie describes how she uses age and family status to signal skill, despite her recognition that “there are obviously some [very young women] out there who are good.” Householder expectations/preferences also play a role, at least in Jeannie’s thinking. Several agency operators reported (the perception) that men make poor domestic workers, particularly child carers (see Appendix D for further reports by agency operators and/or householders indicating statistical discrimination on the basis of gender and race-ethnicity). This approach to recruiting tends to push any

who are not parties to the exchange, the norms governing their work effort are ‘outside’ their exchange with parents.
rejected domestic service providers back into the ‘thin’ open market, because
placement agencies are the first step on the formalisation ladder.\footnote{13}

Fifth, domestic labour market supply side conditions strongly shape the balance
of economic power in householder-worker interactions in which agencies participate
to varying degrees, and thereby shape the nature and extent of agency support for fair
contracting. In Australia, a range of factors (see Chapter 5 and Appendix E) limits the
supply of domestic workers making what Margaret Radin, following Michael Walzer,
calls “desperate exchanges” (1996:48, 124). However, a plentiful supply of domestic
workers amongst whom many are economically disadvantaged reduces agencies’
incentives to behave ‘like a union’ for workers. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos
(1997:69) report that domestic placement agencies are a target of action by the Los
Angeles-based Domestic Workers Association, because of their unscrupulous
treatment of the Association’s immigrant workers. (The Association attempts to
remedy the problems of domestic workers in a variety of ways discussed in Chapter
7.2.1.)

Agencies are able, within these limitations, to remedy contracting problems,
including simple exploitation, for many domestic workers, and to protect them from
personal abuse to some extent. However, agencies can be exploitative themselves: the
commission fee system prevailing in the employment of part-time workers like
cleaners, housekeepers and babysitters amounts to a levy on workers’ pay. Workers
receive an hourly pay rate typically 80% of the service rate charged to householders
(recall Deborah’s remarks in Box 3.2, see also Appendix C.2), because the ‘going rate’
for cleaning services as opposed to cleaning wages is ‘set,’ with some local variations,
across the whole market. The levy is a form of surplus labour appropriation very

\footnote{13. Akerlof’s “Lemons Principle” (1970) captures something of what happens here. Two of his
applications of the principle are relevant. First, the employment of minorities: Akerlof
writes “Employers may refuse to hire members of minority groups for certain types of jobs.
This decision may not reflect irrationality or prejudice — but profit maximisation. For race
may serve as a good statistic for the applicant’s social background, quality of schooling,
and general job capabilities” (1970:494, emphasis in original). In the market for domestic
services, age, family status, and gender serve as such ‘statistics’ in a range of ways. Second,
and less immediately obvious, are parallels between the domestic services industry and
Akerlof’s application of the Lemons Principle to the organisation of credit markets in
underdeveloped countries. He describes how, at the time he wrote, “managing agencies”
controlled two thirds of industrial enterprises in India. These institutional arrangements
worked to reduce uncertainty for investors. Managing agents’ reputations provide the
basis for otherwise chary investors. Domestic employment agencies operate similarly, with
their reputation standing in as a measure of worker quality.}
similar to that Corinne’s company makes, and so can be understood as a form of capitalist exploitation.

It is worth considering explicitly at this point why part-time cleaners and housekeepers agree to this levy. Certainly, not all workers care to pay it: Nadia preferred to find her cleaning jobs in her local network because agencies take “a good sum off your hard labour!” In the first instance, the levy is clearly traded off against job-search costs for workers, costs that can be considerable for those without well-developed networks. However, the income security agency-mediated industry participation offers through the mechanism of reducing – perhaps eliminating – job search costs is crucial. Workers entering the market for cleaning and housekeeping services via agencies may have higher expected average incomes over time, other things being equal, in spite of capitalist exploitation.

Institutions, primarily agencies, which offer the limited transaction management functions discussed above are much more restricted in their capacity to remedy second order problems of the undervaluation of domestic work, and the low social status of domestic occupations. Deborah (quoted in section 6.2.1 above) hints at how this can be attempted, with her assertion of the “professional” status of the workers she places. However, confronting second order problems, we run up against the ‘absolute’ limits of the paradigm of fair contracting, and the market norms these contracts operate within. Section 6.3 analyses two institutions in the domestic services industry that have attempted to challenge market norms, and to remedy the social undervaluation of domestic work.

6.3 ‘Professionalisation:’ Market(ing)-based strategies for work improvement

Agencies’ use of screening processes, reputations, and contract management, as well as their discourse about their operations and workers, formalises and codifies paid domestic work to some degree. These practices contribute to the cultural revaluation of domestic labour in rudimentary ways. However, other institutions confront directly the problem of cultural undervaluation, and its ramifications for workers’ economic and social status. This section looks at case studies of the two private sector institutions in the domestic services industry which pursue explicit professionalisation strategies – franchises and capitalist firms. These strategies include the transaction management functions of domestic employment agencies, but also involve ‘higher order’ symbolic and practical efforts to improve both the economic and cultural status of paid household workers.
My use of the term ‘professionalisation’ here draws both on actors’ representation of their own actions, and on social scientific analysis of work and occupations. Many, many respondents used the term ‘professional’ to describe their work standards and/or approach their work. For most ‘professional’ was used in the sense which opposes it to poor quality work, and indicates some on-the-job autonomy (see Deborah’s comments above). Boo put it this way:

I think I do a professional job.

*What do you mean by ‘professional job’?*

It’s thoroughly reliable, and I do a first class job and in that sense it’s professional. I don’t skimp, I don’t take short cuts and I think I give them a very good service.

However, for a few – those discussed in the case studies below – ‘professional’ took on some of the meanings associated with its use in social scientific analysis of the prestigious occupations of law and medicine: the active pursuit of upward mobility (both higher status and increased economic reward) through training and occupational closure (Macdonald 1995). Respondents make use of ‘professional’ and associated terms in ways that do not match the characteristics we associate with the ‘full’ professions: certified, fee-based, specialist service providers who often operate with state-sanctioned monopolies in service provision and in the oversight of training new members. However, respondents’ deployment of the language of professionalisation indicates their attempts at strategies similar in intention.

These ‘professionalisers’ aim to develop paid household work as a viable ‘career’ in the sense described in Chapter 5.2.4. Not all those participating in the domestic services industry via these institutions aimed at or achieved career involvement: for Jack paid household work was a filler, and for Harry and Carla a stepping-stone. However, the professionalisers aim to change both the experience and social perception of domestic occupations so that freely chosen, long-term participation in the industry is both viable and attractive, at least for those participants entering via professionalising institutions.
6.3.1 Case Study 4: Professionalisation as masculinisation: cleaners as skilled tradesmen

Campbell owns and runs a domestic and small office cleaning franchise operation (see Chapter 3.1.1). He aims to provide his “clients” with a “standardised” and “professional” cleaning service. He moved into domestic cleaning from a high-level public relations job, after “looking around for an industry that hadn’t been professionalised.” Interestingly, domestic cleaning appealed to Campbell because it was dirty work, and so “real,” honest labour. This contrasted with his previous job in a “bullshit industry.”

Campbell’s marketing strategy reveals much about his approach to paid household work. His company’s name aims to evoke “your local tradesman” and its organisation reflects this model. Campbell believes the occupation was not professionalised because it was populated by “floaters” who entered and left the industry, assuming no skills were necessary: young people used domestic cleaning as a fill-in job on their way through town, migrants cleaned temporarily to finance the purchase of “kebab shops” and other such small businesses. The wealthy people who employed these workers tended to treat them like “servants”, and were able to exploit them because of economic inequality. Working on their own, domestic service providers could be prevailed upon to do more and more work. The cleaner, whom Campbell characterised as “Joe Bloggs,” risked losing his livelihood if he didn’t comply with the capricious demands of his employer “Mrs Kafoops.”

For Campbell, to professionalise paid household work means to make it specialised, and defined not by the client but by the service provider. Both the tasks performed and the quality of the service are standardised, not to the personal demands and standards of the consumer, but to company standards in which franchisees are trained. Special equipment and chemicals are used, supplied by the service provider, who also wears a company uniform. “Professionals” invest time and money in their business and work at it full-time.

The franchise structure institutionalises Campbell’s vision of professionalisation, and strongly supports fair contracting. The service provider is positioned in relation to the consumer not as a servant or an employee, but as a skilled “independent contractor.” Training and business support come from the

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14. This section and the next are expanded versions of case studies appearing in Meagher (1997).
franchisor. The franchisor offers franchisees a guaranteed clientele, weakening the economic dependence of the service provider on any particular client, and undermining the force of economic inequality between cleaner and client. Access to clientele generated by the franchisor provides a guaranteed minimum income, and the opportunity to "hand back" clients with whom the franchisee does not establish a successful working relationship. Like placement agencies, the franchise structure formalises and rationalises the collection and dissemination of information resources. The continuous work of finding jobs, necessary for domestic workers in local networks and in the open market because of unpredictable turnover on the demand side, is at least partly taken over by the franchisor. Poor rates of pay have been eliminated. Service price is set by the franchisor at A$25 per hour and franchisees can expect an income of at least A$500-600 a week (after deducting expenses and royalties) for full-time work. The franchise structure introduces a form of "regulation" into the otherwise private worker/householder relationship. The franchise structure triangulates the dyad of client and cleaner, and sets out both the form and content of transactions. The standardised service model greatly decreases worker-householder conflict over job size and content, and reduces the potential for first order cultural problems in the individual householder-cleaner relationship. Campbell also spoke about how loyalty to the company and not the client depersonalised the work relation and gave the cleaner self-respect and a sense of "self-identity" as part of a bigger organisation.

In addition to supporting fair contracting, Campbell aimed to challenge the cultural undervaluation of domestic labour. Emphasis in the following excerpt from our conversation is mine.

*When did you start the cleaning business?*

I actually started myself I think, in October '89, late '89 I started cleaning. So—because I didn't know a thing about cleaning. Crikey, you know, I knew how to clean my own place and that was about it. So I started cleaning and *used* for six months or so to *learn* as much as I could about the *industry* and how it was done and what the *market* was and all that sort of thing, basically *a research period*. And then after six months when I thought I knew enough of what was going on and I thought that our *system* would work, then we set up our first franchise, and then progressively since then we've set up one every six weeks for the last four years.

*How did you go about researching the industry?*
I had a friend... he started the cleaning initially, you know, met the clients and so on and he had the cleaners from whom we bought the two small runs, they taught him how to clean. And then I came back from overseas and he trained me, taught me how to clean a bathroom and so on. And we talked to the clients. I already had in mind some systems and some ideas and we tried those out for six months and more than half of them were totally stupid and totally wrong. So we learnt by a combination of talking to the existing cleaners and by testing our ideas with a small client base. But we were prepared to lose that client base. I mean it was a total research exercise, we didn't buy these runs thinking that "Oh, wow, this is the start of our business!" We bought them to experiment. And we made a heck of a lot of mistakes and we learnt from the clients what their expectations were and what would and wouldn't work from that. We then developed our own system. [emphasis added].

First, Campbell repudiates knowledge gained from cleaning his own house as useful to a professional cleaner. Professionals are trained in a cleaning system. He uses the language of science and management to explain how he acquired the necessary skills to operate professionally. By discovering them through research, Campbell makes visible the technical contents of domestic labour, and institutionalises them as skills in both training and the royalty fees his franchisees pay him (after Steinberg 1990:455).

Campbell was also adamant that specialising in cleaning was essential to his business concept.

I shy very much away from saying [this] is a 'domestic service' company. We are not domestic help. We are professional cleaners who contract to provide you with specific cleaning functions. We don't flit into your house and flop around with a feather duster. I mean look at all the stereotypes. We do not polish your silverware or you know-- we have a standard schedule of services which traditionally perhaps been regarded as a commercial industry and we bring it into the home.

*Why do people employ others to do some of their domestic work?*

I honestly can't see any reason why anyone gets what I would regard as a traditional cleaning service in to flit around with a feather duster and play housemaid. I mean I can't see any logic in that, I think it's self-gratification.

In attempting to establish the superiority of his company's system Campbell explicitly denigrates what he calls traditional domestic service. Specialisation involves differentiating his business from "domestic help" -- a form of service he characterises as "flit[ting] around with a feather duster" and "play[ing] housemaid." This
characterisation reflects a gendered duality in his representations of paid household work. When he talks about problems of the service provider, a woman (Mrs Kafoops) is exploiting a man (Joe Bloggs). Campbell believes that the franchise structure will rescue these men from exploitation by wealthy, lazy women. When he talks about the poor quality of traditional "domestic help," however, the culprit is a housemaid with a feather duster, gratifying another woman's need for social status. Interestingly, the population he seeks to rescue is not at all representative of the (female) population from which paid household workers were most likely to be drawn until recent years.

Campbell seeks to replace particularistic and arbitrary authority of householders with universally implemented rational techniques. He relies on age-old dichotomies which construct masculinity and femininity in opposition to each other, and which privilege masculine modes of thought and action, to reconcile masculinity with work that is typically gendered female. Campbell's analysis and strategy imply he has a sense that the cultural undervaluation of domestic labour is linked to its association with women and femininity. Rather than revalue the feminine, this model of professionalisation revalues domestic labour by masculinising both its representation and organisation. The masculine image of the skilled tradesman structures the organisation of the company and is evident in the model of work on which it is based. To enter the domestic services industry via this institution, participants must make a capital investment (minimum A$10,000) and work full-time. This excludes many women who enter this industry without capital, but with skills derived from keeping their own houses, and with the need for part-time work with flexible hours. It is not surprising then, that of forty five franchisees in his company, only one is a woman working on her own. A handful of women work in husband and wife teams, and the remaining vast majority of franchisees are men. Another franchise company operator participating in the study established a franchised domestic cleaning service he called "Local Maid" to complement his existing "Jim's Mowing" operation, expecting to draw women into the business. 15 After a couple of years operation, there are eleven men and eight women in sixteen franchises, with the women working in husband and wife teams. The company owner planned to change the name of the domestic cleaning arm because "franchising in general is not attracting women" (see also Appendix D.1).

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15. This participant gave me permission to use the real name of his companies.
Although it tends to exclude women working independently of their male partners, Campbell's model does not exclude members of subordinated racial-ethnic groups. A significant minority of the company's franchisees are migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds. Once trained in Campbell's system, these men are able to successfully conduct their business, partly because of ongoing administrative support offered by the franchisor.

Campbell's model has certainly been successful in mitigating both first order economic problems, and the second order economic problem captured in the concept of 'comparable worth,' for the paid household workers working within it. The model has only been partly successful in remedying second order cultural problems, however. Jack did not complain about problems in his relationships with householders he worked for. He reported a single incident of a householder attempting to increase his workload, which he dealt with by referring her to the booking form on which they had agreed his tasks (see Chapter 3.2.1). Nevertheless, he said:

Since being in the business, I think it is a more skilled occupation than I originally thought, but the public, and private individuals don't appreciate it.

...There's a lack of appreciation of the time it takes to clean, of the time it takes to do domestic work. People don't appreciate the value of the work because they look upon it as menial not professional work. They look upon it as being work they could really do themselves, but they don't want to. They don't look on it as being really a skilled occupation.

Jack explicitly contrasted this perception with householders' views of tradesmen like plumbers and carpenters who can command hundreds of dollars because they do work householders themselves cannot.

In the first instance, it is not clear that Campbell’s time and motion system constitutes a significant technical development in the execution of domestic labour: it may be that franchisee cleaners are simply not 'skilled tradesmen.' They do much the same — or less — than domestic cleaners hired through local networks or agencies. Increased service standardisation, and specialised equipment may decrease the time it takes a franchisee to do a 'basic clean' compared to other domestic cleaners, but their hourly charge is significantly higher. Householders may value the consistent quality of a franchisee's service, and believe him to be more committed to continuing to
provide a service, but recognise that the overall quality of the service itself is not significantly different from that offered by others, despite Campbell’s research efforts.

Second, there may be some consumer resistance to the masculinisation of domestic labour. Although domestic labour’s cultural coding as feminine does contribute to the lack of respect accorded those who do it, householders often express a preference for female domestic workers, on both skill (‘it’s women’s work’) and personal and property safety grounds (‘men are dangerous’). Perhaps overcoming the cultural devaluation requires a model of professionalisation which does not rely on denigrating the feminine. The companies profiled in the next case study attempt precisely this.

6.3.2 Case Study 5: Between equals? The domestic worker as executive housewife

This case study analyses the operation of three housekeeping companies which offer a complete housekeeping service, including cleaning, shopping, cooking, running errands, and arranging tradespeople for their clients. I interviewed the proprietors, Sarah, Carla, and Leanne (see Box 6.1). Like Corinne’s company (see Chapter 4.2.1), these companies employ all female staff whose labour services are sold to householders as third parties; their employees enjoys the economic benefits of institutional mediation; and they draw from a feminine model of domestic work.

However, Corinne insisted that being specialised was important to her business project, but for these companies being available to do or arrange virtually anything [with the strong exception of child care] that needs to be done around the house is their selling point. Unlike Corinne, who has never worked as a paid household worker herself, all of these women started out and continue as direct service providers, working with and supervising their employees.

Box 6.1: Company proprietors talk about their entry into the domestic services industry

Carla, housekeeping company operator, with one employee:
I used to be an executive - I was Marketing Director at a computer company - and I hated the corporate scene. I wanted to provide a service that was a genuine personal service that would help people. And my girlfriend and I got together and decided that the thing we both missed in our lives was - we needed a wife - two females and we needed a wife. We thought that there are a lot of other people in the same situation, whether they be women or men or married couples. What they needed, if they were executives or self-employed, was someone to support and nurture them, and that’s how we first got the idea.
Box 6.1: cont.

Sarah, housekeeping company operator, with sixteen employees:
I worked as a personnel consultant, and I was retrenched. I thought "I want to start my own business," and started this. My mother had a catering company, so I'd always been interested in that. I was unemployed, so I started off working for a few friends who were desperately busy at work, and they'd say "Oh Sarah, you're good at these things, can you just come and organise my life?" and "My linen cupboard's a nightmare" and someone else rang and said "We're renovating, we haven't got time to look for the tiles, can you go out and do the shopping for me?" And I put it all together, and of course it's a wife, they all need a wife! And I started it then.

Leanne, operator of a housekeeping company with three employees:
I just wanted to do something for me. I came out of a marriage and I thought you can't sit back and wait for Prince Charming to come along that has his own business. I thought I may never meet anyone so I'd like to try and make myself as comfortable as I can, without just earning your standard office $400 a week. I wanted to do something for me, and I thought "Oh well, I'll try and be a bit independent."
I've always been a personal assistant, secretary, all my life, but at home I've always been pretty fanatical about doing this sort of thing. People used to say "Go and do it!" but it's a big chance, a big gamble to take, to go out on your own, so I started doing it casually after work and on weekends. I got jobs through word of mouth, and then I put an ad in the paper a few months ago and it went through the roof.
I'm not prejudiced in any way, but a lot of cleaners don't speak very good English, and they're very good cleaners, but you can't communicate with them - that's the feedback I'm getting from my clients. They're saying "It's wonderful to see that you can speak English clearly, so you understand what we want." And that's how I got a lot of business, because there's endless amounts of cleaners in the local paper, there's so much competition.

Sarah, Carla, and Leanne use as a model the idea of the middle class wife as a skilled household manager. They have created a more lucrative form of employment in domestic service provision, by successfully claiming feminine skill, and meeting the more diverse and exacting demands of the highly affluent clientele at which their services are targeted. They charge between $23 and $30 an hour, and Sarah and Leanne pay their workers $16, the same hourly rate as Corinne's gross charge. Carla is an exception here. She started with a business partner, who has now left the industry, and employed a small staff. Since then, Carla has decided to leave domestic service provision, and is studying for a new career as a health professional. She has 'wound down' the staff, and retains only one casual employee, a single mother who supplements her social security income with the $10 per hour 'off the books' that Carla pays her to assist with cleaning in five of her jobs. Sarah and Leanne, by contrast, plan to build careers in the industry, and to expand their businesses. They train their workers to take on a clientele of their own, to be 'substitute wives' in their own right. This requires a range of household skills, the possession of a car, the ability
to communicate effectively with clients and to take initiative in developing the set of services offered – and a higher rate of pay. Both Leanne and Sarah emphasised that English language proficiency were important to delivering the kind and level of service they provided. They did not provide employment for women of non-English speaking background.

Although they understand themselves to be skilled, Carla and Sarah rely not on differentiating themselves from their clients but on identifying with them on the basis of their shared cultural capital. Indeed, both employ their own staff in their own homes. Nevertheless, the ideal of professionalism is still powerful. For Sarah and Carla, this means borrowing a little from the corporate world from which they have come and to which many of their clients belong: Carla dresses in a business suit on her initial visit with clients, (and always informs them of her work history). Sarah develops customised printed shopping lists for hers. Leanne stressed the importance of good personal presentation on the job:

I think a fresh, sporty look is good – I have a uniform – black shorts and the white shirt [with company logo] and sandshoes, with flat soles that don’t dent people’s carpet. Some cleaners just go in and they’ve got bleach all over their clothes – naturally you’re going to get bleach all over your clothes and you wear old things. But whether the clients are home or not, it doesn’t look professional. Some people ask me “Do you wear a little frilly black skirt?” [laughs] No! We look neat and tidy, so that if ever the client is there, they can say “They’re tidy themselves.” The way you appear is the way you do your work. The girls that work for me – their houses are immaculate. I’ve picked them up a couple of times, and I think “Well, this is good.”

For all these women taking initiative in providing a flexible, customised and comprehensive service are also hallmarks of professionalism. (In Campbell’s franchise operation, the service is also defined by the service provider to a considerable extent, with the aim of limiting rather than extending the range of tasks.) Like Campbell, these women reject a (feminine) ‘housemaid’ model of domestic service provision – note Leanne’s dismissal of frilly aprons, and the gender-neutral uniform she has designed, and Carla’s emphasis on showing, by her dress and other means that she is a class equal, and nobody’s servant. Rather, they have been successful in establishing themselves as middle class wife-substitutes, trading on similarities between themselves and their clients, who are predominantly English-speaking professionals.

The institutional structure these ‘substitute wives’ created, like Corinne’s, did not require capital investment either by the proprietors or their employees, making
this kind of professional domestic work more accessible than franchising to women. The proprietors make good livings, and Sarah and Leanne offer employment of reasonable quality. None of the three complained about disrespectful treatment by clients, who were, at worst, ‘fussy’. Fair contracting is supported by this model, and second order economic problems of low rates of pay seem also to have been remedied.

However, Sarah and Carla report stigma attached to even this model of paid household work, despite the fact that their very presence and mode of operation in the industry contributes to improving the status, pay and working conditions of the paid household workers they employ. Like Jack, they recognised that the cultural revaluation sought through their professionalising strategy had not been entirely achieved.

6.3.3 Discussion: The capacities and limits of professionalisation

Professionalising institutions are more successful in supporting ‘fair contracting’ than agencies because they are less likely to fall prey to the structural and incentive problems agency operators may confront. Both Campbell’s franchise structure and the company structure used by Sarah, Carla and Leanne avoid the first limitation of agency mediation, that is, failure to establish arms length arrangements between domestic workers and householders. In both cases, householders find themselves in unambiguous contract for service arrangements with domestic service providers. This, in combination with the clear choice not to provide personal services greatly reduces the risk of potentially coercive implicit contracts involving worker gifts of labour. In this way, these institutions avoid the second potential limitation of agency mediated transactions. Finally, the economic and organisational structures of companies and franchise operations mean they do not face the same incentive problems agencies do providing bargaining support for workers.

However, although economic gains for workers are clear, and problems in establishing fair contracting less likely, ‘professionalisation’ is a limited strategy for

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16. Leanne, previously a secretary, did not talk about the social status of domestic service providers at all. In her milieu, the fact that she is an employer with her own business raises her status and may override any negative view of its contents.

17. Campbell’s franchisors enter contract for service arrangements with householders: there is no room or reason for householders to consider themselves in an hierarchical employment relationship with a cleaning franchisee. Sarah, Carla and Leanne are employers, so that they have contracts of service with workers, and contracts for service with householders.
work improvement. First, we know that participants recognise that their professionalising projects have not overcome aspects of disrespect for domestic work and workers. In terms established in Table 6.1, the models of work restructuring profiled above remedy first order economic problems and the second order economic problem of comparable worth. These models also remedy first order cultural problems. But the second order cultural problem of social disrespect is less corrigible.

Second, professionalisation is exclusive. In different ways, the organisations profiled in sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 rely on/result in strategic exclusion of ‘traditional’ domestic service provider source groups: franchises tend to exclude women working independently of their husbands, housekeeping companies tend to exclude non-English-speaking workers. Increased status is built on differentiating aspirant insiders from those who remain outsiders – respondents articulated this variously but explicitly. For housekeeping companies in particular, this is wrapped up with the tapping and/or construction of a ‘market niche;’ they provide a highly customised service to elite clientele, and charge what the market will bear. The ‘economic’ success of Campbell’s franchise is based on standardisation and strict delimitation of job contents which allow workers to be more ‘productive,’ but after they have overcome classical entry barriers: training and investment costs.

