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Trading Gender: the embodiment and gender contradictions of women in the male-dominated industries of skilled manual trades and Information Technology (IT)

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Doctorate of Philosophy
2012
Author’s Declaration

This is to certify that:

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Abstract

This study explores the gender order's tendency towards crisis, contradiction and instability. The study further investigates how this tendency can result in the gender order being either transformed or vigorously maintained. This study recognises the potential of the instabilities in the gender order as spaces for change and as moments in which naturalised gender inequalities can be denaturalised.

One way in which gender inequality is sustained through the gender order is through divisions of labour. Labour is segregated according to gender, certain occupations being dominated by men or women, and domestic and emotional work remaining the primary responsibility of women. The kind of work men and women do has become firmly integrated into constructions of masculinities and femininities, to the point where it seems impossible for women and men to do particular jobs.

For this reason, women engaged in gender-anomalous work represent an immediate rupture to the gender order. I therefore focus this study on two such areas, women who work in manual trades and women who work in Information Technology (IT). In studying women in male-dominated occupations and workplaces, this study explores how gender is practiced at work and how these practices resist, transform, contradict or maintain the gender order. Studying women who represent an instability in the division of labour also gives rise to analysis of the gendered structures of specific occupations and organisations.

Because this study is motivated by an understanding of the gender order as tending towards crisis and instability, it assumes that gender is not stable but that it emerges through social relations. This informed the theoretical and methodological framework for the study. This study uses the concept of embodiment as a way of exploring how gender and labour emerge as dynamic processes rather than monolithic concepts. A life history framework for interviewing helps to ensure that gender practices and labour processes are recognised as existing within a broader context of relations, and as processes in time.
To Morag Mirankar

If I were a Carpenter,
And you were my lady,
Would you marry me anyway?
Would you have my baby?

(Tim Hardin)
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Introduction

This project began with a moment when my gender and sexuality were made salient in a school where I taught. It was the Monday after Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. I felt elated after a joyful weekend. I'd marched body painted in a political float, my torso making up the red stripe of a rainbow. My elation was short lived. By noon I was called into the principal's office and reprimanded for my 'performance'. The principal claimed to have no problem with my sexuality or my politics. It was the public display of my body that she found reprehensible. I was told that if I did anything like this again, I would be fired.

After the immediate anger and shock had been calmed by discussions with the union and the school administration, I was left questioning the relationship between gender, sexuality and the body at work. I became particularly interested in how institutions shape expectations around the bodies of employees and how these expectations may contradict with employees' understandings of their own gender and sexuality. It was with this interest that I approached Raewyn Connell about doing a PhD.

While coming to this project through education, a year of reading about gender, work and embodiment led me to become particularly interested in the gender order's tendency towards crisis, contradiction and instability. I found that work in general, and certain occupations in particular, provided useful sites in which the gender order could be either transformed or vigorously maintained. I became particularly interested in how the transformation and maintenance of the gender order depended on a reference back to the body. The occupations of manual trades and Information Technology (IT) allowed me to compare two occupations which maintained intense gender segregation but used the body very differently.

My interest in embodiment was motivated by a desire to explore how gender and labour emerge as dynamic processes rather than monolithic concepts. This interest also led me to use a life history framework for interviewing. Life history interviews are unstructured in-depth interviews, which ask the participant to create a narrative of their whole life. This approach allowed me to explore patterns in the participants'
experiences of the gender order which reached beyond their work life. I conducted fifteen interviews with women in manual trades and fourteen interviews with women in IT.

In Part I of the thesis I explore how the problem of creating a crisis in the gender order has developed in the literature. Part II provides six case studies which analyse and organise the life history interviews. These case studies are divided into topics which emerged as central to all twenty-nine life histories and which form the foundation of the analytical chapters in Part III. Part III draws out the most salient themes in the case studies into four chapters: entrances, occupations, embodiment, gender contradictions. In these chapters, I compare the experiences of women within the same occupation and between occupations. Through this comparison I make conclusions about the nature of the gender order and how the body can help resist or maintain it.

Over the four years it has taken to complete this project, there are many people who have guided and supported me.

Firstly, and most directly, my supervisor Raewyn Connell, whose knowledge, insight and wisdom about a range of academic disciplines is made truly invaluable because of the respect, empathy and understanding with which she teaches. So often I have left our meetings feeling the rush of someone who has just leapt over a crevice, a crevice I hadn’t known existed until I was led there with careful and gentle questions.

I am grateful to my interview participants. The generosity with which they shared their life histories and their time astounds me.

My academic friends, Jessica Gerrard, Kate Huppatz and Amanda Harris, have inspired me with their careful consideration of ideas, fierce intelligence and appreciation of a fine cup of tea.

My mother, Robyn Smith, bravely attempted to read an early draft and my father who, knowing he couldn’t, bought me a computer and a filing cabinet.
And finally, my partner, Morag Mirankar, with whom, during this project I have travelled the world and come back again to make a home, a family and a son. Morag’s perfect ear, warm heart and steady hand have been beside me through this project, as they are throughout my life. And for this, I can’t believe my luck.
PART I: Literature Review and Methods and Methodology

Chapter I: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review addresses first various literatures on changes or crises in gender structure, then how embodiment has been identified as a useful site at which to study these changes. The focus then narrows to gender at work, first gendered organisations and second studies of gender in particular occupations, finally trades and IT. Here, I focus on literature on the culture of the occupations and women's involvement in them.

Because of my use of life history method, a key component of the literature is book length qualitative studies. I therefore inscribe in the conventional literature review some detailed case studies of particularly pertinent qualitative studies.

Changes in the gender structure

Feminism, gender structures and potentials for change

Axiomatic to my study is the idea that gender structures can change. This is an assumption fundamental to feminist research and activism. While early battles for the rights of women focussed on specific and localised change (such as suffrage movements), the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s aimed at broad change in structures, institutions and attitudes towards gender.

Prior to the Women's Liberation Movement, however, there were a number of significant theories of gender which theorised it as a product of relations and thereby intrinsically unstable. As early as 1921 Vaerting, a German activist and educator, wrote a landmark text on the unstable nature of the masculine and feminine character
which she argued were a result of power relations (Connell, 2009). Similarly, de Beauvoir understood that the category of woman was socially and culturally made (Beauvoir, 1997). De Beauvoir interpreted the process of becoming a woman as a matter of the female body being interpellated as it moved through the world, reflexively made and constructed by its subjectification. This understanding of gender as constructed fed into feminist theories of the ‘sex/gender system’ (Rubin, 1975) in which a distinction between reproductive capacity and its social meaning facilitated an understanding of kinship as socially constructed. The emergence of this understanding of gender as different from sex, while challenged by some poststructuralist feminists (Butler, 2001; Grosz, 1994), has been integral to feminism (Segal 2000) and to feminist advocacy for change.

Feminists located two overarching systems of oppression which needed to be changed to improve gender equality: capitalism and patriarchy. Among feminists there have been many debates around how these systems interacted with one another and what theoretical heuristic was most likely to help facilitate theoretical and practical understandings and thereby promote structural change. Materialist feminism, popularised in France by Delphy’s essay ‘The Main Enemy’ (1977), rested on the understanding that the system of capitalism depended on the exploitation of the unpaid labour of women in order that men could work as employees (Millett, 1970). This argument was problematised by other feminists, such as Mitchell (1971), who argued that the ‘overly economic stress’ (p. 24) presupposed that if women could work for pay gender structures would change - something she believed was untenable. Instead, Mitchell (1971) argued that while the economic system needed to change, it needed to do so alongside other institutional changes, such as changes to education. For Mitchell, who was influenced by a more psychoanalytic approach (Mitchell, 1990), to study the politics of gender oppression four structures needed to be examined in integration with one another; production, reproduction, sexuality and socialisation (Mitchell, 1971). Similarly, Walby (1986, 1990, 1997) recognised that a purely socialist approach was limited in its failure to engage patriarchy as a separate yet integrated system of oppression. She used a dual systems approach, analysing patriarchy as being composed of six structures: production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality and cultural institutions (Walby, 1986, 1990, 1997). These intersections of capitalism and patriarchy provide a useful framework in my study of
women at work in male-dominated trades. I will be interested to see how the structures theorised by Rubin, Mitchell and Walby are pertinent to the life histories of the interview participants to my study.

Gay, lesbian and queer theories of gender structure and change

In the feminist theories discussed above, sexuality was located as a site of gender oppression. The Gay Liberation located homosexuality as a key site of oppression. Early Gay Liberation saw homosexual desire as anarchic, as by existing outside heterosexual desire, there was the possibility of existing outside the patriarchal and capitalist social order (Hocquenghem, 1978). While this may have been its early intention, in its popularisation gay liberation became more concerned with making homosexuality socially acceptable, increasing focus being placed on the importance of ‘coming out’ (Plummer, 1975). In his excellent but disappointed genealogy of gay and lesbian history Weeks (1977), writing in the midst of the movement, noted that coming out was not enough to create change. Weeks described a paradox which was occurring by the late 1970s: on the one hand gays and lesbians could get ‘absorbed and integrated into society without too much disruption’ and on the other a ‘lavish sub-culture’ and ‘engrained sexism’ seemed to contradict the movement’s initial socialist aims (Weeks 1977, p. 230).

Lesbian feminism broke from the Gay Liberation movement because feminists did not consider it to be focussed on patriarchy. Labelled by some feminists as ‘the lavender menace’ (Friedan, 1963), lesbian feminists critiqued compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) as a condition of being a woman. Gay men and lesbian feminists did to sexuality what feminists were doing to gender. Sexuality was taken out of its embedding in nature and seen as a matter of social institutions.

Feminism and new discourses around sexuality changed the way sociology framed discussions of gender and sexuality. In Plummer’s (1975) symbolic interactionist study of sexual stigma he argued that sexuality needed to be considered by sociology and recognised as produced by and in interactions with ‘abstract rules (objective realities), significant others and prior perspectives’ (p. 57). Similarly, ethnomethodologists saw gender as emerging from and within social situations, its
attribution determining social interactions (Kessler & McKenna, 1985), making gender an ongoing personal and collective accomplishment (West & Zimmerman, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) contended that because gender was a ‘routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment’ (p. 126), it was not natural but instead something that was done. This concept of doing gender as an active project was very influential for the sociology of gender (Pullen & Knights, 2007). These ethnomethodological studies are particularly relevant to my research because they acknowledged that gender was a process rather than a static surface. They also stressed that these processes occurred within social frameworks in which certain kinds of gender, when done well, had more power than others.

Poststructuralism provided an epistemological framework for re-evaluating the gender structure, by putting the idea of ‘structure’ itself into question. Emerging as a response to structuralism, poststructuralism critiqued binary oppositions as a foundation for thought. Derrida (1976) used Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of the structures of kinship as an example of western academia’s attempts to hierarchise thought through creating clear categories and binaries around the unknown. In contrast, Derrida argued that categories were always incomplete because meaning was deferred and thereby rendered intrinsically unstable (Derrida, 1976). Foucault’s (1973, 1977, 1978) analysis of power similarly questioned the binary structure of thought. Through his cultural histories Foucault theorised that divisions between outside/inside, public/private, self/other, individual/state always in fact overlapped, through what he termed ‘biopower,’ ‘the two interrelated forms of power associated with the emergence of the sciences of “Man” and the institutions related to them’ (Sawicki 1986, p. 385). Through destabilising the notion of the binaries that underpinned thought, poststructuralism gave gender theorists a new theoretical framework for thinking about gender change. Queer theory was one way of thinking about gender which emerged.

Queer theory arose in the early 1990s in North America and was clearly influenced by the potential poststructuralism offered to critique ontologies of gender, sex and the subject which relied on binary oppositions. While a number of queer theorists claim that central to queer theory’s worth is its resistance to definition (Halperin, 1995; Jagose, 1996), there do seem to be two ways in which queer theory has been used to
challenge the idea that gender is a stable and coherent category. The first was by engaging with the concept of gender and sexuality philosophically, critiquing feminist (Butler, 2006) and gay liberation (Fuss, 1991) approaches to gender as reliant on a binary system of gender and sexuality which was inherently oppressive. The second re-examined past texts in order to unveil the enduring instability of gender categories. The most prominent example of this was Sedgwick (1990) and her re-reading of Henry James to reveal the ever shifting nature of gender identities and relations. The importance of this second type of queer theory, which used the concept of queer as a verb, was that one can ‘queer’ anything if one looks beyond categories. This second type of queer theory sees the process of changing gender structures as changing a way of seeing.

Butler’s conceptualisation of gender has gained immense currency in academic studies of gender and sexuality, many sociologists and others seeing her work as integral to analysing changes in gender structures (Seidman, 1996). Unlike constructionist feminists, Butler (1993, 2004, 2006) saw gender as constitutive and inescapable. For Butler (2004, 2006) gender was performative; discourses produced a powerful legacy of gender which subjects attempted to imitate or repeat. Because gender was produced in and through discourse it became impossible for a physical body to reproduce, therefore, gender became ‘a kind of imitation for which there is no original’ (Butler 2006, p. 21). As with Foucault, for Butler discourse was inescapable and so was gender.

However, in Gender Trouble (Butler, 2006), Butler hinted at a possibility for change:

The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself. (Butler, 2006, p. 201)

In other words, in order to trouble gender, one needed to remove gender norms from their usual or proper place. This was extended in Bodies that Matter (Butler, 1993) in which Butler explored the political potential of queerness. Queerness still involved the citation of gender norms but the norms were resignified by being placed in a new symbolic domain, thereby disrupting the heterosexual imperative. Butler’s discussion of the lesbian phallus which both ‘is and is not a masculinist figure of power’ was an example of an ‘enabling disruption’ as it revealed heterosexuality to be a ‘quasi-
permanent structure' (Butler 1993, pp. 89, 23, 22). Women working in male-dominated occupations could also be seen as an 'enabling disruption,' displacing gender norms by literally being in the wrong place. However, while the women in my study may discursively disrupt gender norms, it remains unclear in Butler’s work how this rupture enables the women or alters gender relations.

While queer theory has been used extensively in contemporary sociological studies of gender and sexuality (Plummer, 2002), its ability to advocate real change in gender structures has been questioned by some sociologists (Rubin, 2003; Namaste, 2000, 2009). Criticisms mainly arise from queer theory's abstract attempts to move beyond categories of gender and sexuality without acknowledging that those categories are still very real for the way people live their lives. This is particularly pertinent for people whose gender and sexuality still contributes to their oppression such as transsexuals (Namaste, 2000, 2009), people living with HIV (Dowsett, 1996) and many gays and lesbians (Connell, 1992). Their experiences and the complexities of their lives can be 'erased' by queer theory (Namaste, 2000).

This critique emerged from a distinctive sociological position in which researchers were attempting to generate social and public knowledge that served the participants of their studies. In contrast, while Butler attempted to change the epistemological position of gender, her research did not explore it empirically. The conflict between these sociologists and queer theory articulates a central difficulty in theorising gender. On the one hand there is a gender order, a wide set of patterns which, while possible to change, also produce stubborn and hierarchical systems of relations which can validate some and oppress others (Connell, 2009). On the other hand, and the sociologists discussed above also acknowledge this, gender relations, while real and informing the regimes of particular institutions (Connell, 2009), are also defined by a certain 'porousness' (Butler, 2006). While categories of gender and sexuality are real, they are also unstable, flexible and tend towards crisis (Connell, 1987, 2005, 2009). It is the exploration of this contradiction between the experiences of these categories of gender and sexuality and the parallel experience of their intrinsic porousness which motivates my research.
Connell’s theorization of gender relations was particularly useful when trying to theorise this contradiction (Connell, 1987, 2005, 2009). Unlike Butler, who saw gender as a discursive and unachievable imitation, Connell argued that gender was a reflexive relational practice; gender was specific to the particular institutional and personal relations engaged in and therefore was generated in and through social contexts (Connell, 1987, 2005, 2009). The relational and reflexive nature of gender meant that within gender relations there was space for disruption and transformation because gender, like other structures such as class (Connell, 1977), was generative. Thus, Connell argued that the gender order had a ‘tendency towards crisis’ (2005, p. 84) and that such crisis tendencies in the gender order, while having the potential to disrupt it, often resulted in significant efforts to restore and maintain it.

When first theorising crisis tendencies in *Gender and Power* (1987) and then more explicitly and expansively in later work, Connell looked at how crisis tendencies arose in the structures of the gender order. The argument assumed that there were multiple sets of relations through which gender operated: power relations, production relations, cathexis or emotional relations and symbolic relations. Connell’s focus on relations makes the application of this taxonomy particularly appropriate for analysing the specificity of people’s lives.

Like the feminist accounts of structure discussed above, mapping how the gender order worked through relations helped Connell think through how it might change, and how individuals and groups respond to this change:

> the analysis of crisis tendencies is a question of identifying dynamics which have the potential to transform these features, and thus change in fundamental ways the conditions of future social practice (Connell, 1987, p. 159)

Connell’s account of the structure of gender as generative and therefore by definition tending towards crisis is particularly useful for my study, as Connell’s work leaves open the possibility that one can simultaneously maintain and resist gender order (Connell, 1992).
Embodiment

The concept of embodiment has been used by some feminists and sociologists in order to overcome the difficult history of the body as static object (Connell, 2005; McDowell, 1999; Rubin, 2003; Young, 2005). As McDowell (1999) explained, using the term embodiment was ‘more useful [than the body] as it captures the sense of fluidity of becoming and of performance that is the key element in the recent theoretical approaches that question the relationships between anatomy and social identities’ (p. 39). Similarly, Grosz’ (1994) Volatile Bodies called for understanding of ‘embodied subjectivities’ (p. 22, emphasis in the original) in order to develop a more specific and complex understanding of bodies. By using the term embodiment, I develop Connell’s notion of social embodiment in which an individual is constantly engaged in reflexive processes of interpreting and reinterpreting their body and changing their relations to it in response to social, cultural and personal relations.

In this section I will discuss a number of theories of embodiment that are pertinent to my project’s conceptual framework.

The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty has been used by some feminists (Butler, 2006; Grosz, 1994; Young, 2005) to think through ways of bridging the gap between mind and body which was left by the Cartesian legacy. For Merleau-Ponty (1962) perception was mediated through sensory experiences of the world: through bodies. He described the body as ‘the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my “comprehension”’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.). For Merleau-Ponty then, unlike Descartes, consciousness was embodied and the field of consciousness was limited to physical horizons. This emphasis on the sensory experience of the world, was perhaps most important to my research as rather than describing sensation as a one way means of the body (object) interpreting the world (subject), Merleau-Ponty described a ‘double sensation.’ In Phenomenology of Perception (1962), Merleau-Ponty used the example of one’s left hand touching one’s right; at that time you are toucher and touched. However, this relationship between the body and perception of the world has
been criticised for being asymmetrical (Grosz, 1994). I also find this asymmetry problematic, as the idea that ultimately it is the body rather than the social or the relational which contains perception, requires recourse to some innate ability to perceive. Despite this, Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the lived experience is important in acknowledging the body as a way in which and through which people understand their worlds.

While Merleau-Ponty has been criticised by feminists for ignoring gendered embodiment (Young, 2005), he has served as useful in invigorating studies on embodiment (Butler, 2006; Rubin, 2003; Young, 2005). Young (2005) used Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the lived body ‘to describe the subjectivity of women’s experience as lived and felt in the flesh’ (p. 4). Young’s analysis of women engaged in activities showed that their experience of double sensation was different from men’s. Because the social position of the women’s body made it more visible, the symmetry between their material experience and the material of their bodies was different. To use the well-worn example, girls throwing balls didn’t throw it with their whole body; they isolated their arm, their embodiment of the throw interrupted by their perception of it. This caused Grosz (1994) to question the usefulness of phenomenology to feminism when perhaps its parameters were not useful to women’s experiences. Rubin (2003), however, found phenomenology a useful counter-theory to queer theory in analysing transsexual lives. He argued that while the narrative that the body expressed the self might be a fiction, as Butler (1993) suggested, it was a powerful one. Rubin found that phenomenology helped understand the ways transsexual men perceived themselves and their bodies and how their bodies helped them recognised themselves. What was particularly important to my research in both Young and Rubin was that the body was a way through which people recognised and mediated themselves as gendered.

Foucault’s conception of the body was much more concerned with the embodiment of power than the embodiment of consciousness. For Foucault (1973, 1977, 1984) the body was docile to discourses of power which produced it in order to make it useful and subjected. In Discipline and Punish (Foucault, 1977), Foucault discussed how the prison replicated the mechanisms for control in the social body, in which, in contrast to Descartes’ construction of the body trapping the free soul, the soul was controlled.
through a discursive annexation of the body. Foucault’s socio-historical analysis of the prison’s surveillance, training and measurement became a metaphor for the functioning of state apparatuses in general. He showed how constructions of space, time and other create discourses, legitimated or sanctioned knowledges, so that power did not need to be wielded but instead was everywhere and embodied. Foucault extended this analysis of the docile body to an understanding of sexuality, arguing that it was a central strategy in ‘penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way’ (p. 107). Foucault discussed this particularly with reference to the family, where the discourse on the productive couple, bound firmly to capitalist modes of production, created a normative model which made everything outside it deviant.

Foucault has been used extensively by sociologists (Turner, 1984) and feminists (Grosz, 1994) to discuss the body and gender. However, Foucault’s conception of the body as docile and always inscribed has also been criticised for failing to recognise a body’s surface (what is being inscribed on?), its recalcitrance (illness, flatulence) or its agency (our body is always subjected) (Connell, 2005). In describing the body as inscribed Foucault assumed the body was a surface, an unstable one which could be destroyed and remade but a surface all the same (Butler, 1991). While Butler saw this as an ontological problem, one in which poststructuralism did not go far enough and assumed a pre-discursive body/surface which could be rewritten like a hard drive, for me the problem is that the surface is not acknowledged as a reflexive medium. If the body can be written on, surely it must also be read. In some senses this was beyond Foucault’s scope. He was not aiming to provide an explanation for the ways in which discursive power is psychologically and socially experienced by individuals and groups. But this leads to a further shortcoming, a failure to recognise agency. For Foucault there was no agency, and therefore no way of resisting the regimes of discourse. But the body, if not the individual, is resistant. It farts, shits, sweats, feels pain and pleasure, blushes, gets crushes and all of this without permission. Connell (1995) and Dowsett (1991) have described moments of bodily recalcitrance as crucial to ways in which people experience themselves. While such experiences may be interpreted within frameworks of power they are outside of Foucault’s conception of the body as surface - a conceptualisation which has lead to a trend in cultural studies, feminism and sociology to ignore the lived experiences of individuals and groups and
For my research, Foucault provides a useful point of departure. Foucault conceived of work as one of the central ways in which habits of order and obedience supervise the body (Foucault, 1977). I am interested in questioning how docile my participants' bodies are in this arrangement and whether, when engaging with their lived experience, they experience their bodies as surveilled, measured and trained or resistant and recalcitrant. The focus on gendered understandings of the body at work will also question whether the ways in which discourses of power inscribe female bodies may be different from the ways they inscribe male ones.

Like Foucault, Bourdieu also believed that bodily identity was inscribed by invisible power. Central to this was Bourdieu's construction of habitus, in which the body, having internalised certain structures and histories, acted in accordance with a particular group (Bourdieu, 1977). The body then became inscribed with class, its deportment reflecting the kinds of relations it could engage in and determining its movement through social, cultural and educational space (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984). Bourdieu emphasised that the embodiment of class meant that bodies were classified and legitimated according to how they were inscribed with different types of capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu generally recognised three types of capital: economic, cultural and educational. In *Distinction* Bourdieu also referred to social capital, the networks or social connections that play into class (Honneth, 2000). Each of these forms of capital could be transformed into another, with symbolic capital being achieved when a particular type of capital was legitimated (Lawler, 1999). However, Bourdieu argued that it was the tastes and capital of the middle and upper classes that were recognised as legitimate. As such, Bourdieu saw that class histories aesthetically marked bodies and defined their movement through the world.

Recently, feminists have appropriated Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital to explore their gendered dimensions. Feminist reworkings of Bourdieu have developed the idea of particularly gendered forms of capital. In a study of mothers' involvement in their children's education, Reay (2004) found that middle class women were able to be more emotionally involved with their children, in particular with respects to
achieving educational gain, than working class women who had larger concerns, such as poverty. Reay defined this ability to invest in someone else’s needs as emotional capital, a form of capital which she argued was both gendered and classed. In Skeggs’ study of caring courses at three further education colleges, she explored another kind of capital, feminine capital (Skeggs, 1997). Skeggs found that the working class women in her study invested in their femininity as a way of achieving respectability. Similarly, Huppatz’s (2007, 2009) study of women in nursing and social work described how senior women in both industries often used feminism as a form of capital, which she calls female capital. These forms of gendered capital operated quite differently from those set out by Bourdieu. Whereas for Bourdieu one form of capital could be transformed into another, for these forms of gendered capital the capital was not easily exchanged for another more legitimated one. Moi (1991) argued that instead the capital of femininity was a ‘negative symbolic capital.’ Despite this I find these feminist reworkings of Bourdieu useful as they acknowledge the body as historically located and as constantly locating itself and others within classificatory systems. I also think that the ways in which women use gendered resources at work, particularly male dominated work, could provide interesting reflections on these ideas around gendered capitals.

When I first read The Second Sex (de Beauvoir, 1997) I was sixteen and I remember it made me feel uncomfortable. It was the era of Garner’s controversial The First Stone (Garner, 1995) and as a young woman I was trying to work out how to be proud of my body. And de Beauvoir did not seem to be proud of hers at all. Instead she positioned the female body as a limitation which needed to be overcome. De Beauvior’s position, while in part influenced by her existentialism, was also indicative of the difficult relationship feminists often have to the body given that it has historically been used to oppress women.

The internationally best known later French feminism - Cixous (1976), Irigaray (1985) and Kristeva (1984) - attempted to find a position for the body within theory, critiquing the production of knowledge and its presentation through language as distinctly masculine. For these writers the body became symbolic, it was embodied not so much on the surface or in the self but in broader schemes of representation. Male domination was not only due to the physical body but to the fact that the broader
discourses, language itself, have been invested with the masculine to the point that they could be read as a male body. While this risks certain psychoanalytic gender binaries that could stray into essentialism, the notion that writing and modes of thinking embody thinking is important when writing about women’s embodiment.

While some of these French feminists attempted to embrace an *écriture feminine*, other feminists in Australia, Britain and North America attempted to change their relationships to their bodies, recognising them as vehicles of oppression. The Cartesian split between mind and body was particularly gendered. While men could be rational to the point of making their bodies invisible, women remained deeply tied to their bodily processes and therefore unable to intellectually or spiritually transcend their bodies ‘[s]he is more body than soul, more soul than mind’ (Greer, 1970, p. 55). For some early feminists, then, acknowledging how their bodies were enlisted by institutions meant a revaluation of the body (beauty, consumption) and its processes (menstruation, breasts, strength) (Firestone, 1970), a revaluation which aimed at being able to partake more equally in social life (Comer, 1974; Greer, 1970).

However, this revaluation of the body in feminism risked sidelining how the materiality of the body continued to be used as a significant object of oppression. Dworkin and MacKinnon’s (1997) analysis of male violence problematized the asymmetrical ways bodies were treated. Indeed, Connell (2011) argued that the continued global focus on women’s breeding capacity created a ‘degree of disability for all women’ (p. 8). This continued significance of the body to women’s experiences has lead to a re-evaluation of the gender/sex dichotomy which, in its tendency to align sex with the body, ignored the social aspects of the body. Grosz (1994) and Butler (1993, 2006) are best known for this poststructuralist revisiting of the body.

Butler’s theories of the body have had significant and wide-ranging influence on contemporary conceptualisation of embodiment. In *Gender Trouble* (Butler 2006), Butler critiqued feminist heuristics around the gender/sex system. She argued that the feminist construction of a sex/gender system in which gender was constructed and sex biological, failed to acknowledge that sex is also discursive. Through attempting to represent the category of ‘women,’ Butler claimed that feminism was constantly
acting in the service of the systems it was trying to be free of. Butler offered a reassessment of the (gendered) subject through an analysis of the genealogy of the category ‘woman’ as presented in feminist and psychoanalytical texts. In her analysis Butler generally questioned the tendency of all theories about sexuality, gender, sex, the body and/or kinship to place sex or the body as being ‘before the law,’ pre-discursive and therefore matters of substance. She argued that any assumption that sex or the body pre-exist cultural construction and have a materiality that was not within a ‘bounded system’ (Butler, 2006, p. 108) encouraged the use of this materiality as a surface that hides an invisible interior. Instead, Butler suggested that the body was not a place or a space but ‘[t]hat the gendered body is performative...[and] has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality’ (Butler 2006, p.185). In other words, the gendered body only came into being by referencing norms which legitimated it. Butler was widely critiqued for positioning the body as the product of discourse, a criticism she accepted and attempted to address in Bodies that Matter (Butler 1993). In this book Butler examined how the heterosexual imperative created norms and regulated bodies that mattered and bodies that didn’t. She argued that the norms of sex materialised in bodies, ‘a process of materialisation that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter’ (Butler, 1993, p.9, emphasis in the original). Butler explained how the ephemeral non-category of queer and the performance of drag could act as a way of destabilising this fixity of heterosexual matter.