Perhaps paradoxically, continuing social disrespect and exclusivity are related. Campbell’s attempt to gain respect requires strong differentiation of ‘professional’ from ‘lay’ practitioners (the latter including householders themselves), and successful recoding of work meanings into those desired. However, householders do not appear to perceive cleaning franchisees to be enough like tradesmen and or different enough from “home help” or self-servicing to accord them the status associated with trade skill. Analogously, housekeeping service providers are perhaps not perceived to be enough like their clients, and not different enough from ‘cleaners’ to warrant the enhanced status they seek. The status barrier between service provider and purchaser is not so easily breached.

It seems that in both cases, the requisite distinctions and similarities have not been rendered stable enough to engender broad acceptance of the professionalisers’ aspirations: professionalisers resemble too closely those from whom they seek to differentiate themselves. This is not just a problem of perceptions, or at the level of

18. Housekeeping companies did not employ men either, but it is not clear to me that this should be characterised as ‘exclusion.’
'discourse.' 'Non-professional' domestic workers offering comparable services remain available through local networks, the open market, and placement agencies, and the vast majority of households continue to rely on their own members to furnish domestic labour (see Appendix B.2). Paid household work, for reasons internal to its present nature and place in the social division of labour cannot become a profession in the way medicine, law or accounting have. While the services of paid providers continue to be more or less identical to activities devalued socially, and from which freedom is sought by their purchasers, it is difficult to see how the required cultural revaluation can occur.

It is also important to note here that capitalist exploitation is a feature of both the professionalising institutions operating in the domestic services industry. Franchisees pay large up-front entry fees, and ongoing royalties: either a percentage of turnover, or a fixed weekly or monthly charge. Housekeeping company operators run capitalist enterprises identical in structure to Corinne’s cleaning company (Chapter 4.1.1).

Second order cultural undervaluation of domestic labour remains, and attempts to redress it by exclusionary strategies have been of limited success in the domestic services industry. However, the struggle for recognition need not stop with market-based professionalisation. Nancy Fraser (1995) offers a useful distinction between affirmative and transformative remedies for injustice. Affirmative remedies aim “at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them” (Fraser 1995:82). She points to how affirmative remedies tend to produce perverse outcomes like the intra-industry segmentation market-based professionalisation engenders. Thus, professionalisation is what Fraser might call an affirmative strategy for improving the fortunes of these hitherto disadvantaged workers. Transformative remedies, by contrast, aim to correct “inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework” (Fraser 1995:82). The next chapter turns to inclusive strategies which do not rely on self-defeating and invidious comparison between professionalisers and those they seek to leave behind. Not surprisingly, these might be thought of as ‘transformative’ strategies.
Chapter 7

The Struggle for Recognition: Solidarity-based Strategies for Work Improvement

The previous chapter showed that market-based strategies remedy many of the problems reported in the literature for those paid household workers whose participation in the industry is mediated by particular institutions. The domestic employment agencies, franchise operation, and capitalist companies I examined in Chapters 4.1.1, 6.2, and 6.3 formalise the transactions in which they are involved, support ‘fair contracting,’ protect against personal mistreatment of workers by householders, and increase pay rates for domestic occupations, albeit to varying extents. This evidence challenges the representation of individual worker ‘resistance’ and/or informal strategies as the primary means of combating householder domination and (simple) exploitation in domestic occupations. This representation, part of the consensus outlined in Chapter 2.1.3, tends to close off avenues for assessing and developing alternative modes of work organisation in the domestic services industry.

Despite their success in mitigating a variety of problems, however, the second order problem of cultural disrespect for domestic labour remained in all case studies: domestic occupations retain a social stigma. Capitalist exploitation also persisted: all institutions discussed in Chapter 4.1.1 and Chapter 6 profited by appropriating surplus labour from domestic workers. Just as importantly, because of statistical discrimination and other barriers to entry, the improvements achieved by these institutions are largely restricted to those who enter the industry under their auspices. Some are relatively inclusive – Corinne’s cleaning company, and many domestic employment agencies offer work to working class women and/or non-English speaking migrants. However, franchises and companies attempting professionalisation tend to exclude these more vulnerable workers.
These findings indicate that formalisation can improve pay and working conditions in the domestic services industry, but at the cost of intra-industry segmentation. Both the individual strategies discussed in the literature (for example, Cohen 1991, Dill 1988, Rollins 1985, Romero 1992) and the market-based institutions analysed in Chapter 6 are limited in their capacity to improve the social and economic status of domestic workers across the industry as a whole.

This chapter explores alternatives to these individualistic (whether personal or market institution-based) approaches, extending my critique of the dominant focus on individual and/or informal resistance, and expanding the ‘repertoire’ of strategies included in the debate about paid household work. Unlike previous chapters, what follows is not based on empirical analysis of the Australian domestic services industry. Instead, I explore the implications for domestic workers of solidarity-based (rather than exclusive) strategies directed at challenging economic insecurity and cultural undervaluation of domestic work in both private households and similar blue collar caring and quasi-domestic work in institutional settings reported by other researchers.

In Chapter 2.1.4 I pointed out that, although highly relevant to debate about remedies to the problems of paid household work, strategies aimed at changing the distribution of work between the market, state, and household, and at removing discriminatory barriers faced by subordinated racial-ethnic groups are not examined within the dominant framework. This chapter explores strategies of this kind, further developing the ‘meso-level’ comparative institutional analysis which is one of my distinctive contributions. My approach contrasts with the approach of most feminist writers on paid household work, who tend to move between micro-level analysis of individual resistance and macro-level invocation of global structures of oppression.

The exploration of solidarity-based strategies has relevance beyond the domestic services industry. First, the economic and cultural undervaluation of ‘women’s work’ is not a problem unique to the domestic services industry – quasi-domestic occupations across the economy are poorly paid and low in status. Thus, whether they enter the industry via the market-oriented institutions discussed in Chapter 6 or through informal networks, most domestic workers find themselves experiencing the same second order economic and cultural problems as a wide range
of other personal and consumer service sector workers (see, for example, Giles and Arat-Koç 1994, Glenn 1992, Macdonald and Sirianni 1996a).

Second, with rapid technological change and economic liberalisation, employment of all types is becoming more precarious, and employment relationships more individualised across the labour market (ACIRRT 1999, Campbell 1997, Mitter 1994:14, World Labour Report 1997-98:175). Thus, the conditions of many employees are converging on those experienced by informal sector workers, including domestic workers in private employment. Organisation and collective action are critical challenges for many workers in the contemporary post-industrial labour market, not just for domestic workers.

Collective strategies devised to improve domestic work, or to respond to the degradation of working conditions in the ‘mainstream’ labour market may be able to learn from each other, and be extended to include occupations on both sides of the formal/informal and consumer/social service divides. It may be that through appropriately organised collective strategies, domestic workers can mobilise additional institutional resources which produce more far-reaching improvements than those I examined in Chapter 6. They may also benefit from struggles to improve the conditions of those doing similar work in institutional settings. Together these strategies may contribute to the democratic recasting of relationships between the household, the state, and the market, as women workers in blue collar caring jobs and domestic workers reshape their own and broader social interpretations of themselves as actors, and of their work.

The next section presents attempts at cooperative organisation by some private domestic workers in the United States. Section 7.2 reports on studies of ‘political’ or ‘social movement’ unionism amongst domestic and quasi-domestic workers in the United States and Sweden. Section 7.3 employs the concept of the ‘ politicisation of needs’ to situate these collective strategies in the evolution of the social division of labour, and women workers’ struggle for recognition. Section 7.4 discusses the limitations of solidarity-based strategies.
7.1 Collective strategies by private domestic workers: Examples from the United States.

In a work unusual in the literature on paid household work, Salzinger (1991) analyses collective strategies by domestic workers to improve their work. Salzinger studied two, quite different cooperatives of immigrant domestic workers in San Francisco: "Amigos" and "Choices." Both were conceived of as alternatives to placement agencies (such as those described in Chapter 6.2.1), to give workers access to a pool of jobs gathered through advertising, but worker controlled, and without the 'middleman's cut.'

A local social service organisation established Amigos for Latin American refugees. The founders saw domestic work as a stop-gap for members, "designed to provide as many refugees as possible with a way to survive until they found other work" (1991:143). Members used the cooperative this way, treating paid household work as a stop-gap job, not a career.' No training was provided by the coop.

Choices was established by feminist organisation, and aimed to create "a collective context where women could support each other in the search of decent, long-term work" (1991:152). Choices members sought – and formed – careers in paid household work, generating for themselves a positive work identity not achieved by Amigos members. Their meetings served "as a context within which workers collectively set standards for themselves and for employers and in so doing redefine[d] their work as dependent on training, and deserving of respect" (1991:149).

Salzinger points out that "women in both groups ended up doing this work for essentially the same reason: because it is the best of a limited set of options" (1991:150). However, the cooperatives' different aims, and associated strategies and modus operandi, produced different outcomes for the two groups of workers they formed. These differences appeared to coincide with a bifurcation on the demand side of the market between households requiring cheap services (and which hired Amigos workers), and those purchasing the more costly "professional" services offered by "Choices." Thus, Amigos operated like an agency, to do little more than support fair contracting -- although in the low-paying market segment concerned, and for this group of workers, this was an important achievement. By contrast, Choices

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1. Salzinger's usage of "stop-gap" coincides with my Chapter 5.2.3 category 'filler.' She uses "career" the same way as I do in Chapter 5.2.4.
functioned more like the professionalising housekeeping companies described in Chapter 6.3, as members used "a white middle class rhetoric" of training, skill, and expertise in its marketing and placement activities (1991:153).

At first sight, these two organisations may not appear to offer anything more than the market-based institutions described – and criticised – in Chapter 6. "Amigos," for example, sets standards on pay only, and apart from this simply offered a pool of jobs. Salzinger describes Choices as engaging in a "professionalization project" (1991:153): is this not just another attempt to 'hive off' good work by exclusion?

In both cases, worker 'ownership' and control of the institutions is an advance for workers, both financially and morally, on the for-profit agencies and companies discussed in Chapter 6. Although wages are still 'set' by competition in the market(s) for domestic services, workers are not exploited by the mediating institutions they have established. It is also particularly significant that Choices members are finding "quality" jobs in the "top tier" (1991:154) of the market. Salzinger argues convincingly that we need to think about the relationship between supply and demand in a dynamic way:

If the market for skilled workers already existed, a collective effort of this sort would not be necessary; workers could simply get training on an individual basis. Clearly, Choices is not creating this demand on its own. But just as clearly, the market for skilled domestic workers is not an outgrowth of unmediated demographic shifts. Rather, the co-op has joined a host of contemporary entrepreneurs already attempting to create a demand for professionalized personal services among the new middle class. Co-operative members are responding to the market and to the structure of constraints and opportunities they encounter within it; but as a collectivity, they are also part of redefining the market and thus expanding the range of possibilities they face. They are not only individuals lucky enough to have entered a context in which professionalization is possible; they are also members of a group that is part of the collective construction of that new structure of opportunity.

The Choices cooperative is remarkable because it is breaking down the ethnic coding of the two-tiered market for domestic services in San Francisco which associates women from racial-ethnic minorities with the lower tier. Latina women, by their collective efforts, are moving into that part of the market being created/occupied by "Young white middle-class women [who] hand advertising posters in trendy
restaurants implying they are just like employers and so can "make your home feel like a home" (1991:152). Thus, Choices' strategy and success counteracts the tendency for professionalisation to be also a process of racial-ethnic segmentation.

The composition of demand for workers in the 'lower tier' of the market is also significant. Although Amigos has been successful in finding work for refugees, and ensuring they receive the going rate of pay, Salzinger argues that "there is no reason to struggle over the social construction of work when employers couldn't pay more for it even if they agreed it was worth more" (1991:153). That would seem an end to collective opportunities for job improvement in this tier by professionalisation or other means. However, Salzinger describes the demand side of the 'lower tier' of the market as consisting of two primary groups: (1) working mothers, either "working-class and lower-middle-class women ... in low paying service jobs themselves," or "professional women raising children alone," needing childcare, and (2) elderly people living on fixed incomes needing housekeeping services. Salzinger does not employ this distinction, but both kinds of demand can be credibly thought of as demand for social, not consumer services. I consider the options for organising and work improvement this might present in section 7.3

7.2 'Social movement' unionism: Examples from the United States and Sweden

Partly because of trade union indifference, and partly because of the prevalence of individualised arrangements in private household employment, historical attempts at unionising domestic workers in Western countries have had limited success.\(^2\) However, union strategy and composition, the organisation of paid household work, and the occupational and industrial structures of the labour market are all changing in ways which may mean that future attempts to unionise domestic workers may be more successful. Unionisation has potentially far-reaching implications for the economic and social status of domestic workers. It is a larger scale form of collective organisation than the worker cooperative, and through links with other unions, a union of domestic workers could participate in the collective pursuit of the reevaluation of 'women's work.'

Changes in some unions' strategy and composition have been particularly important. Labour strategists around the world are recognising that to reverse

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2. See Appendix E.1.2, Box E.1 on Australia, Van Raaphorst (1988) on the United States. However, in poor countries, unions of domestic workers are more successful: see contributions to Chaney and Castro (1989) and Martens and Mitter (1994).
declining rates of unionism and widening income disparities, unions need to operate as a "movement" rather than "just another interest group" (Costello and Miller 1997:12).³ Capasin and Yates elaborate (for an American audience):

a reborn labor movement must be absolutely committed to racial and gender equality. This, in turn, means more than opportunistically organizing women and minority workers. It means a commitment to an end to women’s "double day," real opposition to racism and sexism within unions, relentless antagonism to the dismantling of the welfare state, and a demand for the end of the vicious structure of racial oppression which permeates this country (1997:59).

The idea, practice, and self-definition of participants in some organisations also challenge the definition of ‘union’ as well as its role and functions. Unions are usually state registered and sanctioned, and many worker organisations coming under the description of social movement unionism do not fit this legal definition. These developments are challenging both the organisational and ideological boundaries between social movements and more ‘institutionalised’ collective actors like established labour unions.

Interestingly, social movement unionism appears to be strongest amongst workers and unions in industries involving low-paid, low-skilled ‘women’s work,’ often quasi-domestic work in non-domestic settings. This section presents three thumbnail sketches of innovative worker organisation amongst private domestic workers, commercial building cleaners, nursing home workers, home care workers and others.

7.2.1 The Domestic Workers Association

Hondagneu-Sotelo⁴ and Riegos (1997) analyse a quasi-union collectivity of domestic workers in Los Angeles, called the Domestic Workers Association [DWA]. The Domestic Workers Association was established in 1990 under the auspices of an umbrella group of immigrant and civil rights organisations. It “began as an outreach and advocacy campaign, with the idea of arming live-ins, the most isolated and exploited workers in the industry, with worker rights information and legal

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3. This new strategic development has been called “social movement unionism” (Bonacich 1998, Waterman 1993), “the new political unionism” (Higgins 1996) and “community unionism” (McManus 1997).

4. In another important contribution to the small literature ‘outside’ the dominant view, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) also documents how informal collectivities amongst Latina domestic workers introduce a form of ‘regulation’ to the domestic services industry.
resources" (1997:64). The DWA evolved into a formal organisation "by and for domestic workers" (1997:66), which works "to upgrade and transform the domestic work occupation" for members and other domestic workers (1997:68):

This may include short-term concrete improvements, such as advising a house cleaner on how to get her job application fee back from an unscrupulous domestic employment agency, or advising a live-in on how to negotiate scaling down her work schedule from six to five days; it also includes long-term, less tangible issues such as struggling to establish dignity and respect on the job (1997:68).

These objectives and strategies aim to remedy both first and second order economic and cultural problems of domestic workers.

To achieve these objectives the members need to develop a work identity and culture, to secure "shared standards of what is just and what is unjust in the occupation" (1997:74). Friendship networks and social gatherings drawing on "Women's propensity to develop collective and relational group dynamics" (1997:73) complement formal meetings to provide means for "forging a stronger identity of themselves as empowered domestic workers" (1997:74).

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos place the DWA on a continuum of institutional structures organising domestic workers, with "domestic worker job cooperatives that provide jobs as a service at one end" — clearly Salzinger's case study Amigos fits here — "and home care workers negotiating collective bargaining agreements at the other end" (1997:70). In addition to its worker training activities, recent DWA activities "have included more collectively-oriented efforts, such as participating in public, pro-immigrant rights, anti-racist demonstrations, organising fund-raisers, or engaging in direct actions aimed at domestic employment agencies" (1997:68). This, along with its origins in a civil rights organisation, places the DWA squarely within the paradigm of social movement unionism.

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos (the latter worked as an organiser for the DWA) draw two conclusions from their work. First, they are optimistic about the future fortunes of paid household workers. Organising domestic workers involves some particular challenges — they emphasise the "spatial isolation and atomization of individual employers, employees and their workplaces" (1997:56). In addition, collective worker action by domestic workers cannot be directed at single employers. This differentiates private household workers' strategic options from those of most other workers. American domestic workers' options are further limited by their
explicit and express exclusion from the legal right to organise, and to pursue collective bargaining under the National Labor Relations Act (1997:62).  

However, although isolated, the work is “spatially anchored,” and so protected from the downward pressures on wages and conditions exacted by footloose manufacturing capital. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos refute the argument that “a seemingly constant supply of labor provided by new Latina immigrant workers undercuts occupational upgrading and organising efforts” (1997:74) by pointing to the successful growth of the DWA, and the expectation that demand for domestic labour services will continue to expand. Second, they argue that groups like the DWA, as they “combine expressive or cultural events with self-help seminars and consciousness-raising, along with direct actions and advocacy” may “hint at the blueprint for unions of the future” (1997:76).

Both Salzinger (1991), and Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos (1997) analyse organisations established under the umbrella of immigrant welfare organisations. At first sight, these organisations and strategies may seem ‘exclusive’ in their focus on immigrant workers, in some way analogous to the professionalisers I discussed in Chapter 6.3. However, these organisations raise the floor rather than divide the market, by improving working conditions for the otherwise most disadvantaged participants. Nevertheless, as I argue in section 7.4, their origins in welfare organisations may have implications for the reach of this kind of strategy.

7.2.2 The Service Employees International Union

Since the mid-1980s, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), has emerged “at the forefront of labor’s new direction” in the United States (Fine and Locke 1996:16). John Sweeney, elected as its leader in 1980, transformed the organisation (Waldinger et al 1997:39), and went on to take the top job at the AFL-CIO in 1995. Two campaigns stand out in the SEIU’s recent history – the Justice for Janitors (J4J) campaign of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the current Dignity, Rights and Respect campaign to organise nursing home workers.  

Janitors, called cleaners in Australia, attend to the commercial buildings of American cities. The demographic characteristics of the American janitorial workforce

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5. As are those in Australia, see Appendix E.1.2.
are very similar to that of the private domestic workforce, and janitors perform similar tasks to paid household workers, but as a commercial service for capitalist employers. In a hostile environment, the SEIU Local 399 in Los Angeles combined in its Justice for Janitors campaign “cutting edge industry analysis with effective tactics such as civil disobedience, direct action, government regulatory pressure and community coalitions” (Fine and Locke 1996:18). The J4J campaign “successfully re-organized the building services industry, bringing more than eighty thousand largely immigrant workers under a union contract” (Waldinger et al 1997:37), and thereby markedly improving workers’ pay and working conditions. This achievement stands against the expectation that the now predominantly Mexican and Central American migrant workforce

employed in low-skilled, low-paying manufacturing and service jobs ... would be extremely docile: as long as the newcomers compared a minimum-wage job in the garment center to an unyielding plot of land in Mexico’s central plateau, [so] employers could count on their workers’ quiescence (Waldinger et al 1997:37)

The J4J success in Los Angeles “fuelled similar campaigns elsewhere by janitors and other service workers” (Fine and Locke 1997:19), of which the current Dignity, Rights and Respect campaign is an example. SEIU-provided information about the campaign describes a “multifaceted approach” aimed at improving both worker wages and conditions and the quality of care in the rapidly growing American nursing home industry. The campaign is specifically targeted at Certified Nurses Aides, who receive less than two weeks training to prepare them for their work of feeding, dressing, and monitoring the health of nursing home residents. These workers receive mean hourly wages of US$7.72, compared to the US$7.19 received by crossing guards, US$8.99 by telemarketers and US$11.80 by parking enforcement officers (McDonald and Muller 1998:11-12).

7. For example, Wial reports similar achievements for hotel and restaurant workers by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (cited in Wever 1997:459).
8. Material on the SEIU’s internet site lists the following elements in the campaign’s multifaceted approach: “organizing targeted nursing home corporations on a mass scale; developing leadership and advocacy skills in nursing home workers; lobbying state legislatures for increased staffing levels and reimbursement rates; coordinating bargaining and organizing efforts among local unions; negotiating patient care contracts to address quality of care concerns; researching and distributing patient care deficiency reports; negotiating increased wages, benefits and pensions to curtail staff turnover; working in coalition with nursing home reform advocates; and waging shareholder proxy fights on quality of care issues” (SEIU, http://www.sieiu.org/dignity/aboutdig.html) Although this material is not dated, research reports supporting the campaign carry 1998 dates.
Critical to the SEIU's nation wide strategy is their identification of a shared interest between workers and nursing home residents for funding and employment practices adequate to maintain quality of care. With these kinds of campaigns, the SEIU has "united disparate groups of workers around a 'moral vision' of social and economic justice" (Voos 1997:297), using the avowedly moral language of dignity, rights and respect for both service workers and those to whom they provide services, as well as innovative organising strategies. In so doing, the SEIU is explicitly challenging the undervaluation and low status of quasi-domestic social service work in non-domestic settings.

7.2.3 Kommunal: Feminist unionism in Sweden

Since the 1980s, Kommunal (the Svenska Kommunalarbetareförbundet, or Swedish Municipal Workers' Union), a union of predominantly blue collar, female service workers has improved members' pay and working conditions by organising and engaging them in a comprehensive program of work life reform. In so doing, Kommunal

has imbued unionism with a new moral depth that goes to the core of current citizenship issues in Western Society, and by so doing has taken the political lead in the Swedish union movement, not least around the institutionalized strategies for work life reform (Higgins 1996:167, see also Curtin and Higgins 1998)

Operating within the framework provided by the values and institutions of Swedish social democracy, Kommunal has, at the same time, challenged the 'Swedish gender model' in which women continue to be subordinated. The union did so in a context of a resurgence of the women's movement on one hand, and an economic liberal revival on the other (Higgins 1996:175-6). It has worked to develop a "new women-friendly organizational culture" (1996:177) and a "comprehensive alternative to the traditional [economic liberal] rationalizers' reactive and one-off quick fixes" in welfare service delivery and labour management strategy (1996:184).

9. In Sweden, municipalities or counties are responsible for the provision of most labour intensive welfare services such as childcare, institutional and home care of the aged and disabled, hospitals and medical services, and schools. Most of the non-professional workers in these services, many of whom provide domestic and caring services, are organised by Kommunal (Higgins 1996:169).

10. Higgins (1996), and Curtin and Higgins (1998) describe in detail how the ostensibly gender-neutral model of Swedish social development and social organisation perpetuated the subordination of women in "a society that has become the byword for modern and democratic progress" (Curtin and Higgins 1998:69).
Kommunal aims to defend and renew the welfare state, in the interest of both workers and service users. It employs "forms of organization that are traditional to popular movements – above all the networking of the women's movement and the study circles of the union movement" (Higgins 1996:186) – to generate a democratic model of welfare reform which mobilises and empowers the worker collective (1996:181). By "opening up the 'silent knowledge' of the worker collectivity as to how and where quality and financial gains can be won" (1996:183), it has both improved services and given rise to "a more rewarding and less hazardous working environment" (1996:181).

In wage negotiations, Kommunal has developed a three-pronged, gender specific approach – earmarked supplements to women’s wages (kvinopotte) instead of reliance on traditional mechanisms aimed at low wage categories in general; a concentration on women’s job enrichment based on up-graded skills, on-the-job training and increased responsibility; and work evaluation to challenge the implicit male norm in gendered wage differentials (Higgins 1996:189).

They have succeeded in accelerating women’s wage rises relative to men's (1996:192), and in distilling "a fairer and more rational basis for comparative wage rates" (1996:190). Their achievements have "typified and intensified" the feminisation of Sweden’s blue collar union confederation, the LO (1996:177). Higgins writes that Kommunal is just one union and represents the least empowered and lowest paid corps of workers on the Swedish labour market. Yet its size [665,000 members in a country with a total population of 8.5 million (Higgins 1998:1)] and new political profile make it impossible to ignore...[Kommunal] is unique in having given institutional form to a strategy that makes organized labour the driving force rather than the passive object of work life reform (1996:192-3).

In so doing, Kommunal is remedying the systematic undervaluing of women’s caring and domestic work in private household settings (home care workers) and non-domestic settings, and engendering recognition of women's unpaid caring and domestic skills and responsibilities.
7.3 The politicisation of needs and the struggle for recognition

Although differing in form, compass, and context, “Choices,” the Domestic Workers Association, the Service Employees International Union, and Kommunal all aim to redefine the meaning of work, and being a worker, for those hired to clean and to provide basic personal care for others. If and where successful, these strategies remedy second order economic and cultural injustices that market-based strategies cannot, in inclusive ways.

Each mini-case study points to a strategy, achievement or possibility with important implications for paid household workers in Australia and elsewhere. As I noted above, Choices has challenged racial-ethnic segmentation in the private domestic labour market, taking women from subordinated racial-ethnic groups into the upper or professionalised tier of the domestic labour force. The DWA has overcome some barriers to organising domestic workers traditionally considered virtually insurmountable, and raised the floor on wages and working conditions for the most vulnerable. Both Choices and the DWA undertook a form of ‘consciousness raising’ focussed on developing workers’ sense of identity as workers, and skilled workers at that, and so deserving of fair treatment and respect. With this consciousness raising and the modicum of ‘industrial muscle’ afforded by collective strategy and action, these organisations are succeeding in improving conditions for their workers in the domestic services industry, and in reforming householders’ expectations of their workers, and their relationships to them. The SEIU is mobilising both previously unorganised workers, and a new moral discourse to contest the economic and cultural undervaluation of quasi-domestic and caring work. Kommunal’s workers already have much of what SEIU workers seek, and are building on this to democratise working life and to extend the union’s achievements to support the claims of other workers across the economy, notably women, through their role in the labour movement’s peak organisation.

Both Choices and the DWA organise workers providing domestic labour services to householders as consumer services, whereas the SEIU and Kommunal organise social service providers many of whom work in institutional settings. Moreover, the SEIU and Kommunal do so ‘inside’ the systems of industrial relations in the United States and Sweden respectively, and encompass, potentially (SEIU) and actually (Kommunal) industry wide-work forces, because the workers they organise are employed by formal sector institutions such as nursing homes and municipal
governments. So what can their achievements offer private household workers and their organisations which remain excluded from access to mainstream institutions of industrial relations? The answer to this question begins with an interrogation of the distinction between social and consumer services, which rests on/aligns with distinctions between need and want, and between welfare state-funded replacements for household reproductive activity and market-purchased housework replacements which free up leisure time.

So far, although I argued in Chapter 1.2.1 that paid household work does not fit neatly into either 'social' or 'consumer' categories, I have treated the distinction between these categories as relatively clear and stable. However, understanding the implications of strategies like those of the SEIU and Kommunal for the working lives of those I have categorised so far as private household or consumer service workers requires a dynamic approach to thinking about the relationship between social and consumer services, and to the organisation and evolution of labour markets. Recall that Salzinger (1991) argued that the success of Amigos in raising wages and working conditions was constrained on the demand side by the relative poverty of aged, or working class or single parent householders whose call for services rested on what looks very much like need (section 7.1). In Sweden, comparable householders would avail themselves of heavily subsidised services provided by Kommunal members employed by municipal governments.

Thus, what are understood to be consumer services in the United States are provided as social services in Sweden. This comparison is an example of how differences in political-economic frameworks between nations results in international variations in occupational structures, and in the division of activity between household self-servicing, market co-ordinated, and socialised or public provision of goods and services (Esping-Andersen 1993, see also Chapter 5.1.2 above). Clearly, different national political-economic institutional frameworks understand, recognise and respond to different 'needs,' with repercussions for the sectoral composition as well as the reward and opportunity structures of the labour market.

These issues have been insightfully theorised by Nancy Fraser in terms of "the politics of need interpretation" (1989:144). Fraser highlights 1) how political-economic institutional frameworks involve "tacit norms and implicit assumptions" which shape and constrain their operation, and 2) that the norms and assumptions underpinning social policy and practice are contextual, and publicly contested or politicised. Social
movements can contest existing or hegemonic meanings by articulating new claims for needs satisfaction: "needs that have broken out of the domestic and/or official economic spheres that earlier contained them as "private matters"" (1989:156). Successful challenges to hegemonic meanings can underpin institutional reform, and changes in the division of labour between market, state and community-based provision, or household self-servicing.

When domestic workers in private households and those performing similar work in institutional contexts seek respect, and recognition for their work and their identity as workers, their struggle for recognition can be understood as engaging in the politics of needs formation. They contest hegemonic understandings of women as non-workers, and of domestic work as non-work. They contest the associated assumptions that 1) domestic and caring work will generally be performed on an unpaid basis, which contributes to the ambiguous status of paid household work in the social division of labour, and 2) the skills required for this work are natural attributes of women. Their struggle embodies needs claims: women need stable and independent income compatible with their family role choices. These family role choices must be real. Real choice presupposes 1) income security for parents choosing to limit their labour market participation while their children are young, and 2) the availability of worthwhile employment opportunities, and appropriate and high quality child and aged care replacement services for those choosing to participate in the labour market. Much socialised and commodified child and aged care remains women's work: these jobs need to be transformed into well-paid jobs involving democratic employer-worker-consumer relations, high quality service, and opportunities for occupational mobility.

Fraser argues that needs claims "tend to be nested, connected to one another in ramified chains of "in-order-to" relations" (1989:163). Clearly, women's needs as workers are linked to a range of other claims about the work itself, and its pay, organisation and conditions, as well as claims for enabling services which, by virtue of their role in supporting women's need for full economic and social participation, become redefined as necessary social services rather than discretionary consumer services.

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11. By full economic and social participation, I do not necessarily mean 'full-time labour market participation.'
Increased availability of socialised caring and, where necessary, other domestic tasks, would benefit many domestic workers, and those of their clients currently relying on low-paid 'private' domestic workers to satisfy their needs. In addition, evidence suggests that there is considerable overlap between the gender, life-course stage, and racial-ethnic characteristics of the workforces at 'blue collar' end of caring and quasi-domestic service provision in the welfare state, and in private consumer domestic service provision. These overlapping roles (worker and consumer) and workforces (private household workers and social service providers) are encompassed in the broad, 'social movement' ideals and practices of the DWA, the SEIU, and Kommunal described in sections 7.1 and 7.2. They also point to the importance of understanding - and organising to change - domestic workers' situation at the level of the 'labour market segment.' It is also important to understand the interactions of coexistent institutions providing domestic, quasi-domestic and caring services (for example: informal markets, co-ops, businesses, the family, the state, the non-profit or 'community' sector), which have a range of different organising logics or bases of service provision (for example: profit, reciprocity, citizens' rights).

Chapter 6 showed that there tends to be internal segmentation where attempts to improve paid household work are undertaken primarily by professionalising private sector institutions (capitalist firms and franchises) seeking to differentiate their services from those provided by workers entering the market via 'lower level' institutions (open market and informal networks). However, if and where successful, the solidarity-based strategies of institutions discussed in this chapter are likely to influence the internal structure of the domestic services industry, and worker mobility between the industry and others differently. At the 'bottom end' of the continuum solidarity-based strategies can raise the floor, so that the most vulnerable have their conditions of work improved. At the other end, workers perform quasi-domestic labour in public sector or publicly subsidised employment. These workers, previously outside the bounds of this study, are important because their successes 1) might provide more attractive alternative employment opportunities, and potential access to the 'mainstream' occupational structure for those currently working as private domestic workers, 2) by challenging the undervaluation of caring and quasi-domestic labour in institutional social service settings, bolster claims for recognition by domestic workers doing identical tasks in private household settings. Of course, the 'mainstream occupational structure' itself must be open, and appropriate skill
recognition and training opportunities available to assist workers achieve occupational mobility as they acquire skills and institutional knowledge.

*If social service provision were to be expanded to fulfil emerging needs,* on terms such as those achieved by Kommunal’s members, many women workers’ lives would be transformed. ‘Inside’ the domestic services industry, workers who previously provided low paid caring and housekeeping services to the elderly, and to poor working parents would become recognised social service providers, as the meaning and organisation of their work shifted from ‘consumer’ to ‘social’ services. Mobility between private consumer service provision and public sector social service provision might increase, again giving domestic workers greater access to the mainstream occupational structure. As some demand for ‘consumer services’ is transformed into the fulfilment of needs for social services, the private consumer service segment of the market might shrink to include only those able to afford domestic workers who now have viable and relatively attractive alternative employment options.

Solidarity-based strategies challenge market norms in an inclusive way. Grass roots organisations like Choices, Amigos, and the Domestic Workers Association have done so primarily by collectively confronting racial-ethnically based intra-industry segmentation. ‘Large scale’ strategies like those of like those of the SEIU and Kommunal seek to ‘open up’ the occupational structure and to promote recognition of both citizens’ needs for social services and workers’ needs for quality employment. In so doing, such strategies aim to redistribute work between the market, state, and household in ways which do not rely on the existence/creation of a servant underclass, and which tackle discriminatory barriers faced by subordinated racial-ethnic groups. These strategies’ aims are ‘transformative’ in Fraser’s (1995) sense – they seek to change the underlying generative framework of gender, class, and racial-ethnic inequity.

However, the transformative ‘struggle for recognition’ is undermined if it collapses into a largely *economic* project, concerned with recognition in the form of higher wages for ‘women’s jobs’ in the service sector, and/or the wholesale transfer of child and aged care to state-sponsored social servicing institutions, however well paid their workers. Organisation, formalisation and the pursuit of ‘skill recognition’ are critical strategies at present, remedying as they do the pressing current problems of domestic and other workers. But Himmelweit (1995) has argued convincingly that
feminist pursuit of the recognition of housework as work by modeling its conception on capitalist wage labour has had the perverse effect of diminishing the importance of caring and self-fulfilling activities in the home, and of women's distinctive contributions to domestic and social life. Thus, if it is to succeed, the struggle for recognition by women workers must challenge the very definitions of 'worker' and 'work' as they seek to claim them as descriptions of themselves and what they do.

7.4 Collective action in context: Constraints on solidarity-based work transformation

In the second part of section 7.3, the reader will have noticed a move from analytic to speculative assessment of the strategies outlined in section 7.2. That is, I moved from an examination of the aims and achievements of the strategies to conjecture about the implications for domestic workers and women workers more generally of their widespread take-up and success. The developments canvassed in the second part of section 7.3 require profound social change not yet achieved by solidarity-based strategies for work life reform, although Kommunal's efforts in Sweden are inspiring.

This section examines factors constraining the potential for success, expansion and/or replication of various solidarity-based strategies in Australia and elsewhere. Drawing on some theoretical work on social movements (Melucci 1995, Zald and McCarthy 1987), it starts by recognising that each strategy outlined in sections 7.1 and 7.2 is pursued by a particular group of actors constructed within a particular range of resources, opportunities, and constraints, and working towards particular ends.

The Californian grass roots organisations examined in sections 7.1 and 7.2.1 each had origins in social service organisations' attempts to help migrants to find (paid domestic) work and/or to improve conditions in their existing jobs (Salzinger 1991:143, 145, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos 1997:64). These origins are significant when considering the potential reach and effectiveness of Choices, Amigos and the DWA. The welfare organisations provided what Zald and McCarthy (1987:69) call "infrastructural bases" for "grass-roots mobilization": that is, they provide the "preexisting structures of organization and communication that characterize cohesive, ongoing, face to face groups" (1987:70). In addition, although the migrant members of these organisations came from many countries and diverse social backgrounds (Salzinger 1991:143, 145, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos 1997:66), they are, in their
Californian context, united by their identity as ‘Latinas.’\textsuperscript{12} This kind of unifying cultural identification is likely to be a crucial prerequisite for the subsequent development of worker identity through collective (inter)action that the strategies aim for.\textsuperscript{13}

However, despite their manifest achievements, their origins in pre-existing organisations and in ethnic rather than worker identity may limit the scope of these organisations, given the characteristics of the industry. First, as Hondagneu-Sotelo and Riegos (1997:61) recognise, “[t]here is no shared work place and no readily identifiable zone of employment, such as “the garment district” or “the Alameda corridor” for organizers to target.” Second, creation of worker identity is an objective of strategic action in the domestic services industry, whereas in ‘mainstream’ industries, mutual recognition as workers is closer to the starting point of collective identification. If, as evidence suggests, many domestic workers are incompletely proletarianised\textsuperscript{14} (see Chapter 5, sections 5.2.3, and 5.3.4, also Romero 1992:42), those without contact with a potential institutional base, and without a pre-constructed

\textsuperscript{12} I do not mean to imply here that racial-ethnic identity is some kind of essential, ‘given,’ unifying property of the participants in these organisations. Using Melucci’s (1995) account of “the process of collective identity,” their ethnic identity can be understood as constructed by the participants in response to their social environment, which includes constructions of and responses to them by the state, the mainstream culture, and so on. As Melucci (1995:48) argues “There must by at least a minimal degree of reciprocity in social recognition between the actors (movement, authorities, other movements, third parties) even if it takes the form of a denial, a challenge, or an opposition (“We are for You the You that You are for Us”).”

\textsuperscript{13} Such a prerequisite is not universal. An Indian ‘social movement union’ called the Self-employed Women’s Association (SEWA) also has as a primary aim to assist women workers in the informal sector to construct worker identity as a necessary step towards economic and social security. In its context, SEWA cannot rely on extra-economic bases of collective identification (say, religion or race-ethnicity) – indeed these forms of collective identity are barriers SEWA must overcome. So how does the union come into contact with potential members? In India, the division between domestic and (paid) working life is much less well-developed than in Western countries like the United States and Australia. Even though female informal sector workers may be invisible – even to themselves – as ‘workers,’ they are everywhere: on the streets, working out the front of their houses in crowded living settlements in the cities, travelling together on early morning buses or trains. SEWA organisers can easily find prospective recruits, so the first hurdle of workers’ spatial isolation faced by those attempting to organise domestic workers in the West does not arise. Once found, SEWA can make concrete offers to recruits of services and institutional resources otherwise unavailable: cheap loans to get them out of the cycle of debt with usurious money-lenders, access to trade coops to side-step mendacious middlemen, and so on. Then the process of worker identity construction can begin (personal communication with Elizabeth Hill, Department of Economics, University of Sydney; see also Hill (1998), and contributions to Martens and Mitter (1994)).

\textsuperscript{14} Domestíc workers are often incompletely proletarianised in two senses: first, they may not rely on labour market income alone for economic and social security, and second, they may not understand themselves to be ‘workers.’
basis of collective identification (such as 'Latina' or even 'immigrant') may remain outside the compass of grass roots attempts to organise domestic workers.

Indeed, some domestic workers – illegal immigrants are an obvious example here – may see the ability to 'hide' in private domestic employment to be a particular benefit of paid household work, and believe that organisation and/or increased formalisation might threaten their access to work and income. These workers are making 'desperate exchanges' (see Radin 1996:48, 124), but if they act on their desperation by undercutting market norms, they could hinder attempts by organised workers to use industrial power to reform the industry.

In addition to these potential problems for recruiting and organising, community-based strategies like the DWA and, even more so, coops like Amigos and Choices are small scale operations relying on the personal resources and identifications of members and key organisers. In Western countries like Australia and the United States, such organisations are hampered by their exclusion from mainstream institutions of labour relations and social service provision, access to which is required to inaugurate the kinds of social change outlined in section 7.3. Without formalisation and integration into 'mainstream' social, economic, and political institutions, efforts and achievements are likely to remain local.

Melucci (1995:53) points out that "contemporary forms of collective action [are] multiple and variable. They lie at several different levels of the social system." One way grassroots organisations can overcome their scope and scale limitations is by forging strategic alliances with organisations like registered labour unions that are more fully incorporated into the 'system.' Indeed, links between grassroots worker organisations and formal labour/state institutions are crucial to workers' successfully renegotiation of both their individual and collective identities. Unions like the SEIU and Kommunal negotiate directly with the state over both workers' and consumers' needs, and so are at the forefront of the struggle over needs in their respective societies.

Unions (and their constituencies) can also benefit from alliances with grassroots organisations. Integration of grassroots organisations into the mainstream provides an institutional base for the best aspects of grassroots organisations to challenge old ways of doing things, and deliver a more democratic, inclusive alternative which
improves the lot of all workers.15 Unions can also benefit from the access to workers outside mainstream employment structures alliances with grassroots organisations give them (Mitter 1994:14, Wever 1997:459). The potential for mutual interest in such alliances makes them seem ideal.

However, in very different ways, the potential of unions like the SEIU and Kommunal to benefit domestic workers is also contextually shaped and constrained. By American and Australian standards, Sweden’s Kommunal has been spectacularly successful, and stands as an example of the labour movement’s capacity to engage in the politics of need formation. But this success has unique roots in the extent and endurance of this small country’s welfare state, derived in turn from strength of social democratic traditions, and the densely organised fabric of Swedish society (Curtin and Higgins 1998, Higgins 1996). It is unlikely that the scale and scope of its successes could be replicated in the English-speaking world any time soon, or that there are many domestic workers requiring its sponsorship in Sweden.

The SEIU and other service worker unions in the US have also had some notable successes, including the organisation of 75,000 home care workers in Los Angeles in 1999 (Los Angeles Times, February 26 1999). But these achievements are geographically localised (Wever 1997), and, at the risk of understatement, start from a low base. In its strategic focus on the publicly-subsidised nursing home sector, the Dignity, Rights and Respect campaign builds on achievements in a new way, but this campaign is just beginning. American unions operate in a hostile environment: union busting is big business, and labour law notoriously supports managerial prerogative. As Dorothy Sue Cobble points out (1996: 351-353), significant changes to public policy governing labour relations are required to support the “postindustrial unionism(s)” that meet the needs of service sector workers. Sympathetic observers are at worst sceptical and at best encouraged but cautious about the transformative capacities of the re-emerging labour movement in the US (see for example Bonacich 1998, Gapasin and Yates 1997, Hacker 1999, and Meiksins 1997).

In Australia, innovative attempts at unionising women in the relatively unorganised community services and hotel industries have begun, with modest, but creditable gains (McManus 1997, Reilly 1998). However, the Australian union movement as a whole has been slow to take up ‘social movement’ language and

15. My thinking on these issues benefited much from discussions with Elizabeth Hill, Department of Economics, University of Sydney.
strategy. Mendes (1998) explains this by reference to its tradition of labourism: a focus on securing the wages and working conditions of male workers. To be sure, in recent years, Mendes argues, "the union movement has devoted considerable time to formulating its social welfare policies." But there appears to be a significant "gap between formulation and implementation" (Mendes 1998:115). Since the election in 1996 of a conservative Coalition federal government, unions have not had the access to policy-making fora they enjoyed under the Labor government for more than a decade. In addition, the Coalition government's 'workplace' relations reform agenda is writing unions out of their former primary role in industrial relations, as well as degrading workers' rights across the board. In this context, innovative organising strategies by Australian unions face a newly hostile environment in their pursuit of industrial and social reform.

Finally, the issue of second order exploitation remains like a shadow over both my analysis and the labour market. Most of the institutions and strategies discussed so far involve the obviation of exploitation because they supercede capitalist forms of organisation 1) in the form of worker cooperatives of consumer service providers or 2) as socialised service provision sponsored by the state. Nevertheless, they operate in the context in which the capital-labour relationship is normative in the field of employment relations, and for-profit production is normative in the field of social provisioning. This clearly poses significant constraints on the extent and shape of state sponsorship of alternative rationales for the determination of wages, working conditions, and the distribution of labour market opportunities; and of social service provision. However, comparing Sweden, the United States and Australia through the lens of the politics of needs formation shows that there can be considerable room for manoeuvre.

7.5 Conclusions

I have established that organising domestic workers and formalising paid household work remedy many problems common in domestic occupations. The second part of section 7.3 points to additional sites of potential collective intervention for work life reform which would impact on both domestic workers and other workers in contingent employment, particularly women in low-paid service work.

Although section 7.4 emphasises barriers to the success of solidarity-based strategies for work life reform in the domestic services industry, there is room for
cautious optimism. Through the development of a 'meso-level' analysis, several potential points for collective intervention emerge between individual resistance and waiting for the wholesale overthrow of oppressive structures.

Interventions include developing alternative economic infrastructures like cooperatives, as well as working for reform in existing collective and state-based institutions. Appropriate sites of intervention include institutions charged with forming and recognising skills; income support and social service provision to facilitate full social participation by women; and the framework regulating work. International studies (for example, Bakan and Stasiulis 1995, Colen 1990, Macklin 1992, Tan and Devasahayam 1987) point to the need for change in citizenship and immigration practices in many countries to remedy the particular vulnerability experienced by non-citizen domestic workers. Worker protection laws and regulations should extend to include all resident workers in a country regardless of immigration and citizenship status.

The next chapter returns to critically evaluate the set of propositions underlying much feminist analysis of the domestic services industry, in the light of the insights of Chapters 3-7.
Chapter 8

The Consensus Criticised

In Chapter 2, I reviewed feminist writing on paid household work by drawing out shared views on three main themes: that 1) paid household work or ‘domestic service’ is a unique, and uniquely exploitative occupation, principally because of the nature of the domestic employment relationship; 2) ‘domestic service’ reproduces structures of race, gender, and class domination; and 3) domestic workers resist domination.

This chapter returns to the dominant framework, to explore the concepts and methods that produced it. Although not universal, there are conceptual and methodological problems in much feminist writing on paid household work. Sometimes these problems are difficult to pinpoint and articulate – many subsist in patterns of emphasis, in omissions, and in incongruities between general arguments and evidence presented. However, the problems identified in this chapter are widespread enough to warrant discussion as a ‘general’ concern. They constrain understanding of how the domestic services industry works and affect analysis of paid household work in ways counterproductive to the achievement of stated goals of work life improvement.

Returning to the consensus at this stage in the thesis grounds my criticisms in new evidence and an investigation of alternative strategies, rather than theoretical argument alone. It is particularly important to identify how the prevailing view has been produced through shared assumptions and theoretical and methodological approaches that have worked to close down the exploration of either market- or solidarity-based strategies for change such as those discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Problems arise from two interdependent sources. One is tension between the objectives of exposing oppression and overcoming it. I argued in Chapter 2 that the
emergence of paid household work as an object of social scientific research is partly motivated by the (moral and political) aim of exposing the oppression of women from subordinated racial-ethnic groups. Certainly, oppression needs to be identified and understood in order for action to be taken for change. However, exposing oppression requires emphasising problems, whereas overcoming it requires the search for solutions. These different objectives can result in quite differently constructed analyses, with divergent implications for action.

A second, and underlying source of problems is the way oppression is theorised, in particular, the relationship between ‘grand theoretical’ arguments about oppressive structures, and reports of people’s everyday experiences and understandings. The latter invariably demonstrate a complexity which is not well accommodated by the categories nor by the level and kinds of abstraction of the theoretical constructions typically employed to understand it.

Section 8.1 examines problems with research design and reporting. In section 8.2 I turn to the troubled issue of naming: the term ‘domestic service’ is widely used in analyses of paid household work with some ill effect. Both sections show how the objective of exposing oppression can narrow analysis in ways which hinder the search for solutions. In section 8.3, I take up the issue of theorising systemic domination. This section shows how structural approaches to theorising oppression shape the research process in a way which supports and masks this narrowing.

Identifying these problems within the dominant view (and highlighting those studies which avoid them) supports my argument for an analysis of the domestic services industry which recognises diversity as the precondition for developing transformative strategies for work life reform.

### 8.1 Problems with research design and reporting

The studies of paid household work discussed here, like this thesis, draw extensively on interviews with domestic workers. My methodological criticism of many of these studies is *not* directed at the method of data collection. However, I am concerned with the scope of analysis, the exposition and interpretation of interview material, and the relationship between theoretical argument and evidence.
A pervasive problem in the research design and reporting of feminist studies of paid household work is failure to recognise and analyse adequately *diversity* in 1) worker characteristics and experience, and 2) the institutional structure of the industry. The racial-ethnic characteristics of workers, institutions mediating transactions in the industry, the structure demand for domestic services, and workers' experience of the occupation(s) are diverse and/or change over time. Inadequate recognition and investigation of this diversity within the literature forming the consensus can be seen to compromise the validity of its generalisations.

One aspect of inadequate recognition of diversity is a lack of apposite comparisons within the industry, between worker groups, and with other occupations. When such comparisons are made, a range of strategies for work life reform within the domestic services industry, and clear commonalities between paid household work and a wide variety of other occupations and work places come into view. This section documents the characteristic tendency to homogenise in the literature, and shows how appropriate comparison undermines the propositions of the dominant framework for understanding paid household work.