Connell’s work on social embodiment discussed how the body was used to practice gender. While acknowledging that ‘the physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the cultural interpretation of gender’ (Connell, 2005, p. 52) in our culture, Connell (2005) argued that ‘[g]ender is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body’ (p. 71). By starting with social practice, gender became mobilized through individuals’ bodies and the ways bodies were experienced physically and socially. Freud’s complex consideration of personality, desire and social relations was enacted in Connell’s description of bodies which were both ‘objects and agents of practice’ (2005, p. 61). According to Connell, individuals experienced their bodies through a dynamic cycle of ‘body-reflexive practices’ (2005, p. 60), in which they attributed social meaning to their bodily experiences of physical and social processes. As such the body was in a
continual process of doing gender and therefore changed from moment to moment as it reconciled its contradictions. Probably the best illustration of this was provided by Connell when she described a man who enjoyed anal sex with a woman (a bodily process) and therefore decided he must be gay (anal sex being socially understood as belonging to the homosexual body). Making sense of what this man perceived as a contradiction between his bodily pleasure and his social and sexual identity propelled him into new social practices. The social structures through which personal experiences were interpreted caused an individual to engage in continual change. Thus the body was not an object, a surface or a canvas but formed through social relations.

Gendered organisations and occupations

One example of when embodiment becomes salient is when the body is engaged in production relations.

The gendering of organisations and occupations is studied in a large literature which generally pictures this process as functioning through divisions of labour which entrench certain power relations and maintain gender order. Smith (1979) argued that organisational sociology was ‘grounded in the working worlds and relations of men, whose experience and interests arise in the course of and in relation to participation in the ruling apparatus of society’ (p. 148). Much work, particularly in North America, hoped to address this by exploring gendered organisations and occupations. Kanter (Millman & Kanter 1975; Kanter1977) is often considered the first to theorise how gender matters in organisations, particularly emphasising how while women were encouraged to display femininity it was masculinity, or the ‘masculine ethic,’ which was privileged. Ferguson (1984) also explored the concept of feminine subordination at work but argued that organisations feminized everyone and everything they come into contact with, administrators, workers and clients. While both Kanter and Ferguson attempted to explore ways in which organisations used gender, they depended on dualistic concepts of gender, Ferguson, in particular, reinforcing disempowering notions of the feminine.
Burton (1987), Acker (1990) and Yancey Martin (2003) while also recognising organisations as gendered had a more dynamic definition of gender as a practice which was a ‘constitutive element in organisational logic’ (Acker, 1990, p.147). Burton’s study of how types of work were valued in organisations found that organisational procedures favoured men getting promotions. Burton found that this culture was so pervasive that women embodied this devaluation of the kinds of work they did, reinforcing the ‘masculine bias’ in organisational life (Burton, 1987, p. 110).

Both Acker and Yancey Martin used Connell’s concept of gender as relational, generative and bound up in social processes; Acker explaining that when an organisation was gendered

advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. (Acker, 1990, p. 146)

Organisations were, then, always gendered because social relations always were.

This analysis of gendered organisations emerged alongside and in dialogue with studies of gendered occupations. The concept of a gendered occupation is debated. One definition of a gendered occupation is that it is one which is dominated by one gender, making the work masculinized or feminised. Studies into mining (Williams, 1981), clerical work (Pringle, 1989), printing (Cockburn, 1983) and computing (Wright, 1996) aimed at determining how gender regimes were maintained through gender appropriate occupations. However, Britton’s (2000) excellent analysis of such research on gendered occupations argued that it risked conflating gender and sexuality. Drawing on her previous study of women working as prison guards, Britton argued that male or female dominated occupations did not always involve gender appropriate work, they could be ‘transgendered’ (Britton, 2000, p. 424).

I found Briton’s (2000) use of Roos and McDaniel’s (1996, as cited in Britton, 2000) distinction useful. They distinguished sex composition (representation of men and women in an occupation) from gender typing (the processes by which occupations are made appropriate for a particularly gender) (Roos & McDaniels, 1996 as cited in Britton, 2000). Britton’s critique also highlighted the importance of distinguishing between organisation (the particular institution) and occupation (the field of work).
She argued that a focus on occupations could miss the 'specific conditions under which gendering occurs' (Britton, 2000, p.427).

**Australia**

In the twentieth century the family was increasingly used as a way of reinforcing gendered divisions of labour. In the last two centuries in Australia, perhaps more than in other countries, the conceptualisation of the woman as dependent on her male breadwinner was embedded in public policy (Deacon, 1985). Most famously, the 'basic wage' was determined in a way that positioned men as primary earners and women as dependents, justifying setting women's wages at as little as 54% of that of their male counterparts (Ellem, 1999). This state devaluing of women's contribution to the paid productive workforce reinforced their primary role in the unpaid private reproductive one (Delphy, 1977). It also served to create a significant gendered wage gap, particularly in gender segregated occupations (Burton, 1987). Given the enduring nature of this division, it's perhaps not surprising that the earliest work in Australia in this area was historical. Kingston's (1975) analysis of women at work provided a revisionist history of work, analysing how history enforced women's subordination through work. Kingston examined feminised professions of teaching and nursing in particular, looking at ways in which they reinforced gender roles through pay and unionism.

Similarly, in their seminal work, *Gender at Work*, Game and Pringle (1983) argued that 'skill and male were synonymous' (p. 18) and that women were placed in binary opposition to men. In their discussion of the whitegoods industry, Game and Pringle described some of the binaries used to entrench gendered divisions at work: 'skilled/unskilled,' 'heavy/light,' 'dirty/clean,' 'dangerous/less dangerous,' 'technical/nontechnical,' 'mobile/immobile,' 'interesting/boring' (Game & Pringle, 1983, pp. 30-33). These binaries were a point of return for much of the literature on gender and work, particularly in trades and IT (for example Pocock 1988; Ahuja 2002). I am particularly interested to see whether they persist in the lives of women working in these industries.
A case study: Cockburn (1983) Brothers

Cockburn’s (1983) study of men in the printing industry in London at a time of technical change offered a particularly useful approach to the complex ways in which men negotiated the gender order so they could use ‘work and technology in maintaining their power over women’ (Cockburn, 1983, p. 3). I draw particular attention to Cockburn’s study as her focus on the intersections between technological change, labour processes, the body at work and the maintenance of the gender order provide a useful starting point for my study.

Cockburn used fifty focussed interviews with men who had done apprenticeships in the traditional craft of hot metal printing to examine the effects of technological change on these men’s experiences of gender and class. Printing was traditionally men’s work. It involved using huge metal plates, messy ink and heavy metal presses. The skills involved in this work were valued, protected and entrenched by indentured apprenticeship systems and strong unionism. These strong protections around the skills of the trade made the ‘brothers’ feel that they were an elite in the working class, superior to unskilled men, the unemployed and women.

Changes in printing technology unsettled this as the heavy, messy and physical skills of hot metal printing were replaced by the clean sedentary work of photocomposition. While strong unionism meant most of the printers were retrained, their new role as typists was gendered and humiliating. The printers often felt ‘reduced to what they saw as fumbling incompetence in a job that thousands of teenage girls could do better.’ They felt ashamed. As deskilled of their old craft and unskilled in their new one, these men also found themselves ‘newly adrift in the class structure;’ their skills no longer aligned with a superior position in the working class. With their relations to work, skill and class so dramatically altered, so too was their sense of their masculinity as contingent on ‘waged work outside the home and family’ (Cockburn, 1983, p. 133). Cockburn argued that these difficulty the men had in adjusting to their new roles indicated the instability of the structures men used to maintain a sense of power:

There is always a fragility in men’s reliance on work as a prop for their masculine identity: work can be fragmented, skill flouted, and a man’s tool
made to look impotent beside the employer's new machinery. (Cockburn, 1983, p. 135)

Particularly relevant to my work was the printers' persistent use of their bodies to justify their superiority. Despite large shifts in the labour processes involved in printing, the printers maintained their commitment to excluding women from the craft of printing by referring back to the body. They relied on the fact that women are (supposedly) physically unable to do traditional printing as a way of excluding them from the occupation in general. Cockburn argued that the use of the body to justify the gender segregation of work perpetuates the technical and physical strengths of men, while depriving women of access.

Cockburn's study relied on a dichotomous structure of gender, in which masculinity and femininity were defined and maintained as clear structural opposites. In Cockburn's analysis, there were no stories of male printers who didn't fit a narrative of physical power, nor were there any stories of women in printing. This has been criticised as reinforcing a masculine ideology (Grint & Woolgar, 1995), particularly in its focus on particular kinds of physical male power. I continue to find Cockburn's analysis useful, however, particularly her ability to synthesise the interplay between training, family connections, trade unions, skill, technical knowledge and the male body. Cockburn did emphasise throughout her study a hierarchy among men; the binaries described by Game and Pringle (1983) not only dividing men from women but also being used to distinguish real men from not so real ones.

**Emotional Work**

Cockburn's study emerged at a time in which, in the wake of Braverman, most significant studies of work and organisations examined industrial manufacturing (Braveman 1975; Buroway 1979). However, the processes of industrial and technological change which Cockburn examined in her work have led to significant restructuring of economies and an increased emphasis on the financial and services sectors and knowledge production (Waldby & Cooper, 2010). Within these new economies feminised skills have become essential forms of labour, though not necessarily valued or recognised as such by organisations themselves. Hochschild's
(1983) study on the emotional labour of flight attendants argued that their emotional relationships with passengers were a significant part of their work. Rather than utilising ‘machinic potential’ (Walker, 2009, as cited in, Waldby and Cooper, 2010, p. 4) this kind of labour involved the emotional potential of one person who was being paid to affect another. This emotional labour, also described as ‘care labour’ (Duffy, 2005), ‘affective labour’ (Weeks, 2007) and ‘body work’ (Wolkowitz, 2006) was most common in feminized occupations, gender regimes or arrangements becoming embedded within occupational expectations. Hochchild’s (1983) prediction that emotional labour would become more common with the growth of services industries seems correct given more recent research into management shows that managers are encouraged to focus on human relations rather than rational systems (Prichard, 1996; Kerfoot & Knights, 1996). This shift in value of emotional labour which was previously devalued as the private work of nurturing women has the potential to change the gender typing of occupations or the nature of gender regimes themselves.

Gender-crossing in occupations

A particularly illuminating way in which the gendering of occupations has been studied has been to examine what happens when a worker transgresses the appropriate gender typing of an occupation, that is to say, when a woman worked in a masculinized occupation or a man worked in a feminised one. Underpinning this research is an understanding that in entering gender-anomalous work, a worker puts the gender order of that workplace into a kind of crisis, making it a useful place to study how gender is maintained, reinforced or transformed.

Particularly interesting in this genre of research is the difference between men entering female dominated fields and women entering male ones. In her research on men in female-dominated work, Williams (1989, 1992, 1993) found that in contrast to token women, token men were treated advantageously, moving quickly up the hierarchy. This was facilitated by superiors, co-workers and clients or customers, all of whom, for different reasons, privileged male involvement in female-dominated workplaces. Williams and others have called this the glass escalator (Hultin, 2003; Williams, 1992), a hypothesis placed alongside an existing literature on the glass
ceiling, a metaphor for the invisible but systemic barriers to female advancement at work (Baxter & Wright, 2000). Both literatures supported the idea that men often get around formal promotion rules in the workplace (Baron and Bielby, 1985), relying on personal relationships and networks (Yancey Martin, 2003), while women encounter informal barriers to promotion. Hultin’s (2003) analysis of longitudinal data from a Swedish work study found that while men in female-dominated occupations definitely benefited from the glass escalator to the detriment of women, women in male-dominated occupations also benefited in promotion chances in comparison to women in other industries.

**A Case Study: Christine Williams (1989) Gender Differences at Work: Women and Men in Nontraditional Occupations**

Christine Williams’ (1989) study *Gender Differences at Work: Women and Men in Nontraditional Occupations* is particularly pertinent to mine as she explored the values men and women place on the maintenance of the gender order through case studies of men in nursing and women in the US Marine Corps. Williams’ study explored the asymmetry between maintaining femininity and masculinity. Men had a lot more to lose, so maintaining masculinity was emotionally charged and clearly tied to what they did. I focus here particularly on Williams’ discussion of the women in the Marine Corps as they pose particular significance to my research.

Women working in the Marine Corps ‘seek to minimise the role differences between themselves and their male colleagues’ (Williams, 1989, p. 10). However, while minimising the difference in what they did, women did not see this as impinging on their femininity. On the contrary, women in the Marine Corps valued their femininity. Unlike men, who attached their masculinity to what they could do (and what women couldn’t), women saw femininity as ‘a particular state of being’ (Williams, 1989, p. 78, emphasis in the original). Williams argued that this created a fundamental asymmetry between the ways that men and women understood masculinity and femininity at work; for women gender was about being and for men it is about doing. So Williams (1989) found that despite ‘crossing’ the expectations of their gender roles both groups maintained their gender identity (p. 132). However, this experience of maintenance was asymmetrical, largely due to institutionalised gender inequities.
While this asymmetry in Williams' study was quite neat, it rested on a generalisation of broad definitions of masculinity and femininity. Fisher's (2006) more recent study, which benefited from two decades of masculinity research, described more diversity within an understanding of masculinity. He identified three kinds of masculinity among men in nursing. While some male nurses engaged in 'complicit masculinity' and were rewarded by patriarchal culture, Fisher also identified two other groups, damaged men and soft men, who in different ways did not experience their masculinity as dominant or dominating. So while Williams' discussion of asymmetry between the genders represented an important pattern of inequity at work, Fisher found that within one gender there was also asymmetry which depended on other sets of relations. In my research I aim to examine how the larger systemic inequalities discussed by Williams are mediated by individuals in their personal relations with work.

Most studies of women gender-crossing in occupations have concerned middle class professions such as medicine (Pringle, 1998), engineering (Franzway et al., 2009) and law (Pierce, 1995). These studies focussed on the masculine cultures of the industries and challenges women confronted when entering them. Women able to adapt to these cultures were more likely to stay in the occupations than women who resisted them (Franzway et al., 2009). Franzway et al. developed a particularly interesting argument around how gender segregation was maintained in engineering. In their study there was a significant pattern of men and women saying that they did not know why there were so few women in the occupation. Franzway et al. argued that this not only reflected an ignorance around the reasons for gender segregation, it also reflected an ignorance around sexual politics in general. The presumed gender neutrality of the workplace meant that the gendered experience of the occupation and of other social relations, such as the family, were obscured. This ignorance around how sexual politics functioned in and outside of the workplace made gender-crossing in organisations particularly difficult.
Trades and Information Technology (IT)

Both trades and IT are occupations which are dominated by men. Women make up less than 10% of workers in skilled trades (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2010a) and less than 25% in the IT industry (ABS, 2010b). Such statistics, however, are a little blunt in measuring the specificities of these rather large labour forces. Without hairdressing, of which 90% of employees are women, the statistics of women in skilled trades such as those I am studying dropped to 3% (Australian National Training Authority [ANTA], 2004). Similarly in IT, Diamond and Waterhouse (2007) noted that the occupational classification system of census data tended to ignore the occupational categories in IT work, ultimately glossing over issues of vertical segregation. For instance, while only 19% of software designers are women, data entry operators make up 81% (Australian Census of Population and Housing, 2001, as cited in, Diamond and Waterhouse, 2007)

Literatures around skilled trades and IT were linked through the ways in which technological change, and therefore changes to the nature of work itself, emerged within increasingly neoliberal and globalised societies. While technological change is seeing the decline of traditional skilled trades and their strong labour organisations (Cockburn, 1983, 1985; Paap, 2006), it is creating an expansion in the IT industry (Perrons, 2003). Whereas during early feminist campaigns tradespeople, unionists, parents and teachers were encouraged to ‘give a girl a spanner’ (Pocock, 1988), today the IT industry is seen as providing opportunities for ‘digi-girls’ (Northern Sydney Institute and TAFE NSW, 2010) to earn more with more flexibility (Fountain, 2000).

A number of feminist studies into trades and IT argued that gender and technology were constituted through a relationship with one another. Strategically, the ways in which technology was designed and innovated was in relation to men and the male body (Cockburn, 1983, 1985; Wajcman, 1991). Therefore encouraging women to partake in this technological work was a way of effecting social change (Fountain, 2000). However, continual encouragement for women to enter these male dominated
fields, often to overcome a perceived skills shortage (Crump et al., 2007), ignored significant studies in both trades (Cockburn, 1985; Pocock, 1988) and IT (Hunter, 2006), on the discrimination and harassment women face when entering workplaces defined by masculine cultures. In addition, new economies of insecure, deregulated and flexible work (Beck, 2000) are increasingly being found to reinstate inequalities (Perrons, 2003). Contemporary research into trades and IT reflected how campaigns for gender change intersect with economic imperatives, workplace cultures and a globalised workforce.

**Trades**

Traditionally, skilled trades such as carpentry and plumbing were considered good stable work for working class men. The perception of trades as skilled work established them at the top of the hierarchy of working class work, unions regulating and protecting the rights and boundaries of each trade (Cockburn, 1983). Perceptions of skill also worked to create a hierarchy among trades; electricians above mechanics, cabinet-makers above carpenters. One of the attractions of trades to working class families and boys was that young men were paid to train. Young boys were apprenticed under a master tradesperson, traditionally living with their master while they learnt their trade from him. At this point the young boy’s family gave away their financial and social responsibility for their son. Apprenticeships were often seen as rites of passage not only into the workforce but from boyhood to manhood, from unskilled to skilled and from dependent to independent.

This apprenticeship system was the primary form of training in Britain in the 1800s and colonial Australia was quick to adopt it (Goozee, 2001). A fundamental element of this traditional apprenticeship system was that it required masters or employers to take on apprentices. This has been increasingly recognised as a barrier to certain groups, such as women, accessing apprenticed occupations (Bulter & Ferrier, 2000). As in Britain from the mid 1800s mechanics’ institutes, working men’s colleges and eventually technical colleges were established around Australia to support on-the-job trade education (Goozee, 2001). While there was an attempt in 1914 to include Women’s Industries within the scope of technical training, institutions were dominated by a masculine culture (Butler & Ferrier, 2000). The Kangan Report in the
mid 1970s called for an expansion of the scope and participation of Technical and Further Education (TAFE), arguing that its facilitation of ‘skilled manpower’ had economic potentials that should stretch to more clients, including women. This recommendation coincided with 1970s social movements, such as feminism, and a number of Whitlam initiatives which led to a focus on gender segregation in the workforce. The Women’s Bureau in Canberra became particularly interested in women entering TAFE and pursuing careers in non-traditional areas like manual trades.

This policy focus also saw vocational education become one area in which there has been significant Australian research in trades. Most studies on women in trades training focussed on the significant challenges women faced in largely male dominated and sexist training institutions which were traditionally designed for young working class men (Earley, 1981; Gleeson, 1996; Hollis, 1992; Pocock, 1988). Women suffered from discrimination during their apprenticeships, leading to high drop-out rates (Pocock, 1988; Hollis, 1992). This was also the case in a North American study which showed, as in other areas of work, that women relied on formal networks, such as unions, much more than their male counterparts (Byrd, 1999). More recent studies maintained that despite reforms ‘VET culture is predominantly a masculine culture serving a minority privileged ‘norm’ – white, able-bodied, employed, city dwelling, Anglo Saxon men…This includes not only students but also employers and male oriented enterprises’ (Butler & Ferrier, 2000, p. 58).

Butler and Ferrier’s (2000) scepticism about the long term impacts of gender reform on VET cultures in Australia emerged out of their reflection of VET within a context of globalisation and neoliberalism. Movements by the 1996 Liberal-National Coalition government to privatisate public services, particularly those relating to work and employment, led to dramatic reforms to VET policy (Goozee, 2001). Most significant in relation to trades was the introduction of the Modern Apprenticeship and Traineeship System which became the New Apprenticeship System in 1998. The aim of this system was to make training a more attractive business option. This system centralised the administration of apprenticeships through New Apprenticeship Centres. It also saw the establishment of Group Training Schemes, where apprentices were employed by central administrators who would then circulate them between
different tradespeople over the course of the apprenticeship. Prior to Group Training Schemes trade apprenticeships were among the few jobs available to young people that were not casualised (Taylor, 2005), however, this deregulation of the training market made apprenticeships more precarious. While these initiatives aimed at increasing the number of apprenticeships by easing the commitment on tradespeople who were often reliant of fragmented work, evidence suggests that it has decreased the number of apprenticeships and barred access to certain groups of young people (Goozee, 2001).

These changes around the administration of trade training reflect broader changes to trades. While there are not any book length studies of skilled trades work in Australia, there have been a number of ethnographies of the North American construction industry, which, despite describing a different union structure from Australia’s, provide useful accounts of trade labour processes, structural hierarchies and changing work cultures. Applebaum’s (1981) ethnography of the construction industry provided a particularly romantic view of the craft and labour processes of construction as autonomous, collegial, hard but satisfying, and heavily dependent on rough but bolstering mateship and unions. Workers had stronger allegiance to their union which protected their rights in an industry that was inherently unstable.

Australian writing on skilled trades often focused on the dynamics of the labour movement (Brigden, 2007; Mendalson, 2008), indicating that like their American counterparts unions had a rich history for working class trade workers in Australia. However, contemporary literature on the weakening of the union movement in Australia suggested that this strong historical tie loosened, due to privatisation, deregulation and non-union forms of agreement making (Cooper & Briggs, 2009). The decline in union strength and the deregulation and privatisation of the labour market have been widely acknowledged to have a particularly negative effect on women, who depended more heavily on labour market institutions such as legislation and collective agreements (Preston & Jefferson, 2007). While the deregulation of the labour market affects all workers, I am particularly interested in analysing how it effects women whose recruitment into trades had initially been supported by legislation and training institutions (Pocock, 1988).
Silver's (1986) ethnography and survey data on the construction industry was in line with the Australian literature discussed above and presented a very different picture of the North American construction industry from Applebaum's romantic version of craftsmanship. Silver (1986) used Marx and Braverman to argue that the organisation of the North American construction industry was increasingly defined by a capitalist imperative rather than a commitment to the labour processes involved in the craft. Silver observed that employers were managerial, using subcontractors and contracting out ever smaller specialist tasks. As a result workers were becoming increasingly alienated from their labour process and increasingly deskilled. In addition to this loss of autonomy and craftsmanship, which Applebaum had located as so central to construction culture, Silver argued that with contractors trying to maximise productivity they were constantly battling with unions, union workers ultimately losing strength in a competitive deskilled market.

Paap's (2006) more recent ethnography showed how these conflicting descriptions of the construction industry played out in contemporary North America, with a particular focus on how masculinity intersected with notions of craft, unionism, race and power. Paap (2006) argued that the construction industry’s privileging of white working class masculinities not only excluded women and people of colour but was also detrimental to work conditions and wages in a time when the labour movement had lost strength. Central to Paap's argument was that white construction workers defined themselves collectively as animals. Paap developed the expression ‘pigness’ to describe not only the brute physical strength the workers needed for their work but also the discrimination against ‘outsiders’ required in the workplace.

Paradoxically, these very animalistic qualities were defined as the most masculine in this workplace; strength, virility and hard work without complaint were defined in opposition to being a woman or, to use the language of Paap’s workmates, a ‘pussy.’ Paap argued that this type of masculinity, while exceedingly masculine on the construction site, was not, ultimately, the most powerful. Power lay with the bosses who did not display pigness but instead conducted briefings on occupational health and safety indoors. Paap argued that while pigness may have helped unify and motivate white male construction workers in the past when the labour movement was strong, this identity was currently working for the construction company and at the
cost of the worker, whose bodies were being put at risk for the speed, efficiency and profit of the company. For while supervisors talked of safety, Paap described workplaces where all safety equipment was effectively made useless.

Paap’s focus on the tradesperson’s body being used up by the heavy work is important. Others also suggested that this was a particular plight of the working class male body, which was exploited both physically and symbolically for the benefit of middle and ruling class masculinities. Donaldson (1992) examined the lives of ‘unskilled’ manual workers. His work was particularly useful in its expansion on Connell’s discussion of hegemonic masculinity as often being tied to displays of masculine strength, skill and violence (Connell, 2005). Donaldson argued that working men experienced a double burden. Their bodies had to uphold the social masculinity of the hard, strong and tough. At the same time, by doing this hard muscle work, these men and the masculinity they exhibited were being consumed by the process of its display, the hard work rendering them, in the course of year, unable to labour and unable to sustain their masculine bodies. Similarly, Messner’s (1992) discussion of working class men in competitive sport argued that in sustaining images of the heroic masculine body for middle class spectators they were engaging in an unsustainable form of embodiment.

This is particularly relevant for my work on embodiment in manual trades. If trade work similarly consumes the working class male body in part in the service of masculinity, my research aims to see whether women, without the pressures of maintaining social masculinity, are so willing to have their bodies consumed.

Information Technology (IT)

As with trades, a significant focus in the research on women and IT has been about attracting women to and retaining them in IT professions. One area of this research focused on encouraging girls in high school to do maths and science, particularly computer science (Reid, 2009). However, it was not just formal education that had an affect on women’s entry into computer-related fields. Computers have been seen as boys’ toys, with computer games traditionally pitched at boys and men. It wasn’t until 1996 when Mattel Media launched its first game pitched at girls, Barbie Fashion
Designer, that they realised the market for girls' games (Cassell & Jenkins, 1998). The gaming market's focus on boys and men helped inform who should and will be interested in computers.

Unlike trades, however, the IT industry does not have a defined career path or regulation around training or qualifications. While many people working in IT are university graduates (von Hellens et al., 2004), not all of them are officially trained in IT. Women in more technical areas of IT such as programming and technical usually had formal university qualifications in IT (Truath et al, 2003), unlike women in IT management who had often come to IT through other industries (Pringle et al., 2000).

Many studies of women in IT have been done by researchers who worked in the field of technology studies with the intention of developing strategies to attract and retain women in the industry given the skills shortage (Ahuja, 2002; Crump et al., 2007; Fountain, 2000; Pringle et al., 2000). There is something problematic about encouraging women into a field that is on the face of it discriminatory (Hunter, 2006), that had undeveloped notions of gender equality (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2007), and that may be structured around processes of hegemonic masculinity (Wright, 1996). That said, much of this literature on the opportunities of IT work did acknowledge a need for more qualitative research into the gendered nature of the workplaces (Pringle et al., 2000; Ahuja, 2002).

Another trend in this literature was that it began with the expectation that working in IT would be a gendered experience. Ahuja’s (2002) detailed and oft quoted literature review proposed future directions for the study of women in IT through setting up a series of issues that emerged from conventional assumptions around women’s lives: work-family conflict, technological anxiety, lack of female-friendly networks and an occupational culture which includes long hours and travel. There is a danger in starting with such strong notions of how people do and experience gender. I hope that my use of life history interviews will help avoid making assumptions around how gender interacts with work.

The most significant contribution to research into women in IT in Australia has been conducted through a longitudinal study out of Griffith University, the Women in
Information Technology Project (WinIT). Started in 1995 this project aimed at addressing the perceptions and attitudes of women in secondary school, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and in the workplace in order to understand the declining participation of women in the IT industry. This project researched gendered attitudes towards IT in schools (Neilson et al., 1999), the potential of mentoring programs (von Hellens et al., 2001) and more recently turned its attention to studying women in the IT industry and in IT academia (Pringle et al., 2000; Trauth et al., 2003; von Hellens et al., 2001). This research used focused interviews to highlight the socio-cultural factors that influenced women’s participation and experiences of working in IT (Trauth et al. 2003). The project emphasised that IT remained a male domain which women needed to adapt to in order to survive (Truath et al., 2003), such as the need to socialise at male dominated sports matches in order to gain promotion opportunities (von Hellens et al. 2001). The pressures of IT work also meant that women who were particularly successful in IT prioritised their work over their family commitments (von Hellens et al. 2001), receiving significant support from their partners (Trauth et al., 2003).

The most recent work by the WinIT project attempted to create gender theory around IT and gender, using Giddens’ structuration theory (Von Hellens et al. 2004; Beekhuyzen 2003). This approach began by listing commonly held dualisms about gender and IT, dualisms which were resisted and negotiated by women in the industry. This theorisation was useful in breaking with the idea that the barriers to women’s participation in IT were stable and fixed. However, despite these dualisms of structure being used in a dialectic interaction, I find the initial drafting of these dualisms problematic as they potentially ‘black box’ the analysis of the data by framing it within the researchers’ construction of structural divisions.

In other male dominated professions where there has been a push for gender equity such as medicine (Pringle, 1998), engineering (Franzway et al., 2009) and law (Pierce, 1995), there has been a steady increase in women in the profession. In contrast, studies in the UK showed that while IT began as a relatively balanced profession, gender equity has decreased (Fountain, 2000). Similarly in Australia there has been a decline in the enrolments of women in IT degrees (Truath et al., 2003). While it was women who programmed the first computer to calculate trajectories
during WWII, now, women programmers make up only 25% of the workforce (Fountain, 2000). Speculation around why there has been a decrease suggested that when IT was new, everyone was on a level playing field (Fountain, 2000). Others argued that when it became institutionalised within organisations, IT imported gender models from engineering, a male dominated culture which uses technical specialisation to exclude women (Wajcman, 1991). Clearly, the cultural position of the computer, as something which boys and men play with and women use, also contributed to who would want to enter the computer industry.

The growth of the IT industry, however, means that if there is not greater gender equity within it, women are left out of the new economy (Perrons, 2003). As Perron argued, the term ‘new economy’ has been used to cover a number of different contemporary economic realities. There were two definitions that are useful for my purposes. The first, as described by Castells (2000), was that new communication technologies, such as the Internet, drastically changed economic activity and increased productivity. The second, was that technological change, deregulation and globalisation drastically changed the nature of work (Sennett, 1997; Beck, 2000). In this new economy all IT workers (and, to a large extent skilled trade workers) needed to keep up with technological change in order to be competitive commodities on a deregulated market (Barley & Kunda, 2000).

As with Marxist analyses of work (Braverman, 1975), time remained a central organising principle in the new economy. However, whereas time marked out clear delineations between work and home in industrial economies, in new economies, with globalisation and the rise of the 24/7 society, particularly in the multinational world of IT, work hours are extended even if they are described as flexible (Perrons, 2003; Barley & Kunda, 2004). The flexibility of IT was sometimes touted as an opportunity for women, who often needed to balance irregular caring responsibilities with work (Fountain, 2000). However, detailed qualitative studies into IT found that while employers supported flexibility when it entailed working on weekends and at home at night, there was little provision for part time work (Barley & Kunda, 2004; Diamond & Whitehouse, 2007; Perrons, 2003). Barley and Kunda’s (2004) ethnography of contract IT workers in North America showed that while a number of contractors decided to leave permanent work in the name of flexibility, for most of them this
flexibility involved choosing to work more, sometimes two or three jobs at the same
time.

Long hours produced a significant workplace barrier for people with caring roles
outside of work, which in Australian and most other societies means primarily women
(Acker 2004). Perron (2003), in her qualitative study of IT workers in Brighton-Hove,
UK was shocked at the lack of people in her sample who had caring responsibilities,
particularly given that the demographic of her sample was one with statistically high
caring duties. Diamond and Whitehouse’s (2007) Australian qualitative study of
women working in IT suggested that the expectation to work long hours in order to
meet the needs of the client meant that many women with family responsibilities
selected out of certain areas of IT, thereby becoming a second class of workers who
follow the ‘mother track’ (Wolcott & Glezer, 1995, as cited in, Diamond &
differences in work and time between the private and public sectors. While both
demanded long hours, the less regulated private sector was unlikely to accommodate
part time work arrangements. Hunter (2006) added, using the same qualitative data,
that parental leave and flexible caring arrangements were often thwarted by private
employers.

The above discussion indicates that changes to technology and global economics are
changing the nature of work in both trades and IT. The literature suggests that these
changes are in some cases creating barriers to women’s access to male-dominated
industries. One of the central problems to women’s participation in trades and IT
which is highlighted in the literature is their male-dominated work cultures. These
masculinized cultures also present a problem for women attempting to balance work
and family commitments.
Chapter Two: Method and Methodology

Introduction

The complex gender structures set out by feminists discussed in Section I (Mitchell 1971; Walby 1986, 1990, 1997; Connell 1987, 2005, 2009) suggested a study of gender and occupations would require a method which recognised the interrelation between different structures or relations. For this reason, many of the major studies of gender and occupation used qualitative methods which have allowed them to explore how labour processes, institutions, class, sexuality and reproduction interact for women and men at work.

Ethnography has been one way in which the complexities of gender at work has been explored (Kanter, 1977; Paap, 2006). For Kanter’s groundbreaking study of gendered experiences in organisations, she studied one organisation for over five years, relying extensively on ethnographic observations. While Kanter’s study produced rich data about the contradictions of gendered experiences within one organisation, the necessary focus of ethnographies on one or two sites limited their potential in studying the gendering of an occupation which may differ between organisations (Acker, 1990).

Many other studies of gender and occupations have relied on in-depth interviews. The research of Cockburn (1985) and Williams (1989), discussed as case studies in Chapter I, used focussed interviews which attempted to contextualise the participants’ experiences of gender and work within broader discussions of their lives. While Williams primarily contained her interviews to a set of questions, Cockburn used a list of themes to guide the interview process, a practice similar to that used by many life historians. This method has continued to be popular with contemporary researchers of gender and occupation who are concerned with the intersecting socio-cultural factors which inform experiences of work (von Hellens et al, 2004). However, while focussed interviews go some way to establishing contextualised theories of gender and occupation, lines of questioning often emerge from the researcher’s theoretical trajectory rather than from the participant’s experiences, potentially excluding
unexpected theoretical starting points. It was for this reason that I used a life history framework in the interviewing.

**Life history framework**

Life history interviews are frequently used in sociology as through story telling ‘people turn themselves into socially organised biographical objects’ (Plummer, 2001, p. 43). In telling their life stories, people speak of their personal, social and cultural relations while simultaneously speaking within them. The interaction between the personal and the social, and the telling of their story, shows the ways in which significant others and day-to-day processes and practices are represented and understood.

The life history method has been used extensively in sociology and psychology with a variety of intentions. Here I outline three different types of life history research which I will call the therapeutic, individualist and social.

Early life histories, like Freud’s case studies of Dora (Freud, 1977), the Rat Man (Freud, 1979) and the Wolf Man (Freud, 1979) were therapeutic life histories. Freud’s intention in listening to the life stories of his patients was to heal them. In his case studies Freud included inconsistencies, contradictions and red herrings. His patients’ stories at times read like well-written mysteries, which Freud eventually uncovered by finding the moment in the life story from which his patients’ suffering emerged. Psychology has continued this tradition of therapeutic life histories, with significant fields of psychotherapy being based on the ameliorative effects of telling life narratives (White, 1995, 2000, 2007).

Clearly, a life history told in a therapeutic environment over a long period of time is very different in depth and purpose to a sociological life history which is usually recorded in one sitting. However, sociologist Rosenthal (2003) noted that even short life histories can be therapeutic and curative. In her discussion of her own sociological life history research with people reflecting on war and life crises, Rosenthal emphasised that conversation needed to be guided so that it was ‘supportive rather than burdensome’ (Rosenthal, 2003, p. 915). While it is difficult to predict the
personal consequences of telling a life story, like Rosenthal, I think it is important to recognise that reflecting on a whole life can be an intervention into a person's present.

While therapeutic life histories aimed to heal the individual, sociologists also engage in extended life histories to study individual trajectories through society, what I call individual life histories. The most famous example of this is Garfinkel's (1967) life history of Agnes, 'a natural normal female' who was undergoing gender transition. Through his study of Agnes' life history, Garfinkel concluded that she was a 'practical methodologist,' a sociologist constantly studying society in order that she may engage in an 'anticipatory following' (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 147), predicting what each situation desired of her as a 'natural normal female.' For Garfinkel, Agnes became a case study of the active ways in which people account for their lives to create an order for themselves within a world where they feel they must be accountable.

More recent studies such as Messerschmidt's (2000) have continued to use life histories to uncover social patterns in individuals stories. *Nine Lives* (Messerschmidt, 2000) analysed nine life history interviews with working class adolescent boys who had been juvenile offenders. Through the life histories, Messerschmidt highlighted patterns, contradictions and inconsistencies in the nine lives, which lead to insights into masculinity, violence and the body. While both Garfinkel (1967) and Messerschmidt (2000) drew on their data to make larger comments about social structures, their main concern was the social dynamics of an individual and the accounts they gave of themselves.

The third kind of life history is principally concerned with using life history to study social structures: social life histories. Life history has been used as a form of longitudinal data, particularly in the study of work and work history (Dex, 1991; Jacobs, 2002). In some studies it was the more quantifiable elements of the life history which were of interest (Jacobs, 2002); dates, type of employment, caring duties, unemployment. Scandinavian feminists mapped such life history data on a 'life-line,' in which dates, ages and events visually represented generational and historical comparisons between histories (Davies, 1996). These forms of life history analysis helped examine processes of change and transition particularly in times of accelerated
social and economic development (Jacobs, 2002). More commonly, however, life history interviews are used to create rich case studies of social institutions. The classic study of Australian education, *Making the Difference* (Connell, 1982), is an example, using life histories with parents, students and teachers to ground interpretations of the social processes in and around schools.

Life history studies do not always fall neatly into these categories. Both Connell (2005) and Dowsett (1996) used life histories in ways that examined in detail the trajectories and social dynamics of particular participants, while also drawing out from these case studies into larger discussions of the gender order. For Dowsett, who interviewed men at various stages of HIV/AIDS, in some cases very sick men, it is clear that the relationships and interviews he had with the participants were also therapeutic reflections on their lives (Dowsett, 1996).

My intention is to similarly combine individual life histories with social analysis. I aim to move out from the case studies of individuals into more theoretical discussions of institutions, organisations, gender and the body. This kind of life history research has already provided insights into gender and sexuality (Connell, 2005; Dowsett, 1996; Messerschmidt, 2000) and gender and work (Cockburn, 1983; Donaldson, 1992; Fisher, 2006). It has also been recognised as a particularly useful tool for studying embodiment as it ‘forces one to recognize that the social is present in the person – it does not end at the skin’ (Connell, 1994, p. 34).

Because of the wide use of life history method, the method has been criticised from a range of theoretical positions. Two issues reappear across a range of criticisms: retrospective recall and reflexivity.

The idea that life histories are retrospective seems a given; they are, after all, histories. However, as retrospective recollections of life, they can be inconsistent, emphasising good periods and abbreviating bad ones (Jacobs, 2002). This becomes important if life histories are being used as longitudinal data to understand difficult periods of life, as was the case in Jacobs’ (2002) study of unemployment. Less quantitative uses of life history, however, expect this warping of time. Indeed, the increasing use of oral histories and life histories in sociology has been attributed to a
growing recognition that there is no single history or social reality (Buroway, 1998; Denzin, 1989; Plummer, 2001). The problem for the researcher becomes how to adequately describe a retrospective life history which is told as non-linear and unchronological (Davies, 1996).

The difficulty of representing time within the life history is in a large part to do with the unlikelihood of any retrospective account ever being solely retrospective. While it needs to be acknowledged that they are narratives about the past, they are also being made and experienced in the present (Denzin, 1995; Ditz, 1996). The interviewee is composing their life history in response to their contemporary situation, which includes being in an interview setting.

While this is unavoidable, life history researchers have been criticised for ignoring the complexities of the histories they are using, treating them as simple facts or stories of the past (Denzin, 1995; Ditz, 1996). Denzin’s (1995) discussion of the Chicago School’s classic life history, Shaw’s 1930s *The Jack-Roller*, criticised life history researchers for failing to acknowledge their processes of constructing other people’s stories. Denzin critiqued a particular historic moment in the life history model, a moment when scientific language was used to justify its validity and when research subjects were sought on the basis of their social disadvantage. Denzin argued that these early life histories treated the stories as real and failed to acknowledge the researcher’s position. This post-structuralist argument observed that the life history failed to exist at all until sociologists constructed it (Denzin, 1995 p. 120). Denzin’s main criticism was that Shaw and subsequent life historians failed to describe how they made the stories they heard into text. For Denzin, the lack of transparency resulted in subjects becoming romanticised and constructed through theoretical frames, the text of the subject lost in the sociologist’s text. While Denzin provided a useful reminder about the importance of recording the techniques used to analyse life histories and reflecting on a researcher’s position within the life history’s construction, I have found that life history does have the potential to include the experiences of its participants even when it moves these experiences into sociological knowledge. Indeed, this is one of the reasons that life histories are often used in social research, as by turning themselves into biographical objects, interview participants
often reveal social processes unexplored in sociology, opening the possibility for social change (Faraday & Plummer, 1979).

**Feminist research and life history**

Feminist research is a broad body of work which is held together through intention and perspective rather than method or methodology (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992). Broadly speaking, feminist research and methodology emerged with feminism as a response to research recapitulating patriarchal knowledge which ignored or controlled women. Three main criteria have been proposed for feminist research: including women and women's experiences as subjects of the research; minimising of harm and control in the research process; and adding value to women's lives with an aim to promote social change (DeVault, 1996; Gottfried, 1996; Mies, Jayawardena, & Baas, 1983; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992).

Discussions and debates about method, methodology and epistemology have been central to feminist research. When distinguishing between method, methodology and epistemology, I draw on Harding's (1987) definitions. Harding argued that method was the tools for research, methodology was the way of theorising about the research practice and epistemology was the study of what and how we know. Early discussions in feminist research privileged qualitative methods as feminist method, because they were interactive, participatory and seemed to allow the women participants a certain freedom to create their stories, giving them a voice (Gilligan, 1982; Oatley, 1981). While recording women's voices has been seen as consciousness raising (Gottfried, 1996), it has also been extensively criticised for promoting an identity politics which ignored marginal voices (hooks, 1984), the position of the author/academic as filter (Gottfried, 1996) and assumed the position of 'woman' as stable and taken for granted (Butler, 2006). This has lead to methodological and epistemological discussions which extended appropriate methods for the feminist researcher and prompted feminist oral historians to interrogate their method (Patai & Gluck, 1991). Two areas of this feminist discussion are particularly pertinent to life history research: framing intimate stories and reflexivity.
The initial benefits feminist researchers saw in the intimacy and interactiveness of deep qualitative interviews to record women's experience also presented the feminist researcher with a dilemma. While making women's voices audible (Patai & Gluck, 1991), simply transcribing their stories ran the risk of repeating internalised gender, race and class oppression (Gorelick, 1996). Gorelick suggested that while voices should be the material of research, theoretical interpretation was needed to make power relations visible.

This raised the question as to whether the relationship cultivated between researcher and research participant was as open and non-hierarchical as feminist methodology initially hoped. Watts (2006) argued in her feminist study on non-feminist women engineers that while not completely explaining her feminist intentions would be unethical, imposing her feminist framework on these women through her line of questioning produced harm in their day to day lives. This was because the interview process guided them to critique their experiences in ways the participants found uncomfortable and enduring. One participant said she didn't know how she was going to go back to work after the discussion.

Similarly, Stacey (1996) asked 'Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?' when 'elements of inequality, exploitation, and even betrayal are endemic to ethnography' (p. 92). This same sense of exploitation that Stacey referred to has been talked about with reference to feminist researchers actively building rapport with their interview participants, an intimacy which often produced richer 'data' (Leatherby, 2000).

These dilemmas remain unresolved but have led to a reevaluation of the position of the researcher and a push for reflexivity in feminist research. While reflexivity has been popular, particularly with North American sociologists, since the 1970s (Gouldner, 1971), feminists have been particularly interested in it as a way of escaping a patriarchal model in which the researcher assumes authority (Yeatman, 1994).

Smith (1987) was one of the first feminist sociologists to argue this, claiming that a feminist sociologist needed to make her own bodily experiences a 'starting point' for research. By recording one's own position within the research, knowledge became
‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway, 1988). Mauthner and Doucet (2003) emphasised that reflexivity was not simply about the researcher analysing their own position (their emotions, reactions and inclinations) in the interview and throughout data analysis. It was also about the researcher acknowledging their epistemological and ontological positions, which may emerge from their life history, education, politics and relationships. Without being clear about this, they argued researchers don’t adequately represent their analysis as ‘situated, partial, developmental and modest’ (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 424).

That said, reflexivity is limited. Grosz (1995) pointed out that ‘the author’s intentions, emotions, psyche, and interiority are not only inaccessible to readers, they are likely to be inaccessible to the author herself’ (p. 13). With this in mind, what was important was the intention to be reflexive and to have certain steps in place to ensure this (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003).

Very few researchers talked about how to actually do reflexive research (Reinharz, 1992; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). I will use a research journal and a number of experiments outlined by Mauthner and Doucet (2003) to help make my life history interviews reflexive. In the case studies, I speculate how my feelings of connection or anxiety in regards to an interview participant may have informed the rhythm, flow and content of an interview. These reflections can have larger implications. For example, in the interview with Ruby, a senior manager, I was immediately unsettled when Ruby took charge of the process by explaining that she only had 40 minutes for the interview and told me how best to conduct it. During the interview, I recorded my shifting emotional position on a grid that I had prepared for the interview, attempting to track my feelings in response to Ruby’s responses. When reflecting on this grid, I questioned whether my feelings of anxiety and a pressure to perform efficiently and within her schedule could also be the experiences of those she manages. Through this process of reflexivity and an analysis of the relations Ruby established with me, I could hypothesise about other sets of relations she may establish at work.
**Project design**

**Developing the problem**

My field research was conducted in two stages a year apart. The first was the study of women in manual trades and the second was the study of women in IT.

Because of my interest in developing a problem which had meaning for the women I interviewed, I started with a study of fifteen women in trades to explore some of the conceptual themes around gender change about which I had been reading. These themes included division of labour, embodiment, the relationship between work and family, masculinities and the gender project. From this study certain problems became central, in particular, the impact of education and childhood politics on later work choices, the relationship between men and technology, the use of the body to justify hegemonic masculinity and the ways in which organisations and management effected gender relations at work. With these conceptual themes isolated (through analytical techniques I will discuss in a moment) I considered what other groups of men or women would best develop my thinking around these topics.

I decided on women in IT for a number of reasons. On a superficial level there were some clear links between trades and IT. They were both male dominated and required the use of technology and technical skill. Furthermore, in using technology and technical skill both tradeswomen and IT workers are engaging in an understanding of how the world was built, physically or virtually. I was interested to see if this understanding of how things worked fed into a sense of gender, embodiment or self.

There were a number of contrasts between the two occupations too. Unlike most skilled trades, the body of most IT workers was required to be largely sedentary, which I thought would be a useful way of exploring different forms of hegemonic masculinity at work. IT is also a relatively recent profession. So unlike trades which had long-established institutional and educational traditions of gender segregation, IT was initially seen as a gender neutral occupation. I was interested in seeing how segregation was maintained in such a context and whether it involved different social mechanisms.
Participants

I interviewed twenty nine women, fifteen who had worked or were working in manual trades and fourteen who worked in IT. For the fourteen women in IT I also used quota sampling to ensure I interviewed women in more unusual areas of the IT field.

To recruit my participants I used a form of passive snowballing which first involved sending a broad email to my social and professional network, outlining my project and asking if they knew any women who would be suitable participants, requesting that they invite the potential participants to contact me via email or telephone. In this way, I hoped to avoid the potential participant feeling pressured or coerced by me. I also asked each person that I interviewed, whether they knew anyone who they thought would be interested in my project.

With the women in IT, I saw the need to use quota sampling because IT is a large field of work and, as in most male dominated work, women tend to work in particular areas of it. I wanted to ensure that I interviewed women in particularly male dominated areas such as programming and software development. I interviewed four to five women in each of three areas: management, programming and IT communications roles.

Because of difficulty recruiting women who were currently working in manual trades, I also recruited women who had done an apprenticeship and/or worked in a manual trade but had left the industry. This meant that some of the women spoke of their experiences of work in the past, at times confusing dates and details and perhaps remembering it through the screen of their experiences since. However, most women who entered male dominated fields did not stay in them and most women who worked in manual work didn’t see it as a long term option. This sample was probably the best way to access the experience of women working in trades during the last thirty years and allowed me to see the impacts of organisational and gender change.
The interview

Each interview aimed to gain a rich narrative of the participant’s working and personal life. The interview was structured in two parts. In the first, I asked the participant to tell me their life story from when they were born to the present. I often used Plummer’s (2001) suggestion of asking the participants to imagine their life was a book and run me through a summary of it. The participants told their life stories, as much as possible, without interruption from me. However, while I didn’t provide categorisations for the initial telling of their story, I was present, participants knew that they were telling their story for my purposes and they knew my research topic. This must, very noticeably in some cases, affect the way the story was told. For example, a number of the women, particularly older participants, focused their life history on their work life, rather than discussing their personal trajectories. Some further narrowed their perspective by repeatedly using prefixes such as ‘from a gender point of view’ and ‘in terms of gender.’

The second half of the interview asked for more specific details on particular topics. This method, in which the researcher approached the interview with topics rather than questions, is taken from the life history work of Connell (2005) and Messner (1992). The topics I addressed, in both sets of interviews, were:

- Family relationships, models and guidance: parents’ occupations, class and family talk about work.
- School institutions and experiences: school gender relations and embodiment
- Training: influences on entering male dominated field, gender regimes in educational institutions
- Labour processes: day to day processes and practices at work, gender relations at work and embodiment.
- Intimate relationships: impact of work on partners and/or children.
- The body: how body feels at work, times of embarrassment, joy etc, safety of work.

Usually the first part of the interview, the life history, took half of the interview time, my more direct questions taking the remainder. There were notable exceptions to this in which the interviewee felt uncomfortable telling their life story, or thought it would
be too time consuming. In these cases I addressed the topics early on, and the interviews had a very different flow.

The interviews ranged between forty minutes and three hours. They were conducted at a place and time which was convenient for the interviewee. Nearly all of the interviews with women in manual trades were conducted in their homes in Sydney (n=12). Two were held in the former carpenters’ current place of work, and another was conducted in a hotel room, as the participant was visiting Sydney from interstate. In contrast, all but four of the IT interviews were conducted in the women’s workplace, in a private meeting room or their office. Three were conducted in participants’ homes and one was conducted in a university meeting room. Due to recruitment difficulties, four of the five women programmers were from Melbourne and their interviews were conducted there.

The length, flow and pace of the interviews was inconsistent and seemed to have depended greatly on where and when the interview was conducted. Most of the interviews at participants’ homes were relaxed with few time pressures. However, home interviews had their own interruptions: phones rang, partners or housemates came home, food and drink was offered and consumed and animals invariably sat on my lap. In contrast, most people whom I interviewed at work were in work mode. Managers, in particular, had scheduled it into their work hours (n=4), three giving the interview a time limit, which made me a little nervous, and their life histories a little cut short. Interviews at work, usually conducted in windowless meeting rooms, had very few interruptions and, when not confined by time limits, often became relaxed and fluent. The advantage of conducting an interview in a workplace was that it also gave me a work context for the participant. In one case, this became an extended ethnographic moment, where the participant gave me a tour of the gaming studio where she worked, introducing me to her bosses and co-workers and showing me her work station.

The overall tone of the interviews was relaxed, engaged and intimate. As a novice researcher I was surprised at how willingly people shared their life stories and with what generosity, thoughtfulness and care they considered my questions. All of the participants thought that my topic was important. They all saw the need for more
women in their occupations and in their organisations. This was justified in different ways, sometimes with fierce politics and sometimes simply because they desired female company at work. I think that this made significant impact on the tone of the interviews.

After, and where possible during, each interview I took notes about the content of the interview itself but also about my feelings as it unfolded. I noted particular reactions I had to the place of the interview and the appearance of the interviewee. I tried to note changes in the mood as the interview progressed and in response to certain comments or questions. I also noted significant moments when I felt a shift in the interview’s flow or tone. These notes provided useful insight when reflecting on the interview during data analysis.

Data analysis

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by me or by a transcriber familiar with these kinds of interviews. This was done with the permission of the participants who completed consent forms. On average the transcript of each interview was 30 pages of single-spaced, 12 pt, Times New Roman font, approximately 20 000 words.

Analysing sociological life history interviews involves identifying patterns of social response which link to broader social issues (Plummer, 2001). Connell (2005) argued that sociological life history research was not just about presenting a series of stories but involved theorising them, an approach she called ‘theorised life history’. The data analysis required three phases. The first was turning the transcripts into case studies. The second required making comparisons between case studies within the same occupation. In the third phase, I made comparisons across occupations.

In turning the transcripts into case studies, I approached the analysis from three perspectives. Firstly, I established the biographical narrative of the life history. This included establishing the participant’s social background, significant events and relationships in their life, their labour history and their current position.
Secondly, I analysed the life histories using Connell’s four dimensions of gender relations discussed in my literature review: power relations, production relations, cathexis or emotional relations and symbolic relations (Connell, 1987, 2005, 2009). To do this, I reanalysed the transcripts and the biographical narratives using a grid structured around these four sets of relations. I focussed my exploration of each relation through a series of questions:

- Power relations: who has the power, where and why?
- Production relations: what work is done by whom?
- Cathexis or emotional relations: who is attached to whom and how is this attachment formed?
- Symbolic relations: how does something come to mean what it does?

Thirdly, I analysed the ways participants talked about their bodies. Embodiment became a particularly useful way of examining the interrelations between gender and work and how these large concepts and institutions were actually felt and experienced on a day-to-day level. Here I was particularly interested in examining how the participants had experienced their bodies throughout their lives, as active, as feeling, as working and as gendered. Like Yancey Martin (2003) I wanted to leave open the option that some experiences at work weren’t gendered, and to look more broadly at labour processes.

Case studies varied in length from ten pages to thirty pages. When writing up the case studies, part of the theoretical work involved finding links between the life stories of my participants and those in other research. This created broader implications for my work and avoided the life histories being seen as isolated stories rather than social narratives. Supporting research also helped me to avoid jumping to rash conclusions. For example, in one case I was tempted to see a labour history as particularly gendered; Jane, an IT manager, repeatedly burnt out and needed to quit work in order to recover. However, when reading an ethnography about the IT industry, I realised men in this industry did the same thing (Barley & Kunda, 2004).

The second phase of my data analysis was to find similarities and differences between the case studies of women who worked in the same occupation. As in other research of this kind (Connell, 2005; Fisher, 2006; Messerschmidt, 2000; Messner, 1992;
Wedgwood, 2001), this resulted in certain groups forming within the analysis. Again, I used the four dimensional model of gender grid to structure this analysis. These groupings were at times complicated by the disparate ages of the participants and the different historical times when they had participated in the industries. For example, while initially I thought that participants’ engagement with feminism enabled longer and more successful careers in trades, when analysing the life stories of younger participants I found that this was a grouping that was tied to a particular moment in history, feminism not being such a useful resource in current engagement with work.

The third phase of my analysis involved comparing the case studies across the occupations and finding similarities and differences between them. As with the other phases, I used the grid based on Connell’s four dimensional model. In this phase, however, I also developed other themes for comparison which emerged from the patterns in the first stage of my research into women in trades. These themes included an analysis of education and childhood politics, embodiment, reasons for entering male dominated work, technology and organisations. I was quite surprised by a number of the large groupings which worked across the two occupations, for example, the number of my participants who grew up in rural or regional Australia, and saw this as significant to their sense of self (n=12). In contrast, when comparing the case studies between different occupations, certain moments in history had different effects on women in different occupations despite other similarities. For example, while women across occupations who went to university in the 1970s and 1980s discussed the significance of free university education programs and/or government scholarships, women in trades were much more likely to have been affected by feminism at university than women in IT, most of whom either avoided or were oblivious to it.

The lives of the women participants

The lives of the women participants are presented in this thesis in two forms, as six life history case studies and in groups within the analytical chapters. The women have been de-identified in order to protect their privacy. This has been done by changing their names and, where it would be a point of identification, changing the names of places, organisations and the positions they took in them.
I have compiled two tables (Appendices I & II), which give some general information about the participants.

**Ethical considerations**

Because these women, particularly the manual trades women, are a minority, there are ethical questions around confidentiality. As I have mentioned above, I have done my utmost to preserve anonymity throughout the case studies. As well as changing the participants' names, places of work and locations, I have also omitted sections of their story which would identify them.

The interviews were done with the ethical approval of the University Human Research Ethics Committee, participants being made aware of the process – from interview to publication - and their right to withdraw. Issues of privacy and anonymity were brought up by two participants, who felt relieved that their stories would be de-identified. Neither had a concern for revelations about their personal lives but rather, were concerned that they had revealed something confidential about their work life.