8.1.1 Racial-ethnic composition of study populations


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1. Historical studies of domestic service are exceptions here. Palmer (1989), Stigler (1946), Chaplin (1978), Katzman (1978), and others document change in the racial-ethnic composition and organisation of the labour force over time. See also Glenn (1992). These studies are cited in writings on contemporary paid household work. Some non-historical studies (Rollins 1985 and 1990, Romero 1992) include historical chapters, but subject historical narrative to the overarching agenda described in Chapter 2.2
“Third World” (Arat-Koç 1989, see also Bakan and Stasiulis 1995, and Macklin 1992) or “colored” (Cohen 1991) immigrant domestic workers in Canada. These studies are extensively cross-referenced to produce the prevailing view of the occupation described in Chapter 2. This cross-referencing can result in comparisons insufficiently attentive to historical and social contextual differences in the content and organisation of the work and working relationships.

The exclusion of domestic workers who are not from racial-ethnic minorities is sometimes explained:

White domestics were excluded because most of them are either “transient workers” or professional nannies. Since most career domestics are non-white... and since racial and ethnic differences between non-white poor domestics and white middle-class employers have considerable importance, I limited my study to non-white domestics (Cohen 1991:199).

Employing white women or college students as household workers does not establish the same power differential as does hiring ethnic minority women and Third World immigrant women. In fact domestic service is not the same job for a woman of color as it is for a white woman or a man. A day’s accumulation of the employer’s abuse differs for a woman of color from that for a white woman or man (Romero 1992:133).

The problem here is the very general conclusions about the nature of paid household work drawn from these kinds of study populations. When domestic workers from particular racial-ethnic or migrant groups are systematically compared only with the women they work for, rather than women from their communities in other occupations (particularly those similar to paid household work such as Rollins’ homemaker/health aides), or men and women from different racial-ethnic groups in paid household work, an important opportunity is lost. The construction of study populations by intersecting two sets of people – a racial-ethnic minority and domestic workers is ideal for the purpose of highlighting the experience of the minority in question in domestic work, but not for the purpose of careful discrimination between the range of factors which might 1) worsen or improve domestic workers’ experiences in their occupation, and 2) inhibit their mobility into other forms of work.

2. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Salzinger do recognise diversity within the industry in the variety of ways reported in section 8.1.6, showing that racial-ethnic homogeneity as a ‘first cut’ methodological choice need not compromise the validity of a study.
Moreover, that paid household work is in some sense ‘a different job’ for people from different ethnic groups is simply assumed by writers making this argument. My own research showed that workers both male and female, and from Euro-Australian and non-English speaking backgrounds did not have systematically nor widely divergent experiences in paid household work when they enter the industry via the same institution. My findings did confirm the consensual view that members of disadvantaged racial-ethnic groups were more likely to find themselves trapped in paid household work. However, Chapter 5 showed that mobility constraints are not internal to the occupation, but are related to a range of factors including access to educational opportunities, women’s primary responsibility for domestic and caring labour in their own homes, and discrimination by employers in other occupations.

8.1.2 Institutional structure of the industry

I have shown that institution of entry can change the dynamics of the householder-worker relationship, and workers’ experience of paid household work. However, most writers focus only on individualised transactions between domestic workers and employers in the informal economy. This focus cannot be explained by the absence in North America and Britain of the range of institutions I document in the Australian domestic services industry: sources like trade journals and the internet indicate the widespread availability of formalised service provision.

Indeed, some writers within the consensus recognise the existence of capitalist firms and agencies, although they do little more than mention them in passing. However, these institutions are not incorporated into their accounts of paid household work. This leads to the loss of opportunities for comparative analysis and so to an incomplete account of how the domestic services industry works.

Rollins, for example, notes:

Another new element in housework since World War II has been the development of commercial cleaning services. Entrepreneurs send teams of workers and sophisticated machinery into home and specialize in quick, thorough, “heavy” cleaning ...if the negative attitudes toward them of the employers I interviewed for this study reflects a norm, there is no danger of their displacing individual workers (1985:58).
She mentions later that employers preferred to hire a domestic over a cleaning service because

"they will not do everything," "these services are too expensive," or "I hate the impersonality." Indeed. The preference for an individual is in part a preference for an ongoing relationship. (Cleaning services send teams of workers that might change with each visit) (1985:130).

However, she does not go on to interview those who did prefer to buy from a "commercial cleaning services," nor to compare the experience of workers employed by them to that of private domestic workers, nor to investigate why the workers she did interview did not take up employment with the commercial services. Rollins also reported interviewing domestic employment agency operators, but does not analyse how their involvement in the industry may have affected domestic employment relationships, or other aspects of the labour market experience of domestic workers. Nor does Rollins study the experience of "homemaker/health aides," whom she defines as performing "disguised domestic work" (1985:57).

Gregson and Lowe also note that

in the late 1980s brightly coloured vans ... ferried teams of cleaners, many of them uniformed, to their client middle class households... [as] small business capital was expanding into the provision of domestic services (1994:4).

They also acknowledge the presence of domestic employment agencies in the market for both nannies and cleaners. However, none of the cleaners they include in their study worked entered the industry via these organisations, nor were their operations further analysed.

Romero points out that a small minority of the domestic workers she interviewed had entered the industry via agencies, but moved rapidly to informal networks where pay was higher (1992:144). She later asserts that the efforts of Chicana domestics to "transform domestic service by selling labor services rather than labor power ... are consistent with the emergence of cleaning agencies that advertise expert and skilled labor" (1992:161), but she does not examine how and why this might be the case, and what the significance of this development for the occupation as a whole might be.

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3. Gregson and Lowe mention that one cleaner, "Sheila," worked for a firm before she was "poached" by one of the two employers for whom she cleaned at the time of the study (1994:209).
Failure to examine how companies, agencies, and other organisations involving third-party mediation work focuses analysis on one kind of employment relationship only - that of the householder or employer with the domestic employee. These exclusions mean, again, that the domestic employment relationship is assumed to be the source of problems for domestic workers. Yet Chapter 4 showed that the kinds of problems commonly thought to be characteristic of the unique structure of the household employment relationship can arise under a range of employment relationship structures.

Moreover, even if the domestic employment relationship could be demonstrated to be the primary source of disadvantage, the opportunity to examine the role institutions or collective strategies might play in generating different kinds of employment relationships and so in shaping the work and work experience of paid household workers has been forgone. Chapters 6 and 7 showed that institutions and collective strategies could remedy a range of problems workers face in the domestic services industry.

8.1.3 Contextual factors affecting work status and experience

Chapter 2.2.3 noted the wide variety of factors cited across the literature as affecting the bargaining power and so the social and economic status of domestic workers, but, with the exception of Salzinger (1991), these do not receive adequate attention. Romero’s very influential work provides an example. She points out a difference between the Chicanas she interviewed, and domestic workers from other racial-ethnic groups:

Another strategy used by Chicanas in the struggle to transform domestic service is to define themselves as expert cleaners or housekeepers. It is a unique strategy not reported among the African Americans studied by Rollins, Coley or Dill or the Japanese Americans in Glenn’s study (1992:155).

Romero does not explain why Chicanas alone have pursued this strategy, although she does offer an explanation of why they have been successful:

To redefine their work as skilled labor, Chicanas capitalize on the face that working women are no longer interested in supervising the labor of the private household worker. Women hiring domestics to escape the double day syndrome cannot reap the benefits of the work if they supervise the work of a “menial laborer” (1992:158, emphasis added)
The workers’ strategy may not have been reported in earlier studies because a shift in employers’ priorities is a recent development on the ‘demand side’ of the industry, constituting a significant change in the context in which waged domestic labour takes place (see Salzinger 1991). Romero aimed to compare her results with those of these earlier studies (1992:7), choosing her native-born study population on this basis. However, consensus-building rather than deliberate comparison seems to be the organising relationship between Romero’s study and those she cites. Thus, she does not expressly and systematically take into account differences in their historical and social contexts.

In a later report of her findings, Romero explains that

the increased autonomy, independence, pay and benefits can be attributed to the different circumstances each faced in the labour market. Unlike many of the Black domestics studied in the Eastern U.S., this group of Chicanas were not sole supporters of the family, nor union members; and unlike the Japanese American women in Glenn’s study, most of the Chicanas were second or third generation and much younger. The Chicanas whom I interviewed have much more formal education, and for the most part are not being replaced by newly arrived immigrants (1994:54).

Here Romero recognises significant differences between her respondents and those to other studies. However, her research agenda, which is partly directed towards “support[ing] many of the findings on working conditions found in studies of women of color in domestic service” (1994:53), means that she leaves ‘women of color’ as a relatively homogeneous group, and does not examine whether and how racism might affect Chicana and Black women differently.

8.1.4 Reporting findings on the experience of domestic work.

In addition to problems with the selection of study populations discussed above, there are problems in the presentation of evidence in several studies, again with implications for generalisations made about the nature and operation of the domestic services industry. Just as third-party mediating institutions are at most mentioned and set aside, variability in domestic workers’ experiences, and accounts of long and happy – or even relatively unproblematic – employment relationships may be noted, but typically receive perfunctory treatment. The starting point of the experience of oppressed racial-
Ethnic minorities has produced some tendentious readings of complex data, and so some significant distortions/blind spots in many accounts.

Colen (1990) exemplifies this problem. She concludes her introduction of "The Interviewees" by noting that

In this highly personalized relationship, employers' behavior towards workers falls on a continuum from that which is fair and helpful to that which is exploitative and disrespectful. Some amount of ambivalence surfaced in all workers' discussions of their employers. Variability in treatment of workers and in workers' perceptions of their situations are influenced by the variable conditions of the household work situation and broad cultural factors (1990:93).

With "variable conditions of the household work situation," Colen refers to whether workers live in with their employers, or live out, and whether they are documented or undocumented workers. Live-in and/or undocumented workers, she notes, are much more vulnerable to abuse.

Colen (1990:98) mentions in passing variable experience for workers, and the possibility of good employers. However, her detailed analysis of experiences on the job, and of the employment relationship, focuses entirely on negative experiences. Bad experiences are explained in terms of 'structural' factors, particularly cultural undervaluation of reproductive work, differences in cultural expectations between white employers and West Indian employees, and the contradictions of wage labour in the private sphere. By contrast, positive experiences are 'left hanging' as arbitrary and random instances of personal kindness.

Rollins (1985, 1990), perhaps the most influential writer on the oppressive character of 'domestic service,' also notes that "the relationships within employer-worker dyads vary dramatically with the diverse personalities involved," but goes on to say "Yet there patterns that emerged from my research, patterns which led me to the conclusion that the relationship is essentially one of psychological as well as material exploitation" (1990:78, emphasis added). Indeed, Rollins represented the minority of her interviewees who "had mainly good things to say about domestic work" (1985:133) as having "slightly ingratiating" personalities, and as being (albeit understandably) self-deluding (1985:133-38). Although women who had positive experiences are 'given voice,' their positive accounts are downplayed and rationalized away as "personal" whereas arguments
elaborating and theorising negative experiences are set out in detail. Negative experiences are read as definitive, and so generalisations are made from them. Positive experiences, by contrast, are discounted as useful for understanding the dynamics of how the occupation works. If Rollins had interrogated the context and ‘content’ of positive worker experiences as systematically as the negative, she may have been able to contribute more to identifying and promoting points of strategic intervention for positive change.

8.1.5 Some revealing comparisons.

In Chapters 3-6, I relied largely on comparisons with my own fieldwork in challenging the dominant view of paid household work. This section shows that evidence from studies of a range of service sector occupations, *inter alia*, refutes the argument that paid household work is subject to a range of characteristic problems because of a uniquely exploitative employment relationship.

Feminist writing on paid household work rarely compares it with conditions in other occupations. When they do, conclusions are difficult to draw. Glenn (1992) analyses the shift from domestic service to institutional service work in the organisation of "reproductive labor" in the United States since the early nineteenth century. She argues that the commercialisation of many aspects of reproductive labour, and the expansion of paid caring work outside the domestic sphere expanded the market for female labour, and paid household work has been replaced by low level service occupations as the major employer of black and minority women. These are jobs which

As in domestic service ... are often part-time and seasonal, offer few or no medical and other benefits, have low rates of unionization, and subject workers to arbitrary supervision (Glenn 1992:22).

The "dirty work" of, for example, cleaning, food service and basic institutional care in the public sphere - "the same sorts of tasks that servants did in a private setting" (Glenn 1992:22) - is performed predominantly in the US by the black and minority women who would have been servants in previous generations. Glenn argues that although race and gender hierarchy are not diminished in importance, they are institutionalised in organisational structures rather than direct and personal. Service workers
appreciate not being personally subordinate to an individual employer and not having to do "their" dirty work on "their" property. Relations with supervisors and clients are hierarchical, but they are embedded in an impersonal structure governed by more explicit contractual obligations and limits (Glenn 1992:23).

In this way, what Glenn calls a "structural hierarchy" replaces a "personal" one, with significant consequences for the experience of workers. In addition, the presence of a "work group for sociability and support" as well as a "workplace culture" which challenges the value system imposed by managers, provide peer group backing "for individuals to stand up to the boss" (1992:23). This, Glenn argues, contrasts with the isolation of individual workers in domestic service.

Glenn reports that institutional service workers from black and other minority groups preferred this form of employment because of its "modern" characteristics, chiefly the freedom from oppressive personal relations. Yet Romero's interviewees saw employment in food service, laundry, waitressing, unskilled hospital work and so on as "particularly disagreeable" alternatives to paid household work (1987:218), without its potential for on-the-job autonomy (1987:209). The latter's flexibility is also cited as a distinctive advantage, enabling fulfilment of the women's traditional familial roles (Romero 1987:206). Chicana domestics seek to "modernize" domestic service by establishing professional and contractual relations to increase control over the labour process of domestic service (Romero 1988), rather than avoiding it altogether in institutional service sector jobs in which "you're under somebody" (Romero 1987:207).

The occupational studies in Giles and Arat-Koc's collection (1994) Maid in the Market: Women's Paid Domestic Labour challenge claims to the uniqueness of paid household work more pointedly. In this book, private household workers, retail saleswomen, fast food outlet workers, hotel housemaids, office cleaners and childcare centre workers are all characterised as "paid domestic workers."

This collection shows that a variety of problems represented in much feminist writing as particularly acute, sometimes unique, in paid household work are experienced by workers in quasi-domestic occupations in a variety of formal sector settings. Neal's study of contract office cleaners in Toronto lists "lack of respect, low wages, poor working conditions, a divided workforce, limited job security, and difficulties in
organising” as problems “cleaners will readily tell anyone willing to listen” (1994:75). In addition, “working in isolation makes them easy targets for harassment and assault, especially by men at night” (1994:75). Those who are immigrants, particularly those with tenuous immigration status, are most at risk of economic abuse. Giles’ study of Portuguese immigrant hotel housemaids in London indicate that immigrant workers in these settings are vulnerable to abuse in ways identical to immigrant domestic workers, as strict rules govern their entry and stay, and their lack of familiarity with labour regulations and precarious citizenship status make complaints and recourse for ill-treatment difficult to pursue (Giles 1994:84). Live-in hotel housemaids (like paid household workers) “are frequently asked to increase their workload for no extra income and run the risk of dismissal or eviction if they refuse” (Giles 1994:90). Giles also claims that “reproductive labour moved from the home into the market must maintain its image of self-sacrifice and devotion while also appealing to the tenets of the market economy” (1994:80). Reiter’s study of the fast-food industry argues that workers are expected to “produce a friendly, welcoming setting” for patrons, and face dismissal if they do not have “‘the right attitude’,” particularly “if the employee is working at the cash register where customer contact is closest” (1994:104-5).4

The ‘personalism’ of Rollins’ ideal-typical domestic employment relationship5 is attenuated in the corporate occupations discussed in the Giles and Arat-Koç collection,

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4. The Giles and Arat-Koç (1994) collection makes an interesting contribution to the literature, although it does share some faults with the consensual view of paid household work. The book’s “focus is women’s reproductive work in the service sector – cleaning, tidying, feeding, and caring for and serving people” (1994:1) in order to “bring an understanding to the forms of subordination that reproductive workers in different occupations share” (1994:2). This focus on shared subordination does not foster the comparisons which might assist in identifying strategies for work improvement. (Giles and Arat-Koç argue that although in “forms of reproductive and service work which take place in the public sphere...[employment] relationships are impersonal and more fully commoditized than in private homes” (1994:7), oppressive ideologies of “the labour of love,” the undervaluation of work, and the predominance of women, particularly those from subordinate racial-ethnic groups, prevail in both private and public domains (1994 Introduction).)

Second, the selection of occupations and industries for inclusion retains a tendentious edge analogous to that I criticise in studies of paid household work. It excludes the “reproductive labour” undertaken by state employees to which Giles and Arat-Koç’s content-based definition of paid household work also points. Chapter 7 showed how important it is to understand paid household workers in the context of their labour market segment.

5. Recall that Rollins described publicly funded home health aides as ‘disguised’ domestic workers. Given her emphasis on the interpersonal relationship between employers and domestics in domestic service, it is difficult to see how home health aides can be consistently
but the uniqueness of 'domestic service' on that score can also be challenged. We have seen already that Romero, for one, has recognised that personal relationships, exploitative or otherwise, are unlikely when domestic workers exchange labour services for a fixed price with many employers (1992 Chapter 6). But perhaps more importantly, personalism in the form of what Sanjek and Colen (1990b) call "fictive kinship" is common in other employment situations, particularly small businesses. Ram and Holliday (1993) write about the mobilisation of the ideology of the family to produce a "family culture" in small firms, even in some of those in which there are no blood ties.

Moreover, if we characterise the personalism of 'domestic service,' as Romero does, as the demand for emotional labour, then uniqueness on this count is even more difficult to demonstrate. Hochschild argues that "most of us have jobs that require some handling of other people's feelings and our own...By my estimate roughly one third of American workers today have jobs that subject them to substantial demands for emotional labor" (1983:11, see also Macdonald and Sirianni 1996a).

8.1.6 Discussion and some counterexamples

The analysis to this point indicates the importance recognising diversity in the industry and in worker experience if the industry's structure and operation are to be well understood, and its most vulnerable workers' lives improved. The possibility of significant diversity along the following dimensions needs to be taken into account: the industry's institutional structure, the characteristics and experiences of participants, the nature of demand, and the political-economic framework of the industry's operation. (Although the last of these is receives no systematic analysis in the literature about paid household work, Chapters 5 and 7 have argued that it has significant influence on the size and composition of the industry.)

Failure within the dominant view to analyse diversity in these dimensions has served well the objective of exposing exploitation of racial-ethnic minority women and their resistance to it. However, the cost is lost capacity for discerning, by careful comparison, more precisely than is typically the case, where efforts at reform might best be targeted, where reform opportunities are emerging, and where problems external to

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described as "disguised domestic work" in this way. It is also difficult to sustain an argument about uniqueness, if the unique occupation cannot be clearly defined.
the domestic employment relationship need remedy. Claims to uniqueness, although
difficult to substantiate, function in feminist analysis to support claims about the ‘role’ of
these occupations in ‘reproducing’ ‘systems of gender, class, and race domination’ and
excite outrage and highlight the plight of these workers. However, these claims also
undervalue workers’ attempts to redefine themselves and reorganise their work.

There are studies which avoid these problems. By taking seriously how differences
in the background characteristics, labour market experience, and organising strategies of
two groups of Latina women affect their experiences within the local labour market, and
by careful attention to demand and supply conditions in this industry, Salzinger (1991)
presents a subtle and convincing argument which does not rely on the invocation of high
level abstractions about ‘systems of domination’ nor the ‘essentially exploitative nature of
domestic service.’

Hondagneu-Sotelo’s (1994) examination of informal organising strategies amongst
Mexican women also shows how fruitful focus on organisational arrangements and their
structural conditions can be for understanding how the fortunes of domestic workers are
differentiated. She does not avoid analysing differences within the community she
studies. Hondagneu-Sotelo reports that some workers get ahead by using others as sub-
contractors, sometimes resulting in an “exploitative and demeaning” experience for the
sub-contractor (1994:57) at the hands of her fellow migrant domestic.

In her unpublished study of immigrant Latina domestics in San Diego, California,
Doreen Mattingly notes that “some live-out domestic workers have themselves employed
live-in domestic workers to care for their children while they clean houses” (1996 Chapter
4), and that “most immigrant domestic workers prefer to work for Anglos than for other
Latinos” because the latter do not pay as well, and, as one respondent put it, “they want
you to work a lot” (Mattingly 1996 Chapter 4).

These three studies cut across the picture of an internally homogeneous and
mutually supportive community of domestics facing exploitative householders across the
class and race divide that is presented elsewhere in the literature. In this way, these
studies point again to the necessity to examine rather than invoke class and racial-ethnic
factors as explanations.
8.2 Problems with naming

This section looks at debate about what domestic occupations should be called, in particular, whether domestic service is an appropriate name for contemporary paid household work. This debate about naming is important because it is linked to questions about the nature and extent of economic and social transformation, the meaning of work, and the appropriate limits of markets. It also considers an intervention based on a conception of “servants’ work” (Gorz 1989). Gorz’ concept, like Giles and Arat-Koç’s extension of “paid domestic labour,” potentially expands the scope of analysis to include (and exclude) a range of tasks and/or working arrangements beyond the buying and selling of housekeeping, cleaning, and personal care services in private homes on which analysis has so far been focused.

8.2.1 What’s in a name? Domestic service and modernisation

Feminist writers typically avoid and sometimes disavow use of the term ‘domestic servant’ to refer to contemporary household workers (see, for example, Sanjek and Colen 1990b:1). However, although they also use terms like “private household work” (Dill 1988, Kousha 1994), “domestic work” (Rollins 1985), “paid domestic labour” (Bakan and Stasiulis 1995), many writers continue to use ‘domestic service’ to refer to the occupation in general. Thus, whether workers live in full-time, or clean house for several different employers who may be absent while the domestic worker goes about her part-time job, they are described as working in ‘domestic service.’

Writing in the tradition of modernisation theory declared decades ago ‘domestic service’ to be a “status and role [that has] become obsolescent” (Coser 1973:39), and the “housemaid” to be “an occupational role in crisis” (Aubert 1956). Coser is declaring the obsolescence of a certain kind of hierarchical, particularistic, and consuming employment relationship - that of master and servant - not the end for all time of the buying and selling of housekeeping and cleaning services in private homes. He differentiates between ‘servants’ and “a new profession” of “specialized,” “part-time...caterers, dog-walkers, clean-up services and the like” (1973:39).

Might not some of those described in the literature as working in ‘domestic service’ be better characterised as members of this ‘new profession’? Why might the term ‘domestic service’ still be in use?
André Gorz, although not a feminist writer, has linked some of these issues most forcefully. His focus is on ‘servant’ more than domestic, but his arguments resonate with those put by feminists writing on domestic service. He argues that no productivity gains are made in the substitution of purchased domestic services for one’s own domestic labour time (unlike, say, with the purchase of manufactured goods). Rather, “To buy someone else’s time to increase your own leisure or comfort is merely to purchase the work of a servant” (Gorz 1994:49). Recall that Gorz defines a range of non-domestic personal services as servant’s work, and does not distinguish employment in private homes from work for service companies (Chapter 1.2.1).

Gorz’ usage seems to slide over the useful distinction Coser makes between modern, part-time, specialised service provision in a “new profession” (1973:39) and the premodern relationship of domestic service. However, it is precisely this distinction that Gorz, Romero, Rollins and other feminist writers on paid household work challenge, and why they continue to use the terms ‘servant’ and/or ‘domestic service.’ Divergence between their views and those of Coser and other modernisation theorists derives from some fundamental disagreements with modernisation theory itself: in short, servitude and modernity are far from incompatible.

For writers like Rollins (1985) and Romero (1992), the contents and organisation of private domestic employment may be much changed since the nineteenth century, particularly with the advent of day work for several employers, but the relationship of servitude; of deference and maternalism (a specifically female form of authority); continues to prevail, and so, then, does ‘domestic service.’ Thus, their use of ‘domestic service’ is partly a political statement.

Rollins, for example, seeks to emphasise continuities and commonalities between the experiences of her respondents (and herself – she worked ‘undercover’ as a domestic worker to research the subject) and ‘domestic servants’ across time and place, because her aim is to explore how social, particularly racial, stratification is reproduced in interpersonal relationships (1985 Chapter 1). Thus, she explicitly rejects what she considers to be euphemistic formulations used by organisations of household workers (such as “household technician” or “household engineer”) “because they feel the historical connotations of “domestic” and “servant” contribute to the present degraded
position of the occupation" (1985:234n6). From Rollins' point of view, to call paid household work 'domestic service' is to call a spade a spade.

In using the term 'domestic service' to refer to both live-in service and day work for several employers, feminist writers are making both theoretical and political claims about and for the domestic workers whose lives they seek to document and analyse. Similarly, Gorz' purpose is to make a politically engaged theoretical argument about the evolution of capitalist society when he designates a range of personal service tasks as "servant's work," to be taken up by those thrown out of productive work by technological change.