That said, I was struck by how willing my interview participants were to discuss the intimate and personal details of their lives. I left every interview feeling a sense of responsibility, as I do now, to take care with the trust they had placed in me to use their life stories with integrity. A significant ethical consideration is that while I de-identify the participant to others I still maintain the integrity of their stories as whole, rich and contradictory. To check myself, I returned often to the original transcripts and considered whether the case study adequately represented the arch of the participant's story with all of its contradictions and uncertainties. As Sandelowski (1986) stressed:

> A qualitative study is credible when it presents such faithful descriptions or interpretations of a human experience that the people having that experience would immediately recognise it from those descriptions or interpretations as their own. (p. 30)

In Connell's (2009) reflections on the life history method she also emphasises that this issue of respect is central to the method, which desires to witness the life history
as ‘unfolding’ through time and ‘reveal trajectories through an assemblage of institutions – families, schools, companies, clubs and so on’ (p. 15).
PART II: The Case Studies

Introduction

Each of the twenty nine interviews I conducted was transcribed and analysed so that it could be written up as a case study. Six of these case studies are now presented in full to illustrate my method and to demonstrate the ways in which gender and labour histories emerge through time. Three come from trades and three from IT. I chose the cases to show, as far as possible, key patterns and contradictions found in the study as a whole. These case studies launch the analytical chapters. The conclusions I draw at the end of each case become motifs that run through the analytical work.

The cases were also chosen to illustrate changes to women’s participation in these industries over the past 30 years. This was particularly important for the women in trades, where all the life histories indicated the significance of historical context to women’s experiences of labour processes. The three case studies show an arc which moves out of feminist activism in the 1970s, through a recession in the 1980s and into neoliberalism in the 2000s.

The selection of case studies of women in IT also took into account this historical perspective. I also wanted to choose one case study from each sub-sample frame: IT managers, programmers and communication roles. While in trades most women worked on construction sites or in workshops, in IT women worked in a range of industries, making it difficult to determine a larger sense of historical continuity specific to the IT industry. Distinctive patterns did emerge in their experiences of working in male dominated work environments and their experiences of their bodies.

There was overlap between the interviews within each sub-sample. In the case of the five management case studies, my selection was more difficult because of the considerable overlap. Ultimately, I chose the case study which best represented the patterns in all five interviews, while also providing a counterpoint with the other two case studies selected.
Each case study is structured under a number of headings which emerged in the data analysis as significant strands of the participants' narratives. These headings help to collect themes in the research - work history, gender and sexuality at work and the body - while also showing how the participants' experience of these themes changes over time.
Chapter Three: Case Study I: Trades, Zadie

The interview

Zadie worked as a carpenter and builder for over ten years until she had to leave her trade due to an injury to her foot. At the time of the interview Zadie was forty-nine and worked as the producer for a theatre attached to a large tertiary institution in Australia.

The interview was conducted at Zadie’s home and lasted for approximately two and a half hours. It was the first interview I conducted for my PhD and my first experience of life history interviewing. While I was initially nervous about this, Zadie’s relaxed approach to telling her story, along with her cat, who spent most of the interview on my lap, put me at ease. At the time of the interview I recorded in my research journal my delight at the pleasure with which Zadie told her story and the rich material her telling it produced. The fluency of Zadie’s narrative was aided by her own interest in her past and the fact that she had had some practice in telling her story to others. Zadie had recently been researching and recording her family history for her own purposes, therefore in telling her own life story she often found links with her family’s past. As a feminist Zadie also had a significant awareness of the academic and political position of women in trades and in male dominated work. This made the way she told her life story reflective and sociological; she would often draw links between moments in her life story and larger political or social moments.

Life course

Zadie was born in the Caribbean in 1958. Both of Zadie’s parents had migrated to the Caribbean after experiencing the traumas of WWII. Zadie’s father had been in a Nazi workcamp and escaped a Germany on the brink of war, accidentally migrating to the Caribbean in his desperation to leave. And while it was unclear from the interview why Zadie’s mother migrated, Zadie did tell of her joining the Air Force and driving an ambulance through bombed-out London collecting bodies:

She was this tiny, very delicate woman, nothing like me, not as chunky as me by any means. And she was…driving trucks.
Zadie described them as 'discarded people' because they were 'so outside what's socially normal'. While bringing 'class stuff' and 'white privilege' with them when they migrated, 'they also came from really hard places,' meaning they 'couldn't possibly engage in society in a normal...a really normal way.' I tell these stories of Zadie's parents as they provide a backdrop to her understanding of herself as similarly outside of 'normal.'

Zadie described her childhood as happy and free. She also emphasised the significance of growing up in the Caribbean which meant that she grew up differently: 'ultimately about being white in a very black, mainly black community'. In fact, her family left the Caribbean in 1972 when a black political movement emphasised race inequities, leaving Zadie with an intense awareness of being white and an awareness that the rest of the world wasn't.

Moving from the Caribbean to Australia at the age of fourteen caused huge changes in the family's lives. In the Caribbean Zadie's family was middle class. Zadie's father was a sound engineer and her mother a receptionist. As was the case with most middle class people in the country, they had a servant and Zadie went to a fee-paying university school. Migration to Australia caused a huge shift in Zadie and her family's social position and organisation. Both Zadie's parents changed to working class occupations (her father as a salesman in a department store and her mother as a housekeeper). With no servant the domestic arrangements also changed. However, there was not a conventional division of domestic labour. Her father being 'organized and houseproud' things were 'fairly shared'.

When Zadie arrived in Sydney she was in the middle of high school and attended a 'pretty rough' public girls school close to the centre of Sydney. Zadie found this an extremely difficult transition, feeling as though she needed to conform and yet not understanding the rules to which she was to conform. Zadie was grateful, then, when she left school and went to university in 1976 where she 'learnt how to be a lesbian' and 'a radical feminist with socialist leanings'. University gave Zadie, as it did a number of other trade women I interviewed, the 'political framework' which underpinned her future careers.
After university Zadie engaged in a series of unconventional jobs; fruit picking, house painting; being a case worker in social security and counselling in a women’s health service. At the age of twenty-eight, Zadie decided to commence a carpentry apprenticeship, largely due to a government initiative to support women in trades. At the end of Zadie’s apprenticeship she went into partnership with an experienced builder and they ran a successful construction business for eight years before Zadie left the business after an operation on her foot.

At the time of the interview Zadie was forty-nine and worked as a producer and building manager at a theatre at a tertiary institution on Sydney.

Gender and sexuality formation

Zadie saw being an only child as central to the way her parents regarded her choices:

Because parents can’t, kind of, choose to put, you know, some things on the boy and some things on the girl, they’ve only got one of them.

This sense of a certain freedom from gendered responsibilities was furthered by Zadie’s mother’s interest in Rudolf Steiner philosophy, which according to Zadie meant her mother believed she ‘should be as free as possible, you know, and grow up without having those kind of restrictions.’ This meant that as a child Zadie felt free of gender restrictions:

My identity in being female or male, that kind of, I did feel pretty free. I was a kid who ran around in shorts all the time and never worried that much about being a tomboy or playing the boys games or… um …all that just seemed normal. No one ever said, ‘Aw you can’t do that.’ I might get called a tomboy but it didn’t have the inference that that meant weird.

Any sense of freedom around her sexuality and sexual identity changed when she was about twelve ‘when all that kinda normative stuff starts to happen.’ At this age everything was replete with desire […] But definitely for me it was going towards other girls even though I was pursuing having a boyfriend and that kind of stuff but that was different. It wasn’t necessarily about desire at 12.’ (5).
One of the first things Zadie remembered about arriving at her new school was someone saying, ‘Aren’t you wearing a bra?’ The cruel question made Zadie feel that her body had let her down, that it had done something wrong. This contributed to Zadie feeling ‘very at risk here [in Australia] like everything I knew had vanished.’

Despite the difficulties Zadie experienced when she came to Australia and the pressures to conform, she still had ‘little seed inside of me that always resisted.’ Even as a teenager Zadie could ‘see that things didn’t necessarily make sense, that there were alternatives.’ This vision of alternatives was in keeping with a political impulse at that time in Australian history. The period that Zadie attended high school (1972-1975) was the term of the reforming Whitlam Government. Many teachers at Zadie’s school were overtly political: ‘one [teacher] was a member of the Labour Party and used to talk very openly about politics.’ Others were feminists who clearly translated their politics into their teaching. For example, when Zadie wanted to do woodwork instead of cooking, the school principal organized for Zadie to do woodwork at the local boys school. But when Zadie realized that she would be the only girl she ‘chickened out’.

Work history

Zadie’s work history involved a broad range of jobs. In her twenties, before she became an apprentice, Zadie had a number of jobs from farming to counselling. Zadie worked at each job for approximately two years before getting ‘bored’ and moving on. Many of the jobs Zadie had were either unconventional for women (fruit-picking, tractor driving, house painting, labouring) or in unconventional work places (an abortion clinic). This continued when Zadie started her apprenticeship in carpentry and was involved in two building cooperatives, both being alternative non-hierarchical organisations.

However, Zadie did take one ‘straight job’ in the Department of Social Security and loved it.

I was politicised, angry at everything, trying to bring down the system and there I was, heart of the system that was basically there to assist people but often discriminated against them.
Zadie was resistant; she had pink hair and when working on the counter wore buttons that said ‘Question Authority.’ She felt like she made a significant impact in the social services because she was able to rectify a former employee’s mistake and send cheques of up to $3000 of back-paid rent allowance. What caused Zadie to leave this job was the same reason she left her counselling position, a desire for more physicality in her work: ‘too much head stuff and started drifting back to making things.’

In the course of her training to become a carpenter, Zadie had three apprenticeships. Her enjoyment of the labour processes in each of these apprenticeships was significantly effected by the attitude of the master builder towards her gender (which I will discuss in more detail in Part 4).

After completing her training, Zadie started a business with a male carpenter, Frank, who had been in a supportive role at the women’s building co-op. As an experienced builder Frank respected Zadie’s carpentry skills and her ‘head for business’. Frank had employed the very first female carpentry apprentice in NSW well before the schemes which facilitated Zadie’s entry into trades. Zadie explained that Frank employed women because he didn’t like working with men. Interestingly, when discussing why Frank preferred working with women, Zadie emphasised that it was because ‘[h]e was a real dreamer.’ She went on to explain that he would think hard about projects, because ‘he could just imagine anything.’ Like Frank and other tradeswomen I interviewed, Zadie found the physically imaginative aspect of trade work intensely satisfying. What’s interesting here is that Zadie also saw it as particularly gendered. Frank being a ‘dreamer,’ who would create in his mind before he would create physically, did not seem to fit with him working with men. Indeed, a number of other women I interviewed stressed that most tradesmen prioritised getting things done, moving quickly towards actions, which led to mistakes, risks and bad work. Like Frank, these women found that their slower approach led to better work, despite this approach being unusual in the industry.

Zadie and Frank’s business became locally renowned for employing women: ‘people would want the company with the women in it because it was so normal and nice to have that kind of building site.’ Employing women tradespeople became a marketable
feature of their company, partly because it was unusual but also because it provided a more balanced worksite. Zadie implied that this was particularly the case with residential work, where having a male dominated work culture was not seen as conducive to a domestic space. As Zadie explained, having women in the worksite mimicked the gender dynamic of the home, making it ‘normal and nice.’

Zadie and Frank ran their business for eight years:

And we did really well. Never made a lot of money, but we always, you know, broke even with enough money to go on a holiday at the end of the year.

When Zadie left building she went into producing events, managing venues and rehearsal spaces at a large university. Zadie saw this job as bringing together the different strands of her life: her interest in alternative performance culture, her interest in buildings and her organisational small business skills.

**TAFE**

Zadie’s experience of TAFE was unlike any other woman I interviewed. At the time when Zadie began her trade training there was a significant federal government push to get women into trades. Because of this Zadie’s TAFE class had an equal number of men and women. This was unprecedented for the TAFE. The TAFE administration wanted to divide the women into two classes, thinking that together they would dominate the younger men in the class. Zadie stressed that these women were dominating women. The TAFE was in the middle of a capital city and the women who had been attracted by the government initiatives were all older women who were feminists and lesbians. It seemed that it was these women who had the knowledge, the networks and the understanding of gender politics who felt that trades were a realistic occupation. The position of empowerment with which these women entered trades training meant that they established a strong rapport with one another and a strong political voice within the TAFE. They argued against being separated into two classes, claiming that alienation was one of the main reasons women left trades. The TAFE complied and the class with majority women went on to be highly successful, also assisting the less educated boys with their trade training. Clearly the critical mass of women had an impact on Zadie’s experience of TAFE, however, what seems more significant is that the women who entered trades were, like Zadie, already politically...
equipped to question male dominated institutions and cultural assumptions. It was through mobilising these collective resources that these women had a successful TAFE experience.

**Gender and sexuality at work**

**Discrimination**

Zadie's first experience of gender discrimination in the workplace was when she finished school at 17 and applied for a job as an animation camera assistant. Despite her experience working for the animation studio, the other applicant, a boy, got the job. The reason Zadie was given was that in that the long hours and stamina demanded by the position were not suitable for a woman, the employers literally saying to her 'you are a girl.' This incident made Zadie angry and inspired her to take a different direction: 'And I thought, fuck you [...] Now I'm going to get educated, I decided I'd go to university.' This established a pattern in Zadie's narrative, in which angry responses to discrimination inspired action that empowered her. Another example of this was when as an apprentice one of her bosses was 'patronising' and she made a passionate speech to the co-operative board, which got him fired and replaced with a woman.

Not all discrimination was as overt, however, and Zadie found these less visible forms of discrimination more difficult to move out of with a sense of empowerment. When Zadie took an apprenticeship with a shop-fitting company she was the only woman and found it extremely difficult, particularly in terms of sexuality. She found the men she worked with either fell in love with her or were hostile. While there were some workmates who simply treated her as they would anyone else, Zadie described the other two groups of men as making 'your life hell.'

One relationship with a particular employee caused Zadie significant stress and ultimately tainted her whole experience of working at the shop-fitters. The most significant incidents of harassment by this man happened out of the workshop when Zadie and carpentry team were on site. This is a pattern in the interviews with women in trades, a number of women describing the managerial supervision in the workshop
environment as increasing surveillance and thereby having the potential to enforce certain codes of appropriate behaviour. Zadie was not out as a lesbian at the shopfitters, ‘So, you know, everything was kind of hidden and secret.’ This one employee constantly questioned Zadie’s sexuality and hinted that she might get raped, never making his suggestion clear enough for Zadie to make a formal complaint. One day he brought a carved wooden penis to work and pulled it out of his bag to show her. Zadie yelled for everyone to come and look at what the ‘dickhead’ had brought, a response that made him quickly put the phallus back in his bag. For Zadie, this man’s focus on his sexuality as a form of power and intimidation was a direct result of her working in his industry: ‘But it was really that incredible intense intimidation, you know, that direct. This is about my penis. You are threatening my penis and I’m going to have to confront you.’ It seemed that in invading his work space, Zadie had invaded his sense of his sexuality and his body as distinctively different to a woman’s. His threats of rape could be seen as attempts to enact on Zadie’s body the same sense of invasion of sexuality that he was experiencing, making her feel just as unsafe and threatened as he did.

Despite other more positive relationships with men at work, this relationship ruined Zadie’s feelings of safety at the shop-fitters.

I just never felt safe. I didn’t feel safe about who I was or anything. It just felt like this constant having to be on edge waiting for comments, waiting for things to happen, even though most of the time it was fine. You learnt lots and people were really fair to me and really great.

The occasional act of kindness from individual workmates did not outweigh the masculine culture of the workplace or override Zadie’s sense of insecurity. For example, when Zadie complained about the pornography all over the workshop one man did bring in a calendar of landscapes to show his support, but management told her it would be easier if she ignored it. There was a sense here that one woman was not a large enough incentive to make organisational change.

**Positive Discrimination**

Zadie’s choice to take on an apprenticeship coincided with and was facilitated by a Hawke Government push to get women into non-traditional jobs. If you were
unemployed you could apply for any of a series of apprenticeships in trades which targeted women. Zadie was employed in one of these jobs in the Department of Housing. She was employed to work for a housing co-op, in which people living in government housing would manage how they wanted to live and what kind of building maintenance they wanted done.

Interestingly, when applying for both a job years earlier in women’s health and for her apprenticeship, Zadie was not the first choice, due to affirmative action employment policies. The jobs targeted women from disadvantaged backgrounds. But in both cases the people ahead of Zadie could not take up the job. As Zadie explained:

It’s not always easy for people from disadvantaged backgrounds to take up opportunities. So again the same thing happened, three people ahead of me got offered this job and basically chickened out or couldn’t do it or whatever. So they ended up coming to me and offering it to me.

I find it interesting here that Zadie used the same expression, ‘chickened out,’ to describe these women as she used to describe herself as a teenager when she didn’t go to the woodwork classes at the boys’ school. In both cases the opportunity alone was not enough. When Zadie took up these positions she had political resources, she was a feminist and knew about the possibility to change gender regimes.

In 1988 Zadie worked in another government funded initiative, a women’s builders co-operative which lasted for about a year. Its main function was to employ women in the building industry so they were supported financially while they worked and trained in male dominated industries. Unfortunately, the co-operative still had to operate as a business and for many of the women in the co-operative it was learning, skill transfer and co-operation which were the priority. This challenged Zadie politically:

I was a feminist and I had, you know, socialist leanings. [I] believed in business having to be this thing that worked properly and efficiently so that you could survive.

Ultimately they did not get enough funding or make enough money to support training. Eventually they lost money and had creditors to pay. While they paid all the small businesses they were unable to pay a large insurance bill.
The body

In telling her life history, Zadie invariably talked about her body: the free body of her childhood; the constrained ‘plucked’, hairless and monitored heterosexual body of her adolescence; the lesbian body of her university years and the need for a labouring or moving body in her work.

I want to focus here particularly on Zadie’s experience of her body when working in a physical trade. When I asked Zadie what her job physically demanded she did not tell me about the actions she had to do with her body but rather that ‘it’s just an attitude:’

An attitude of being able to do things. You know, so nothing is too overwhelming and if you’re five foot two and you’re building a house, that you always know how to work out how to get that beam up or when you have to ask for help and it’s never about being unconfident in any way. It’s always about being competent and confident in your strengths and your abilities. If not to have the actual strength then to be clever enough to work out a system that would make something happen which would probably be more sensible anyway and easier on everyone’s backs and all that kind of stuff.

So the physical body was not powerful in itself, it was powerful because of the perspective with which it approached the physical world. Physical strength was not as powerful as strength of will and confidence. Interestingly, like a number of other interview participants in both trades and IT, Zadie mentioned her height a number of times throughout the interview. It was as though being shorter than most men she worked with Zadie had a heightened awareness that a structure’s physical size was insignificant and surmountable. As the extract above suggests, this sense that a physical obstacle could be overcome with thought had implications on the way Zadie used her body. Zadie suggested that her attitude drew the focus away from what had to be done (get a beam up) and toward the best way to do it (asking for help or using a pulley system). This approach has significant implications for the bodies of all workers, as the work relied less on physical strength and its accompanied risks and more on thoughtful and safe approaches to physical problems.
When Zadie was engaged in building she described herself feeling very powerful. She felt powerful and confident not because of what she knew she could do physically but because of what she knew about physicality:

You do walk differently and you do have a way of being in the world which I think is different. It’s almost like being in a bit of a secret club about the physicality of the world and how it’s constructed like this kind of world, fridges and houses.

Just as Merleau-Ponty (1968) argued, Zadie’s perception of her physical world changed because of the way her work in trades allowed her to comprehend it. This particular kind of perception, however, had previously been reserved for a secret men’s club. Zadie explained that her understanding and knowledge about this world had a significant impact on her relationships with men. When they realised that ‘you actually understand their world and that it’s your world too,’ Zadie explained that most men were relieved rather than hostile. Zadie theorised that having that knowledge allowed men to let go to the ‘bullshit’ and responsibility of having the ‘paternal relationship between the tradie and household person.’ It is as though in holding this knowledge and its power was a certain burden, and for some men, women sharing it released pressure. Clearly, this explanation does not rest easily with Zadie’s previous story of the threatening and threatened carpenter at the shop-fitters. Nor does it correlate with the stories of the many men who did not recognise or respect her position as a builder or carpenter. However, it does present an alternative view, where perhaps the resistance by some men to women’s entrance into trades was because this burden was so entrenched within concepts of masculinity that not carrying it was inconceivable. The idea that women could lighten the load - by sharing the knowledge or organising a pulley - just did not fit with the way they knew the work of masculinity was done.

While Zadie emphasised the power of perception of physicality, the interview was also peppered with references to the physical strain of trade work: the early mornings, long days and often six day weeks. She also described the lifting and moving required. Despite this strain, and perhaps because of it, Zadie emphasised the intense beauty of the body when it was ‘unselfconsciously’ labouring, she admired men’s bodies as they worked and was sure that they would have admired hers. This admiration was about the body’s capacity to move efficiently and effectively. Even
though Zadie stressed that this appreciation was aesthetic rather than sexual, she did describe a number of occasions where heterosexual women clients were particularly fascinated by the body of a tradeswoman. She recalled a wealthy heterosexual woman employing one of her female carpenter friends to do a small renovation. While the female carpenter drilled in curtain rails, the woman sat behind her watching, flirting with her over a glass of white wine. Zadie described this woman as admiring her carpenter friend’s body, she emphasised that the carpenter was conventionally attractive, tall, slim with long blond hair. Clearly, however, the fascination with the trades woman’s body was that this attractive body was also accomplished with a drill. Holding a drill, this woman became an object of sexual interest to a heterosexual woman, a fetish perhaps. Rather than using the popular Australian handy-man company, ‘Hire a Hubbie,’ a company which clearly embeds trades work within the labour divisions of a heterosexual partnership, this woman appropriated her tradeswoman into this model of gender, sexuality and work. Just as the shop-fitter had felt his sexuality tied to his embodiment at work, this woman found that despite the gender of the carpenter, her embodiment in competently doing carpentry work was sexually alluring.

Similar to many men in physical trades and who do manual labour, such as those in Donaldson’s (1992) study discussed in Chapter I, it was ultimately Zadie’s body that made her stop working as a carpenter. When Zadie needed an operation on her foot she simply couldn’t do her job anymore. Zadie also placed this in the context of aging, ‘there are very few old tradies, and when you do see them it’s kind of sad.’ That said, working in a trade had given Zadie’s body a shape, strong and lean, that she recognised as herself. Losing her trade also meant losing this body and a certain familiar identity. Zadie experienced the sadness of losing some of her confidence in her body, a confidence which this case study suggests helped to define her approach to the world. She no longer felt as sure. She described the day she had to ask someone to help her lift something as deeply challenging to her identity.

Conclusion

Zadie’s trajectory through a number of gender anomalous occupations including carpentry and building rests on a statement she makes a number of times throughout
the interview, that there was a 'little seed in me that always resisted.' Zadie believed that this seed was planted early in her childhood when she grew up free from gender expectations to parents who provided models of resistance. However, in adulthood Zadie's resistance, while potentially fuelled by these early experiences, was also facilitated by resources and networks that were acquired by being involved in gender politics. This involvement meant that she was linked in to a network which informed her about opportunities and government initiatives, giving her the opportunity to apply for positions that a less politically connected person would not have been aware.

It was Zadie's feminism which also allowed her to recognise personal difficulty and discrimination as a cultural rather than as an individual problem. This empowered Zadie to stay in trades despite difficulties and persist in creating her own business. As such, political knowledge and awareness was central to Zadie being able to have a successful career in trades. Zadie’s feminism gave her the skills and knowledge which allowed her to maintain a job as a tradesperson. Unlike feminist Bourdieusians discussed in Chapter I, I do not see this as a form of feminist capital. While feminism allowed Zadie to enter and stay in trades, ultimately transforming itself into economic capital, that is a better wage, this transformation would not have been necessary if she was a man. Instead, feminism was used as a necessary tool to destabilise and resist a gender segregated occupation where men still had the social and economic advantage.

Zadie’s case study suggests that the male dominated nature of trades was defined in relation to heterosexual relations. In Zadie’s case study both men and women were seen to sexualise trade work as the work of a virile and active man, particularly when the conventional relation between men and trades is threatened. However, Zadie’s embodiment as a trades person suggested that disguising trade work as the active work of a heterosexual man failed to acknowledge the significant knowledge and understanding tradespeople possess, a knowledge which is gendered. For Zadie becoming a trades person was not so much about being physically engaged as being engaged with and by physicality. The changes in Zadie’s perception and view of the world as a result of this engagement meant that she was able to engage with many men more equally. Therefore, not only were heterosexual relations being used to create boundaries around occupations, these boundaries and the restriction of access
to certain kinds of knowledge and perception also created and maintained heterosexual relations.
Chapter Four: Case Study II: Trades, Lisa

The interview

At the time of the interview Lisa was forty and on maternity leave caring for her four-month-old baby. At seventeen Lisa had been employed by local council in a four year indentured apprenticeship as a carpenter. Lisa did not pursue carpentry after her apprenticeship. At the time of the interview, Lisa worked for a university as a laboratory manager.

The interview was conducted in Lisa’s home and lasted approximately two hours. Lisa was very excited about telling her life story. She explained that she loved to talk about herself, and that having a small child she was also thrilled to talk to an adult in the day time. Like other interviews in people’s houses, this interview was interrupted a number of times: a few times by a need to check on the sleeping baby and another by Lisa’s partner’s arrival home from work. Despite these interruptions Lisa told her story fluently.

One of the most interesting elements of Lisa’s story telling style was that when she described her younger self, up until about her mid-twenties, she spoke of herself as though she was another person. She interjected on the story of her younger self by making comments about what her older self would do if she was in that situation. The significant split between these two parts of her life seemed to be caused by Lisa attending university in her mid-twenties, where, like Zadie, she was exposed to politics and learnt how to be a lesbian. The retrospective interjections into her own life story were a fascinating reflection on the impact of a political framework on someone’s understanding of their life. Unlike many of the life histories which made the life stories make sense by forming cohesive links between past and present contradictions, Lisa’s reluctance to do this made her reflection on her work as a young trades person particularly sad.
Life course

Lisa was born in 1968 in a regional centre in North West NSW. She grew up on a chicken farm as the middle of five children. The chicken farm was run by her father’s extended family who all lived on the property. Coming from a property-owning family of some success, Lisa saw her father as middle class Catholic. Her mother, on the other hand, was a working-class Protestant, creating some tension between Lisa’s mother and paternal grandmother who ‘ruled the roost.’

Lisa did not enjoy school, finding primary school particularly isolating because she was considered ‘weird’ for reading too much and playing too rough. Lisa enjoyed her home life much more, their mother giving the five siblings freedom to run around the property burning blackberry bushes and riding motor bikes.

When she was eight, Lisa’s father had a nervous breakdown and went to Sydney for electroshock therapy. When he returned he became engaged in art therapy and was not as involved in farm work. Lisa described her father as being ‘airy fairy’ and artistic; he read Sartre, knew about art and was very thoughtful. Lisa stressed that he was not the ‘traditional authoritarian father figure.’ When she was 21, her father committed suicide after his long struggle with mental illness. While Lisa mentioned her father’s suicide in passing, it clearly had a significant impact on her. Interestingly, three other tradeswomen I interviewed also described their father’s as physically and emotionally vulnerable men who were unable to engage completely in the physical and social work of masculinity because of their injured bodies or minds. These examples of vulnerable masculinities seemed to have offered these women alternative models.

Lisa wasn’t ambitious at school and didn’t know what she wanted to do when she finished. The school careers counsellor provided only three career options: nurse, teacher or bank teller. While Lisa found the schoolwork boring, the recession in the 1980s meant that she had little option to leave school before completing her HSC. On
completing school, Lisa did what she described as a traditional rite of passage for a rural teenager, she went to the city to see if she could find success.

In Lisa’s family an apprenticeship was considered to be ‘gold,’ so when Lisa arrived in Sydney she tried to get one, quickly getting a carpentry apprenticeship with a local council. From the beginning Lisa found this a highly sexist and discriminatory workplace. She also recognised that the work culture was deeply demoralising for everybody. Lisa left the council three days after completing her apprenticeship, lacking confidence and feeling unskilled.

Feeling ill-equipped as a carpenter, Lisa returned to her home town after four years of her apprenticeship and now said she felt like she spent a year in hiding trying to work out what she was going to do. The following year Lisa enrolled in an applied science course through TAFE. For the first time, Lisa enjoyed a learning experience, finding it supportive and encouraging. In this same year Lisa went on a youth sailing expedition aimed at fostering confidence. Both her studies and the sailing trip made Lisa confident and happy.