Critiques of modernisation theory implied in use of the terms 'domestic service' and 'servant' are powerful, pointing as they do to the persistence of hierarchy and domination in modern societies. However, continued use of the term 'domestic service' to connote an occupation tends to obscure differences in the nature and organisation of paid household work within and between particular historical periods, and is fully burdened with the implied servitude, surveillance and subordination of its incumbents - 'domestic servants.'

Several writers recognise that many domestic workers do not see the work itself as demeaning (Dill 1988:36, Glenn 1987:280, Rollins 1985:133, Salzinger 1991:154). Respondents to my study frequently agreed. Paid household work is not 'essentially' anything. It is a job, a set of tasks, the contents and social meaning of which are unstable: varying through time and with the economic, social, and political context (as does the unpaid household work to which it is related). The work can be personally satisfying and well paid for some, and exploitative and poorly paid for others, and such discrepancies have a wide variety of causes. If, as Romero argues, Chicanas are

6. The experience of live-in domestic workers, who, these days are most likely to be those performing childcare, is much more likely to approximate the relationship of 'domestic service' as described by Coser (1973) than is day work cleaning for an employer one rarely even sees. Yet it is white middle class girls, native and immigrant, who are more likely to work as live-in childminders than as cleaners. Failure to recognise this is a serious flaw in much research design. Julia Wrigley (1995 Chapter 3 ) shows that some American parents choose "class peers" in the form of "educated, culturally similar caregivers" for their children. Wrigley notes that the "main types of class peers available for care-giving work are American college students, European au pairs, young women from the American Midwest, and Irish and British nannies" (1995:51). She reports that some parent-employers treat these young women as servants, challenging the idea that racism is the primary origin of worker maltreatment in private domestic employment relationships.
"transforming domestic service," (1988, 1992, 1994) it could be argued that they transforming it into something else. By continuing to emphasise continuities between contemporary paid household work in all its variety with "domestic service,"⁷ feminist writers are inadvertently working against attempts by domestic workers to redefine themselves and their occupation as skilled, valuable, and worthy of respect.

8.2.2 Discussion

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that definition and usage are social activities, and so are shaped by a writer's purpose and context. The terms 'domestic labour,' 'domestic service' and 'servant' are complex, composite terms, without essential defining features upon which all agree, and the usage of which overlaps with other words (domestic with reproductive and household; service with servant, 'emotional labour' and servitude etc.).

In writing about paid household work, categories such as 'domestic service', 'reproductive labour' and 'domestic labour' carry a lot of theoretical baggage, most notably from socialist feminism.⁸ They stand in for theoretical arguments perhaps more than they refer to specific practices in the social world. In a parallel literature, in a critique of the concept of 'care,' Carol Thomas shows how the term 'care' is used to connote a variety of different activities in different contexts, depending on the user's agenda. She concludes that the epistemological status of the category 'care' is dubious: it is not a concept that can have "independent theoretical validity" (1993:665), because the case cannot be made "that 'care' constitutes a distinct form of social production by virtue of its

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7. Calling the occupation 'domestic service' differs from calling housework 'domestic services.' This is because the latter formulation uses the term service rather than economists use it to refer to a set of tasks rather than a particular kind of employment relationship.

8. For example, Maria Garcia Castro has written "The salient feature of domestic service, like domestic labor, is that it is performed by women, a social category that participates not only in the daily reproduction of the labor force but also in the biological and ideological reproduction of the species. However, the live-in [domestic worker], in contrast to the day worker, is unable to realize her potential for biological reproduction in the house of the employer family and is thus restricted to the reproduction/restoration of the labor force, and the reproduction/restoration of social relations. Such ambiguities demand that the feminist debates on sex/gender culture include analysis focusing specifically on the dimension of class relations and antagonisms. It must be borne in mind that such a culture materializes via specific situations, overdetermined by the class positions of the persons concerned" (1989:121). In my view, this is not a very helpful characterisation of "the salient features of domestic service," demonstrating the problems associated with this kind of marxist theorising.
social relations” (1993:665). ‘Care,’ Thomas argues, is an empirical category, with several dimensions along which its practice and meaning can vary. These dimensions include the social identity of the carer and recipient of care, the interpersonal relationship between them, the nature of the care, the social domain in which it is carried out, the economic relationship (whether it is paid or unpaid), and its institutional setting (Thomas 1993:656-7).

Much the same can be said for the categories ‘domestic service,’ ‘reproductive labour’ and ‘domestic labour’ as they are used by writers on paid household work. They are empirical categories unable to do the theoretical work for which they are exercised, and they are complex terms which vary along several dimensions very similar to those Thomas develops for ‘care.’ Thus, only by detailed investigation of these dimensions and relationships between them in concrete situations can we understand the meaning and implications of the buying and selling of housekeeping, cleaning and childcare services in those situations, and strive for democratic and egalitarian work life reform.9 The preceding chapters have shown the fruitfulness of this approach.

8.3 Theorising systemic domination

A third problem in writing on paid household work is the way class, race and gender are theorised as “systems of domination” (Romero 1992: :130). In a sense, this problem underlies those discussed above. In devoting attention overwhelmingly to what Bakan and Stasiulis (1995:303) call “the role of paid domestic service in oppressing minority and working class women,” feminist scholars have employed the methods and developed the arguments described in sections 8.1-8.2 above and in Chapter 2. These methods and arguments lead away from analysis of 1) the diversity of experiences, populations and institutions in the domestic services industry, and 2) the commonalities between domestic work and other occupations. Consequently, paid household work is represented as the ultimate lousy job, and its incumbents positioned as victims of racist capitalist patriarchy writ small in ‘domestic service,’ with little hope of improvement.

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9. This is not the implication Thomas draws from her critique of ‘care’: the final sentence of her article states that “Forms of care, and the relationship between them, remain to be theorised in terms of other theoretical categories” (1993:168).
Moreover, arguments are confused by the chicken and egg relationship between the putative specificity of ‘domestic service’ and the effects of structures of domination. To describe this relation as ‘domestic service reproducing the systems of domination’ is to avoid the task of explanation. When reproduction is presumed, evidence is at greater risk of tendentious interpretation in ways described above.

There is an alternative to the dispiriting and ultimately confusing language of ‘the reproduction of systems of domination,’ emerging from critiques within social scientific discourse of structuralist modes of theorising. The alternative involves careful documentation of the practices and discourses, institutionalised in various ways and to various extents, some more tractable than others, some in conflict with others, that form racial-ethnic, gender and class relations in a particular time and place. Chapters 6 and 7 showed how this approach supports a realistic assessment of the possibilities and challenges facing attempts to remedy a variety of economic and cultural problems in the domestic services industry and beyond.

This is not to deny that there are patterns in social life of racism, sexism, and class exploitation; that there is what Connell calls “an orderliness which needs to be understood” (1987:116). However, this orderliness has not the unity of a system, nor of an expressive totality (such as that connotated in Romero’s (1992:130) formulation), but rather a unity - always imperfect and under construction - of historical composition... ‘composition’ as in music: a tangible, active and often difficult process of bringing elements into connection with each other and thrashing out their relationships. It is a matter of the real historical process of interaction and group formation. The difference from music is not that the process lacks a composer, but that it has a whole stack of them; and that all are inside the piece being composed, since what is being composed is their own lives. The product of the process is not a logical unity but an empirical unification. It happens on particular terms in particular circumstances (Connell 1987:116).

10. Clearly there is a massive literature on the structure-agency question, and I certainly make no claims to originality here. I have been particularly influenced by Connell (1987), Folbre (1994), Giddens (1993), and Kitching (1988, 1994).

11. Many analyses include discussion of some of the practices and discourses in question - from ideas of the good domestic, to the effect of immigration laws. - but tend to subsume these under ahistorical structuralist formulations.
This approach changes the way general arguments and evidence are related in social scientific writing: for example, racial hierarchy and the character of paid household work are linked, but not in only one way, not without contradictions, and not, perhaps, necessarily. Nor is either unchanging in character or dynamics.

From this point of view it remains possible to recognise and distinguish patterns of disadvantage and subordination. For example, it is true that middle class white women, even feminists, benefit directly from racist institutions and practices in the society as a whole, including the availability of cheap domestic labour. But this does not mean that they (we) are acting as racists when they (we) hire domestic workers from subordinate racial-ethnic groups. To make assumptions about motivations for action based on observations of second order injustice is to confuse aspects of society best thought of as structures with individuals' behaviour, best thought of as actions.

Although there is an attractively pure and ideal finality about the wholesale demolition of 'structures of domination,' structuralist approaches make strategy difficult to 'think.' Ch. 6 and 7 have shown that 'meso-level' investigation rather than the macro-level analysis of structuralist approaches also has positive implications for the pursuit of justice, and work life reform.

If feminists want to envision and enable better ways of working for the women we write about, we need to see the object of analysis from a point of view that 1) recognises the possibility of change; 2) distinguishes different ways of organising particular practices; and 3) can judge between them which is likely to be most effective in achieving particular goals. For feminists concerned with the domestic services industry, these goals include improved status, increased job security, better pay and conditions, opportunities for labour market mobility, and appropriate income and social support services.

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Chapter 9

Conclusion:
Evaluating the commodification of housework

The arguments of this thesis are two-fold and interdependent. Empirically, the thesis has presented a systematic study of the supply side of the domestic services industry in Australia. It has built a picture of an industry with a complex institutional structure, in which heterogeneous actors pursue a range of economic goals. This picture is based on extensive fieldwork and detailed analysis of 1) the fortunes of individual participants in the context of both their life biographies and their mode of participation in the industry; 2) the structure and operation of the range of institutions organising the industry; and 3) the domestic services industry in the context of the political-economic framework of Australian society.

Based on this picture, I have argued that the industry’s characteristics defy essentialising definitions and unqualified normative judgements. This argument is not a methodological premise or the product of an a priori (post-structuralist) anti-essentialism. Rather, I arrived at it after the kind of careful, comparative empirical analysis for which I make a case, and which the thesis demonstrates.

Methodologically, the thesis has built a case for a middle way between macro- and micro-level analyses in feminist social science. This ‘middle way’ involves 1) understanding structures in terms of how discourses and practices are institutionalised; 2) placing economic actors in their institutional contexts; 3) recognising diversity amongst both actors and institutions, and complexity and contingency in their interactions and; 4) ‘mining’ complexity and diversity for clues about reform strategies. Although by no means new arguments, my interpretation of much feminist writing on paid household work points to the need for their restatement.
The thesis has implications for 1) methods in feminist political economy and 2) developing work life reform strategies in the domestic services and related industries. These issues have been extensively treated in previous chapters. This treatment lays a better foundation for any moral evaluation of paid household work as a job (and so as a potential ‘solution’ to the problem of the gender division of labour). Thus, in conclusion, I turn to the critical question that motivates this study and that I have bracketed so far: Should housework be bought and sold?

I have identified three divergent evaluations of commodified housework within feminist discourse, based on different moral and political standpoints. The first position implicitly proscribes commodified housework on the grounds that it is a uniquely exploitative occupation. By stark contrast, the second proposes wide-ranging commodification of housework as the means to gender equality. The third regrets the extension of market metaphors to include housework, and the growth of literal markets for just about everything, including housework, as inimical to human flourishing.¹

My own view is that although the practice of commodified housework may not be undesirable on the grounds that it causes unique and specific harms to domestic workers, the further commodification of private life represents a threat to important cultural resources, values, and institutions. I arrive at this view by examining the three existing positions, and exploring how my findings both shed light on and are illuminated by debate on the contentious issue of commodification.

The first position I examine is that of feminist writers whose primary project is analysis of paid household work. This position focuses ethical critique of ‘domestic service’ on the plight of workers, and the relationship between workers’ experience and their background characteristics. In this literature, the dominant view of the nature of the domestic employment relationships and the place of domestic occupations in social hierarchies condemns and so implicitly proscribes the commodification of housework as uniquely exploitative (see Chapter 2, especially 2.1.4).

In most feminist studies of paid household work, the nature of the unique domestic employment relationship is a primary object of ethical critique. My findings

indicate that this focus is misplaced. Evidence suggests that 1) domestic workers have a variety of relationships and experiences at work, and 2) workers share injustices they experience in paid household work with workers in a range of other service sector occupations and work contexts (for example, family firms). This evidence challenges the uniqueness hypothesis, and indicates that ethical critiques are not well focussed on occupational categories such as ‘domestic service’ in which the posited special relationship is understood to exist. This weakness is exacerbated by the semantic implications of the occupational category used; as I argued in Chapter 8.2, ‘domestic service’ carries a vast normative and historical baggage not all of which accurately reflects current reality.

Certainly many domestic workers are subject to a range of economic and cultural injustices in their working lives, and these injustices rightly provoke criticism. However, I have shown that 1) these injustices do not primarily derive from the domestic employment relationship; and 2) the first order (interpersonal) injustices that are the principal object of critique in the literature are being (and should further be) remedied by formalisation in the domestic services industry. In my view, the argument that housework should not be bought and sold because it causes particular and unusual harm to sellers (workers) is not well sustained. If particular tasks in particular contexts place some or all workers at increased risk of economic or cultural injustice, then precisely how and why this happens needs to be discerned. Careful comparative analysis both ‘inside’ occupational categories, and between them, will better determine the relationships between actors, contextual factors, and injustices.

(At this point, it might fairly be contended that the argument that paid household work is little or no worse than other bad jobs is a miserable defence of the moral integrity of transactions in the domestic services industry. I return to this crucial question later.)

Although the moral critique of paid household work on the grounds that the unique domestic employment relationship harms workers is not supported by my findings, there is an alternative basis of moral critique within the feminist literature on paid household work. This is the prevailing view of ‘domestic service’ as a practice which reproduces social hierarchies. This viewpoint rightly stresses that paid household work is low status ‘women’s work,’ and women (and some men) from subordinate racial ethnic groups are over-represented amongst domestic workers, pointing to the existence of injustice. However, ‘occupational ghettoisation,’ which is
the relevant empirical indicator of persistent social hierarchies of gender and race-ethnicity, has diverse and complex causes external to the domestic services industry. Moral critique and strategies for reform are better focussed on those practices, discourses, institutions, and policies which restrict disadvantaged groups’ access to a full range of social and economic opportunities and rewards.

It might be argued that the buying and selling of housework is one of those practices, sustained by sexist and racist norms, that contributes to occupational segregation. But to stop there is to treat paid household work as an unchanging practice occupying a static position in a fixed hierarchy. This thesis has challenged this representation of social hierarchies and where paid household work fits into them, showing that there is both change over time, and scope for actors to contest their social positioning. Specifically, I have shown that both market- and solidarity-based strategies for reform of paid household work are in different ways challenging the low economic and social status of the work and the workers. Domestic service providers are changing both the practical organisation of paid household work by developing new institutions, and the cultural meanings associated with the work and the work force by mobilising discourses of professionalism, dignity and respect.

When we take into account 1) causes of injustice external to the domestic services industry; 2) the dynamic character of both the domestic services industry and social hierarchies; and, related to this, 3) challenges inside the industry to its low status; it is not clear how the practice of buying and selling housework is a primary source of the injustices suffered by those service providers who find themselves without desirable alternative income sources.

Do my conclusions so far mean that I concur with position two, which calls for wide-ranging and further commodification of housework? Not necessarily: arguments that paid household work is the primary source of specific harms to domestic workers (position one) do not exhaust moral criticisms of the practice. However, the further moral criticisms of metaphorical and literal markets for household work (position three) which do not rely on claims that paid household work is the source of specific harms to workers need to be tested against the argument for commodification (position two).
Liberal feminist economist Barbara Bergmann (1998) puts position two forcefully, calling for “a high degree of commodification of the tasks that the present gender system assigns as duties to the female caste.” This proposal derives from Bergmann’s primary concern with the redress of inequality between women and men: “high commodification,” she argues, is women’s “only ticket to equality.”

Bergmann (1998) argues that “a world of very similar lives for women and men is likely to be the only kind of world in which gender equality could be attained.” She arrives by a process of elimination at her contentious proposal for “most child rearing, cooking, meal cleanup, housecleaning, [and] laundry services …[to] be done by paid employees of both sexes.” First, Bergmann rejects “[t]he ‘separate but more equal’ regime” in which women stay in the “female world” of the home on the grounds that women themselves have rejected it, “voting with their feet by moving massively into paid work.” Then she rejects the “integration of both worlds,” in which men and women would share equally in paid employment and unpaid family work, supported by family friendly policies on the part of employers. Here, the “striking growth in single parenthood” is the stumbling block: integration would be strongly biased against the increasing number of parents who have no partner with whom to share unpaid work, and insufficient funds to buy replacements. Integration of both worlds is not, prima facie, undesirable to Bergmann in the way a “separate but more equal” regime would be, and significantly, Bergmann does recognise that the integration regime has a particular virtue: equality, with “the benefit of more personalized caretaking of children and perhaps elders.” However, high commodification has the virtue of being “easier of attainment.” For women to achieve the power they need to change the world and to enter the male world on equal terms, Bergmann argues, “it is likely that they must play the male game,” though it may be “hierarchical, competitive and emotionally cold.”

Bergmann values (a certain model of) equality between the sexes over the pursuit of caring and self-fulfilling activities in the home. Given this hierarchy of values, she is confident that commodification – the expansion of the market – is the best available route to her primary goal.

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2. The author provided me with a copy of this article by email, and so I cannot provide page numbers for quotations.
Bergmann’s confidence in the market is challenged by the findings of this thesis. Chapter 6 showed that market-based strategies for remedying problems in the domestic services industry do not foster gender, class and racial-ethnic equality, but rather are the means of work force segmentation. Chapter 4 showed that although the domestic and caring services provided by the Home Care Service are heavily subsidised by the state, workers are subject to quasi-market forces through fiscal austerity programs, and the organisation of their work is increasingly couched in language and accounting practices figured through market metaphors. This compromises workers’ ability to continue to offer the care for which they are contracted, and may mean that standards of care compatible with the dignity of both ‘customers’ and workers will come to rest increasingly – and unjustly – on (the predominantly female) workers’ gifts of labour. Bergmann recognises that personalised (family-based) caring will be sacrificed in the pursuit of high commodification as the route to gender equality, but she fails to recognise that caring itself may be jeopardised.

It is the cost of such losses in a “high commodification regime” that underpins position three, which, like position one is critical of commodified housework but not exclusively from the point of view of the plight of domestic workers. Writing about the implications of understanding housework as ‘work’ on the model of capitalist wage labour (an example of what Radin would call ‘metaphorical markets’), Himmelweft (1995) argues that the expansion of literal markets for domestic labour (along with virtually everything else) is undermining what is important in life and distinctive about women’s caring contributions in the home. Like the prevailing view in feminist writing on paid household work, Himmelweit is concerned with inequality between on the demand and supply sides of the market for domestic services, and like Bergmann, she is concerned with inequality between the sexes. However, her critique is aimed very much at the level ‘society as a whole.’ “As money becomes the unequally distributed single means to all ends” (Himmelweit 1995:13), human societies confront a form of cultural impoverishment or degradation.

3. Of course, confidence that feminist goals can be met primarily through the market – and criticisms of this point of view – have been much discussed amongst feminist economists – see for example the Dialogue “Debating Markets” in Feminist Economics, Volume 2, Number 1, Spring 1996, in which both sides were forcefully put. More generally, critiques of the market are the stock in trade of radical political economy in a vast and centuries old literature.
Himmelweit’s critique of commodification starts with a critique of “the discovery of ‘unpaid work’” in feminist economics, and expands to become an encompassing and rueful commentary on contemporary society and culture. Her analysis weaves together historical changes in social and economic organisation with associated changes in understandings and interpretations of domestic activities and human needs. Changes in social and economic organisation include the movement of women into paid employment and the increased availability of market substitutes for “the results of many activities that go in the home” (1995:7). These developments are linked to the re-interpretation of much household activity as “work,” as both the option of purchased alternatives to unpaid domestic activity emerges, and the opportunity cost of continuing to provide goods and services on an unpaid basis in the home becomes more clearly calculable (1995:8). At the same time, changes in the distribution of activity between the market and the household are related to changes in what Himmelweit calls “the construction of needs” as “more and more of the needs and desires of workers and their families are being constructed in a form that has to be met through the market by consumer goods and may involve consumption time too” (1995:11). To meet needs this way, households must devote more time to paid work, which is itself being “immiserat[ed]” as “personal and relational aspects of jobs [are squeezed out] in the pursuit of efficiency” (1995:13).

From Bergmann’s point of view, some of these developments might be welcome moves down the road to ‘high commodification.’ However, Himmelweit argues that the caring and self-fulfilling activities which take place in the home are not well captured by the paradigm of ‘work’ and as such are “easily ... squeezed out by the competing demands on time of work and consumption” (1995:11). These “non-consumption needs” are invisible, private, and have no price put on them, so they are of “apparent marginal significance to the economy, and ...their importance to the actors within it [is] easily ignored” (1995:10).

For Himmelweit, although inequality between households is both driving the process of commodification and differentiating experience of it,⁴ all persons suffer “as money becomes more and more the only means to any end” (1995:13). In order to arrest or reverse the process of commodification, decreased inequality both within

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⁴ Inequality 1) is an important driver of the process of commodification, through aspiration formation when “money and consumption ...are the visible signs of success” in addition to the role of wage inequality generating both supply of and demand for labour-intensive
and between households is required. Himmelweft suggests several policies to reduce inequality within households, including “limiting the working day, and/or improving the conditions of employment for part-time work so that it could be treated as the norm rather than as appropriate only for a household’s secondary earner” (1995:14). Removing “the assumption of dependence within households common to nearly all welfare regimes” would reduce inequality between households, as “a household’s fortunes would not inevitably be determined by the fate of its largest wage earner, and the whole household would not be dragged into unemployment the moment the largest wage earner loses ‘his’ job” (1995:15).

Himmelweft values caring and self-fulfilling activities over apparently ever-expanding consumption ‘needs.’ She believes that the further expansion of the capitalist market (and associated models of work, value, and needs) to be inimical to human flourishing, because this process reduces time for, and obscures the value of the caring and self-fulfilling activities which support and enrich life. (Although she doesn’t use this language, she is arguing that ‘the system is colonising the lifeworld,’ see Chapter 1.1.2.) Capitalist market expansion is a gendered process because caring and self-fulfilling activities are “largely carried out by women” (1995:16) and their eclipse endangers women’s struggle for recognition.

I share both Himmelweft’s valuation of caring and self-fulfilling activities over expanding commodity consumption, and her lack of confidence in the further expansion of the capitalist market to always support human flourishing. However, arguments I present in Chapter 7 develop Himmelweft’s policy conclusions, pointing to a wider range of actors, strategies, and points of intervention, and offering forms of socialisation as alternatives to both commodification and household self-servicing. In a Better Society, domestic labour may continue to be bought and sold, but in ways more compatible with the sustenance of care and self-fulfilling activity.

Himmelweft’s policy ideas focus on changing the distribution of activity between the market and the household. She does not discuss how these changes might impact on existing markets for domestic services. However, her policy ideas imply that if 1) working hours were reduced and more equally distributed between households; and 2) responsibility for paid work and/or entitlement for income support more evenly distributed within households; per-capita time in paid work per

services, and 2) differentiates experience of commodification through class differences in purchasing power and employment opportunities (1995:12-13).
household would decline, enabling households to perform domestic, caring, and self-fulfilling activities for themselves, and perhaps to begin to replace previously purchased goods and services with those provided by household members.

In Chapter 7, I show how the pursuit of change in the public domain aims to reorganise the buying and selling of domestic, quasi-domestic and caring work in ways that overcome several of Himmelweit’s concerns without relying largely on households to return to self-provision by changing incentive structures. By engaging in the politics of needs formation, some social movement actors pursue economic and cultural revaluation of quasi-domestic and caring labour in institutional contexts in the public domain. Others mobilise community resources to pursue this revaluation in the ‘consumer services’ market segment, using the discourse of professionalisation in democratic organisations like worker cooperatives. If successful, at the level of the labour market segment, these strategies will increase the extent of socialised service provision (and so alternative employment opportunities for domestic workers), and increase the price and status of consumer services until only those prepared to pay ‘professional rates’ will find a supply of workers. These changes reverse the “immiseration of work” in domestic, quasi-domestic and caring occupations. Thus, paid household work will no longer be one of a range of lousy women’s jobs, but rather ‘women’s work’ will be properly valued.

Commodification is of underlying importance in analysis of paid household work because domestic occupations, like prostitution and commercial surrogacy, lie outside conventional understandings of ‘work,’ and on the wrong side of conventional boundaries between the market and private life. Buying and selling appears to breach these understandings and boundaries. In a different way, the ‘ultimate lousy job’ representation of paid domestic work in the literature is also related to the conventional understanding of domestic work as non-work; and, worse, as women’s non-work. Yet arguments for either the complete decommodification of housework or its complete commodification are in the danger of treating all paid household work – and workers – the same way.