The following year Lisa went on an even longer sailing trip, a four and a half month journey from Sydney to Cairo. Lisa then travelled through Europe and England where she met her first girlfriend. When Lisa returned to Australia she finished her studies and then moved to Sydney ‘to become a lesbian.’

In Sydney Lisa moved into a house with her sister and found a job in a laboratory at a university which eventually became the job she had at the time of the interview. While working Lisa enrolled to do a science degree part time and slowly through university groups came out as a lesbian. Despite the effort and time it took Lisa to tell her family, they were ‘very non-plussed’ when she told them.

In 1999 Lisa bought a house with her sisters where she lived while she became active in the lesbian social scene. Lisa had no significant partnerships until she met her partner, Sally, five years ago. Two years ago the couple were married in a traditional ceremony. They bought a house together a year ago where they now live with their daughter, April. At the time of the interview, with Lisa caring full time for her young
daughter, Lisa discussed a number of times throughout the interview the work of parenting in comparison to paid work she had done.

Gender and sexuality formation

It seemed that much of Lisa's experience of being a child was informed by her growing up on a farm. When she was young Lisa felt like her brothers and sisters were allowed the same freedoms to be 'rough and tumble.' Lisa's life on the farm involved physical play with motor bikes and animals and physical work building gardens and collecting eggs. Interestingly in her descriptions of her childhood, Lisa did not distinguish between her brothers and sisters, it was always just 'we.'

Lisa emphasised the equal availability of her parents in comparison to other people's parents. Lisa said a number of times throughout the interview that her father was not a traditional authoritative father role, instead, he was airy fairy. This was in part due to his mental illness, which Lisa saw as directly entwined with his disempowerment in the family farm ruled by a manipulative matriarch. Both Lisa's family home and the family farm were led by strong women.

Lisa described her mother as the antithesis of her father. While her father was artistic and thoughtful, her mother was 'sensible, logical and practical.' Lisa's mother was always engaged in physically hard work on the farm. In the following extract Lisa illustrated her mother's robustness:

when she [mum] moved into the house...[in town] there were pencil pines in the front yard, and she hates pencil pines with a fiery passion. And so she got out the chain saw and in thongs chopped them down and then chopped them up into little pieces. It was a curtain-twitching moment, because here's mum, little grey haired old mum, and vroommm.

Work history

When Lisa first moved to Sydney and started looking for work, she was looking for apprenticeships in particular because in her 'social set' apprenticeships and 'getting a trade' were highly regarded. Her older brother had commenced an apprenticeship at 15 with the railways. He flourished at his apprenticeship, despite his age making him
vulnerable, at one point being threatened with a knife in a boarding house. This story of potential risk, did not change Lisa’s mother’s perspective that a trade was ‘something to fall back on.’ In the economically unstable early 1980s, in an unfamiliar city, Lisa also saw security in getting paid to train in a skilled and dependable area of work.

The council where Lisa eventually got her job advertised three trade apprenticeships in different trades (gardening, carpentry and painting) at the same time. The main tool used to assess the candidates was an examination. Two hundred people sat the test and Lisa did exceptionally well, making the council obliged to offer her one of the apprenticeships. While she had applied to do carpentry, however, the council officers in the interview encouraged her to do one of the other apprenticeships in an area where other women were working. Lisa insisted on doing the carpentry apprenticeship she’d applied for, holding a romantic image she had of a carpenter. She realised later she was imagining a cabinet-maker, as she had no idea that carpenters constructed roofs:

I didn’t really know what a carpenter did. I might have been really naïve but in my head there was sunlight streaming through the window and people were making things with a plane. I think I was thinking of cabinet-making.

As soon as Lisa started her apprenticeship she knew that it was going to be extremely difficult. The council carpenters were based at a large male dominated workshop with the painters and welders. While some of the carpenters’ jobs were constructed in the workshop, most of the interesting work was done on site. Head carpenters, leading hands, would take a group, ‘gang,’ of carpenters out to work on public works projects. The gangs were selected based on favouritism and friendship, a leading hand choosing people with whom they wanted to spend the day, which didn’t include Lisa. This meant that Lisa spent nearly the whole four years in the workshop with the carpenters who had the least skill, limiting her opportunity to learn new skills and eroding her confidence.

Ironically, there was a lot of rhetoric around equal opportunity in the work place. Lisa reflected that it was common knowledge that the main reason she was given the apprenticeship was because of recent changes to anti-discrimination law. Men Lisa
Lisa worked with would often refer to the fact that she was protected by anti-discrimination laws and could easily make a complaint if she wanted to. However, while this may have been true in theory, Lisa did not feel that she could easily invoke these protections. This was mainly due to the ways in which equity strategies and campaigns for worker rights were managed in the workplace. The senior management who had recruited Lisa through transparent, gender-neutral measures had no direct contact with the carpentry workshop where she worked. Their efforts in ensuring anti-discrimination stopped once Lisa was employed and therefore did not have an impact on the sexism in the workplace. Complaining to these managers seemed erroneous given their unfamiliarity with her day-to-day working life. Lisa also recognised that making a complaint would further alienate her from her workmates, who she was dependent on for training. Unions similarly provided no avenue for complaint, the union representatives often being the people who Lisa would have been complaining about. In both of these cases, potential avenues for complaint and change were made inaccessible to Lisa because they were managed by people who failed to supportively access her.

The failure to implement equity policies into the organisation was most clearly illustrated by the women the council chose to employ as apprentices in the years subsequent to Lisa’s employment. In the early 1980s the State Government demanded that councils meet a quota of women employed in male dominated trades. To meet these quotas the council employed a seventeen-year-old lesbian alcoholic and a twenty-eight-year-old feminist lesbian ready for a political fight. Lisa saw these appointments as an active attack on the quota system and attempts at gender equity, both women being employed with the intention that they could not succeed in the sexist and homophobic work environment.

Lisa described the council itself producing an overall culture of disenchantment, malaise and disempowerment, none of which are conducive to learning:

"Councils are appalling places to put young people because they have this culture of the less you’re doing the more you’re getting away with. And so people are generally happier if they work and council does everything they can to break you of that. But they also instil in you that you’ll never get a job out in the real world because you haven’t got the skills. They’d expect you to"
work too hard, you’d never make it in the real world. This is a cushy job stick
to the cushy job. So they don’t give you any skills, they sap you of any
confidence you have and they give you this really bad work ethic.

This culture created a stagnating ennui in its workers, who both believed they had a
good job because they didn’t have to work hard and at the same time knew that this
laziness rendered them deskilled and unemployable anywhere else. This culture also
meant that Lisa didn’t feel prepared or skilled enough to work in the ‘real world’ of
carpentry. Lisa felt that in order to build adequate skills as a carpenter she would have
to complete another apprenticeship. This lack of confidence was exacerbated by her
gender, as a woman Lisa felt that she was watched and monitored more closely.

Working at the council, going to a trades shop or even working for friends Lisa felt
that people were ‘looking over my shoulder the whole time.’ While other women I
interviewed described the high levels of surveillance they received as tradeswomen,
Lisa’s inadequate training meant that she ‘wasn’t good enough to withstand the
scruptiny.’

When Lisa eventually moved to Sydney she got a job in a laboratory and she
gradually worked her way up in this job to become the manager of the laboratory. She
found her carpentry skills useful in this job. They allowed her to build things for the
lab that others couldn’t:

I don’t regret doing carpentry at all, it’s been fantastic and it’s opened up a lot
of avenues at work in a funny kind of way because I could build things. I
could build cages and benches…and it gives you a way of thinking about
things that are solid and practical.

In this context, outside the male dominated world of carpentry Lisa’s skills were
valued and valuable. Beyond the world of trades, where certain skill levels are
expected and measured, Lisa found her carpentry empowering, the unexpected nature
of her gender anomalous skill pleasantly surprised rather than gained scrutiny from
those she works with and for.

TAFE

Lisa’s experiences of TAFE were greatly influenced by the teachers she had and their
attitudes towards women in trades. In the first and the third year of TAFE, Lisa had a
supportive teacher who welcomed women into the occupation. Lisa talked about this support being a fine balance between not singling her out but still recognising that she would need more help and subtly offering it to her. On one occasion this teacher did explicitly single Lisa out but it was in a way that encouraged her and made her feel valued:

It’s one of the few times he drew attention to me and he said, ‘You shouldn’t pick on the women, you know, the women in this job have made it so much better because we now have lunch rooms and women were a bit of a force for change in the industry because otherwise you’d just be pissing behind the tree you have lunch under and women have brought in safety stuff that you just ruin your body.’ And I remember always keeping that in mind.

While Lisa felt this as an acknowledgement of her important position within the trade, presumably the way it was meant, I find it interesting that this teacher has chosen to attribute significant industrial changes to the civilising influence of the very few women in the industry rather than on by referring to industrial reforms into occupational health and safety. To me, his comment exaggerates the impact of women on the work culture, thereby reinforcing perceptions that male dominated workplaces can be changed by women entering them and that such an entrance will render the workplace completely altered. Women in this view are very powerful indeed. But given Lisa’s experiences of the men in her workplace staunchly protecting their territory, this power is not something most men embrace, instead it is regarded as a threatening imposition.

Lisa found her second year of TAFE challenging because her teacher didn’t believe that women should be in the profession. At one point when Lisa was struggling with something he asked, ‘you going to go back to your needle-work then?’ Until this point Lisa had thought that this blatant form of ‘sexism was something you read in books.’ This teacher’s attitude changed the tone of the boys she was studying with. Lisa recalled that one of the few times she felt physically threatened during her time as a carpenter was when she had to walk down a corridor at TAFE with boys hissing at her on either side.
Gender and sexuality at work

As I have already discussed, Lisa encountered sexism in her initial interview for the carpentry apprenticeship, where the interview panel tried to convince her that she should go for an apprenticeship in a more gender appropriate area. In retrospect, Lisa acknowledged that she was probably naïve not to take their advice: ‘not knowing anything and being seventeen-years-old I had no idea what I was doing.’ Lisa thought that as she’d never liked men before, working in a male dominated industry would be an opportunity to get to know some men properly. She quickly realised that this was not going to be the case:

I was stupid. They hated me...actually I don’t know if they hated they just weren’t happy.

As I have already mentioned in my discussion of the council, much of the discrimination that Lisa experienced was due to poor management. Lisa’s boss had been at the council for an extremely long time and had had a bad accident which left him with a metal plate in his head and a sense that he was ‘off with the pixies.’ This ‘engendered no respect from anyone.’ This meant that the three leading hands were left to manage themselves. The man who was most respected was the young man who had recently been promoted from an apprentice. He was what Lisa described as an alpha male, tall, good looking and privileged because of this:

He was alpha male to the core and he got the good truck and the good jobs. And he set the tone to a large extent about what happened. He set the rules and everyone just fell into line with him.

He took the best craftsman and one or two male apprentices out on his jobs:

They’d go out and do all the good jobs. And they’d take two apprenticeships and have all the fun.

This left Lisa in the workshop with all of the disrespected and institutionalised carpenters who ‘never really showed me how to do it properly.’ She made ‘lots of handles’ and ‘boxes.’
The men in the workshop treated Lisa very differently from how they treated the other apprentices. Lisa said that there was generally ‘a lot of bastardisation that comes with being an apprentice.’ Apprentices got the worst jobs, which was definitely the case for Lisa, but apprentices also got nailed to the floor and had pranks played on them. This did not happen to Lisa. Instead the men ignored her. They would not help her or even acknowledge her. Being excluded from normal social play and interaction in the workplace meant that Lisa felt isolated, lonely and bored:

In retrospect [I was] quite depressed. I used to sleep all weekend because there was no one to talk to.

While Lisa did connect with some of the gardeners and the women on the gangs, they had different social interests to her; their idea of fun was getting drunk at the leagues club. Lisa also found that the council was a place where people from low socio-economic position could get jobs and she met many women – particularly lesbians – who had made ‘poor life choices’ and who consequently made Lisa think that lesbians were women who got in bar fights.

There was lots of pornography in the workshop. Lisa found this offensive and at one point moved a piece of porn that was just near her locker. When she did this the men put porn everywhere:

They put porn in my locker and in my book. I just had to ignore it ‘til they settled down which, given they were bored...

Lisa’s passive strategy of moving the porn aside and ignoring the onslaught that followed was typical of Lisa’s attempt to be as ‘unobtrusive as possible.’ Lisa described herself as Teflon: ‘I was like Teflon; very hard to get stuff to stick to me.’ This strategy contrasted directly to the strategy of the next female apprentice who the council employed, the 28 year old feminist lesbian who ‘would not be ignored.’

Lisa described the period in which this woman worked at the council as the worst time in her life. As a 17 year old Lisa had recognised that in her attempts to protect her Teflon strategy, she had ‘felt like a Nazi collaborator.’ As an adult, Lisa saw this woman’s active response to the injustices and sexism as appropriate and in line with responses she would have had ‘in hindsight.’ However, Lisa also stressed that this woman’s failure to assimilate into the workplace meant that ‘they [her workmates] just ate her for dinner.’ She became alienated because she didn’t let any sexism pass
without comment. For example, she reprimanded one man for calling his wife the ‘old girl.’ While Lisa could see this comment was offensive, she also pointed out the need to choose your battles and that this man in particular was not as exclusionary in his actions as other men in the workshop.

Interestingly, the biggest problem this woman had with the other employees was not with the men but with the women. Some of the women who worked for the council harassed her, one woman putting a noose in her locker, punching her and eventually causing her to leave. When I asked Lisa why she thought there was this conflict amongst the women when there was obviously so much inherent conflict between the women and the men, Lisa explained that the women provided one another with a ‘pressure valve:’

I: The boys were adding all the pressure, social exclusion and pressure, pressure, pressure. And then you’d blow at an opening that was something that meant you could get out. Because the boys were extremely skilled, very good at picking on you in a way that you couldn’t put your finger on it. The boys never laid a finger on me, they never looked physically intimidating because they knew that the moment they did I had something on them. So they never did anything like that because they knew that was too far […] Whereas they never laid a finger on me, they were fantastic at making that exclusion without actually giving you something to complain about. So if someone said to you, ‘What do they actually do to you?’ you’d have to say nothing, because you’re 17 and you don’t really understand what machinations. If they said are they rude to you well they’re rude to everybody, they don’t swear at me they occasionally throw things at me but it’s really…

I: So it’s a really different form of harassment and that in itself is discrimination.

L: Yeah. The harassment was never physical and the sexual stuff was oblique, like it was about the pornography. It wasn’t about me. Because they knew, right down to a fine line, what they could get away with, and that again is set by the tone of the boss.

Lisa theorised that the constant invisible and unexplainable pressure imposed by male workmates, a pressure which had no outlet for complaint or release, needed to be redirected. In Lisa’s case, it seemed that this pressure was released on herself; she
internalised the pressure, becoming depressed. For the women who engaged in these attacks, this pressure seemed to have been internalised differently. The feminist apprentice threatened the safety of the position the other women in the council had established for themselves. In making the sexism visible the feminist also exposed the gender inequalities in the workplace, inequalities which, as Lisa described above, men worked hard to disguise. In attacking the feminist the other women at the council attempted to maintain the status quo of the workplace. They seem to have internalised the sexism as a necessary burden, hating, just as the men did, that this feminist made their gender visible. It is interesting that the violent techniques these women used to threaten the feminist would be traditionally associated with a hegemonic form of masculinity. In physically threatening the feminist these women aligned themselves with a rough and tough physical work culture, both minimising their distance from men and precluding themselves from a need for gender politics.

Lisa’s boss provided the most startling example of harassment at the council. In one of the rare instances when Lisa did get out of the workshop, it was to renovate her boss’ kitchen on council time. While she worked on the kitchen her boss sat in the next room watching pornography on television. Every now and then he would call out, ‘Come in and watch this, love.’ On another instance he told a group of workmates that he’d had a wet dream about Lisa. Lisa didn’t know what to do and in the passage that follows it is still possible to hear how confusing and difficult it would have been for a young woman:

How far do you ignore this kind of shit? Because there’s no redress, there’s no one to talk to. You can’t dob him in. So he’s sitting in the next room watching porn films, saying, ‘Come in and watch this, love.’ And you just have to take yourself away. That was the only tool I had. In hindsight I would have taken a bat to the television but it takes ten years to develop that kind of aggro. And I would have to. That would have fixed him. It was horrible, it was nasty.

As with Lisa’s entire apprenticeship, this experience served to emphasise the importance of equal opportunity policies and initiatives engaging with workplaces rather than assuming that having a woman in a male dominated workplace was enough. To this end, Lisa found some solace in the Women in Non Traditional Jobs office. The office linked her up with a carpentry apprentice who was working for another council. The women would whinge together and they also lived together for a
time. Lisa wished that the office had more funding and more events she could have attended.

The body

Lisa’s body had always been physically capable from when she was a child. She explained that she was:

quite good at using my whole weight and my whole body to do things. And it wasn’t until I tried to work with people who had never done that [...] when I realised that wasn’t intuitive.

She recognised that the physical activities she’d engaged in as a child ‘showed me that I had a capability.’ It is in this sense that Lisa didn’t think about her body, she didn’t think about its capability because she hadn’t ever doubted it: ‘I don’t think it occurred to me that I wouldn’t be able to do it.’ This form of embodiment, in which Lisa engaged her whole body confidently, is very different from the gendered embodiment of the girls described in Young’s (2005) work, where girls’ embodiment of physical actions was impeded by their perception of it. Her experiences of rough and tough physicality in her youth, through being active at the farm and watching her mother’s physical fearlessness, seem to have allowed Lisa to avoid this gendered embodiment, allowing her to have a greater sense of her own sense of physical possibilities.

Despite not consciously thinking about her body, Lisa did describe her body being under constant surveillance. While when Lisa first began working at the council she said, ‘I don’t think it occurred to me that I wouldn’t be able to do it [trade work],’ she was made to doubt her capability later when men she worked with explained that she would not be able to get a job in the ‘real world’ outside the council because she wouldn’t be able to lift the heavy weights necessary. The demoralising talk of the council and its failure to provide Lisa with any opportunities to succeed did make Lisa think about her body differently. She said that she deliberately chose clothes that were as neutral as possible so as to detract from the gendering and sexualising of her body. There were a number of occasions when despite her attempts to neutralise her body, she was still treated sexually: men would look up her shorts if she was standing on a table and on one occasion she was pinched on the bottom:
Someone pinched me on the arse once. It was one of the few times when I felt intimidated. I was out with a road gang, you have lunch in these little caravans and they’d sandwiched me in the middle and I had to go over someone’s lap to get out because he wouldn’t move. And he pinched me on the bum. Again, in hindsight, I should have taken a piece of 4 by 2 to him but I just rushed out.

As we saw in Zadie’s case study, the serious instances of harassment towards Lisa happened when she was out of the workshop. Also similarly to Zadie and the incident of harassment discussed earlier, here Lisa was made to think of her body at work as a potentially sexual one.

Lisa was very aware of how men abused their bodies with the physical work they did. She remembered her favourite TAFE teacher saying:

you’ve got until about 35 until your body starts to give out, so you better think about what you’re going to do after this. And of course the room full of young boys weren’t even paying attention.

According to this TAFE teacher, trades work is not sustainable for the body. It is the work of youth. Lisa recalled many of the boys who worked for the council had bad backs at twenty one: ‘they were trying to do things the stupid way.’ By stupid, Lisa meant they were using their bodies instead of their minds. Like Zadie, Lisa emphasised that the work was physically exhausting for everyone, particularly the constancy of the physical demands of just staying on your feet. Lisa was resigned to the fact that she would not be as strong or fast as the boys she worked with. In retrospect she recognised that this resignation saved her body, as by expecting a different speed of herself, she did not place the same pressures on her body as the young men. Her gender had acted as a kind of protection against masculine competition and unsafe work practices.

Parenting her four month old daughter, on the other hand, Lisa was astounded by how difficult it was for the body. While gender may have protected her in trades, the physical strains of parenting had been hidden from her until she began parent-work. Lisa explained that the physical difficulty of parenting was largely because of the unpredictability of a baby’s body when you try to lift it:

It’s almost impossible to do anything with the baby that’s ergonomically good. Like bathing her. Even if you’re bathing her at the right height and everything
she’s just an awkward little bundle to hold. And picking her up off the cot and playing with her on the floor and picking her up off the floor is just all bad. And you never do the same thing, or you do repeat things over and over again, with work if you had to do that all the time you’d build it up or you’d do something else, anything else [...] My friend Caroline who has various RSI type issues is going to really struggle because you do things over and over again. Even breast feeding it’s impossible to do in a really easy way.

Lisa explained that even when you don’t have ideal conditions or work practices in carpentry there was more control because you are working with static objects and you know how not to ‘overdo it’. For Lisa, these experience of her physicality at work meant that she knew the safest way of being physical, making the physical risks of parenting both obvious and problematic.

Lisa expressed a level of anxiety over how the unergonomic management of her growing daughter’s body:

Hitting my great maternal age I’m quite aware of how hard it is with kids. What’s it going to be like when she’s two and really heavy and wriggly? I don’t know what I’m going to do...how do people with disabilities do it? Interestingly, she drew an oblique connection between the ‘horrible’ way parents treat their bodies and the way that young men abuse their bodies in the building trades. The irony being that as a parent, Lisa found herself using her body as unsafely as the young men she had criticised by unthinkingly abusing their physical strength.

With this in mind, carpentry became a much more manageable form of embodiment while parenting. Lisa engaged in a number of building projects around the house during and after her pregnancy. She found the physical work in which she saw the tangible results fulfilling:

I like to do it and I’ve found that [...] because babies are so repetitive and there are no actual visible signs of action, other than that she’s still alive and cleanish, I find that doing things around the house is fantastic because you can look at it at the end of the day and think I did that.

Given that myths of motherhood often cultivate the idea that reproduction and childhood are the ultimate forms of creation, Lisa’s day-to-day experience of
producing in carpentry as more satisfying than producing a child is revealing. Like many women in trades who I interviewed, Lisa gains a great sense of accomplishment when being able to see what she has made and created. For Lisa, the impact she had on a baby was not as immediately visible or as useful. Lisa’s carpentry skills became a way of making a home for her family. Lisa said of her carpentry:

I’m better at it now than I used to be and I’m pleased with that […] and you know Sal loves it and I like to do it to make her happy […] I do enjoy it. It’s much more fun as a hobby.

As such trade skills are again inserted into the domestic arrangement, but unlike hiring a hubbie, where trade skills are the realm of men who now do not even belong in the woman’s own home, Lisa used her trade skills to make house and do mothering in particularly unusual ways.

Conclusion

Going into carpentry Lisa felt extremely capable in her body due to her childhood experiences of embodiment. However, unlike Zadie, entering a trade at the age of seventeen Lisa did not have the resources to contend with the harassment she would encounter in a male dominated workplace. Without these social and political resources, resources which at the time of the interview she used to reflect on her experience, Lisa’s sense of her own physical capability was eroded. This ultimately caused her to leave trade work feeling depressed and disheartened. Ironically, Lisa’s entrance into trades was facilitated by federal and local government initiatives to encourage women into male dominated occupations. However, the culture of the organisation and a backlash against such equal opportunity initiatives within it meant that Lisa felt isolated and disenfranchised. Without workplace change, in which gender relations are examined on a more micro organisational level, such initiatives and quotas do not seem to have helped individual women or created change within the occupation.

Lisa recognised that the way men used their bodies in trades work was unsustainable. She used her understanding of her gender difference as a way of protecting her body from needing to act in accordance to masculine standards of speed and strength. Lisa’s awareness of how to use her body safely and effectively in intensely physical
work gave her a different perspective when she began doing the work of parenting a young child. Having already experienced a particularly gendered kind of embodiment and gaining a knowledge that was usually that of men allowed Lisa a different position from which to critically reflect on another particularly gendered form of embodiment: parenting. As in Zadie’s case study, there is a sense that the gender segregation of occupations has created a segregation of knowledges which has limited the understanding and approach to all gender defined roles. Lisa and other interview participants stress that, despite the segregation of trades being maintained by a sense of masculine strength, parenting is much more physically demanding than trades work.
Chapter Five: Case Study III: Trades, Jesse

The interview

At the time of the interview Jesse was twenty-eight and in the second year of her apprenticeship as an electrician. She was doing her apprenticeship with a company that specialised in telecommunications. Jesse had struggled to get her apprenticeship and so had settled for one with which she was not happy. Jesse aimed to train and work in renewable energy.

The interview was conducted at Jesse's apartment and lasted approximately an hour and a half. At the beginning of the interview, Jesse was uncertain and overwhelmed by the idea of telling her life story. Like a number of other participants, she thought her story would be boring. When she got started, though, Jesse told her story with animation. She often retold stories from her past dramatically, re-enacting dialogue and speaking in the present tense. This gave the sense that many of the stories Jesse told about her past were very alive to her. It felt like Jesse did not tell many of these stories often. At the end of the interview Jesse declared that this was in fact the case and that she'd found the process of telling the story cathartic. The fact that Jesse made the anger and frustration in her life story so present and real meant that I left the interview drained and exhausted. It was as though, recognising that unique privilege of hearing her story and sensing some overlaps with my own, I invested more in my sense of responsibility to listen actively and, perhaps, therapeutically.

Life course

Jesse was born in 1979 in a small regional mining town (8000 people) in Northern Canada. Jesse described her family as working class. Both of her parents worked for the mining company in the town. Jesse's father was a miner and her mother was a clerk who distributed the zinc and copper. Both of her parents worked hard and long hours. In hindsight Jesse recognised that spending most of his life underground and six months of the year not seeing any light made her father depressed and resulted in alcoholism.
Having an older brother and a younger sister, Jesse said she would have felt an overwhelming sense of isolation had it not been for her strong relationship with her grandmother. Jesse's nuclear family resided in her grandmother's family home and her grandmother was Jesse's primary care giver. Other than her grandmother and sister, both of whom she was very close to, Jesse felt like her family didn't like her and thought she was 'weird.' This was demonstrated through the gender favouritism that her brother received 'because he was a boy' and the favouritism her sister received because she was feminine and heterosexual. Jesse's parents reinforced their gender roles through their own behaviour, in which 'dad was the male…'

While Jesse didn't enjoy school, she recognised that an education was the only way to leave her small town and so chose subjects she knew she would pass; the strikingly traditionally feminine subjects of music, drama and art. Jesse's sense of being an outsider at home continued at school. In part this isolation was because she didn't partake in the most popular local social activity, getting drunk. Jesse also felt her sexuality, be it unconscious at this point, contributed to her feeling different. She expressed this difference in her clothing, choosing to wear 'grandma' dresses from op-shops instead of conforming to the style everyone else was wearing:

[I'd] wear old ladies dresses and stuff. I liked it. That's how I felt comfortable.
But [now] I think it's because I was a homo and didn't know it and I was looking for a way to find myself and I thought it was with clothing and being different. But end of the day, gay.

When Jesse was nineteen, she came out. Her mother was horrified and treated her very badly. So by the time she was twenty Jesse had moved to the nearest city, 600km away, where she pursued her first relationship with a woman and worked in cleaning jobs. After breaking up with this woman after three years Jesse went travelling to Europe and ended up staying in a youth hostel in Brighton for eight months. Here she met her current partner, an Australian woman, Julie.

Jesse and Julie travelled together and eventually decided to go to Australia. The couple temporarily settled in Australia, their intention always to save money to travel. However, in Australia, Jesse found it difficult to get work because of her visa and because she lacked networks. Jesse's job hunt was also interrupted twice; once by her
grandmother dying and another time by her mother getting sick. On both of these occasions, Jesse travelled back to Canada.

It was Julie, when looking for work for herself back in Australia, who found an advertisement for an Australian energy firm and suggested that Jesse might like to be an electrician. Jesse could see the appeal and so started her course when she returned to Australia.

Jesse found studying to be an electrician relatively easy, quickly improving her maths and coming top of the class. She found getting experience and employment much more difficult. At twenty-eight, Jesse also found the apprenticeship wages minimal and Julie supported them.

At the time of the interview, Jesse aimed to apply for a position at a large energy firm that would pay for her further training in renewable energy so that she could 'change the world.'

Gender and sexuality formation

Jesse's grandmother was her primary caregiver for the whole time she lived at home and a 'massive figure in my life. She was like my mum.' Jesse's grandmother did most of the cleaning, cooking and childcare.

Jesse described her grandmother as 'exuding' love for her and supporting everything she did. The most significant and happy times of her childhood were spent with her grandmother on an island where her grandmother had a lake house. Here Jesse enjoyed the freedom of nature and her grandmother's company:

It was like heaven. You'd just run around naked and nobody's looking at you 'cos there ain't nobody round. It was just the freedom. And I remember that and if there was anytime in my life I could go back to it would be that.'

On the island Jesse described her grandmother being a physical worker. Interestingly, when Jesse described her grandmother doing all different types of work she posits her as opposite to her parents who she saw embodying conventional divisions of labour:
Growing up on the island my grandma did everything, male and female. She split kindling, she washed the clothes, she hauled the wood, she did everything. And that’s why when we moved back into town I didn’t think twice about doing physical things because that’s what grandma did and that’s just what you do. Tilling the garden the whole bit. She just did everything and I admired her my whole life. She’s the ultimate being. Stacks of love to give hard hard worker, calloused hands. Ultimate. Ultimate...Mum was female and dad was male and very much into their roles but grandma was everything.

Just as the farm had provided Lisa with a model of women doing hard manual work, the island did this for Jesse. However, unlike Lisa, for whom these role models made such physical capability seem normal, for Jesse, her parents’ adherence to traditional gender roles, meant that her grandmother’s embodiment was admired as special and ‘ultimate.’

Clearly, the influence of her loving and hard working grandmother had a significant impact on Jesse and her gender and sexuality formation. Jesse respected her grandmother for her free and dynamic body that was capable of so much. There was also a strong expectation at home from Jesse’s parents and grandparents that the children would do physical work:

Physical labour, yes, that’s what we did as children. We were slaves. Shovel the snow, do the dishes...haul the wood...split it all and stack it all. Summer time out at the cabin, paint the deck, paint the cabin...Things like welding, dad would let me have a go. If I didn’t get it, that was it, he had patience with my brother but not with me because I’m a girl and it doesn’t really matter.

Despite this expectation of physical work, Jesse’s parents had much more conventional images than her grandmother about what was appropriate for a girl and a boy.

In her descriptions of her youth, Jesse emphasised with some bitterness the favouritism for her brother in her family. As children her brother got more toys and as a teenager her brother got a car for his sixteenth birthday. In a regional town a car made a huge difference to a teenager’s life. Neither of the girls ever received cars. Jesse also explained that as soon as she left school her father demanded that she got a job and her mother asked her to contribute rent. Jesse did not mind either of these
things except that her older brother hadn’t had to follow the same rules and only had to start paying rent when she did. Jesse suggested that her parents’ push to make her more independent may have caused her to take on some qualities often associated with masculinity.

Her sister’s identity as a ‘perfect housewife woman’ was, like her brother’s maleness, privileged. Jesse knew that her mother always wished her to be more feminine. Jesse recalled that her mother had ordered a flight attendant manual in the mail and announced to Jesse that it was easy to become a flight attendant, an occupation which Jesse elided with the embodiment of a hyper heterosexuality and style which she did not embody:

She would have loved me to be straight. She would have loved me to have a straight secure feminine style job

In fact, it was seeing the privileged acceptance that her sister received by being straight and feminine that prompted Jesse to feel intense sadness and eventually to come out. Jesse told the story of being an outsider in her family evocatively:

Well I was sitting in the living room and my sister who had this boyfriend Nicholas...had come to spend Christmas with our family. And my mum and dad, my sister and him were all in the kitchen and I was in the living room in the dark, sitting in the dark. And there was laughter and it was just so great in the kitchen and the acceptance of him was just just so great for everyone. Except for me, because I’ve never been accepted in my family, or at least that’s how I felt besides my grandma and my sister. My brother always thought I was weird and my mum and dad didn’t like me. I was the only planned child and yet they didn’t want me. It was weird. And so I was just sitting there and I started to feel all sorry for myself and I started crying and I was like, I’ll never be accepted like this stranger is.

What was particularly striking in this description was that it was Jesse’s embodiment, sitting in the dark, in another room, which allowed her to realise her grief around her position as an outsider. The physical experience she described dramatised or encapsulated her emotional experience of not being a part of the laughter or the group due to her gender and sexuality.
The small town in which Jesse grew up didn’t provide her with gay or lesbian role models. Jesse had always been attracted to women (‘I had a crush on my grade two teacher’) but did not know what this meant. Jesse thought that every woman liked women but that they got married and had children and that was that. Jesse said the only lesbians she had seen were on Jerry Springer ‘and they’re not lesbians, man.’ But she did have one gay male friend who she was extremely grateful for, because through his sexuality she was able to recognise her own. Jesse’s mother thought that Jesse and Chris were having a relationship when he stayed the night. She was very excited about this. But when Jesse’s brother informed her that he was gay she ‘turned on a dime’:

She just was like blah blah blah going off, ‘If he ever cuts his finger, I don’t want you sucking it,’ and stuff like that because I’d get AIDS. Meanwhile he’s never been with a guy because he lives in a small-arse town full of morons like you mum. And then all of a sudden we weren’t allowed to be friends anymore.

This response provided Jesse with a rehearsal of the homophobia she could expect when she came out. When Jesse did tell her mother, her mother’s response was extreme:

For a few months everyday it was just like she was crying everyday and she’d come at me with all these questions […] And I don’t really know, I’ve never been with a female, all I know is that I think about them when I touch myself. I don’t know…One day she just had awful things to say, she said, you know we made that bet with the alcohol, can’t we do that with this, I can give you money you know. She was going to pay me not to be gay. Or she said, this blows my mind away, she’d rather me be a prostitute than be gay. A little bit of resentment there you see. Because that would be getting it from a man. Getting what? Getting abused. What do you want? You’d rather me be…prostitutes don’t have it easy. You’d rather me be that than be someone who happens to like females.

The shifts in tense and the truncated sentences in this extract show how vivid and present the experience of this rejection was for Jesse in the interview.

Sadly when Jesse moved to the nearest city where Chris lived at the age of 20 she found the gay community equally unaccepting. Jesse was committed to ‘learning the
gay community game’ but found it rigid and conformist and exactly what she was trying to move away from:

I don’t like the gay community. I think it’s very dirty...if you don’t fit in you don’t fit in...particularly in [Canadian town she moved to] you couldn’t wear nail polish because that was too girly and that was conforming to some feminine bullshit. And I was like, fuck you, man, I like to paint my nails...You can’t tell me I can’t do that because that just makes you as bad as my homophobic parents.

Work history

Jesse’s experiences at school, where she had not felt confident, successful or smart, significantly affected her approach to work after school. She explained that she ‘hadn’t even considered career to be an option at all’ and instead did unskilled manual work such as cleaning, labouring and packing boxes in a warehouse. Doing this physical work, which involved long hours and night shifts, Jesse met other people who were considered outsiders in society. She found the social aspects of these work environments validating and accepting.

For Jesse work was about gaining independence. From the time she started working when she was still at school, Jesse recognised that having her own money gave her the ability to get out of her town and create a life of her own. Jesse’s labour processes, then, were a means to an end, allowing her to move to the city and eventually to travel.

Given Jesse’s sense of herself as unable to pursue a career, it took her partner to suggest that she consider being an electrician. When her partner read out a job description for an electrician that she saw in the paper, Jesse thought that she could enjoy doing this kind of work. At this point Jesse was twenty-seven and had been in the workforce doing a variety of unskilled jobs for ten years.

Becoming an electrician meant becoming a skilled tradesperson. Like many of the trades women I interviewed, Jesse felt extremely empowered by gaining the skills of her trade. However, this sense of empowerment was often interrupted by the gender
discrimination she received in the workplace. As an apprentice electrician Jesse found it difficult to get work. Jesse, like two other younger tradeswomen I interviewed, found that her gender and lack of access to social networks meant that she was often not considered for apprenticeship positions in small companies. As Fuschia explained in her interview, small time operators often still employ their sons, cousins and friends of friends. The difficulty in getting work experience, let alone an apprenticeship, created cycles of disenfrancisement. Jesse wanted to work for one of the largest energy suppliers in Australia, which has both an expertise in renewable energy and also offered equal opportunity places to women. However, when Jesse did apply for this position she found that her inability to access adequate work experience meant that she was not offered a job.

Jesse did eventually get an apprenticeship with an electrical company run by two women, because her TAFE teacher rang the company and vouched for her. In a sense, Jesse’s TAFE teacher became her social network, convincing this company that Jesse was smart, logical and talented and would be an asset to their company. Jesse’s employment, then, relied on two interventions into a male dominated culture. It required a respected and committed TAFE teacher with industry knowledge to personally intervene in the job hunt and it required the company approached to be run by women. It was extremely rare to find an electrical company run by women, particularly because this company did electrics as well as telecommunication and fibre. While Jesse was not interested in staying in fibre, a more accepted avenue for a female electrician, she took the job because it was her only option.

Jesse described working for this company as feeling like a slave. She explained that most companies now used apprentices as cheap labour rather than training them adequately. As such, Jesse spent most of her time doing work she found boring, easy and laborious, such as laying fibre. The reason this work was considered more appropriate for a woman was because it was not as physical. It didn’t involve heavy cable or the more dangerous work involved in electricals, such as dealing with broken powerlines or circuits. This electrical work, however, was the kind of work that Jesse was interested in as it involved more skill, knowledge and problem solving.
While Jesse loved the physical aspects of her work, she did not see herself as always working on the tools but instead imagined moving into a managerial role:

I don't want to be on the tools in forty years, so I'm concentrating now on doing really well in the academic end of it so I can work my way up the ladder quicker and get off the tools. Don't get me wrong, I like it, I like being able to fix shit and I like being able to do stuff to do it.

Like other women in both trades and IT, Jesse saw the need to manage the physicality of her labour processes to ensure that the work is sustainable.

TAFE

Despite Jesse's reservations, her experiences at TAFE were extremely empowering. Because Jesse had not been very successful at school she was very nervous about going to TAFE. She was particularly anxious about her maths skills: 'I got a tutor in because I didn't know math, I didn't know fractions.' This combined with her gender made Jesse feel:

nervous, vulnerable and I was expecting to feel like an outsider because I was female...

Jesse has actually found the academic side of TAFE engaging. At the time of the interview she expressed her love for maths and was interested in it. She found this success confidence building:

The first test I got back I got 90% or something and that was very rewarding. The first time I applied my brain to something I got it.

And while Jesse’s parents had never supported her choices in unconventional occupations previously, they were really happy with her choosing to be an electrician because it gave her ‘drive.’

Gender and sexuality at work

As I have mentioned, one of the most significant experiences of her gender at work involved Jesse getting employed. This was largely due to the institutional and bureaucratic processes which acted as apprenticeship gatekeepers. TAFE colleges sometimes facilitated student access to apprenticeships. One way was to invite apprenticeship employers onto campuses to interview students. Whereas in the past, apprentices were usually employed by individual tradespeople or trades contractors,
now, due to changes to the apprenticeship system, it has become more common to be employed by a Group Training Company or an industry body who would then hire out apprentices to contractors, often for short periods of time. The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) is the national peak body for electrical contractors and came to Jesse's TAFE to interview apprentices it would then hire out. Jesse and four others from her TAFE course applied. Jesse thought it was the best interview she'd ever had but she didn't get the job:

I had a great chat to the fellows. It felt great, like the best interview I'd ever had. Didn’t get a job though. Blew my teachers’ minds away, all of them, I don’t know why you didn’t get a job, top of the class. Why wouldn’t they take me? Committed, not one day late, not one minute late, like why wouldn’t they take me? Because I’m female....And it even got a few of my teachers shitty and they kept saying, ‘Don’t worry about it, Jesse, you’ll get something way better.’ And they kept saying that but there was nothing. My head teacher couldn’t find me work experience, even where I go and work for them for free. I don’t get a cent off them. All they have to do is give me the shit jobs where I get to learn how to use the tools. He couldn’t even get me that because as soon as he said ‘she’ or ‘female’ they weren’t interested. [...] Some of my teachers where I was getting these great grades in it felt like they were feeling a bit of disappointment, like why can’t...But then they kept assuring me, ‘You’ll get something better.’ Well, I didn’t get the Renewable’s one.

Of the five of the students that applied for the NECA apprenticeships, the only other two who didn’t get places were both failing TAFE. Her TAFE teachers’ disbelief at Jesse not getting an apprenticeship, along with the clear injustice when Jesse’s results and interview were compared to the students who did, suggested that she wasn’t recruited because of her gender.

Jesse suspected that one reason she didn’t get offered an apprenticeship was because she didn’t want an appropriate job for a female electrician:

I said in the interview, ‘I’m an electrician I want to get into renewables.’

Nobody wants to hear that. Nobody wants to hear renewables. They want to hear construction. I’m a female, they assume I can’t lift a spool of cable. Because I’m female, you wouldn’t be able to do construction so would you like to do telecommunications, which is like telephones, the stuff I’m doing
...Oh I don't really want to do that, no, I want to do electrical...so because I didn't want to do the sissy girl job I couldn't get a job for them. Like other women I interviewed in trades and IT, within male dominated occupations there was often another division of labour, another hierarchy which marked out the type of work that women might be able to do within the industry. In this case, telecommunications was an appropriate specialisation for a woman as it did not require the strength or exposure to danger that was required in other forms of electrical work.

Jesse expressed elsewhere in the interview, that the reluctance of having women doing electricals was not just related to strength, but also because doing electricals often required working on male dominated construction sites. Jesse believed that the men interviewing her from NECA thought that construction sites weren't suitable for women because they might get raped by the other tradespeople. The danger of the work is shifted from the physical threat of the work itself to the physically threatening culture of male dominance and sexual violence in the workplace.

While Jesse had not felt physically threatened at work, she seemed to suggest that tradeswomen needed to embody a certain toughness in order to survive. The company where Jesse got her apprenticeship was run by women who she described as tough, driven and uncompromising:

Penny's worked really hard to get the respect of a lot of guys in the construction field and I think that some of them respect her. Like they know that she is a bitch and she is tough.

The word 'tough' emerged in three of my interviews with tradeswoman as a central requirement for women in male dominated industries. In being 'tough' women illustrated through their social and emotional manner that they were capable of being with men and doing what they did. Interestingly, as Jesse's description indicated while the embodiment of toughness may gain respect in male dominated industries, it was not a respected form of femininity: being a tough woman, in Penny's case at least, meant being a 'bitch.'

When I directly asked Jesse whether it was necessary to be tough and hard as a woman in her industry she was unsure. Jesse recognised the difficulty in creating an
electrical business as a woman but also believed that once a woman was successful it did not matter what other men in the industry thought.

I really don’t know. I don’t know if it makes a massive difference being female or not. I think building a business would be tough because it’s male dominated and a guy’s just going to go, ‘Dumb bitch,’ and you’re going to get that. But whatever, you just keep doing what you’re doing and eventually they can call you dumb bitch as often as they want and it doesn’t matter. You’ve got your own business.

I was surprised by this response. To me, it would seem that working in an industry where you were expected to be called a ‘dumb bitch’ despite your experience or success would require significant ‘toughness.’ In fact, I think that withstanding this kind of ongoing taunting could be a form of labour in itself. I was also surprised that given the level of discrimination Jesse acknowledged and experienced in the industry that she was unsure about whether ‘it makes a massive difference being female or not.’ In this response I feel that Jesse revealed her hope that when she was a manager or held a senior position as an electrical contractor the discrimination and harassment she experienced during her training would not matter anymore.

Clearly, for Jesse’s bosses this is not the case. Gender did still matter. One of Jesse’s bosses preferred to work with women electricians, perhaps because she did not have to work so hard to maintain her persona as a ‘tough’ ‘bitch’. Indeed, Jesse described this boss wanting to talk to her about her life history and her personal relationships. Interestingly, Jesse did not feel solidarity with her bosses or her female colleagues, in fact her descriptions of them were quite derogatory:

I work with one [boss] all the time. She only wants to work with me because she’s some old hag lesbian who doesn’t want to work with the guys so I’ve got to work with her everyday. And I don’t give a shit about her life, please stop telling me about your life! And I’m in a position where I can’t go, ‘We’re not friends,’ because I need to get tool experience

While Jesse’s boss seemed to recognise her gender and sexuality as a point of connection and a relieving break from ‘tough’ conversation with men, for Jesse this extract stressed that the importance of collegial relations were purely didactic.
Even having an apprenticeship, Jesse found getting exposure to knowledge and skills continued to be a challenge. In more than one instance, Jesse felt that despite working for women, the sexism of male electricians she worked with blocked her access to certain kinds of experience. Jesse recalled one of the men she worked with being extremely unhelpful and exclusionary, ultimately sending her home early for the day because he did not want to teach her or have her around while he worked:

One guy in particular, who doesn’t think women should be in this man driven field, and one day he just sent me home early. Well, how the fuck am I going to learn anything if I’m sitting at home? [...] All of a sudden I had bad credit with her [the boss] because I had been sent home early.

The body

As I have already mentioned, there is a distinct divide between the physical tasks involved in different kinds of jobs an electrician can do. Doing electrical work can involve strong physical work:

You pull a lot of cable...It’s tough with beginning electricians...You do a lot of hammer drilling into brick...Pulling cable is one of the tougher bits because you’re often up in tight roof spaces or under tight floor spaces. Dark dirty full of all kinds of rats, spiders and shit like that. And depending how many cables you’re carrying it can be quite heavy, but unless you’re breathing bad air that I’m recognising is carcinogenic then I quite enjoy it.

Doing fibre cable is ‘not physical at all really,’ and it is what Jesse referred to as a ‘sissy job’ because of that. For Jesse, this notion of physical work as holding more value than non-physical work was not just something she had absorbed as an electrician, it is something she has always felt.

When Jesse was working with her body she felt good about herself. Jesse found physical work fulfilling because she could physically see what she had done, she could see the change that the things she had done had made.

For me, if I were to have to sit at a computer all day, and that would be my work, that would be so unfulfilling. Whereas I even notice it now [...] I spend a week working with the guys and I’ll feel good [...]. I feel like I’m getting something done when I’m doing physical stuff. I’m just one of those...
physically minded people where if you’re not doing physical work you’re not doing work, which is bullshit but for me I feel fulfilled working in the old school term labouring [...] It’s so physical you get something done…physical, real visual thing, where you cut a whole pile of wood and at the end you stand back and you go look what I’ve done and you know what that wood’s going to be used for, it’s going to help you down the line. So that physical labour for me is…you do that physical labour to make things easier down the line.

Everything’s physical for me [...]. If I couldn’t do something physical I’d be useless.

In this way Jesse’s identity was strongly reliant on her ability to do. Her sense that she was contributing relied on this physical process of creating physical output.

Despite this Jesse did talk throughout the interview about the vulnerability of this physical work. She talked about the fact that she wouldn’t want to be ‘on the tools’ when she’s forty because of the dangers it presented to her body. Ironically, the thing she depended on became the thing she could no longer use. She also talked about the vulnerability of her body. At the time of the interview she had severe anaemia which often meant that she came home from work completely exhausted.

Like Zadie, Lisa and other women tradies I interviewed, Jesse emphasised that there was usually a way to do something that was not so physically demanding:

Usually there’s a way out of doing physical really heavy heavy stuff you just have to use your brain [...]. If you just take a minute to suss things out a little, you can find a way to dumb things down a little.

Jesse says that the ‘smart ones’ work out the easy way, and that those who do things in a laborious fashion often also end up ruining places.

Jesse described two ways in which her embodiment had benefitted her ability to get along with the male electricians. Firstly, Jesse was very small and agile and was therefore able to lay cable in places that most people wouldn’t be able to fit:

Right now people at work call me the weasel because I can fit in places they can’t. And it’s really good for them because a cable run that would take them ages, I can just strap it onto things. I can just hop into the roof and run it [...]
won’t be able to do that work in forty years and I wouldn’t really want to there’s a lot of bad air up in those places, I don’t mind doing it for a while but you can just get cancer if you breathe that stuff in your whole life, a whole life of doing that is a bit unhealthy.

In this sense Jesse had an especially useful ability but it was an ability that was unsustainably demanding and dangerous: a kind of physical work which put her physical body at risk.

Another advantage Jesse had in regards to her embodiment was how she enacted her sexuality. Jesse said that like her male colleagues she liked admiring women and calling out to them on the street while she worked. Jesse felt that this meant she could understand men better but because she is a woman she also felt she is excused from this being a sexist act:

I don’t think men are just arseholes that hoot and holler all the time. There are men who do hoot and holler, I’m one of them, like, I would be one of those guys if I had my balls. But I’ve got my ginie and I get away with it because I’ve got my ginie. Um, yeah, I think obviously you can’t let people walk all over you.

Again Jesse’s embodiment allowed her a sense of connection with her male colleagues but it was a connection that emerged out of an action that could potentially feel dangerous for another woman.

Conclusion

The three case studies of women in trades captured particular moments and initiatives to support women’s involvement in trades. While Zadie’s and Lisa’s case studies showed the varying degrees of success of federal and state government initiatives in the early 1980s, Jesse’s experiences in the 2000s showed that such initiatives had been taken off the agenda. Without these interventions, contemporary apprentices such as Jesse were faced with the same barriers of institutional discrimination and male dominated work culture described by research in the 1980s (Pocock 1988). Together, these three case studies suggested that for such initiatives to have an impact on occupational segregation they needed to work with women and organisations
beyond the level of occupational entrance and they needed to be maintained beyond
the term of a government.

For women who did manage to enter and maintain a position as an electrician, Jesse
described a limited range of occupational and gender practices which were
appropriate. Jesse experienced intense pressure to specialise in telecommunications,
an area of electrical work which was seen as appropriate for a woman. Even within
this specialised area, women were still expected to perform a particular kind of
femininity, a tough and aggressive style which Jesse said allowed them to survive in a
world of tough aggressive men.

Unlike Zadie and Lisa who used a feminist lens to discuss their experiences of gender
inequality and discrimination, Jesse did not use this as a resource. Instead, while she
recognised the gender discrimination she had experienced as unfair, this experience
did not change the way she regarded other women in the industry or sexualised
women outside it. Unlike Zadie and Lisa who often felt their sexuality and gender as
points of difference from men, Jesse dismissed her similarities with women inside and
outside of the industry, preferring to focus on how she used her embodiment of
gender and sexuality to form connections with the men she worked with.

For Jesse this use of gender and sexual embodiment as a resource to attain skills and
knowledge at work fitted with her labour history’s focus on skill acquisition. Jesse’s
frustration in not being given an apprenticeship was not frustration directed at sexism
but rather at not being allowed access to skills and training. This could be seen as a
product of Jesse’s class. In acquiring a skilled trade, she was moving up an
occupational hierarchy. As a child and adolescent Jesse had already embodied the
gender and sexuality of an outsider. This was not new. What was new was wanting to
access skills, and forming connections with men she worked with was integral to
getting them. Jesse also stressed throughout the interview the importance of
physicality and physical work to her sense of self. While Jesse did not describe this
physicality as gendered, earlier descriptions of her grandmother suggested that the
ultimate form of physicality was bi-gendered (Wedgwood, 2004), a physicality which
could do male and female roles. And while being the weasel and whistling at women
allowed Jesse to connect with men by embodying a physicality with which they
identified, implicit in her description was the contradiction that it is only by being a
woman that she is able to do these things in the way she did. So while Jesse used the
embodiment of her gender and sexuality to connect with men to gain skills, there was
also an underlying sense that this connection involved tricking them about her
difference.
Chapter Six: Case Study IV: IT Management, Jane

The interview

Jane, in her mid forties and single at the time of the interview, was a member of the executive at a large organisation in Australia. While she had held this executive position for four years, prior to this she had spent most of her career in IT systems management. This was my first interview with a woman in IT and felt in many ways incomplete. At the beginning Jane asked that the interview be kept to an hour and in trying to keep to her time frame I didn’t ask questions about her life course. Despite this, the interview reveals much about the way Jane chooses to organise her life. She spoke quickly and efficiently about labour processes and work systems. However, she paused and struggled to discuss specific examples, moments or stories from her personal life. This pattern emerged most strongly when I asked Jane, on a number of occasions, to discuss references to sexual discrimination and harassment in the workplace, questions which produced some of the only long pauses in the interview. Because of the few women in executive positions in Australia, I have omitted the type of organisation Jane worked for at the time of the interview in order to preserve her anonymity.

Life course

Jane was born in 1962 to a ‘country Irish Catholic family’ in rural NSW. She was brought up on a number of farms, her family moving around rural NSW to find farmable land in the drought. She loved primary school, being dux of the regional school and excelling at sport. While Jane’s family were poor, requiring her to take a scholarship to provide school uniforms and equipment, both of her parents had high expectations of Jane and her three siblings, expecting them to achieve at what they did. Jane did, however, encounter opposition from her father when she left school and applied for university. Her mother’s support and a government scholarship allowed her to study for a Bachelor of Business at a regional university.

Jane finished university in 1984, at a time when small and medium sized businesses were beginning to be computerised. Her first job out of university, while difficult, gave her excellent training in computerising business systems. In 1985 Jane moved to
Sydney and got a job as an accountant in a large freight company. She stayed in this company for ten years, becoming the head of office administration and IT. In 1994 Jane was head-hunted to be the Asia Pacific Chief Information Officer (CIO) for an international management consultancy company. She stayed there for four years, continuing her habit of working long hours and travelling extensively. After four years Jane burnt out and decided to go travelling. At thirty-five she went backpacking for two years and returned to Australia feeling that she had a new perspective and wanting to work for an NGO. Upon her return, however, Jane got a job as the head of IT at the large organisation where at the time of the interview she had worked for ten years.

While Jane spoke quickly and efficiently about her work and labour processes, she did not include discussion of her personal relationships in the initial telling of her life story. When asked, Jane laughed and said that her personal relationships with partners, friends and family had been significantly affected by her commitment to her work, as had her own sense of well being. She said that she only had 'purportedly serious relationships' because she was both a commitment phobe and obsessed with her work. Jane repeated a number of times throughout the interview, that the long hours and travel were a result of her attitude to work, particularly her work as a manager. This statement rested uncomfortably with another theme of the interview, which was Jane's repeated claim that she didn't really care about her position or her job security.

Gender and sexuality formation

At one point Jane described her mother as a ‘quiet CWA mother,’ but was quick to emphasise how the division of labour worked on a farm. While her mother was expected to do most of the domestic duties, she also did active manual farm work, just as Jane did. When describing her childhood, Jane was cursory, not talking in sentences but instead listing concepts that I was expected to understand: Irish Catholic family, working class, working farm, 'you know what I mean'. From this I only inferred quite far through the interview that the family's itinerancy was due to incredible financial stress, stress experienced by many farmers in the 1970s and many others in Australia.
Like other women I interviewed who grew up in the country, Jane described the freedom and adventures she had as a child:

The things I remember were the things we did wrong. What we got up to. I remember stuff like climbing the trees and falling down and breaking my arm. I remember we used to walk around the school in bare feet. This was a different time. I guess. In the country, it was all behind everything else. The school bus was a kombi van and in summer the bus driver would stop and he’d have hessian bags and we’d go down the irrigation channels in the mud.

In terms of describing the physical world which Jane inhabited, this was probably the richest description in Jane’s life history.

Jane was one of four siblings and during the interview identified most strongly with her elder brother. When they lived on the farm they went to a two-room primary school where Jane described feeling that ‘I could do anything.’ Towards the end of her primary schooling the family moved to a bigger town where they went to the large local primary school. Jane continued to enjoy the social, academic and sporting aspects of the school.

Because of a scholarship Jane completed high school always intending to go to university. Much to her surprise, her father — who she’d previously described as supportive - was completely opposed to her attending university. Jane storied this into a narrative of her father’s stoic working class pride and firm ideas about the role of the woman. Ultimately, it was her mother who convinced her father that Jane must go to university. Jane said that her mother could see that she had to ‘escape.’ It seemed that her father, bolstered by a sense of his role as breadwinner and patriarch, couldn’t see beyond his interpretation of work (unskilled and skilled labour) and women (wife and mother) and clearly had no concept that Jane had anything to escape from.

Her father’s objections significantly informed Jane’s choice of university and course. She didn’t study in a large city because this would have been too intimidating for her father. Jane limited her choices to courses she saw as particularly employable. Jane’s negotiations look like a kind of patriarchal bargaining (Kandiyoti 1988), in which
women give away some of their choices to patriarchal authority in order to gain some power.

**Work history**

Jane’s first job was as a ‘girl Friday’ while she was completing her university degree. While her title was belittling, Jane actually ran the business operations of a middle sized muffler business in Milling. She described this first job, which she did for a year, in great detail. This became a pattern in the interview in which Jane focused on the details of labour processes.

In her descriptions of this time her dreadful boss and the excellent work experience she gained remained irreconcilable. Jane would be in the middle of describing the labour processes she was involved in when she would cut herself off by saying, ‘Gosh he was a bad boss.’ This established another pattern in Jane’s descriptions of her work, that it was difficult for her to describe directly how labour processes and personal relationships related to one another. It was as though she had had to segment those two aspects of her work in order to achieve.