In contrast, this thesis has shown in detail the diversity of modes of participation in the industry and of employment experiences in domestic occupations. Although I have focused on refuting the ‘ultimate lousy job’ flavour that suffuses feminist writing on domestic occupations, I am also refuting both the proscription of buying and selling housework, and the high commodification agenda
as essentialising analyses. This does not diminish the moral significance of these contributions to the debate about the future of class, race and gender relations and the future of work, but it signals that important and relevant contextual factors and complexities are in danger of being overlooked.

The important contribution of this thesis has been to show that analysis of change, and the potential for change, must confront 'actually existing' paid household work, in which 'bad' experiences are not universal, and when they do occur, are likely to have complex causes outside domestic employment relationships. Possibilities for change emerge out of the full range of work experiences and as the agenda of domestic workers themselves, as well as out of redefinitions of work and its social valuation. The case studies of mobilisation amongst domestic and quasi-domicile workers I consider in the thesis provide grounds for, at best, cautious optimism. There is a long way yet to go.
Coming Clean: A postscript

The reader might be interested to know that I have both worked as a domestic cleaner, and employed one.

For me, domestic cleaning was a filler for less than a year when I was making the transition from mother and housewife into the labour market. My first job found me when a fellow parent at the pre-school my daughter attended offered me a job cleaning her house. I found another job by answering a newspaper advertisement. An acquaintance offered me a third when I inquired after part-time work in his shop. My experience in these jobs echoed that of my respondents: it was hard and dirty work (although not as hard and dirty as the restaurant kitchen work I had done as a teenage university student), and it was a good feeling to look back at a cleaned house at the end of a few hours. It paid comparatively well, and off the books. I did not see two of the three householders after they gave me the keys to their homes. The fellow-parent was patronising, but I thought her a slattern, and so we were square. (Two of my three sisters also took up paid household work as very young women, in both cases as a stop-gap while they pursued higher education. The third worked for a while as a part-time nanny as a filler when young mother herself, looking after a family of children for a few hours on weekday afternoons.)

I gave up this work when I moved out of the area, and cannot say I was sorry to do so. I later worked in a friend’s business and experienced there much more than in paid household work the problems associated with the blurring of ‘public’ and ‘private’ relationships in an employment situation.

For the last four years or so, I have employed a married couple, immigrants of non-English-speaking birthplace, to clean my house fortnightly. I pay them well, and see them rarely. As a transaction between individuals, our ‘contract’ offers benefits on both sides. I would prefer that people of their age could take up less taxing work, but I honour their decision to sacrifice themselves to give their children what they believe to be a better life.

On bad days during the research and writing of this thesis, as I have watched what appears to be the End of the University as We Know It and faced yet another competition for my job, I have contemplated going back into the domestic services industry. I certainly know now how to go about it.
Appendix A

Method

For both epistemological and technical reasons, I have mainly used 'qualitative' rather than quantitative methods in this study. Even if I had been able to fulfil the procedural requirements of quantitative methods, crucial interpretive aspects of the study requiring sensitivity to respondents' own constructions of their experience of paid household work would have been lost in the pre-emptive conceptualisations demanded by sample survey construction and coding techniques.

This brief appendix describes the 'mechanics' of the research process.

A.1 Sampling and recruiting

Although public lists of domestic service providers (such as telephone directories or newspaper classified advertisements) exist, they are far from comprehensive because many contacts between service providers and consumers are made by word-of-mouth in local networks, or via mediating institutions operating with private lists. Some, perhaps a majority of paid household workers operate in the 'informal' or cash economy, outside the reach of the Department of Social Security, the Australian Tax Office and the Commonwealth Statistician.¹ Moreover, the 'domestic services industry' appears to be evolving rapidly, with new kinds of institutions emerging to organise transactions it. Thus, with the exception of the Homecare Service, the size, institutional distribution and personal characteristics of the whole population is unknown.

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¹ Reliable and comprehensive labour force statistics for the domestic services industry are not produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, see Appendix B.1.
These factors have significant implications for selecting and recruiting respondents. In this kind of study, the criterion of equal probability of selection presents an insurmountable barrier to the assembly of the kind of sample considered ideal in social inquiry. A sampling frame simply does not exist prior to research. Instead, a sample was constructed, in part inductively, as research proceeded.

Preliminary research indicated considerable diversity among both participants and institutions in the industry. Selection and recruitment of respondents took place in stages, simultaneously with the development of a stratified sample designed to capture the diversity of participants and institutions as it emerged. The sample is representative to the extent that it replicates the known diversity of the population along several dimensions - institution of entry, sex, ethnicity, migrant status and life cycle stage. (The use of a stratified sample structure ensured a good range of respondents, but it suffers the limitation of few in each 'cell.' Unfortunately this is an intractable problem in a one-researcher study of this kind.) No statistical measure of the representativeness of the sample in relation to the whole population is possible. However, available evidence on the composition of the domestic labour force is included in Appendix D which profiles the industry’s participants.

Beginning with a rough dichotomy of formal and informal markets, I began with a two pronged approach to finding respondents. On the 'informal' side I had no option but to seek initial contacts within my own local network, and 'snowball' from there. On the 'formal' side, I started with the public list provided by the advertising telephone directory or 'Yellow Pages'. The contacts made this way led to others, and with the help of paid household workers and agency and domestic service company operators, a stratified sample encompassing the personal and institutional dimensions of the population was developed (see Figure A.1). During the year or so in which most data was collected, I included all willing participants I came across by the various means already described. Recruiting fieldworkers from the Homecare Service of New South Wales required the permission and assistance of Area Coordinators, which was readily obtained.

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2. This divide is rough because some participants operate in the informal economy, but use registered employment agencies to find work, others neither advertise nor use institutional mediators, but work full time and 'on the books' (ie. pay tax).

3. The Yellow pages provide free one-line advertisements to individuals, companies and other organisations and larger listings for which advertisers have to pay. Two categories used by the Yellow Pages: “Cleaning- Home” and “Domestic Help Services” were relevant.
More than fifty people agreed to participate in interviews carried out between December 1993 and April 1995. Of these, some thirty were direct providers of domestic services. The remainder operated businesses of various kinds - agencies, companies or franchise operations - providing domestic workers to households. A small minority of this second group also worked themselves as domestic workers. Where possible, I carried out some follow-up interviews to find out if domestic workers were still working the industry in 1997 and 1998.

**Figure A.1: Stratified sampling matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>local network agencies capitalist firms franchise operations open market Home Care Service of NSW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market Relationship</td>
<td>worker organiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Type</td>
<td>cleaning, domestic only cleaning, including commercial housekeeping housework with childcare housework with aged care personal care (aged or disabled care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>female male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration status/ Ethnicity</td>
<td>Australian born English speaking country non-English speaking country</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Granovetter points out “Every [sampling] method, of course introduces systematic distortions and it is best to be aware what these are before evaluating results” (1995:8). The principal systematic distortion in this study is that it is a study of the *supply side* of the market for domestic services only. I did not interview householders who employ domestic workers, apart from the handful of domestic service providers (both workers and company operators and so on) who themselves
hired or had hired domestic workers. Secondly, company and agency operators are
over-represented in the study group – they appeared on public lists (and so were
easily accessible), and were able to offer some work-force and industry information
that individual workers could not.

My inclusion of Homecare fieldworkers is slightly controversial, and requires
explanation: although these workers may perform exactly the same work as paid
household workers employed to provide ‘consumer services’ by able-bodied working
people, and carry out their work in private homes, these workers are public
employees, protected by employment legislation, with recourse to a third party
employer, and unionised. My original intention in including fieldworkers in selecting
respondent groups was that they should form a kind of ‘control’ group, whose task
content and location corresponded to that of private domestic workers, but whose
relationship and conditions of employment differed sharply. I subsequently
discovered a continuum of employment relationships and conditions such that the
distinction between Homecare fieldworkers and private domestic workers was much
less clear (see Chapters 4 and 8).

A.2 Interviewing and transcribing

I invited respondents to participate in an interview about their work history
and work in the industry, promising them anonymity in accordance with the
University’s research ethics protocol. (Respondents’ names were changed to protect
their anonymity.) Interviews lasting from one half to two hours took place typically
at the respondent’s home in the case of domestic workers, and at the place of
business of agency and company operators. With the permission of respondents
(given in every case) I tape recorded interviews, and produced verbatim transcripts
of the conversations. Thus, a complete record of each interview was available for
analysis. A handful of respondents participated in shorter telephone interviews
which were neither taped nor transcribed in full.

I used a semi-structured interview schedule to conduct the interviews. The
schedule differed slightly for domestic workers and those running businesses
organising domestic service provision.
For domestic workers, the schedule included questions about:

1. the nature, duration, and extent of the respondent's involvement in the provision of domestic services
2. process of and reasons for entry into the domestic services industry
3. the organisation and content of transactions including pay, job description, source of jobs, role of third parties
4. the respondent's work history
5. the advantages and disadvantages of paid household work compared with other forms of employment
6. the market for domestic services in general - why people by domestic services, and the advantages and disadvantages of doing so
7. personal details about age, level of education, country of origin, household composition, household income level and sources
8. the role of paid household work in their economic life, including its proportional contribution to household income, and its place in their expected future work life

Those running agencies, companies or franchise operations in the industry are numerically 'over-represented' in relation to their numbers overall, but they provided a range of information about the domestic services industry as well as the occupation(s) of paid household work. In addition to points 1-6 above, I questioned these respondents about the history of their business, in the attempt to elicit information about demand trends in the 'industry'. In rare cases, they were also able to provide quantitative data about the number and personal characteristics of the paid household workers in whose work they were involved.

The path through the schedule was flexible and the interview process open. Respondents were frequently encouraged to expand on or explain further issues they raised, and the loquacious among them were not constrained. Often I did not need to ask about every issue individually, because respondents introduced topics unprompted by a specific question. I used bland, vaguely technical language ('service provider,' 'paid household work') to phrase the questions. Comments on the substance of responses were rarely offered other than general support of the "That's interesting" variety. This, in combination with a relaxed approach to questioning, gave the respondents the opportunity to shape the language and emphases of the conversation to some extent.

This approach to data collection was the most appropriate for several reasons. I wished to collect many facts about the operation of the industry and the
characteristics of its participants, but I also wanted to understand how they interpreted the processes and experiences they described. Construction of research instruments in survey-based research requires strict definition of the concepts or variables being measured before data collection starts. Strict protocols regarding survey administration are designed to ensure uniformity and thus comparability of responses. In these ways, reliability is secured. But this study aimed to discover rather than measure dimensions of the organisation and experience of paid household work. Data collection and analysis needed to be sensitive to the understandings of participants in the market themselves, and to undiscovered issues which emerged as the study proceeded. Thus, validity of the data rather than the reliability of measures was assured.

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the voices of participants to define to some extent what they want to tell me. By giving the respondents some authority in the interview process, the dialogic structure of the conversation allowed respondents to feel free as well as being free to talk. In many cases a more structured approach to questioning would have alienated the respondent and diminished the richness of their responses. The immense fertility of the data collected in the interviews would have been compromised by the pre-emptive reductions required by more conventional survey methods.

A.3 Data processing and analysis

Transcripts of the interviews are subjected to content analysis, based on careful reading and interpretation, managed with the use of an electronic database (the Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising, or NUD*IST computer package, developed by Qualitative Solutions and Research at Melbourne’s Latrobe University). This tool facilitated comprehensive incorporation of all data, and allowed me easily to code and retrieve the hundreds of thousands of words involved.

A.4 Using fieldwork data

Excerpts from interviews are presented throughout the thesis as evidence supporting its arguments. Because of the size and structure of the study sample, statistical summaries of responses (of the type “34% of respondents earn above the average hourly rate of $14.67”) are inappropriate, and so are neither calculated nor presented. Instead, material gathered in interviews are “summarised” in ways
appropriate to both their character and method of collection, and supplemented with information from other sources to build as comprehensive and nuanced picture of paid household work as possible. Information about the respondent group as a whole is presented in Appendix D, which describes, as far as possible, the domestic workforce. Again, other evidence supplements these suggestive numbers.

A brief explanation of my approach to choosing and presenting excerpts is required here. Because in interviews with domestic workers I allowed respondents to speak as expansively as they chose in response to general prompts such as “Tell me about your job,” I include my prompts and questions only when they (rather than the respondent’s interests) obviously shape the subject matter by introducing a topic, or asking pointedly for expansion on a particular theme. Even in the more structured interviews with agency and company operators, respondents were expansive, and introduced topics themselves, and in such cases, again, their comments stand alone. Excerpts are not always verbatim, in the strict sense of recording every utterance from a particular part of the interview. Sometimes respondents returned to a topic, and intervening comments on other topics are replaced with an ellipsis, unless the juxtaposition is particularly significant to the respondent, or illuminates a point I am trying to make. These divergences from verbatim reports are based on intellectual decisions, but I made others on aesthetic grounds. I edited excerpts from interviews with less articulate respondents for readability, removing false starts on sentences unless they seemed to reveal conflict; and oft-repeated utterances such as ‘you know,’ ‘sort of,’ and ‘um’ when they appeared to be verbal tics rather than qualifiers or expressions of uncertainty. Apart from such omissions, the cadence and flavour of the spoken word remains. Because I analyse both the content and language of the interviews, word choices remain entirely those of respondents.
Appendix B

Official Statistics on the Domestic Services Industry

This appendix sets out available – and unavailable - sources of official statistical data about employment in and expenditure on paid household work.

B.1 Employment in paid household work

The Australian Bureau of Statistics collects data on the occupation and industry distribution of the Australian labour force in a purpose-designed Labour Force Survey as well as in the five-yearly Census. The Australian Standard Industrial Classification (ASIC)\(^1\) and the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO) provide the hierarchically structured system of categories used to sort the data from both the Labour Force Survey and the Census. Unfortunately, when less is more, paid domestic work is scattered widely across the Bureau’s classificatory systems.

The ASCO includes four relevant occupations. This is not surprising, given the diversity of tasks required to maintain domestic life. Within the classification Labourers and Related Workers are listed Domestic Housekeeper (8915-13) defined as persons performing ‘cleaning and housekeeping duties in private homes,’ and Domestic Cleaner, a specialisation within the category Cleaners, not elsewhere classified (not elsewhere classified [nec]), (8301-99). The broad classification Sales Persons and Personal Service Workers records the occupation Nanny, defined as a person who ‘minds children as an employee in a private household’ as a specialisation under Childcare, Refuge and Related Workers, nec, (6601-99). Baby Sitter and Child Minder are recorded in this classification as specialisations under Childcare Attendant (6601-15). Finally, amongst croupiers, escorts and tattooists, the category Personal

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1. The ASIC has been recently replaced with the Australian and New Zealand Industrial Classification (ANZIC). However, the 1991 Census and the Labour Force Survey data used in this chapter were coded using the ASIC.
Service Workers nec (6699-99) includes Butlers, defined as persons who supervise household staff, provide personal services, receive telephone calls and announce guests. Any reader with familiar with labour force data will immediately recognise a problem. Labour force data in either the Labour Force Survey or the Census are not reported beyond the four-digit level of either the ASCO or ASIC. Because all the occupations of interest here are either classified at or within the six-digit level, occupational classifications alone are not useful. Perhaps cross tabulation of occupational with relevant industrial classifications can be used to ‘filter’ the data?

Whereas the ASCO attributes individuals to occupational classifications, the ASIC is designed as a system for classifying establishments according to their primary activities. The ASIC includes (as its penultimate class before Non-classifiable Economic Units) under the division Recreational, Personal and Other Services an Industry sub-division Private Households Employing Staff (9400). This consists of "establishments mainly engaged in employing caretakers, maids, chauffeurs, gardeners, butlers or other servants for domestic purposes". This classification records ‘establishments’ where the householder is the employer of a domestic service provider. Cross tabulation with the occupational groups set out above should filter out non-domestic cleaning, or institutional child-minding. However, when the domestic service provider works, for example, cleaning several houses for different householders in a given period of time, s/he is not included in the Private Households industry classification. This means that although data are reported for this four-digit classification (see Table B.1), it is not comprehensive. Where service providers are self-employed, or work for a third party, they may be classified under Property and Business Services in a subdivision Cleaning Services nec (6387), which includes housecleaning services. Alternatively, the classification Personal Services nec (9364) records the provision of babysitting service and domestic services on a contract or fee basis. It is likely that the overwhelming majority of paid household work is performed on a contract or fee basis, and so if recorded, would appear in these latter two classifications. Unfortunately, cross classification with occupational groups will not filter paid household workers out of these industry divisions. A diverse set of occupations cross-classified with a diverse set of ‘establishments’ or work settings collected on an analogous principle cannot reveal much at all. Personal communication with George Silvestri at the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics confirms that equivalent measurement problems also exist in the US.
Table B.1: Private Households Employing Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Persons (000)</th>
<th>Females (000)</th>
<th>% of persons</th>
<th>Female household workers as % of all female workers</th>
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<td>77</td>
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</table>

B.2 Expenditure on domestic services: The Household Expenditure Survey

The Household Expenditure Survey obtains data on household expenditure on goods and services for private consumption. Thus, this survey can be used to measure the demand side of the domestic services industry.

In addition to data on expenditure on goods and services coded to some 426 commodity variables, the HES collects information about the level and sources of household income, and about household composition. Together with expenditure data, information about the economic and demographic characteristics of households can be used to analyse relationships between expenditure patterns and household types. Thus, expenditure data is useful for analysing the characteristics of households purchasing domestic labour services, and enables comparison of these households with the population as a whole.

Surveyed householders are not required to specify to whom payment for domestic services is made, so it is my judgement that data collected in the HES on these services is reliable, in spite of the generally presumed predominance of unrecorded transactions in the market for them.

I did not have unlimited access to the HES to use for this study – the unit record files required for the kind of analysis described in this section cost tens of thousands of dollars. However, I have done some collaborative work on domestic service expenditure patterns with Michael Bittman and George Matheson of the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales which held the last three Household Expenditure Surveys (see Bittman, Matheson and Meagher 1999), and through this gained some access to expenditure data.

Using the HES, the size of the demand side of the market for domestic labour services can be measured in two ways: in terms of 1) total and mean expenditure on these services; and 2) the incidence of purchase, measured in terms of the number of households purchasing services (i.e., households spending > $0.00, or in some cases, some other designated figure) expressed as a proportion of the total population.

These are very useful measures, but are subject to some important limitations as measures of the ‘domestic services industry.’ In particular, expenditure data on its own gives no direct information about the level of employment in domestic occupations. Strong growth in the proportion of households purchasing domestic
services would do little more than suggest that more people work providing such
services. Although the HES is the best quantitative data source available, these
limitations mean that caution must be exercised in using results of HES analysis to
confirm or disprove general hypotheses about domestic employment and the future of
work.

Three expenditure items in the HES record spending on services relevant to this
study:

◊ **Housekeeping and cleaning services including ironing** (Commodity Code 415)
  under which label are listed the following service commodities:
  - Chimney sweeping
  - Cleaner (person)
  - Cleaning of windows
  - Housekeeper
  - Ironing (person)
  - Window cleaning

◊ **Household services not elsewhere classified (nec)** (Commodity Code 416)
  under which label are listed the following service commodities:
  - Chauffeur
  - Night-watchman
  - Maid
  - Cook
  - Domestic services (excluding childminding)
  - Odd job man/woman

◊ **Childcare services nec** (Commodity Code 418)\(^1\)
  under which label are listed the following service commodities:
  - Babysitting fees (paid to a person)
  - Playgroup fees (nec and undefined)
  - Childminding (person)

Tables B.2, B.3, and B.4 present some basic expenditure data on the incidence of
expenditure on 1) household (housekeeping and cleaning) services, and 2) on home-
based childcare. Table B.2 shows that fewer than one in twenty five households
purchased household services the fortnight reporting period in any year of the HES,
and the growth trend posited by so many writers is clearly not evident. (By stark
contrast, nearly nine of ten households replaced their own labour in food preparation
by purchasing restaurant meals, take-away food, or convenience foods for home
consumption (Bittman, Meagher and Matheson 1999, figure 1)).

Table B.3 shows the incidence of purchase of child care services most closely
corresponding to the class of services which includes nannies. The table summarises
information about households reporting positive expenditure amounts, and those

\(^{1}\) All three commodity codes (415, 416 and 418) included services excluded from this study,
such as chauffeur, window cleaning and playgroup fees. However, I did not believe these
mismatches to be significant enough to undermine reported results.
spending more than $60.00 weekly. These categories are designed to distinguish expenditure on hiring a ‘babysitter’ to care for children while parents pursue recreational activities (defined as spending less than or equal to $60.00), and expenditure on private childcare for longer periods, which constitutes employment of a ‘nanny’ (spending more than $60.00).  

Table B.2: Incidence of and weighted mean weekly expenditure (1988-9 dollars) on domestic services (household proportions use weighted estimates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mean expenditure ($ per week)</th>
<th>Mean expenditure ($ per week)</th>
<th>Purchasing households as % of total households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. All households</td>
<td>2. Households spending &gt; 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping and cleaning services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>17.53</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-9</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>17.50</td>
<td>2.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-4</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>19.51</td>
<td>3.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household services nec (CC416)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>17.56</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-9</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>20.86</td>
<td>0.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-4</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>15.13</td>
<td>0.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All household services (CC415 or CC416)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>17.60</td>
<td>3.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-9</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>18.44</td>
<td>2.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-4</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>19.28</td>
<td>3.66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Household Expenditure Surveys.

Table B.3 shows that if relatively few Australian households purchased housekeeping and cleaning services, even fewer purchased private childcare: fewer than one in forty in 1993-4. When the household count is restricted to those spending more than $60.00, this proportion falls further, to fewer than one in four hundred in 1993-4.

However, this is not because parents are not purchasing childcare services. Table B.4 sets out the incidence of expenditure on all types of childcare services for the subsets of households with a) pre-school age children and b) children under fifteen

2. This is a very generous way of estimating the number of households purchasing nanny services: that is, it tends to over-count rather than under-count.
years old. What leaps out at the reader here is growth in the proportion of households with children purchasing childcare of various kinds: nearly half of all households with pre-school age children purchased some childcare service in the fortnightly recall period for the survey in 1993-4, compared with less than a quarter ten years before.

Table B.3: Incidence and weighted mean weekly household expenditure (exp.) in dollars per week on childcare services nec (at 1988-9 prices, household (hh) counts are weighted estimates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mean expenditure</th>
<th>No. of households</th>
<th>% of all households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households spending &gt; $0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>24.72</td>
<td>106735</td>
<td>2.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-9</td>
<td>18.66</td>
<td>152676</td>
<td>2.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-4</td>
<td>23.86</td>
<td>164571</td>
<td>2.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households spending &gt; $60.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>82.31</td>
<td>13384</td>
<td>0.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-9</td>
<td>93.43</td>
<td>11689</td>
<td>0.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-4</td>
<td>114.54</td>
<td>15921</td>
<td>0.24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Household Expenditure Surveys.

Table B.4: Incidence of expenditure on childcare services (household (hh) counts are weighted estimates) amongst households with children under 15 years of age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of all households</th>
<th>1. % purchasing any childcare</th>
<th>2. % purchasing 'nanny services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households with children &lt; 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-4</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Households with children &lt; 15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-9</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-4</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Household Expenditure Surveys.

In addition to the benefit of any quantification acquired, these findings are significant because they challenge the widely propagated view that a growing proportion of households are employing domestic service workers.
Appendix C

Domestic Labour Tasks and Domestic Occupations

C.1 Characteristics of domestic labour tasks

Patterns in the demand for and supply of paid household work are shaped by the characteristics of the tasks constituting domestic labour and their social organisation. Differences between the tasks affect, but do not determine, the extent and means of their commodification. Table C.1 sets out six dimensions which differentiate the tasks of domestic labour spatially, temporally, technically, and in terms of the kinds of personal relationships required.

Site-dependent tasks must be carried out in the home of the purchasing householder - cleaning is an obvious example here. Time-dependent tasks, such as childcare, must take place either at specified times and/or for periods of specified duration. With person-dependent tasks, "a relationship is involved and who performs the activity becomes part of the activity itself" (Himmelweit, 1995:9). For such tasks, particular persons in particular relationships, rather than a particular location, are distinctive: 'emotional care' is strongly person-dependent. Any of these tasks can be or become person dependent, if a relationship exists or develops between the task performer, and person enjoying its fruits. However, in the first instance, the quality and successful performance of laundry work is not obviously dependent on a particular kind of relationship between the launderer and who sleeps on the clean sheets. When task content varies strongly, that is, is customised, it needs to be regularly communicated or negotiated between parties. Shopping and emotional care - otherwise very different kinds of tasks - both have strongly variable 'content'. Some tasks are easily and relatively cheaply replaced by the purchase of commodities in the production of which there are considerable economies of scale. Cooking (in the form of take-away or restaurant meals) or laundry are obvious candidates here. Tasks such as
Table C.1: Characteristics of tasks constituting domestic labour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Site Dependent</th>
<th>Person Dependent</th>
<th>Timing Dependent</th>
<th>Time Consuming</th>
<th>Customised</th>
<th>Economies of Scale in Commodity Production</th>
<th>Household Capital Goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>moderately</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>very weakly</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>very weakly</td>
<td>very weakly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>moderately</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>moderately</td>
<td>moderately</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>moderately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>moderately</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>moderately (car?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Management</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>(except tradesperson supervision)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Care of Persons</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>moderately</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>not at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Care</td>
<td>weakly</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>moderately</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>strongly</td>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>not at all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
childcare also commodified and/or socialised in the public sphere, partly because economies of scale operate in childcare centres and the like.¹ Tasks are also differentiated by the extent to which productivity in their performance is enhanced by domestic capital goods. Laundry is made relatively quick and easy in households owning washing machines, for example, explaining why self-servicing by households is common, despite the economies of scale achievable in industrial laundering.

I identified three clusters of tasks in the industry: cleaning, ‘housekeeping’, and personal care. Cleaning of floors, bathrooms, kitchens and basic dusting make up the ‘basic clean,’ which may be supplemented by oven or refrigerator cleaning, furniture polishing and more careful detailed dusting by negotiation. Housekeeping includes laundry, cooking and shopping in addition to cleaning. Personal care includes bathing, toileting, feeding, and generally looking after dependent members of purchasing households in their homes, typically children, and aged or disabled adults. Tasks for which there are economies of scale in commodity production (most notably cooking and laundry) are rarely, if ever, purchased singly in the form of labour time performed in the home of the purchaser. When these services are purchased, it is usually because the service provider is on-site concurrently performing a time-dependent task like childcare, or because the householder purchases ‘housekeeping’ in which these tasks are included. The three service clusters of cleaning, housekeeping and personal care resolve into a set of sub-occupations in which service providers work. I found people working in the following domestic ‘occupations’:²

1. cleaning, domestic only
2. cleaning, including commercial
3. housekeeping
4. housework with childcare
5. housework with aged care

¹ However, Gorz points out why ideas of economic efficiency are limited in their usefulness for tasks like childcare, because “It is possible for the efficiency of ‘carers’ to be in inverse proportion to their visible quantitative output” (1989:143).
² Gregson and Lowe (1994) identify two forms of waged domestic labour only: cleaning and nanny. In both cases, they emphasise the labour intensity of the tasks as reasons why they might be substitutes for unpaid labour by female partners or both partners in “new middle class” or “service class” households (1994). In addition, they argue that “traditional ideas about the care of young, pre-school-age children” (1994:120), specifically “the dominant ideology...that home care in the parental home is best” (1994:92), influenced the choice of nannies as a form of childcare.
6. personal care (aged or disabled care)

[7. personal care (childcare)]

(The seventh service is not included in this study on the same basis as the others listed, principally because it overlapped too much with other forms of childcare. I use an eighth, more general category 'general domestic services' to describe agencies placing domestic workers in all these occupations.)

C.2 Rates of pay for domestic and comparable occupations

Domestic workers in different occupations receive different rates of pay. Table C.2 sets out reported rates of pay in domestic occupations (column A), and service charges to householders (column B). Table C.3 sets out award rates of pay for comparable occupations in non-domestic settings. Here comparable means both jobs with similar 'content' – such as cleaning, child care, and general kitchen and laundry assistance – as well as occupations categorised at similar skill levels, and in which women workers predominate. Comparison of these tables shows pay rates for domestic occupations to be close to pay rates in similar occupations in non-domestic settings.

C.3 Service types and institutions

Service types, or domestic service occupations are not evenly distributed between institutions. Agencies alone take on the entire range of services (as indicated by the formulation 'general domestic services') including aged care with housework which is otherwise only offered by the Homecare Service. Cleaning is organised through every institution. Franchise operations are conspicuous by their absence in the provision of personal care, and their specialisation in cleaning, both domestic-only and domestic combined with small scale commercial cleaning. Domestic cleaning franchising, where associated with other kinds of services, is offered by large

4. A couple of agencies reported that for clients seeking housekeeping and personal care services as part of compensation and other insurance claims, the agency offered staff as its own employees paid on invoice by the insurance company involved. This kind of service provision lies outside the bounds of this study, and so this activity was not discussed in detail in interviews, and is not dealt with here. However, for one 'agency' this kind of service was its core business - which in fact operated as a ‘company’ (using the definition developed below). Agency provision of domestic services as a consumption good represented only 5% of turnover in this business - and it is this part of their business which formed the basis of that organisation's classification for the purposes of this study.
franchising companies which sell franchises for specialised services like car detailing, carpet cleaning and lawn mowing individually.

The Home Care Service is the only unambiguous social service provider I examine in this study. However, agencies and companies do offer cleaning, housekeeping and personal care as social services, either through contracting-out in Home and Community Care programs (see Appendix E.5.2), or through the market for those elderly people who may be excluded from or chose not to use publicly provided services.
**Table C.2 Reported rates of pay for waged domestic labour ‘occupations’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>A. Reported rates of pay for domestic workers</th>
<th>B. Service charges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cleaning, domestic only</td>
<td>range $10-20 per hour, ‘going rate’ $11-15</td>
<td>$10-20 per hour, ‘going rate’ $15 per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleaning, incl. commercial*</td>
<td>$18-20 per hour</td>
<td>$18-25 per hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housekeeping (h-k)</td>
<td>$12-16 per hour part-time, several employers</td>
<td>$16-50 part-time (going rate $25 h-k companies, $18.50 agencies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$250-350 per week live-in, single employer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housework with child care (nanny, nanny/housekeeper)</td>
<td>range $4-14 per hour</td>
<td>same as pay rates but placement fee of up to $750 for full-time worker may apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$350-60 per week live-out, full time, 1 employer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(live-in $100 per week less; permanent part-time, pro-rata)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$10 per hour casual rates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$100-200 per week 'au pair'(live-in, part-time, 1 employer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homecare Service of NSW Field Staff</td>
<td>Grade 1 $414 p.w., hourly rates $10.89 p.t., $13.07 casual</td>
<td>variable, and subsidised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1: housekeeping</td>
<td>Grade 2 $437</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2: h-k and personal care</td>
<td>Grade 3 $471</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3: h-k and complex personal care</td>
<td>[shift allowance ($5 per break), meal money ($5.90 overtime), and a vehicle allowance of $0.48 per kilometre also paid]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live-in rates: Grade 1 $527.80; Grade 2 $600.60, Grade 3 $718.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These data were collected between 1993 and 1998. It was not possible to adjust them to a single date. Anecdotal evidence suggests that pay rates rise and fall with demand for domestic services, but no measure for demand that would support adjustment is available. It is not possible to distinguish gross rates of pay from those net of tax, because of the widespread, but not universal, practice of unrecorded cash transactions in the domestic services industry.

*These are rates of pay for domestic cleaning for those service providers also offering commercial cleaning. Their hourly rates for commercial cleaning may be higher. Commercial cleaners who are waged labourers receive lower rates of pay (see Table 8.2). Structural differences between the small scale cleaning operations in the domestic and small office market and the corporate cleaning industry account for this anomaly.

*This information comes from Whelan (1995). Whelan confirmed $350 per week as the ‘going rate’ for full-time, live-out, agency-placed nannies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Hourly rate in dollars Total</th>
<th>Weekly rate</th>
<th>Award</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clerk (data processing, stenography etc)</td>
<td>$12.65 + $1.06 holiday pay</td>
<td>$13.71</td>
<td>$400.50 Clerks (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assistant in nursing</td>
<td>$10.87 + $0.91 holiday pay</td>
<td>$11.78</td>
<td>$375.30 Nurses &amp; c. Other than in Hospitals (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$11.82 + $0.99 holiday pay</td>
<td>$12.81</td>
<td>Nursing Home and Nurses (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waitering</td>
<td>$12.27 + $1.03 holiday pay</td>
<td>$13.30</td>
<td>$310.70 Hotel Employees (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$9.83 + $0.82 holiday pay</td>
<td>$10.65</td>
<td>Restaurant, &amp;c., Employees (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kitchen hand/sandwich hand</td>
<td>$11.74</td>
<td>$11.74</td>
<td>$352.40 Private Hotels, Motels, Guest Houses &amp; c. Employees (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>textile outworker</td>
<td>$12.58</td>
<td>$12.58</td>
<td>$358.10 Clothing Trades (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleaner (female)</td>
<td>$11.58 + $0.97 holiday pay</td>
<td>$12.55</td>
<td>$362.60 Miscellaneous Workers - General Services (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hotel housemaid, linen-, pantry- or kitchenmaid</td>
<td>$12.15 + $1.02 holiday pay</td>
<td>$13.17</td>
<td>$307.80 Hotel Employees (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>process worker</td>
<td>$11.08 + $0.92 holiday pay</td>
<td>$12.00</td>
<td>$366.10 Metal and Engineering Industry (NSW) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sandwich/salad maker linenmaid, cleaner/useful</td>
<td>$9.78 + $0.82 holiday pay</td>
<td>$10.60</td>
<td>$293.30 Restaurant, &amp;c., Employees (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kitchenhand/maid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shop assistant</td>
<td>$12.34 + $1.03 holiday pay</td>
<td>$13.36</td>
<td>$407.80 Shop Employees (State) Award</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child care worker</td>
<td>$11.77 + $0.98 holiday pay</td>
<td>$12.75</td>
<td>$388.80 Miscellaneous Workers - Kindergartens and Child Care Centres (State) Award</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Compiled from NSW Department of Industrial Relations Award Enquiry Service Centre award information sheets, supplied by Gayle Robson, Women's Equity Bureau, NSW Department of Industrial Relations.*
Appendix D

Characteristics of the Domestic Workforce

In Australia, as elsewhere in the advanced capitalist world, the stereotypical paid household worker is a middle aged ‘cleaning lady’ from a subordinated racial-ethnic group. Although I am unable to give a comprehensive demographic profile of the work force (see Appendix A), I can state with confidence that women and men of various ages and ethnicities work in domestic service provision. However, the domestic labour market is segmented. Available evidence suggests that men and women are clustered in particular domestic occupations, enter the industry through different institutions, and that there are gender, ethnic and life course stage differences in how paid household work fits into service providers’ lives (see Chapter 5). This appendix presents available evidence on the composition of the domestic labour force.

D.1 Sex of domestic service providers

In this study, women form a clear majority, 35 of 50 or 70%, of respondents. Most studies of paid household work treat it as an exclusively a female occupation, so the presence of even a few men is significant. However, evidence suggests that men and women are not evenly distributed throughout the domestic services industry. Table D.1 shows the distribution of respondents by sex and institution, market position and service type. One known divergence of the study group from the population is that organisers are over-represented. However, additional evidence presented shows that the study population broadly reflects the pattern of the distribution of men and women involve in buying and selling housework and home-based aged and childcare.

Table D.1 indicates several imbalances in the distribution of women and men across this sample. Men are absent from both housekeeping and housework with childcare, but relatively dominant as providers of cleaning services to a combination of
domestic and commercial customers. Women dominate in all institutions except for franchising. Men are also slightly over represented as ‘organisers’ in the industry.

Table D.1: Distribution of study population by sex, service type, market position and institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>F as % of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cleaning, domestic only</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleaning, including commercial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housekeeping</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housework with childcare</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housework with aged care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal care (aged or disabled)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general domestic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worker</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worker and organiser</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agency</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>franchise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Care Service</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local network</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open market</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the study population is skewed towards organisers, evidence provided by agency, franchise and capitalist company operators, and the Home Care Service about their workforces corroborates the sample’s sex distribution within these occupation and institution categories (see also Box D.1).

◊ Jeannie reported that her cleaning agency sent out “mainly ladies,” and when pressed for more precision said “One percent men.” Clare, who said that cleaning was “not traditionally a woman’s job any more,” reported that twenty of her eighty cleaners were men.

◊ Of the 127 people working in domestic and combined domestic and commercial cleaning franchises across four companies, 41 percent were female. Intra-company male-female ratios varied from 49 to 23 percent female, and the overwhelming majority of female franchisees worked in partnerships with their husbands.

◊ Every single one of seventy five people owning, administering and/or directly providing housekeeping and domestic cleaning services in the five capitalist companies I spoke to was female.
The Home Care Service provides a gender breakdown of its entire workforce. In 1996-7, women were 91 percent of the Service’s workforce. However, women were only five of the ten senior administrative staff, and 69 percent of middle managers (Home Care Service Annual Report 1996-7:66).

Agency operators often spoke about their workforces as “the girls” or “the ladies.” Work involving childcare is performed overwhelmingly by females.

Box D.1: The gender profile of the domestic services workforce

Catherine, au pair (child care with housework) agency operator:

It’s always girls because there’s no demand for boys. Absolutely none. ... Australia’s just not as far ahead in hiring au pairs as Europe is ... Maybe Australian men are a bit more reserved about having another man in their house or maybe Australian women feel uncomfortable about having a young fellow running around the house as well. But it doesn’t work. Here. Yet.

Deborah, diversified agency operator:

[Do you have many men on your books?]

Yes.

[To do what kind of jobs?]

Gardening, elderly caring, when it comes to elderly men, although a lot of elderly ladies are big, and the guys are better at moving them around. They do a lot of waiting jobs - we get some requests for male babysitters only, when they have say three or four big boys, 10, 12 and 8 or something and they want somebody to kick a ball around, not somebody to sit and play with dolls. We get live-in temp work when the parents go overseas or away on weekends, if they’re a family of boys - I’ve just had a young boy of 21 live-in with 5 boys all over Christmas, being paid really well, but he’s been to uni, done the childhood thing and worked with disabled kids - very highly qualified. And the parents said, “Look, I don’t care if they have pizzas and lasagne every night, I don’t care if you can’t cook. We want a man to take control of all our boys. Ring up and get take away every night, they’ll have good food when we get home. As long as the boys are kept in line, and they don’t go wild and run off and don’t come home.”

[Why did they think a man was better for that?]

They rang up and they wanted a man - and they said “Have you got any good men?” And this fellow was the first one that came to mind, because he does disabled childcare as a permanent job, and he’s free over the holidays, so I put him in there. That’s just one example. A few regular clients will ring and say “I want a babysitter,” I say, “Oh, yes, Mrs X, you like a man.” She’ll go “Yes.” We have male cleaners - about the best cleaner we have at the moment is a male.

[What proportion of say cleaners and people working with children would be male?]

In the agency, I would say - it goes up and down. At a maximum, 20% men, at a minimum, 10%. Up and down. We’ll have some really good men working for us, then they’ll leave. We’re quite selective with the men, because a lot of ladies go “Oh, a man?” They feel insecure in the house with a man coming in. And a lot of ladies say “I’d love a man because I’ve got big heavy furniture to be moved while they’re cleaning, a man would be great.” But we have constant lawn mowers, constant gardeners that go from job to job to job. ... We get live-in butler style jobs, they’re for men. We get work for men domestically.
In general, men and women are more likely to work for some institutions than others, and certain institutions are more likely to provide particular service types (see Box D.1). These differences are the effect of the interaction of:

1. pre-existing patterns participation and reward in the labour market
2. cultural norms leading to the sexotyping of occupations
3. the economic structure of particular institutions.

D.2 Ethnicity of service providers

Much writing on paid household work emphasises that it is not only women’s work, it is immigrant or “subordinate-race” (Glenn 1992:8) women’s work (see also Chang and Groves 1994, Romero 1992:69, Sanjek and Colen 1990a, 1990b, Tan and Devasahayam 1987). This is not borne out in the Australian case: many domestic workers are Australian-born, and most are white. Geographical isolation, the operation (until 1973) of a profoundly racist immigration policy, and decimation of the black indigenous people, have undermined the development of a sizeable and impoverished urban population of people of color available as a service caste. Thus, the association of domestic workers with people of color is weak.

Nevertheless, racial-ethnic hierarchy is evident in the Australian labor market, and shapes the domestic services industry. Aboriginals¹ and people of non-English speaking birthplace (NESB)² are disadvantaged, and women fare particularly badly. Aboriginal and NESB women are over-represented among the unemployed and in blue collar occupations, and under-represented in service sector industries and white collar and professional occupations compared to non-Aboriginal women born in Australia or migrant women from English-speaking countries (Caroline Alcorso and Graham Harrison 1993; Women’s Bureau 1994).

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¹ Aboriginal people constitute less than 2 percent of the total Australian population of approximately 18,000,000. However, due to a variety of interdependent historical, locational and cultural factors, they have a low economic status which “bedevils policy makers and continues to appear intractable” (Jon Altman and Anne Daly 1995:64).
² Before the 1970s, although the White Australia Policy favored British and northern European migrants, labor shortages meant that hundreds of thousands of migrants from southern and eastern Europe were encouraged to settle here. These latter groups, and the wave of migrants from Asia and the Middle East arriving since the White Australia Policy was revoked in 1973, constitute a broad and heterogeneous population of people of non-English speaking birthplace. This population is, with the significant exception of some east and south Asian groups, is disadvantaged in the Australian labor market (Jock Collins 1992).
Table D.2 shows the distribution of the study population by migrant status, service type, market position, and institution. It suggests that migrants are unlikely to enter the industry via institutions involving third party mediators (companies, franchise operations and agencies). However, the sample population derived from these institutions is biased towards organisers,\(^3\) and migrants are less likely to be organisers than Australian-born service providers. So what do these Australian-born organisers say about the ethnic composition of the direct service providers they are involved with? Box D.2 shows that paid household workers from a range of ethnic groups enter the industry via third party mediated transactions. However, patterns of participation mirror aspects of gender difference: like men, migrants from non-English speaking countries are unlikely to work in domestic occupations involving childcare\(^4\) and part-time housekeeping, and more likely to work as cleaners.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that certain ethnic groups are more likely to take on paid household work than others. In Sydney, Portuguese-, Chinese-, Korean-, and Spanish-speaking immigrants can be found more often than other ethnic groups. Juyun and Kim, a Korean husband and wife, respondents to this study remarked that many people from their ethnic community worked as domestic cleaners or combined domestic and commercial cleaning. Fernanda Duarte’s sociological study of the cult of beauty among Brazilian women in Sydney in 1986 included some information about the thirty respondents’ occupations before and after migration. Only one reported “domestic maid” as her pre-migration occupation in Brazil - others had been, among other things, teachers, housewives, nurses and secretaries. In Australia, twelve of these women worked as domestic cleaners (Duarte 1986:123). Janaína, a Brazilian migrant and former cleaner put it this way:

It’s almost like a cliché among the Brazilian community here - the women clean and the men do construction work. Just about every Brazilian women you meet, she has done or is doing some cleaning.

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3. This is because these respondents were able to offer information about many more service providers than this study could include directly.
4. Although women from non-English speaking backgrounds do provide Family Day Care, under state-funded and locally managed schemes in which (typically) married women at home with their own children are paid to care for a small number of children from other families in the carer’s home. A survey of family day care providers found that approximately 10% of family day carers were of non-English speaking migrant background (National Family Day Care Council, 1991: 278).
Table D.2: Distribution of study population by migrant status, service type, market position and institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Australian-born</th>
<th>Migrant, ESC</th>
<th>Migrant, NESC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cleaning, domestic only</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleaning, incl. commercial</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housekeeping</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aged or disabled care</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housework with aged care</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housework with child care</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general domestic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worker</td>
<td>1-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organiser</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worker and organiser</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transition</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local network</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>franchise</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agency</td>
<td>1-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open market</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homecare Service</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Study population TOTAL</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box D.2: Comments on the ethnicity of domestic workers

Jeannie, small domestic cleaning agency operator:
They have to be able to speak English because otherwise they can't converse with the client, and she can't explain what she needs done. ...We've got a Yugoslav, a Spanish lady who's very good, a couple of Chinese or Hong Kong Chinese, there's a Korean girl who's very good. I suppose there would be about thirty percent whose first language is not English.

Sophie, personnel consultant with a large, general domestic agency:
Our clients are very, very particular - they want their floors cleaned in a particular way, with particular stuff, and they need to leave notes for the cleaner. With childcare, safety is the thing. They have to be able to communicate immediately with the child, especially if the child is in danger. They also have to be able to receive written and verbal instructions. I would say half our cleaning staff are from [NESB] ethnic backgrounds. We also have lots of uni students doing cleaning, and mums whose kids are at school. Most of the nannies are born here.

Campbell, franchise cleaning company operator:
In the late eighties and early nineties, certainly on the North Shore, the cleaning industry was predominantly Korean. Korean husband and wife, and that was the system at the time, that was the industry norm. I suspect that what happens is as new waves of migrants come into the country, they start by the easiest access. They're the cheapest source of labour and they'll do the less attractive jobs.

Our franchisees are about 40% [from] non-English speaking [backgrounds], primarily Chinese, and 60% Australian or second generation [migrants] - we have Algerians and Lebanese and what have you.

Bob, diversified domestic agency operator:
[From your perspective as an agent, what are the most important qualities of a service provider?]
Experience and communication. Now I use the word communication - as I say we don't discriminate on the grounds of race or language. But if we have somebody who doesn't really speak or understand the language, there's not much point in sending her to an area where she's looking after a six month old baby and something happens and she's got no idea who to ring and if she did, no one would understand her at that end of it, so that's where we've got to be careful. Its different if they're the same nationality, then they could ring where the people are going to or something like that. And then of course when I say you don't discriminate, we have an enormous eastern suburbs area. Now we have a lot of Jewish people in the eastern suburbs, we have a lot of people from Mediterranean areas, a lot of Arabic. Now we don't want to send an Arabic person to a Jewish person because we don't want to cause a problem and vice versa.
Appendix E

Public Policy and Paid Household Work

This appendix analyses relationships between public policy and the domestic services industry in Australia. Public policy influences the size and composition of the domestic services industry labour force and the work relationships and experience of participants directly and indirectly. By looking at the public policy framework in which 1) decisions to participate and 2) transactions in the industry are made, we can better understand the opportunities and problems facing participants in it and the distinctiveness of the Australian industry's structure.

The following public policy areas as particularly relevant:
1. labour regulation
2. labour market programs
3. education and training
4. immigration and citizenship
5. social security (income support) and taxation
6. public social services provision (childcare and aged care)

(Where relevant, some historical background on policy issues relating to domestic service are given, in a series of boxed notes.)

E.1 Labour regulation

E.1.1 An outline of the Australian industrial relations system

A complicated accumulation of federal and state laws governs employment relations in Australia. Domestic workers employed directly by householders (private domestic workers) are uniquely subject to explicit exclusion from jurisdiction in some of these bodies of law, and differentiated from all other kinds of workers and subject to special rules in others. Those employed by domestic service companies come under the umbrella of employment regulation to a greater extent, and are not differentiated
from other workers. Areas of law relevant to private domestic employment include industrial relations law, common law pertaining to employment relations, anti-discrimination law and policy on superannuation.

Until very recently, industrial relations law was enacted in both state and federal jurisdictions in Australia primarily through a system of industrial awards governing wages and conditions of employment. Awards are a product of collective application to the relevant state or federal Commission by a registered trade union, and operate with the force of law. Since the early 1990s, the award system has been supplemented by enterprise bargaining, through which workers and management, with or without union involvement make agreements which set out wages and conditions of employment for those classes of employees covered by them.

In 1996, the Liberal – National Party Coalition government at the federal level enacted The Workplace Relations Act which legislates their policy platform designed to “place the primary responsibility for industrial relations - including the determination of wages and conditions - with employers and employees at the workplace” (Liberal Party 1996). Under the legislation, employees and employers are encouraged to make Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) which may be negotiated collectively at the workplace level, but function as individual contracts (Parliamentary Library 1996:24). The essence of Australian Workplace Agreements “is that they eschew third party (union and AIRC [Australian Industrial Relations Commission]) involvement” (Parliamentary Library 1996:24). Although AWAs include minimum provisions, in addition to other measures aimed at restricting the jurisdiction of the AIRC, suppressing union activity, and changing the function of awards from setting down ‘paid rates’ to embodying ‘minimum community standards’, provision for them radically alters the institutional framework of industrial relations in this country. The implications of these changes for the ‘future of work’ in Australia will be examined in section E.2.

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1. Changes of this kind have also occurred in some state jurisdictions, notably those such as Victoria and Western Australia (with the Workplace Agreements Act 1993) where Coalition governments rule. In NSW, which has the only Labor government currently in office, the award system remains in tact for workers under its jurisdiction.
E.1.2 Domestic workers in the industrial relations system.

To date, transactions between paid household workers and the householders who purchase their services have remained largely outside the jurisdiction of the industrial relations system outlined above (see Box E.1). In none of the six state jurisdictions nor the federal do private domestic workers work under an award (although those employed by government agencies such as municipal councils or the Home Care Service of NSW do). This exclusion is important because it places the parties outside the structured system of obligation and recourse set down in awards and enterprise agreements.