Despite Jane’s detailed description, this first job was by far her shortest term of employment. At the age of 48, Jane had worked for three other companies, two of them for ten years. Much of the literature on the glass ceiling suggested that because women were more likely to need formal networks to get promoted, they were more likely to be promoted externally than internally (Baron and Bielby, 1985). This was not the case with Jane, who gained a number of promotions in each organisation she worked in and suggested that her exceptional skills may have allowed her to operate outside certain gender regimes.

Most of Jane’s interview involved her describing in detail, and with great speed and efficiency, the systems and labour processes of each job she had done. It was clear from these descriptions that Jane took great pleasure in business systems working as well as they could, and that IT became a way of achieving this. In her first role for a freight company in the 1980s, when computers were just beginning to enter businesses, Jane described initiating and implementing the computerisation of the
weekly profit and loss, the payroll and other systems which had previously been manually recorded.

As a manager of IT in the freight company, Jane had to learn what everybody's jobs were, researching the working systems of the company so that she could computerise them. This meant that as part of her IT job, Jane spent a lot of time talking to people who did a variety of jobs in freight, from packing and sorting to delivering.

This way of using IT as a 'business tool,' to borrow Jane’s expression, was just becoming popular in the 1980s. Jane felt that most people did not include this detailed knowledge of the business and how it functioned in their understanding of an IT role. She hypothesised that if these less technical aspects of the role were understood as IT, IT would be less gender segregated:

We spend heaps of time trying to get to understand what it is the organisation’s doing. It makes a huge difference. And I think if I just reflect briefly on that, if more women could see that it does require that interaction, they might be in there.

Computerising and making things more efficient could result in a reduction of jobs and skills (Braverman, 1975). As a manager, Jane found negotiating the changes in labour processes both challenging and rewarding. As a twenty-three year old, new to work in general, Jane wasn’t aware of the consequences of computerising processes that had previously been done manually. She was, however, quickly confronted by a strong labour movement.

In the extract below, Jane described her approach to managing change with a union when distributing information technology and retraining freight workers to track freight electronically.

I don’t think you’re going to get this system up if you are going to stand and lie to these people. [...] These are the days of pilot strikes and lots of industrial action, probably before your time. They could just pull the plug on all sorts of things and ruin the business [...] We were working really closely with a bunch of drivers from Adelaide and we’d really won their trust. [...] And they’re not going to stick with you, not if you want to be in there for the long haul.
Jane's justification of honest and clear communication with unions here was in response to many managers in her industry who were lying to unions and workers about organisational change. While Jane emphasised the emotional significance of managerial honesty forming loyalty, this honest communication was also to facilitate efficiency. Jane recognised the power of unions in the 1980s to stop work and effect change. It is interesting to reflect on this statement in a contemporary context, in which unions have less strength. With the pressure off, would managers feel it necessary to be so clear and honest?

Jane was clearly very good at her work. At the freight company, Jane was promoted to a management position within the first year of her employment at age twenty-three. This was followed by a quick ascent to a senior management position and a position on the national management team at the age of twenty-seven. Jane did not, however, apply for any of these promotions. In fact, she had to be cajoled to take the senior management position by the general manager of the company at the time. She was head-hunted for her next job at the management consultancy firm where she spent four years. The interview did not reveal how she got her job at her current place of employment nor how she achieved her promotion onto the board. While I can't speak accurately on the last ten years of Jane's career, in the first 16 she described her largest choices around work as about choosing when to leave to avoid or deal with 'burn out'.

The contradiction between Jane's perception of herself as unambitious and lazy and her success and 'work obsession' ran throughout the life history. Jane said that one of the reasons she liked computerised processes was because she was 'born lazy' so it seemed ridiculous to do everything manually. Jane also said a number of times that she 'wasn't interested in her future career' and that she 'couldn't care whether I was somebody who was making beds or running a big job [laughs],' which fits with her passive promotions discussed above. However, this proclaimed laziness and lack of ambition seemed opposed to Jane's other perception of herself as a 'work obsessive person,' who worked such long hours and travelled such long distances that she burnt out. Jane seemed a little confused by this contradiction (as indicated by her laughing at herself in the above quotation). Jane's lack of ambition seemed tempered by the fact that she did not need to be ambitious because she had always been successful.
However, the apathy around her occupation or what kind of work she did was more difficult to understand given how hard she worked.

Perhaps it was best explained by the fast pace and insistent rhythm with which Jane described herself engaged in labour processes. Her narrative style seemed to mimic her getting caught in the flow of the processes themselves, a flow which made her forget herself. Perhaps it was not so much that Jane was obsessed by work but that she was obsessed when she was working to the point where getting things working consumed her attention. This helped to explain why Jane emphasised that she did not need to focus on the type of work or the status of that work, but rather on the processes of solving problems. That said, while Jane attributed her long hours and burn-outs to her personality, other studies of IT work show that this is also an occupational culture (Barley & Kunda, 2004).

The long hours and travel in IT work consumed a number of my IT interview participants to the point where they could not actually work anymore. This forms an interesting connection to the unsustainable pressures placed on the physical body as a result of work in trades. In Jane’s life history, she described her ‘manic’ work habits as resulting in two of her three major jobs ending in what she calls ‘burn-out.’ Barley and Kunda (2004) described similar patterns in IT workers, particularly amongst gurus or experts who were brought in to change systems and processes.

After her first burn-out, Jane moved on to a different but equally high powered job. After her second, she decided to go travelling indefinitely. When Jane interrupted her career she was thirty-five and a Chief Information Officer (CIO) of a multinational company, this move was professionally unconventional and not considered good for her career:

[The CEO] said, ‘I don’t know what you’re doing, you’re leaving at the peak of your career. You’re insane.’ I was thirty-six or thirty-five. What are you talking about? So I said, ‘I don’t really mind. I’d be really happy to come back to a lower paid job, not have the top dog job.’ I’d had enough of being the CIO. I’d rather go out and be somebody else’s assistant [laughs]. She says, sitting in this bloody job.
Here again Jane’s declared lack of ambition butts up against her success. Her ironic description of herself in the third person at the end of the extract again showed her own awareness of the contradiction. Indeed the description splits Jane from her work choices, as though she inhabits the position of somebody else.

Jane saw her two years of travel as changing her perspective and making her a new person. Jane had since struggled to integrate this perspective into her day-to-day work life as a manager in a large organisation:

   I went away for two years and I got my health back and my sanity back and I came back a whole different person. So a decade ago, when I came back to Australia with a completely different perspective than I’d had for the decade before. When I came into this job I was under great threat of going back to where I’d been before. I thought what the hell was I thinking. And the last few years, I’ve been working very hard to get back to where I was.

When she was travelling, Jane realised she was sick of corporate life and wanted to work for an NGO. During the interview, I felt a disappointment from Jane that she hadn’t followed that path, but had instead gone back to a work culture similar to the old one. Jane was self-deprecating about her current position contradicting her aim to work for a less corporate company, jokingly reporting that friends often comforted her with claims that universities were similar to NGOs.

The contradictions Jane sets up in the interview between herself and her work success and labour processes suggested that the momentum of organisations and the greediness of the institutions had stripped her of agency. While travelling, choosing where she could go and how to get there, she could find health, happiness and imagine a different future. Back home, Jane found her successful work history burdensome:

   I figured surely that after two years off, I wouldn’t have to explain to people why I was the CIO of [Consultancy firm] Australasia and New Zealand and why now I just wanted to work in some little...[laughs] Anyway, cut to the rest of the story, I ended up here [university], thinking I would only be here for two years and that was ten years ago.

Jane depicted herself passively here. In a filmic description she ‘cuts’ all agency from the story of her labour choice, her current position simply being where she ‘ended up’
rather than an active part of her story. This description of herself surprised me as I had assumed that somebody in a highly paid, powerful managerial position would have pursued it. Instead, Jane had felt pursued by the job and the organisation.

Despite not choosing her role at the university, Jane still described enjoying it. During her five years as CIO she was able to implement significant changes to a very basic IT system. Jane also believed she reformed the 'boys' club' culture of the workplace and helped encourage women to enter IT. However, as the above extracts suggested, the university remained a workplace that facilitated Jane losing her 'health' and 'sanity' and the person she found that she wanted to be when she was travelling.

**Gender and sexuality at work**

In her first job as 'girl Friday' for the medium sized muffler company, Jane confronted the sexism of her boss as a personal challenge. The gendering of Jane's role, embedded in its inadequate title, extended to her having to pick up her boss' children from daycare and his dry cleaning from the laundry. As Pringle (1989) argued in *Secretaries Talk*, the secretary became a kind of wife at work. Her boss treated her paternalistically, telephoning her father when he found out that she wanted to move in with her boyfriend. While apart from these domestic duties, Jane learnt a lot at the company, after seven months she threatened to leave. Her boss' response to Jane's threat was a pattern-setting scene for Jane's attitudes to sexual discrimination for the next eight years. Jane found that personally standing up for herself changed her boss' approach to her; he increased her pay and treated her differently. From this Jane seemed to have concluded that being treated badly could be rectified by being determined, strong and outspoken.

Throughout her four and a half page description of the labour processes and systems upgrades she was involved in at the freight company, Jane only mentioned gender once in passing. This was right at the beginning when she was describing her first job as a 'domestic' accountant. The rest of the description was densely focused on her labour processes. It was not until I asked why Jane left the freight company that she recalled the gendered culture of the workplace. Jane began her explanation of why she left the freight company by using business language, she said she was 'head-hunted'
and 'burnt-out.' But eventually, after working through these reasons, Jane haltingly remembered that it was the sexism and discrimination that had been the major motivating factor at the time:

part of what was winding me down [speech very slow] was that...about two years before... I'd really become aware of some really, really nasty sexual harassment going on in a couple of places.

Some other interview participants shaped their response around my declared interest in women in the workplace. It took Jane time and prompting to talk about gender, even when it was a significant factor in her decision making. It seemed that Jane was practiced in talking, remembering and valuing her life in business language rather than in emotional and personal languages.

Jane told the stories of sexual discrimination as though they had dropped from her memory and her way of understanding herself. The pauses, the fragmented and at times incoherent expression and the direct speech contrasted dramatically with the fluent and unhalting way in which Jane described the rest of her work and labour history. So while this may have been a time when Jane 'sort of grew up,' she did not initially story her rite of passage into understanding sexual discrimination as significant. Eventually, Jane’s description suggested a kind of political awakening, a movement away from understanding sexual discrimination as the benign responsibility of an individual woman to understanding it as violent and institutional. Jane’s revised attitude to sexuality and gender in the workplace caused her to 'see red,' created significant change in the workplace and ultimately leave it feeling deflated.

One reason for Jane’s initial omission of sexual discrimination seemed to be its normalisation in the freight industry. Jane was clear that it was the particular organisational culture of the freight industry, rather than IT work itself, that determined the gender order. Jane described the freight industry in the 1980s as male dominated; it was 'normal' to be exposed to 'verbal stuff, all of the crass and rude jokes.'

Despite a certain level of discrimination being normalised, Jane was still shocked when she realised that her female colleagues were being physically 'mauled' and
assaulted at work drinks. This shock surprised me given the level of symbolic
discrimination in the workplace. In addition to a workplace strip show, where a
stripper was invited to a work function, Jane told another story of her and a colleague
being rewarded for work well done with a dinner at a topless restaurant. While Jane’s
position as a valuable senior employee allowed her to stand up for herself and refuse
to attend such events, women in less powerful positions did not feel they had recourse
to such action.

Aware of male domination in the wider organisation, Jane described IT shops more
generally as ‘boys’ clubs.’

J: [T]here’s nothing but this group of boys drooling over their computers. It
becomes a little boys’ club. I’m being dreadful. But it leaves them [women]
with very little room [...] The first thing I heard about was the photos of all
the nude women they had on their computers. They liked to bring them up [on
their screen] every time one of the girls went past to embarrass them or shock
them or whatever or see if they reacted in some way.

For Jane, the ‘boys’ club’ was largely about numbers. Enough men together without
women means that ‘boys will be boys;’ they will have pornography on their
computers and they will make women uncomfortable. The engagement with the
sexualised female body in the workplace was used as a way of indicating that the
workplace was not a woman’s space. While inviting a stripper to a work event and
going to a topless restaurant seemed to assume that the workers were men, the
pornography was actively used by men to intimidate women. Jane described, rather
roughly, the complex responses women had to men showing them computer porn. In
her description Jane emphasised the difficulty these women had in managing the
harassment consistently, sometimes they would ignore it, sometimes they’d get
annoyed and angry and sometimes they felt that they needed to be quiet about it in
order to get on with their work. The burden of managing this harassment became a
part of these women’s daily work and in attempting to manage it as a personal issue
their responses were regarded as emotional rather than political.

Since doing her analysis of ‘boys clubs’ in IT workplaces, Jane created regulations
around appropriate behaviour in her current workplace to ensure that women felt
accepted at work. While Jane was not explicit about these regulations, she implied that they involved setting clear boundaries around appropriate and inappropriate use of work spaces. These boundaries referred back to the expectations around what kinds of bodies were invited and permitted into the work arena.

Jane said that in her role as IT manager for the organisation where she currently worked, she encountered an ‘endless struggle to get women into it.’ Noting that the types of organisation where she worked were usually more ‘geared to deal with those kinds of issues, the cultural fit, they have much more of an eye on it,’ Jane described a large-scale focus on gender equity benefitting her in the world of IT management and management in general. She said that equity strategies had focussed on providing her with opportunities to get involved. Jane’s discussion about the importance of being invited and asked to be involved supported Gheradi’s (1996) argument that women in male dominated work felt like visitors, which made invitations into male networks particularly important. Jane, who took up many of these opportunities, found that:

Sometimes it was drudgery and sometimes it was great and I would end up being the key person in a network because there was so few women.

Jane said that she had definitely benefited from positive discrimination.

For Jane the most crucial thing in ensuring gender equity in an organisation was having gender balance. She said that it took joining her current organisation’s executive to realise how important a critical mass of women was. For Jane, this first manifested itself when she arrived in the job and received a bunch of flowers and welcome cards from the executive. She immediately felt cared for. As such, the board enacted the often gendered work of care, which, unlike the management at the freight company gave Jane the sense that women were present and respected.

Jane described this care as informing the way women talked in board meetings. With a number of women on the executive, Jane felt that the ‘conversation moves differently.’ She found that the conversation was supportive and people listened to what was said. When the gender balance changed on the executive and Jane became the only woman for a time, she realised this more starkly. She found it difficult to speak and found that she was being interrupted.
Because the organisation fostered itself as a woman-friendly workplace, Jane found that it was the first workplace where she had seen older, executive women working and saying what they thought. Before this, Jane said the only grey haired women were secretaries of the bosses. Jane found this inspiring, it gave her ‘a new lease of life’ and she felt young. Probably the most interesting thing about Jane’s description of the shift to a workplace with more women managers was that it was an existential one. Jane was struck by the fact that in meetings she was no longer thinking about ‘who she was:’ ‘It’s not like when I was in other jobs I was constantly thinking about who I was or my identity, but working with other women something was different.’

The body

Jane’s descriptions of her body as a child and a young woman had an element of nostalgia. Not so much for the way her body looked, but for how it felt to be active and sporty. Jane saw her level of activity as an adult as directly tied to the long hours and travel involved in her job, as she found it impossible to play team sport. Jane described being embarrassed about putting on so much weight. Jane mentioned two occasions when she has prioritised her body over her work. She did this the first time when she went overseas ‘to get her health back.’ The second time was at the time of the interview when she described realising the negative impact of her hours on her health and wellbeing:

I: Do you think that your work has affected your health in any way?
J: Yes, because of the hours. [...] I’m much more rational about my hours now [at this point it was 7pm and we were still at her office]. My job is much more broad than it was then. I think right through til I was forty, you don’t feel all of the impacts. I mean you do on your relationships, but you don’t feel all of the other ill effects of it until you start hitting into that. It starts taking a toll on your wellbeing. Not just intimate relationships in terms of partners but also friends and family. I had less time for everybody and friends and family would sometimes intervene in that.

Jane’s definition of health encompassed physical health but also a sense of her own wellbeing, which she defined through her connection to others. The absence of significant others in this life history interview was important, particularly the absence
of intimate relationships, where one might share habitation or caring responsibilities. This falls into line with Perron’s (2003) case study of British IT workers, in which she was similarly shocked to find a statistically low number of women with caring responsibilities. This absence was clearly explained by Jane, she just didn’t have the time for relationships when she worked so much. Jane declared that she was a ‘commitment phobe’ (though clearly not with regards to her work) who had never had a relationship she considered serious. Jane felt that her significant relationship was with her work which required that she ignore other relationships. It also required her to ignore her physical and psychological body.

One of the key ways women in IT talked about their bodies was to talk about their clothes. Jane noted that her dress changed when she moved organisations, depending on the organisational culture and her age. In her first job in the freight company, it was the 1980s and Jane was young so it made sense to her to wear skirt suits and to be a ‘corporate girl.’ When she moved to the management consultancy company, all the women accountants were forbidden to wear trousers. Jane described this as ‘outrageous’ and became subtly resistant, always wearing trousers. When she started working at the university, Jane loved that she didn’t have to wear a suit. At the time of the interview she described herself as dressing down but wore suits if she needed to meet with someone external.

Jane saw dress as important, though she mentioned twice that she didn’t spend nearly as much time or money on it as other women. However, Jane still recognised the significance of dress in getting noticed. Jane said that she’d seen dress affect people’s careers, largely because their bodies became part of the organisation’s brand or product:

In quite a few positions I’ve been in it’s been about how a person is going to present to a client or something. And so, I have mixed feelings about that. I think it’s taken way too far in many places and I think it can be completely superficial. I do have attitudes towards just a general, borders about how you might present yourself at work, and particularly particular kinds of work, but then there are a whole lot of jobs where I just don’t get it. I don’t see what the fuss is about.
Jane described work functions that weren't in the work place, such as leadership retreats where you wore casual clothes, as the most embarrassing and difficult in terms of the presentation of her body. This formed an interesting link to Zadie and Lisa’s case studies, both of whom found that they were more likely to be harassed when working on a construction site, rather than in a confined workshop. The spatial and formal confines of work provided a set of codes and rules which are known and accepted. These codes and rules helped define relations between colleagues. When the context changed these codes and rules were unsettled, in the uncertainty around what the new rules were, gender relations and bodies were brought into focus in particularly normative ways to sure up relational insecurities. For Jane, wearing casual clothes amongst a group of men meant that her body literally became the focus: swimming with her colleagues was particularly confronting.

Conclusion

Like the women in the three trade case studies, Jane also experienced a sense of physical freedom and capability in her childhood. Growing up on a farm, Jane, like Lisa, witnessed her mother do intense physical work. While in the trades case studies I attributed their entrance into physical work directly to their youthful experiences of physicality, Jane’s case study suggested such rough and free physicality could be seen as contributing to alternative gender projects in a broader sense. Embodying and seeing women embody a range of work while growing up might have implications for what women think they can do both physically and in worlds that are traditionally physically dominated by men.

However, unlike the trades women whose work forced them to acknowledge their bodies, the nature of Jane’s work with its long hours and travel seemed to encourage her to ignore hers. It took much prompting for Jane to discuss her body and the bodies of others at work. This seemed ironic given the amount of attention her body and female bodies in general received in the different institutions where she worked; the erotic female body even being permitted into the workplace as a celebration of and for men. It was perhaps because of this unwanted attention that the female body received in the workplace, that Jane ignored her own bodily needs. In order to dismiss the crass
comments and sexualization of her body at work, Jane had also to dismiss caring for her body altogether.

While working in a male dominated environment caused Jane to ignore her body, it made her subconsciously question who she was. When working on a board with more women, Jane recognised an ontological shift in her regard to herself: she no longer thought about who she was as much. I think one of the reasons for this was that Jane was no longer so visible. From a Foucaultian perspective, the idea that as an individual woman she was always being watched meant that she was also always watching herself.

There was a contradiction at the centre of Jane’s work history. On the one hand, she was intensely committed to her work, her long hours and extensive travel resulting in her repeatedly burning out. On the other hand, Jane described herself as lazy and unambitious and in some senses her work history supported this claim. She acquired her promotions passively, being head-hunted and coerced into ever more senior positions. While Jane may have been unambitious and desired a more balanced life, her commitment to making things work made her an exceptional and sought after IT manager. Indeed the interview’s focus on the efficient functioning of business systems through the use of IT suggested that in each role Jane became consumed by getting things to work. So consumed that she felt she had sacrificed other areas of her life, in particular a significant partnership. While Jane insisted that the absence of a partner or other any significant relationship was due to her personal attitude towards her work as a manager, I think the demands organisations placed on Jane and other IT managers I interviewed made relationships, at least conventional heterosexual ones, very difficult to maintain.
Chapter Seven: Case Study V: IT Programmer, Cassie

The interview

This interview was conducted at Cassie’s suburban home. At the time of the interview, Cassie worked three days a week, so the interview was conducted on one of her days off. When I arrived, Cassie had been reading a novel in the sun, which, she explained during the interview, was one of her favourite things to do. I think this context is important given that many of the IT interviews were scheduled at or directly after work. Unlike Cassie, when I arrived at the interview, I was struggling to be relaxed. The night before I had spent hours making sure my sister-in-law was safe during a psychotic episode. I was extremely tired. I was also extremely uncomfortable. It was a hot day and I was wearing wool. I had my period and felt that I was going to bleed all over Cassie’s couch. When I read through the interview transcript, it was difficult to recognise that this was how I was feeling. I do, perhaps, ask more questions that I usually would in the life history section of the interview, in part because I found Cassie’s story intriguing and in part because I wanted to stay focussed. I have wondered whether Cassie’s astute observations of her own body’s discomfort were because she could see or feel mine. Despite being uncomfortable, I was enchanted by Cassie’s story. It was a very rich life history conducted over approximately two hours and I remember thinking, this material is ‘gold.’

Life course

Cassie was born in 1963 in rural NSW. Cassie was the middle of three children, being flanked by brothers. While Cassie’s parents had both grown up on farms, they both studied teaching and met working in a rural high school. Cassie grew up in a house attached to an agricultural college where her father was the Principal.

Having parents as teachers, school and schoolwork was always highly valued when Cassie was growing up. Cassie always did well at school. This success at school was a pattern among many of the women I interviewed in the management and programming areas of IT, which contrasted with women in trades who often did not achieve in school environments. It seemed that academic achievement, particularly in maths and sciences, was a good foundation for IT work. Cassie particularly enjoyed
science and maths and was encouraged by her father, who was a science teacher. The
main problem Cassie had with school was that her mother taught there. Cassie’s
mother always knew what was going on for all of her children socially and
academically and Cassie found this invasive. She also occasionally got bullied
because of it. In Cassie’s description of her childhood, her mother emerged as
somewhat of an antagonist.

Cassie, like many of the other women I interviewed from rural areas, had always
known that she would not stay in the country after high school. In 1981 she applied to
study teaching at a regional university. But out of curiosity, on the spur of the
moment, she also applied for a cadetship as a metallurgist with a major mining
company. Because of her good marks, she got the cadetship and was one of two
women in a pool of sixty men. The cadetship involved working for Luna, a major
mining company, and going to university to study engineering, majoring in
metallurgy part time. With the recession of 1983, Luna changed the cadetship
program because there wasn’t enough work for the cadets. Cadets were forced to
study at university full time with a small scholarship. Cassie much preferred this
arrangement, really enjoying the social opportunities of university, particularly the
competitive sport. Cassie described herself as always being very sporty; at university
the hockey club became her social life. It was through the hockey club that she met
her husband and made a group of friends. Indeed, when Cassie finished her
Engineering degree she went back to university and did a degree in Maths part time
simply so that she could continue to play hockey with the university team in a
national competition. So like Jane in Case Study IV, Cassie’s sense of physicality in
her youth was extremely important to her sense of self. Unlike Jane, however, the
importance of Cassie’s physical activity both to her wellbeing and to her social life
became a pattern throughout her whole life history.

When Cassie finished studying engineering in 1985 she wasn’t sure what to do. As
with high school, there was a lack of support or guidance about satisfying careers and
how to move into them. Cassie found herself back in the job which she’d first done as
a cadet, in the ‘clean lab’ of Luna, a process of job acquisition which she describes as
passive and disappointing. Cassie theorised that it was very different today, young
university graduates were given a lot of support in finding jobs.
After two years in this role, Cassie got a job working as a metallurgist in the rolling mill, where hot molten metal is poured into moulds. Cassie really enjoyed this work but it was a much more male dominated position and one defined by masculinist union culture. As a metallurgist, Cassie was not only a woman but a skilled knowledge worker, amongst men who were 'unskilled' or who had learnt on the job. While this hierarchy presented problems for many metallurgists, Cassie dealt with it by creating social connections with the people she worked with before asking them to do something. The importance of social relationships to Cassie’s notion of successful and fulfilling work was a theme of the interview.

After four years of working in the rolling mill, Cassie wanted to move on. However, she was very good at her job and so management started ‘dangling carrots.’ Cassie went on a work trip to Europe and had the time of her life. She was also sent to Japan. Much of this was about management grooming Cassie for a management position.

However, during her time in the rolling mill, Cassie was trying to have a baby. She described being on call, the irregular hours and the stress of the workplace as contributing to a number of miscarriages. She also believed that her son, whom she did conceive while working in this environment, was affected by the extremely loud noises of the mill. She said, ‘I had ear muffs but I could feel him kicking and jumping. And even now he’s terrified of loud noises.’ Cassie also wondered if this was one of the reasons her son had attention deficit disorder.

In 1996 Cassie gave birth to her son and took eight months maternity leave. She said she would return to work for Luna but not in the same position. Her maternity leave was unpaid and Cassie implied that Luna created a position for Cassie to return after her leave because she was brilliant rather than their social obligation.

The position Cassie returned to was to an IT team which aimed at converting all of the systems in the rolling mill into an IT program. Because Cassie had an excellent knowledge of all the processes and systems in the rolling mill, she acted as a person ‘in the middle,’ translating the requirements to the very ‘nerdy techie IT people.’ To do this work, Cassie worked in an office, which she enjoyed even though it was filthy.
from coal dust. In 1998 she gave birth to her daughter, after a much easier conception and pregnancy. Again her maternity leave was unpaid and because she was earning significantly more than her husband, who was also working full time, their family needed her to return to work as soon as possible. After six years of developing IT projects for Luna and having developed expertise in IT systems and programming, Cassie was put back into her old role as metallurgist in the rolling mill. Cassie was flabbergasted and disappointed. The big organisation, which had previously tried to manipulate Cassie into staying with them, which had paid for her expertise to be developed, now effectively deserted and wasted a resource.

This coincided with Cassie turning forty and having what she describes as a 'mid-life crisis.' Cassie did not want to return to her old job, she was frustrated by working for a constantly changing and incompetent management who did not understand the systems as well as she did. When she told her husband that she really wanted to leave Luna and go back to university, they realised that it was good timing. Her husband had just been given a promotion and his pay had doubled. It was the first time in their life together that they could afford to cut back on her work.

In 2004 Cassie enrolled in a Masters of Digital Multimedia. She did this part time over two years. She found the course lonely, particularly in comparison to her first experiences of university. She was older, one of the few women, and one of the few students who wasn’t an international student.

Coming towards the end of her Masters, Cassie was really eager to find a job. She didn’t want to be unemployed, in part because she recognised that she was changing careers late in life, and also because she didn’t want to be a housewife. Cassie explained this was simply because she wasn’t a very good one. Cassie got a job programming interactional education programs for a faculty in the university. When this faculty got a new dean, this program was shut down and Cassie applied for a university help desk position. Again, Cassie’s job was affected by large organisational restructuring, in which she was not really considered. She didn’t get this job because she was over qualified, but they created another job for her.
Since moving into IT, Cassie worked three days a week. She found this allowed her to have a better balance between work, friendships and family. However, she also mentioned that Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI) in her arms meant that working full time in an IT position was impossible for her physically. Cassie tried to be involved in important events at her children’s school and also had scheduled weekly times when she saw friends.

Gender and sexuality formation

Even though Cassie always remembered her mother having a job, she was a little ashamed to confess the traditional division of labour in her family home. She explained much of this by her mother’s commitment to ‘the house.’ She was a home economics teacher and Cassie recalled being intensely frustrated by her mother not being involved in their family games, sport or fun. Cassie explained that her father ‘would never come home and sit,’ instead, he would always set up sport with the children. Cassie’s father organised a house cleaner so that her mother would have more time to be involved in these games, but she still didn’t. This frustrated Cassie, as did her mother’s self-deprecating attitude. Cassie described her mother as ‘defeated’ and always putting herself down. Unlike other case studies which suggested that growing up in rural areas provided alternative models of femininity, Cassie’s mother was more conventional. Cassie’s own parenting and values seemed to be a reaction to this.