Two distinctions significant to the establishment of jurisdiction in the industrial relations system have been relevant to domestic workers. First is the distinction between employment in an ‘industry’ and employment of a ‘private and domestic nature’, which clearly excludes domestic workers. Similarly, in some states - Western Australian, for example - ‘employee’ means (among other things) “any person employed by an employer to do work for hire or reward including an apprentice or industrial trainee; ... but does not include any person engaged in domestic service in a private home” unless more than six paying boarders live therein, or the person is in the employ of a non-resident third party (Industrial Relations Act 1979 S. 7(1)).

The second test for jurisdiction is the existence of an employer/employee relationship, as opposed to a householder/independent contractor relationship. The distinguishing test considers the right to control over the job. Thus as Beazley argues, "a cleaner who regularly cleans the house a certain number of hours or days per week and who is paid by the hour for his or her time would probably be an employee" (1984:665). By contrast, the operator of a cleaning service who provides their own equipment and agrees to produce a particular result (a cleaned house) for a specific fee to several householders is likely to be an independent contractor.

However, this distinction is not always clear in practice. This is partly because of the changed organisation of domestic service provision since World War Two from live-in, full time service to part time and casual work. Thus, by treating domestic workers as contractors, householders may avoid obligations in respect of sick leave, holiday pay, and so on. The distinction is also blurred by problems in interpreting the “control over the job” criterion – the sense of ‘being your own boss’ is common amongst many domestic workers who might otherwise be considered employees.
Because awards are not available to private domestic workers, the amount of remuneration is left, in legal parlance, "to the determination of the parties" (Beazley, 1984:671). Rates of pay, job descriptions, hours and conditions are determined in a range of ways, depending in part on the way participants get into the industry - through an agency, through private advertising or informal networks, or a domestic service enterprise, such as a specialised cleaning service. For example, in principle, domestic service companies should be subject to the full force of industrial regulation, because their proprietors' employment of domestic workers is not 'of a private and domestic nature', rather, it is for the purpose of profit-making.

Box E.1: Domestic workers and labour law: An historical overview.

Domestic workers were excluded from laws governing labour relations when compulsory arbitration emerged in the Australian colonies in the late nineteenth century. Before this time their wages and the duration of their employment were established by contracts between themselves and employing householders (McCallum, Pittard and Smith, 1990:29). These contracts were enforced under the law of Master and Servant, which established sanctioned relationships of domination and servitude between all workers and their employers.

Industrialisation and the rise of trade unionism in the late nineteenth century brought about labour law reform, and the emergence of systems of compulsory arbitration, first in the colonies (which became States of the new Commonwealth), then in the Commonwealth itself. Kingston documents that around the country unionists made several attempts to unionise domestic workers, and bring them under the umbrella of the arbitration system. For several reasons, not one had lasting success. The labour movement was male dominated, and focused on the emerging industrial economy. Many of those women active in public life spent their energies on obtaining female suffrage. The isolation of domestic servants in private households made their organisation a feat "far beyond the theory and the capacities of the union movement of 1891" (Kingston 1975:52) and after.

Later, industrial law itself thwarted attempts by domestic servants' unions to enter the arbitration system. In the 1930s, Domestic Employees Union of NSW was excluded by the distinction between employment in an industry, and employment 'of a private and domestic nature.' The Full Bench of the NSW Industrial Commission rejected the union's application on the ground that although "domestic workers in private employment undoubtedly have a calling or occupation," they were employed by householders who did not engage in an industry for the purposes of the Industrial Relations Act, and so remain outside its jurisdiction (NSW Industrial Reports of December 9, 1938:686-695).

Despite the failure of private domestic workers to gain access to arbitration, some of the aims of early domestic servants unions have been taken up elsewhere. Early unions had concentrated on achieving government regulation of labour bureaux and employment agencies, which had exploited domestic servants (Kingston, 1975:53). Some regulation of employment agencies is now incorporated into industrial legislation in NSW. In particular, employment agencies are forbidden to charge workers for the brokerage service they offer: payment can be demanded from employing householders only.
However, where an employment relation does exist between a private domestic worker and a householder, common law and statutory duties owed to an employee by their employer do apply. The employer must provide

- a safe workplace,
- plant, equipment and tools, properly maintained,
- and a safe system of work (Beazley, 1984:669).

In addition, general responsibilities of employers to their employees prevail, with respect to superannuation, worker’s compensation and some general rules pertaining to leave (two consecutive days for full time employees etc).

But other laws pertaining to employment also exclude private domestic workers, or dilute their provisions in respect of these workers. Federal Superannuation Guarantee Legislation exempts employment of a “private and domestic nature” from its ambit, unless the person employed works more than 30 hours per week or receives more than $450 per month. So too do both the Sex Discrimination Act and Race Discrimination Act exempt employment in private homes from laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex or race.

These laws, like industrial regulations, rely on and construct a distinction between the public (market) and private (domestic) spheres. The latter is, in the famous words of Atkin LJ. in Balfour v Balfour, “a domain into which the King’s writ does not seek to run, and to which his officers do not seek to be admitted” ([1919] 2 KB 571, cited in Graycar and Morgan 1990:35). The way paid household work is incorporated by social regulation reflects its contradictory status, as a form of employment - a category of the ‘public sphere’ - carried out in the ‘private sphere’ to meet the domestic needs of householders. In preserving the home, for better or worse, as a domain relatively free from the intervention of these various forms of social regulation, householders are relieved of their statutory responsibilities as ‘employers’, and private domestic workers of many of their statutory rights as ‘workers’.

E.2 Education, training and labour market programs

Before the early 1970s, labour market programs were not part of the economic and social policy strategies of Australian governments because unemployment, at which they are aimed, was not a problem. Expenditure on labour market programs depends partly on cyclical and partly on political factors. Labor governments, particularly those after 1983, have spent more than conservative, Coalition
governments on labour market programs. Labour market programs reduce unemployment either by job creation or job matching (Ross, 1989:29-30). Job matching programs are relevant here, because training for domestic workers has been provided through them in recent years.

Economic restructuring since the 1970s has altered the demand side of the labour market enormously. One important change has been a marked decline in employment opportunities for unskilled workers in the last couple of decades with the decline of manufacturing industry (Gregory, 1993:69). Labour market programs are increasingly aimed at job matching rather than job creation, and need to offer a wide range of training programs, including those encouraging self-employment, to be effective. Training unemployed people for paid household work is one such way labour market programs have sought to improve their capacity to find work. This is significant, because it shows that private household employment is recognised and sanctioned by the state as a form of employment. However, as evidence presented below suggests, although cleaning and caring work of various kinds is being recognised as a possible source of formal employment, very few of the thousands of labour market programs undertaken in recent years are training domestic workers. In addition, there is significant emphasis in some programs, on training for domestic work as a social service, in particular, for carers for the children and the aged, who might work in either home or institutional settings.

Three programs are relevant: Jobtrain, Skillshare and the New Enterprise Initiative Scheme, or NEIS. The design and provision of labour market programs is

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2. The primary objective of Jobtrain was “to assist job seekers who are long term unemployed or at risk of becoming long term unemployed to gain employment. It does this by providing training assistance which is either: directly related to immediate job opportunities in the local labour market, or directed towards the gaining of durable, recognised skills for local labour market participation. This program was not renewed in 1996-E.

Skillshare is also a community-based labour market program, organised through some 350 locally-based projects, administered by local government authorities or non-profit community organisations. Skillshare aims to provide training and employment related assistance primarily to longterm unemployed people 21 years of age and younger.

The New Enterprise Initiative Scheme (NEIS) was established in 1985, and has been continued under various umbrella programs, including the Job Compact of the 1994 White Paper on Employment and Growth, *Working Nation*, during the Labor Government (until 1996); and since as part of the Coalition Government’s employment and training framework. The NEIS is “to create new employment opportunities by providing income support and training to those unemployed persons who have the capacity to establish a small business” (Department of Employment, Education and Training, [DEET], 1995:2). At the time of its establishment, “small business was seen as a viable alternative for unemployed people who were encountering difficulties in obtaining paid employment” (DEET, 1995:2).
not centrally organised, because program guidelines dictate that programs are to be tailored to local needs to ensure the highest employment outcomes. Available evidence suggests that training preparation or small business support for unemployed people to move into employment as paid household workers occurs under these programs, albeit to a very limited extent.\(^3\)

Around the country in the financial year 1995-6, three Jobtrain programs trained housekeepers, and seven trained cleaners. It is not clear whether these programs offered training for domestic and commercial cleaning, and participant numbers are not available.\(^4\) The New Enterprise Initiative Scheme supported a total of 19,379 people into self employment in the financial years between 1990/91 and 1995/6. Of these, 67 described their business as a variant on domestic cleaning or home help services. A further 16 specified a combination of domestic and commercial cleaning. 43 persons were offered income support to establish themselves as commercial cleaners. 68 persons described their business as cleaning services without specifying commercial or domestic.\(^5\) A survey conducted for this study by the Skillshare section of DEETYA revealed that domestic services-related training under the auspices of Skillshare are “very rare,” comprising less than one percent of the total number of courses offered in the year for which data was available, 1997-8. A majority of the courses offered in this category were directed at training personal carers who might find employment in either aged care or childcare institutions in addition to, or instead of, private homes. Most were located in Victoria, where contracting-out of aged care to private contractors is further advanced than in other states (Kaye Fryer, DEETYA, 1997, personal communication).

In sum, then, the Australian state could not be said to be encouraging the development of a domestic services industry directly through labour market programs, although some training and income support for participation in this market is offered. Insofar as labour market programs reflect both government and community

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3. Data collection is patchy because no central database of the activities of labour market programs is kept by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. I relied on personal communication with officers of the DEETYA to supply me with the data presented below.


5. Ted Boardman, DEETYA, 1996, personal communication. I was provided with a spreadsheet containing a list of several hundred “business descriptions”, classified by industry type. The sheet was produced using ‘cleaning’ as a search term, and contained some (limited) further information allowing the counts given above.
priorities for the 'future of work,' waged domestic labour is not being actively worked up as a solution to the persistence of unemployment.

Education and training policy more broadly also shape participation in the domestic services industry because of the access to labour market opportunity education provides. Government policy widened access to post-secondary school education in both the 1) technical and further education and 2) university systems in the 1970s and 1980s, leading to increased participation by previously disadvantaged groups. However, since the late 1980s, user-pays principles in various forms have been introduced in the tertiary education sector, partially reversing the access previous development encouraged. The election of a conservative Liberal-National Party coalition government in 1996 sharply accelerated emerging trends. Chapman and Salvage, writing on the decision in the 1996-7 Federal Budget to allow universities to charge full fees to local undergraduate students failing to gain subsidised places on the basis of academic competition, argue that

Such an approach moves the composition of higher education away from those with the capacity to learn, and instead towards those with the capacity to pay[. T]he consequences are that academic talent is wasted at the same time as there is a further entrenchment of the nexus between students' socio-economic background and their likely lifetime professional success (Chapman and Salvage 1997:69).

The vocational training system has also been subject to 'reforms' which threaten both the levels and quality of training. Here, Pickersgill and Walsh (1998) argue, the rhetorical aim of the establishment of a unified national system of training and skill accreditation cannot be achieved by privatising training in the context of an increasingly deregulated labour market. Together these changes in the training and education system may compromise occupational mobility of disadvantaged groups in the labour market.

E.3 Immigration and citizenship

Many writers on contemporary paid household work from advanced capitalist countries stress the importance of immigration law as a determinant of the number and fortunes of paid household workers (Arat-Koc, 1989; Bakan and Stasiulis 1995; Ball, 1993; Colen, 1990; Chang and Groves, 1994; Tan and Devasahayam, 1987). In the countries these writers deal with - Canada, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States - foreign domestic workers lack full citizenship rights, so enjoy few rights in
their employment relationships. Many of these workers participate in special immigration programs for the importation of domestic workers. Those on special visas are often required to live in, which may exacerbate their problems. Others are illegal immigrants, who may be particularly vulnerable in employment relationships.

Box E.2: Immigration and domestic service in Australian history

Immigration policy no longer directly shapes the supply of domestic workers. However, it was an important generator of a supply of workers from the time of white settlement well into the post-war period in the second half of the twentieth century.

Demand for female labour was high in the male-dominated colonies early on in white Australian history. Convict women - whom Stephen Nicholas and Peter Shergold somewhat controversially define as 'migrants' (1988:43-61) - were predominantly employed as domestic servants when assigned to private employment (Byrne, 1993:39). Assisted immigration for free women to the colonies from the British Isles was a means to solve both 'the servant problem' in the colonies, and a perceived dangerous surfeit of unmarried women in British towns (Gothard 1990:74, see also Hamilton 1991). In 1831 the first load of assisted immigrants arrived in Sydney from Britain, consisting of 'free, healthy but poor women and girls between fifteen and thirty years of age' (Ryan and Conlon 1975:24). Of the 296 women on the James Pattison which arrived in Sydney on February 11 1836, 250 found work immediately, the vast majority in domestic service (Anderson 1992:226). This form of emigration of working class women from the British Isles continued well into the twentieth century. The (British) Empire Settlement Act, offering preferential passage rates to single women travelling as household workers to Australia, Canada and New Zealand, was enacted in 1922 (Gothard 1990:79).

In addition to women from the British isles, female immigrants from Melanesia also worked as domestic servants, particularly in Queensland. Trade in Pacific Island labour began in 1863. It was primarily aimed at providing workers for the sugarcane fields, so most Melanesian migrants were male. Some of the minority of women were indentured as agricultural labourers and worked alongside the men. Others were indentured as domestic servants, particularly before 1884, after which importation of agricultural labour only was permitted (Saunders, 1982). At the turn of the century, the new Commonwealth government halted Melanesian immigration, and many of the remaining Melanesian women worked as part time domestics (Moore, 1992:72). Their descendants of these people remain one of Australia's poorest ethnic groups.

More recently, thousands of women from Greece, Spain and Italy received assisted passage to Australia between 1955 and 1973 in exchange for two-year work contracts as domestic servants (Kunek 1993).

In Australia, illegal immigrants do not form a significant proportion of the population, nor of domestic workers. As an 'island continent', Australia is simply not particularly accessible to a would-be clandestine immigrant service class from poorer countries in the region. The federal Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs found that 45,100 people had overstayed their visas at the end of a fiscal year (June 30th 1996) during which 2.9 million visas of various kinds had been issued. The
number of ' overstayers' has declined steadily in recent years as methods to detect their presence have improved. Continued decline is to be expected as measures come into force designed to increase the difficulty of entering the country by persons from groups at heightened risk of overstaying.  

Nor has Australia had special immigration programs for domestic workers, at least in the last quarter of a century (see an historical note in Box E.2). Thus, lack of full citizenship rights, and of lack of access to regulation because of this deficit are not problems for the vast majority of contemporary Australian paid household workers, although this has not always been the case (see an historical note in Box E.3).

Box E.3: Citizenship and Australia's indigenous domestic servants

Although lack of citizenship rights has not generally been a problem for immigrant domestic workers in Australia, it has been a very significant determinant of the experience of life, and of domestic service, for the indigenous people of this country. Not until the 1960s were Aboriginal people granted citizenship rights. Before then, a range of paternalistic and abusive practices forced many Aboriginal women into domestic service.

In New South Wales, the Aborigines Protection Board removed many hundreds of Aboriginal girls from their homes and placed them as indentured domestic servants around the state from the 1880s until the practice ceased in 1969 (Walden 1995). Similar practices occurred in all states of the Commonwealth (Austin, 1991; Evans, 1982; Huggins, 1987/8). Less formal, but no less coercive practices pushing women into domestic service co-existed with these formal systems of control of Aboriginal labour.

Nevertheless, some migrant groups, particularly those from non-English speaking backgrounds experience disproportionately labour market disadvantage. Many domestic workers are migrants, for the same reasons as in other times and places: poor access to other jobs because of discrimination or lack of access to networks through which information about job availability circulates; poor English language skills and/or lack of other labour market skills (see Chapter 5).

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6. The countries of origin of the two largest groups of overstayers during 1995-6 were the United Kingdom (11.2% of overstayers) and the United States of America (10.2%)(DIMA 1997), although overstayers as a percentage of arrivals from these countries were 0.1% in both cases. Groups of whom members are more likely than others to overstay temporary entry visas include entrants from the Middle East, former communist countries, and poor countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The Migration Regulations, under the Migration Act of 1958, were recently amended to make it harder for members of these groups to enter the country (Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No. S 241, Friday, 27 June 1997, AGPS, Canberra).
E.4 Social security and tax policy

The Australian social security system is funded from consolidated revenue, and income support is highly targeted by the use of stringent entitlement criteria, and income and assets testing. Significantly, unlike many benefit systems in other countries, access to health insurance and income support are not linked to employment. There are no designated social security taxes, apart from the recently introduced Superannuation Guarantee Levy on employers, which partly privatises retirement incomes. As a consequence, pension and benefit levels are very modest, with income support for the aged, sick, invalid, unemployed, carers and sole parents set at approximately 25% of average weekly earnings. Basic rates may be ‘topped up’ with additional family and rental assistance payments. Benefits are also subject to various ‘tapers,’ so that additional income earned on top of benefits in the labour market and elsewhere reduces benefit payments.

Private domestic employment is ideal for social security beneficiaries for two reasons. First, discrete blocks of casual work are easily available in domestic service provision, enabling beneficiaries to ‘top up’ benefit payments within prescribed limits on earnings with one or two small jobs weekly.

Moreover, the ‘poverty trap’ of low benefits combined with tapers, provides income support beneficiaries with an incentive to engage in additional employment ‘off the books’. From the point of view of the tax system, householders purchase domestic labour as a consumption service, a service of ‘a private and domestic nature’, and so labour and other costs are not tax deductible. This means there is no strong incentive to report the purchase of domestic services. Cash payment for services is common, making additional income from domestic employment easily concealed.

A recent media report on the problem the cash economy poses for tax collection notes that “Perhaps the most common instance is leaving $30 in cash for the cleaning lady or the babysitter” (Sydney Morning Herald, 31 Aug 1994). Austrac is the federal agency charged with monitoring cash transactions for the purpose of protecting the tax base. Austrac uses statistical techniques designed to uncover major ‘risks to revenue’. This agency has not, so far, considered it necessary to monitor the domestic services industry. If it did, the costs of retrieving revenues from delinquent domestic service providers would very likely exceed the revenue raised thereby.
E.5 Public social services provision

Since the mid 1980s, government expenditure on welfare services – that is, “assistance to clients or groups of clients, with special needs, such as the young, the old or people with a disability” (AIHW 1997:19) - increased considerably. Between 1989-90 and 1995-6, Commonwealth spending on childcare increased almost fourfold in real terms (AIHW 1997:110), and on aged care spending more than doubled. Childcare spending increased as the number of childcare places was rapidly expanded to meet growing demand. Spending on welfare services for the aged increased as care in the community rather than in institutions came to be seen as the preferred method of enhancing the welfare of the aged and disabled. However, the AIHW calculated that households provided the bulk of welfare services – an estimated $16,600 million of a total of $27,230 for the year 1995-6.

E.5.1 Childcare

As married women's labour market participation rates increase, so does demand for childcare services. Arat-Koc (1989) and Bakan and Stasiulis (1995) argue that unmet demand for childcare in the public domain is expressed as demand for private child carers such as nannies, who frequently double as general housekeepers in employing households. Thus, the level and kind of publicly funded and for-profit childcare services are related to employment of some categories of paid household workers.

However, in Australia this is only part of the story. The level of demand for nannies, is not simply a residual emerging only after public domain childcare services are 'full'. Demand for nannies is at least in part determined by pattern of government subsidy for childcare services, the availability of nanny labour and the perceived advantages of employing nannies over other forms of childcare services, which include greater flexibility, a preference for one-on-one care in the child's home, and increased parental choice and control of the child carer.7

In both Canada and the United States childcare is subsidised through the tax system, which does not discriminate between public/formal childcare provided by the state or private enterprise, and private/informal, home-based care. In Canada

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7. Whelan (1995:26) recorded these advantages of nanny childcare, in addition to: a nanny will often do the housework as well as care for child(ren), a nanny is more cost effective than centre-based care for families with three or more children, children prefer nannies to centre-based care, illness in childcare centres makes them unattractive, or centre based care is unavailable.
childcare expenditure up to $5000 is tax deductible for parents (Frances Woolley, Carleton University, Ottawa, personal communication). Similar provisions operate in the United States (Julie Nelson, Brandeis University, personal communication). In both countries, as noted above, immigration policy facilitates the importation of nanny labour. This policy-generated supply of nanny labour, the availability of subsidies for private employment of childcare workers, and the likelihood that nannies can be expected to perform at least some domestic work in addition to their childcare responsibilities all make nanny employment a particularly attractive childcare option in those countries.

In Australia, by contrast, only those childcare services offered in the formal sector were subsidised by governments before 1993. Thus, paid care provided by friends, relatives and nannies did not attract subsidies of any kind. In 1993, the Labor Government introduced the Childcare Cash Rebate (CCR), available to all parents for work-related childcare services purchased from registered childcare providers. (Provider registration is available to any party offering or intending to offer childcare services who is over 18 years of age and in possession of a tax file number.) The CCR extends government assistance (of up to $1466 a year for one child and $3182 a year for two or more children) to the approximately two thirds of women estimated to be reliant on informal care (Keating, 1993). Table 1 provides information on the extent of uptake of the CCR for care provided to children in their own homes.

The Health Insurance Commission, which oversees registration of carers and the payment of rebates, is not permitted to request, obtain or record the tax file number of providers, under Section 50 of the Childcare Rebate Act 1993. Thus, any speculation that the CCR system is a means for bringing informal care providers into the tax system is not founded.

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8. Formal and informal are designations used in policy documents. The formal sector refers to childcare centres, whether for-profit, or community-based, the Family Day Care system (in which care is provided to up to five children in the homes of carers), and out of school hours care, usually provided on primary school campuses. Informal care is organised by parents, and provided by family members and/or private employees.

9. No further breakdown of the category 'Care provided in Child’s Own Home' is available. Personal communication with Louis Young, of the Family and Children’s Services Branch of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Community Services confirmed that this category includes nannies and other informal carers such as friends and relations.
Table E.1: Registered carers and expenditure on care provided to children in their own homes in the Childcare Cash Rebate Scheme, Australia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of carers</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At 30 June 1995</td>
<td>10,035</td>
<td>25.57</td>
<td>$5,128,127</td>
<td>8.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At 30 June 1996</td>
<td>15,401</td>
<td>29.52</td>
<td>$7,576,035</td>
<td>6.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*A carer is a person or organisation registered under the Commonwealth CCR Scheme to provide care for children. This means that proportional figures do not correspond directly to the proportion of children cared for in their own homes. The figures are useful as an indicator of the level of quasi-formal nanny employment, although paid family members would also be included (see note below).

The extension of childcare subsidies to the informal sector is an important development in the childcare ‘industry’ because it may have positive effects for informal carers’ rates of pay by subsidising their cost to employing households. Moreover, the registration system may provide the basis for a future system of regulation of informal childcare. However, unless and until this happens, the CCR provides incentives for the expansion of unregulated home-based childcare.

E.5.2 Aged care

Just as the balance between institutional and home-based childcare affects demand for nannies, the balance between institutional and home-based aged care affects the way domestic and personal care services are provided for the aged. In 1985, the Commonwealth Department of Community Services introduced the Home and Community Care Program (HACC) to expand resources for community-based care for the frail aged and disabled, to prevent their premature or inappropriate institutionalisation. The Program involves collaboration between all levels of government, and works mainly by subsidising the provision of a range of services including community nursing, domestic help, home maintenance, respite care and transport.

The HACC initiative and the ageing of the population have generated increased demand for domestic services for the aged. Some sixty percent of the HACC budget in NSW is spent on ‘home help’ services which include housekeeping, personal care and help with attending appointments. The organisation and provision of these services...
are undertaken primarily by the Home Care Service of NSW. Additional services are provided by non-government organisations and domestic employment agencies.

As governments have moved into subsidising and overseeing the provision of domestic services for the aged and disabled, some of the work force providing subsidised domestic services has been brought into the domain of labour market regulation. In 1993, the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission made the Home Care Industry (State) Award. This award made industrial relations history, because it applies to persons previously excluded, that is, “who perform domestic work in private residences”. However, the award specifies further that its coverage applies only to those employed: “in private residences where the occupant of the residence is funded by one or more government and/or non-government [organisations, including agencies, insurance funds, companies etc.]”. This outcome contrasts with the effects of recent interventions in childcare, which introduces subsidies for unregulated private care provision.

E.6 Discussion

Paid household work does not fit comfortably within either the private domain, nor the public, its ambiguous status reflected in the public policy context in which it takes place. Paid household work remains largely outside the system of industrial regulation, yet labour market programs train unemployed people to move into domestic service provision. Government subsidies for childcare offer incentives to parents to employ nannies informally, while subsidies for aged care have contributed towards the first award being made to domestic workers in Australian industrial relations history.
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