Work history

Cassie’s launch into metallurgy makes a wonderful story. Every Saturday Cassie would ride her bike to get her father the newspaper. One Saturday she was running late and when she arrived there weren’t any of the local papers left and so Cassie bought a state wide broadsheet. When she was flicking through the newspaper later with her father, she saw an advertisement recruiting cadets in metallurgy. Cassie asked her father what metallurgy was and when he replied that he didn’t know, she said, well I’m going to apply and find out. She did apply and got an interview. When Cassie went to enrol in teaching, she decided to do the metallurgy interview at the same time. Her father accompanied her on the long train trip to the coastal city and they had long discussions about which course she should do. Cassie described her
father leaving it entirely up to her and not giving a strong opinion either way. However, she did know that her father was disappointed when she'd decided to do teaching because he thought she could do more. Cassie did get the metallurgy cadetship. It seemed one of the main reasons she decided to do it was that it was different and she got paid, similar to a trade apprenticeship, giving her independence from her family.

Having completed her engineering degree, Cassie spent two years working in the laboratory at Luna, which she described as the most difficult time of her life. She was in her early twenties and having finished a challenging university degree was doing boring work with poor supervision. Like a number of the women I interviewed, Cassie explained that one of the main reasons she didn’t enjoy the job was because she was micro-managed. Supervisors never gave lab technicians complete tasks but instead allocated them minor, repetitive actions. Cassie felt that she was being treated like a child. This kind of management resulted in a culture of laziness, where she and her colleagues would spend hours talking about their weekends with their eye to a microscope looking at nothing. For Cassie, the lack of fulfilment at work meant that she became irresponsible. She began to drink and eat a lot and came to work seriously hung-over. The emotional and physical affects that poor management had on the young Cassie were similar to the affects poor management at the council had on Lisa in Case Study II.

When Cassie did move jobs and got a more fulfilling position as a metallurgist in the rolling mill, she discovered that there were a number of hierarchies in the workplace. There was the hierarchy between staff and wage-earners, which in turn formed a clear delineation between non-union and union. Cassie did not clearly align herself with either side of this division because the majority of the staff were classified as unskilled workers. Because Cassie had a university degree, she was not accepted into this group. She also did not join the union because she found the frequency and triviality of union strikes baffling: ‘they’d go on strike if the price of Coke went up in the vending machine.’ The sharp delineations in the labour force created problems for management, metallurgists and workers. Cassie said that there were constant changes in management because managers were employed from outside the rolling mill and therefore did not understand the way it worked or how to talk to people. Many of the
metallurgists had the same problem. They would order the long term ‘unskilled’ labour force around without taking their experience into account. Cassie took a different approach which made her four-year period in the rolling mill very successful and made management target her as a potential leader.

Cassie’s approach was to acknowledge that while she had the theory, the people working on the factory floor had the practice. With this background of respect, Cassie used what she called ‘common sense’ to talk to the men in the mill. Rather than acting superior to them, Cassie found out what they liked doing on the weekends – fishing, brewing beer or playing sport - she talked to them about that and formed working friendships. When Cassie needed something, she would approach the men in the mill through this familiarity. These strong working relationships became central to Cassie’s labour processes.

Cassie used the same approach when she needed to implement quality control processes. Most of the men on the floor, much like the men Jane negotiated with in the union disputes for the freight company, were resistant to changing their processes and couldn’t see the point of following new procedures. Cassie decided that to illustrate the importance of quality control, she’d get the men to use the same processes on their beer brewing. Most of the men in the industry brewed beer and so Cassie saw it as a useful way of making the procedures relevant. She learnt how to brew beer from her husband and then introduced the quality control framework and a beer tasting competition to the workplace. She explained that many of the men’s beer improved and they changed their perceptions of the importance of quality control measures.

This solution to change management was contextual, situated and creative. It required a detailed knowledge of the culture and values of the people she was working with. Cassie’s ability to integrate her understanding of the personal or private with the work or public identities of the ‘staff’ seemed to be an unusual skill. On one level, making the effort to communicate, to engage with the men about their personal lives was the kind of emotional work often done by women. However, being a woman also seemed to distance Cassie from the hierarchies of men’s work, between unskilled and skilled, staff and wages, non-union and union. Not feeling an allegiance or even being invited
to join a particular group of men, Cassie was able to cross conventional social boundaries and create unusual but useful relationships.

Like Jane's experience of IT management, Cassie's induction into management, while alluring to an untravelled novice, required her to spend extensive periods travelling away from home. Having children and caring responsibilities interrupted Cassie's trajectory into management in a way which Cassie seemed relieved about in the interview. Taking maternity leave allowed Cassie to have a break from and set conditions around her employment at the company which she had not felt empowered to do before hand. Prior to having children Cassie explained that she'd wanted her husband to intervene on a number of occasions and say that she couldn't attend a work commitment. While her husband refused to offer Cassie an out, caring responsibilities did. Without this interruption, Cassie felt that, like Jane, she would have been consumed by the frenetic rhythm and demands of the company.

While caring responsibilities provided one change in Cassie's work history, her husband's income offered another. Throughout most of Cassie and her husband's marriage she had been the primary breadwinner. As soon as this situation reversed, Cassie sought a change in career and significantly reduced her working hours in order to care for herself and others.

Like all of the women who I interviewed in IT programming, Cassie found it difficult to talk about her labour processes. In part this seemed to be because programming work was too abstract, academic and disembodied to explain to someone who was not involved in the project. It was also because sitting at a computer for Cassie did not involve the same complex social relations as she had engaged in as an active metallurgist in the rolling mill. So when I asked Cassie what she did in her job, her first response was that to say that she sat. For an intensely physical person, it was the sitting which was the singularly most significant process in which she was engaged.

That said, Cassie was obviously very good at the programming work she did. When her job programming interactional educational software was terminated, Cassie applied for a job on a help desk, and her employers created a new position for her which utilised her skills. At the time of the interview, Cassie was working in this
position, a largely self-directed project which involved reporting to her first female boss.

**Gender and sexuality at work**

When Cassie started metallurgy she was one of three women in a sixty student cohort. When I asked Cassie whether she thought she’d got the cadetship because she was a woman, she said that she was pretty sure that she just got it because she’d done well at school. Certainly the organisation made no allowances for female cadets; while the boys were placed by the company into university boarding facilities, there were no such spaces for the women, they had to find their own accommodation.

However, during the cadetship, the company did allocate women to kinds of work that Cassie felt were particularly gendered. All three female cadets were sent to the laboratory rather than the coke ovens. At the beginning all three of the female cadets stayed together but they quickly realised that they didn’t have anything in common. Cassie said that she got along well with the men, she explained that growing up at a boys’ school campus and having two brothers contributed to this. Cassie’s ability to make social connections with men and define herself outside of the expectations men had of a young woman contributed to her ability to stay in a male dominated workplace and profession.

Cassie’s gender still remained a point of contestation particularly early in her time at the company. It seemed that her gender was brought into relief most powerfully when there was a crisis of some sort. For example, when Cassie did well at university or received a prize for her success, her male peers didn’t like it. They asked questions like, ‘Who did you sleep with to get that?’ For her male peers to have such a strong reaction to Cassie’s success suggested that her success posed a threat to them, a greater threat than if she was a man.

Something even more interesting happened in the rolling mill. A rolling mill is where metal plate or coils are made. In the 1980s when Cassie first started working in the mill the processes were very dangerous. There was an open hearth and metal moulds into which molten metal would get poured. Metallurgists had to stand and watch the
metal being poured into the moulds to ensure that the correct substances were being added to the metal. Obviously this was very hot work and involved standing precariously close to an open vat of molten metal. Metallurgists had to wear a full woollen suit to make sure that the molten metal didn’t burn them. The first day Cassie went out wearing the suit an old and established worker, whom Cassie described as a ‘real union guy,’ came up to her and said that she couldn’t do this work because it was bad luck to have women doing it. In such dangerous work environments (sailors and miners have also been known to have this superstition) it seemed that superstition was used as a safety measure and that the mere presence of a woman represented a crisis. Bringing gender into view here seemed illogical but served as a way of comforting men who work in high risk situations.

Cassie’s movement out of the laboratory into the rolling mill had been due to her initiative, persistence and social networking. Her boyfriend at the time wanted to leave his job in the rolling mill but was only allowed to leave if he could find a replacement. He persuaded his supervisor to consider Cassie. When Cassie went for the interview, she realised that the supervisor was really checking whether she could survive in the male dominated environment. Cassie described him as an old fashioned industry boss, with a cigar in his mouth and a big desk to put his feet on. He started by explaining that he was hesitant to employ Cassie because the rolling mill was a rough workplace with no women and lots of swearing. Cassie replied by saying, ‘So bloody what.’ Swearing was a performance for Cassie; she did not usually swear, but saw it as a simple and rather superficial symbol of what it meant to be a ‘bloke’ and ‘become part’ of this ‘boys club’: ‘And I thought, well if you want me to swear, I’ll swear, if that’s what it takes to become part of it I can swear as much as the next bloke.’

At the time of the interview Cassie found her current boss extremely difficult. She struggled to know whether she found her difficult because she was a woman or simply because she was a difficult person. When Cassie started describing her, the first thing she mentioned was that her boss was obsessed with power. Cassie found that her boss was aggressive, unpredictable and inflexible. To illustrate, Cassie described the aggressive way her boss reprimanded her daughter on the phone while at work. While Cassie had not experienced such serious aggression from her, Cassie was constantly aware of her moods. It seemed that Cassie’s understanding of certain kinds of
femininity fed into her understanding here. Judging her boss by her mothering and her moods, it seemed that Cassie was imposing a particularly gendered framework on this behaviour.

Cassie’s assessment of her boss as inflexible largely emerged from a lack of flexibility around Cassie’s child care responsibilities. While in a male dominated environment, Cassie’s male bosses had always allowed her to take time off to care for her children or attend school functions, Cassie was perplexed that this woman, a mother, wouldn’t. It was as though previously, as the only woman in a workplace, Cassie’s mothering responsibilities were permitted and expected whereas in a workplace with other mothers there were different expectations. Ironically, at the time of the interview Cassie described herself beginning to have a better understanding of her boss because they’d had a long conversation about her boss’ daughter. It seemed mothering in the workplace had the potential both to connect women and divide them.

The body

Of all of the people I have interviewed in IT, Cassie discussed the body the most. Cassie seemed acutely aware of her physicality and discussed her embodiment before I brought it up. When I asked Cassie about her daily routine, she began by saying that she got up at 5:30am every morning to go for a swim or a run and that this daily activity and physical space was her sanity. When Cassie described her routines and her labour processes, she constantly returned to the body. For Cassie the ideal IT worker was ‘someone who can sit in a chair longer than what I can.’ When she described her routine at work, she repeated that she ‘can’t sit down for long periods’ so she will always go for a mid-morning and afternoon walk.

For Cassie this sedentary embodiment at work placed significant limitations on the social environment of the workplace; ‘I would literally come in, put my bag down and start. There was no conversation at all.’ Cassie described sitting with her back to co-worker for six months without him ever saying good morning to her. This particular man was an ‘IT nerd’ and a ‘gamer,’ meaning that most nights he’d play games until the early morning. When he came to work it seemed his body was not in the same time zone and his head was not in the same spatial one; he seemed to exist most fully
online. Other programmers I interviewed also discussed the potential for IT to create disembodied and anti-social workplaces where workers were more connected to worlds online or in code than with the physical worlds of their workplace. In contrast, Cassie refused to use IT in her social life, except to communicate with her husband about household management.

Moving from the male dominated and safety orientated environment of the mining company to an office environment, Cassie experienced a change in the pressures on how she must manage her body. When working in the steelworks, being a woman meant that Cassie encountered overt sexism - as when Cassie was declared bad luck. Similarly, whenever a man rang Cassie's section to ask a question, they'd always ask to speak to a man when she answered. Here, it was not Cassie's body in particular that was being singled out for scrutiny but women's bodies in general. In both cases, her physical body was invisible (under a suit or behind a phone line) and it was what her body symbolised (bad luck, incompetence, lack of technical skill) which presented the problem. Interestingly, when other steel workers got to know Cassie, they did not associate her with those initial negative symbols. Instead they instated more positive ones, making sure that someone came to pick her up if she was on night shift and coming to help when she was laying concrete in her home. While Cassie appreciated the kindness and protectiveness with which the men came to treat her, this behaviour worked as a simple inversion of the first. It was a more paternal version of patriarchy which protected, guarded and served the female body to deliver it from risk.

Working in an office environment, however, Cassie found her body was under more pressure because it was more easily visible and more directly attributed to who she was rather than what she did. The difficult physical conditions of the mill, the heat, the dirt and the noise, also meant that the highest priority about the body was that it was safe. In the office environment Cassie was constantly worried about her 'body in that regard that I don't want to offend people.' Just as Jane in Case Study IV found the visibility of her body in male dominated boards made her think about who she was, Cassie found that her body's visibility in the office space required her to be vigilant about it. For both Cassie and Jane it seemed the pressure of being a woman in a work place manifested itself on the body in ways that were stressful and changed their relationships to themselves.
When I asked Cassie if there was anything she found particularly embarrassing about her body when she was at work, she answered quickly, explaining that she found perspiring extremely embarrassing:

Even when I exercise I’m dripping with sweat. And when I go to meetings I get very embarrassed and I try to wear clothes that won’t show. I wear a lot of deodorant and I’ve really tried… And at the steelworks it didn’t matter that I was sweating so much but in this environment I do really feel self-conscious about that because girls don’t perspire. But I somehow do. I’ve never seen Lizzie sweat. I’ve never seen my boss sweat. Any of the others. I’m in an office with quite a lot of girls. They’re not in my area. They all dress up. It’s like a fashion thing. I’ve never seen anyone else. But, what can you do?

Perspiring only became embarrassing for Cassie when she entered a workplace where women’s bodies looked a certain way and did certain things. Her older female body, which she could not disguise as either young nor dry stood out in this particular workplace among the ‘girls’ with whom she worked. These young women’s un-perspiring bodies made Cassie monitor her own body more closely. She made explicit choices to hide her physiological response: her clothes and deodorant are selected to minimise her sweat. While in the steel mill, men assumed that Cassie’s body was weak in ways that she didn’t seem to internalise, in the office environment, Cassie’s body’s recalcitrance made her feel intensely self-conscious. For while in the mill Cassie’s body was actively doing gender entirely inappropriately, in the office environment Cassie could not get her body to behave.

Cassie’s desire to contain her body was heightened by the fact that people in IT work were in close proximity and often discussing work around one computer monitor. This closeness made Cassie feel uncomfortable. This sense of close bodily contact in IT work environments was not what I expected. It contradicted stories that even Cassie told of being socially alienated in an IT office environment. However, it was perhaps this contradiction that Cassie struggled with, the awkwardness of physical intimacy without emotional intimacy or social connection.

Cassie’s heightened self-consciousness of her body in the office space suggested that she felt that bodies were noticed there. Cassie talked about the importance of being
able to read bodies in the workplace. On a simple level, this was seen in Cassie’s approach to dress. In her first IT job at the university, she wore jeans because that was what all of the men she worked with wore. However, moving into her new job, Cassie felt she needed to be dressy. She read this expectation off her boss’ body and dress. Interestingly, much earlier in the interview when Cassie was describing why she found her boss difficult she focussed on her boss’ embodiment. Cassie said that she dressed in a suit, a power suit, and was a bottle blond. Cassie felt that this description of her boss’ body would help me to understand that her boss was obsessed with power. Here Cassie expected that I would share her literacy about the female body.

Cassie found that this sense of a collective and gendered body literacy was one of the advantages of working with women. She also found that her female co-worker could read her body more accurately because she understood Cassie’s particularly gendered experience. Cassie explained this on a physical level, in that when she was pre-menstrual she felt that the women with whom she worked understood, whereas the men hadn’t. However, Cassie also noted the more social aspects of this gendered body literacy. For example, Cassie explained that some mornings when she got to work she felt like she had already done a whole days work - exercising, getting children ready, dropping them at school - and her female co-worker, who also had caring responsibilities, could read this morning from Cassie’s body. This immediate recognition was comforting to Cassie. There is no real reason that a man wouldn’t be able to read either of these experiences from a woman’s body. Indeed, there is a history of men attributing women’s hysteria to their menstrual cycles which goes back as far as the etymology of the word hysteria itself. But Cassie didn’t feel that men understood or responded in ways that showed they were reading women’s bodies either accurately or with compassion.

Cassie felt that both the work as a metallurgist and her work in IT had put her body at risk. The risks at the steel works were obvious ones. It was a large factory in which Cassie was in charge of monitoring metal, often in its molten form. It was loud, dirty and hot. These conditions had a physical effect on Cassie’s body. She believed the stress and long hours caused her to have a number of miscarriages, while the noise resulted in minor deafness in one ear, and had an impact on her child in utero. Working in IT had given Cassie serious Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI) in both arms.
In both cases the risks posed by work worried Cassie. While the safety requirements of the steel mill insisted that she wear ear-muffs, the IT industry was less regulated. Cassie managed her RSI herself by only working part time. She believed if she worked full time it would cause her more difficulty.

**Conclusion**

Particularly early in her work history, Cassie described her limited exposure to career options as having a significant impact on her choice of occupation and her access to jobs. Like most of the women I interviewed, Cassie was given limited and gendered career advice at school. This meant that it was by accident that Cassie initially chose a male dominated occupation, only in her forties actively choosing another one, IT. Because poor career education at school left women incognizant of gender anomalous career options, most women I interviewed entered male dominated occupations in their late 20s, after having experienced other training and work. In IT management and communication roles in particular, women, like Jane and Cassie, often entered the field accidentally, working their way into IT positions within large companies.

Throughout the interview, Cassie stressed the importance of her social relationships at work. In the rolling mill, in particular, Cassie highlighted that while her relationships with men at work were very useful, other male metallurgists in her position rarely fostered them. The complex negotiation between the social worlds and labour processes of men from different classes could be seen as a form of feminised emotional work. However, unlike traditional forms of emotional labour, in which relations served others at a cost to the employee’s emotional life (Hochschild, 1983), for Cassie these emotional relations were fulfilling and served a career trajectory into other male dominated areas. Indeed, Cassie’s success in the rolling mill was highly regarded by senior management, who targeted Cassie as a potential manager. As such, this form of emotional work which served to increase efficiency was valued by the company, reinforcing that new styles of management are increasingly at odds with the conventional disembodiment and disassociation of managerial masculinities (Kerfoot & Knight, 1996).
However, while the company valued Cassie’s ability to foster caring relationships in the organisation, the long hours and travel made it impossible to continue a managerial role when she had significant caring responsibilities outside it. As Jane found, it was as though the intense time commitments demanded by managerial labour and domestic caring responsibilities created two separate realms of care which were impossible to integrate.

Cassie’s experience of her body at work suggested that, like trades, IT had the potential to have a significant physical impact on the body. Cassie was very conscious of her body in IT work, managing the physical stress that computer work put on her body and the emotional stress the recalcitrance of her body caused her in the context of the workplace. For Cassie, the abstract labour processes and the disembodied nature of the work meant that she felt more self-conscious and scrutinised about her body in IT. In part this seemed to be because the labour processes did not allow Cassie to use her emotional relations to foster relationships with her colleagues, making her feel as though her body was the only point of relation. While in some regards Cassie seemed to scrutinise her body more because of certain models of clean and groomed femininity in the workplace, her sense of her body’s recalcitrance also seemed to be governed by a perception of the office space as a space for clean and sterile bodies that contained their functions much like a computer does.

Cassie’s sense of being scrutinised at work was perhaps exacerbated by the fact that she knew she scrutinised other bodies in the workplace. Indeed, this body literacy was integral to Cassie’s successful emotional relations and labour processes in an IT workplace, just as being literate in fishing and beer had assisted her relations in the rolling mill. Cassie described her body literacy in IT as distinctively gendered. It was gendered in that only women seemed to understand the physical and social experiences of another woman’s body and because only women’s bodies and ‘moods’ demanded this understanding. So while Cassie’s body literacy helped her form bonds with other women in the workplace, it also tied women to their embodiment and a sense that their bodies told their stories.
Chapter Eight: Case Study VI: IT Communications Role, Claire

The interview

I liked Claire before we were introduced. When she walked into a large student services waiting room where we were supposed to meet, she was wearing my favourite shoes and she warmly greeted and hugged at least three members of staff before she noticed me. I was surprised that this woman was the woman I was interviewing, she had a very Irish name and yet appeared to have South East Asian background. At the time of the interview, Claire was thirty-nine and working as a web co-ordinator for a large university. The interview took place after work hours in an office in the university where Claire worked.

Claire told her life history with remarkable fluency and humour. Claire was sure that I’d find her story really boring but then launched into explaining how she was adopted by parents who had fallen in love when they were a nun and a priest. Claire had completed a degree in social sciences at university and had spent most of her working life in employment services before transferring to IT in the last two years. Claire’s family background, her education and her social work experience meant that she talked about her life sociologically. She was often curious as to how her own experiences fitted into larger intersecting theoretical understandings of race, class, family, gender and sexuality. The interview lasted approximately three hours, and she seemed to enjoy talking about her life despite her initial comments. She revealed she had been involved in creative projects which had largely focussed on using her life narrative as a focal point for political discussion. One of the most interesting moments in the interview was when Claire started to ask me questions and, upon realising I was a lesbian who wanted to have a child, Claire revealed an intimate narrative about her difficulties conceiving and how this related to her experience in IT work.
Life course

Claire was born in a ravaged South Vietnam in 1971 and was adopted by Australian parents eight months later. She grew up in rural Victoria, the second of four children, the other three naturally born to Claire's mother. Both Claire's parents had left religious orders when they fell in love, only three years before they adopted Claire. This meant they were not only starting a family but also building their lives independent of the church. Claire's father started his PhD in Education when she was three and, living off a PhD scholarship, the family were poor, living simply without electricity. Like a number of women I've interviewed who grew up in the country, Claire claims the deprivation made her creative and encouraged outdoor play. In rural Victoria, Claire experienced significant racism from both adults and children.

Moving to the city at the age of fifteen, Claire was excited by the diversity and by the fact she wasn't the only 'Asian.' She attended a 'funky' inner city high school. Claire considered herself lucky in that both her parents valued education, both of them having postgraduate degrees and working in universities. Not being ambitious or knowing what she wanted to do as a career, Claire completed a general social science degree at university. Beginning her studies in 1990, she became heavily involved in a non-aligned leftist campaign around the introduction of fees to Australian universities. Her interest in politics also created networks where she met lesbian women and came out. During three of the six years in which Claire was studying, she also worked for the Commonwealth Employment Service as an employment case worker in both Melbourne and Sydney.

Claire enjoyed moving to Sydney in 1999 because there were so many 'things happening.' With a friend she devised, performed and produced community TV and radio shows which reflected her politics. She found the rights-lobby politics of the Sydney 'LGBT [Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender] community' conservative at the time and so ran discussion panels to facilitate unheard or marginalised stories.

While working extremely hard as a case worker, Claire burnt out and got a serious illness. To recuperate, Claire spent about two years in Western Australia where her partner was working as a lawyer. It was in Western Australia that Claire got involved
in IT work. However, upon her return to Sydney in 2001 she found it difficult to get work and eventually got an administration job at a university in Sydney. Claire quickly got a job as a case worker in student services where she worked for five years.

At the time of the interview Claire had been working in IT for the university web team for two years. This career move, which involved better pay, options for promotion and ultimately more flexibility, was in part because Claire and her partner have, over the last two years, been ‘settling down.’ Settling down involved getting married, taking out a mortgage and trying to have a baby. Claire and her partner saw IT as providing a better income and lifestyle to support these choices.

**Significant others**

When I asked Claire if there was anyone in her family to whom she was particularly close, she gave a detailed description of each member of her family, their relationship and how they affected one another and the family as a whole. This description seemed to position the family as a relational system, each relationship significant to the others. This perspective seemed to be influenced by her sister having a mental illness and by Claire being adopted. Claire’s sister was diagnosed with a type of mental illness when she was twenty and required large amounts of family support. Claire explained that her sister’s illness became the significant focus of the family, it became what they related through:

No doubt, that’s [the sister and her illness] what a family becomes and that’s a lot of pressure for her and I don’t know how I’d feel being Mel in that situation.

When Claire explored her adoption by reading her file, talking to her parents and returning to Vietnam she found nothing about her birth family. Despite this, the exploration made her feel better:

I think I just let go. I think I just became more comfortable with the family I was in, and it was probably a big step.

She also came to realise through this process, that her adoption was also about her parents, their position and their politics. This changed her sense of herself as connected to them and fostered a more equal respectful relationship:
I said to them, for the first time I started to realise I was not the most important person in the universe, I said, ‘What’s your story? What were you doing? Why would you get a child from overseas? It’s not very popular.’ At the time the social work movement was dead against it because of the stolen generation in Australia and lefties were understandably really against inter-racial adoption because of all the issues with Aboriginal people. So they told me what they were doing and what it was like for them and what every step meant for them and I had an epiphany that this was actually a three way relationship not just me. And then everything changed and became a lot clearer.

Through examining her adoption from her parent’s perspective, Claire came to realise her significance in their lives and in the family.

Claire spent quite a long part of the interview discussing her parents, perhaps because I was fascinated by their stories. The first time Claire told her story she did so in a matter of fact way:

I came over here by plane - leader of the boat people - in 1972 in February. My parents, Linda and Albert, they’re kind of Irish background I guess. They had one kid of their own, Annie, and they had another one on the way. And they were... when Albert was twelve he went into the monastery and when Linda was sixteen she went into the convent and then they met when they were thirty.

Being adopted from a war-torn country might have meant that having parents who had left their religious orders paled into insignificance. Indeed, when I asked Claire to elaborate her parents’ stories and their difficulties in transitioning to lay people, she said that it was an empathetic question she’d only just asked her parents herself.

Claire’s father still found it difficult to talk about that time because of the pain he went through being excommunicated and shut out from a community he had joined when only twelve. While Claire’s mother also left her convent, she wasn’t excommunicated and maintained life-long friendships with some of the other nuns. Claire repeated that she ‘can’t imagine’ how difficult it would have been, particularly for Claire’s mother, a social person, suddenly finding herself with three children under three in an isolated rural community. It was because of her parents’ connections to the church that Claire was adopted. A nun from Claire’s mother’s order was
running an orphanage in Vietnam and told them about all the children who needed adoption.

Claire’s parents’ approach to Catholicism seemed driven by a human rights agenda. She described a photo of her mother and a friend in their habits at a land rights rally in Adelaide. This political agenda persisted after they left the church. In order to adopt Claire in 1970s Victoria, in which social workers were highly critical of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families, her parents had to go to court and prove their case. Claire was brought to Australia as a result of her parents’ political gumption. She recalled being a child and spending days and sometimes weeks at land rights protests, her family often the only non-Aboriginal people there:

I think they had some friendships when we were kids with some of the elders and main motivators, some of the old women actually, and I think they had a car so we just got sucked into doing anything really and we were just there. I wonder about how having parents who are political influences young children.

Claire later says that her interest in politics was what inspired her to go to university and when she moved to Sydney she keenly acted upon her own politics through local organising.

Claire had different relationships to each of her parents. She described herself as being close to her mother, who she described as ‘odd’ and focussed on ‘disasters.’ Claire did not feel as close or connected to her father, though her siblings had fulfilling relationships with him. He recently asked Claire’s partner if she could tell him something about Claire because he didn’t feel like he knew her at all. That said, Claire did describe intimate memories with her father, such as him reading her *The Hobbit*, cooking them his home-grown vegetables and doing re-birthing with her.

There was a time when there had been distance between Claire and her mother, who told Claire that she had thought Claire hated them for being adopted when she was a teenager. Claire reported that she was just being a teenager and that it wasn’t until her twenties that she wanted to examine her adoption.
Gender and sexuality formation

Claire was careful when describing the gendered division of labour at home. She began by saying that her parents were good role models and that her dad did all the cooking. She then checked herself and said that her mum was the one who stayed at home while her father pursued his career, despite the fact that she had a degree from Oxford and would later pursue postgraduate study.

For Claire, growing up in a conservative Irish Catholic extended family and in conservative rural Victoria, it wasn’t gender relations but race relations which were prominent in her day-to-day life. Claire recalled her extended family emphasising her difference through comparison:

They were always like, ‘Cindy you look so much like your father,’ and, ‘Mel you look so much like your mother,’ and, ‘Steve isn’t he beautiful.’ And then, ‘Oh...Hi Claire.’

The rural town where Claire grew up also emphasised her difference, largely through being so uncomfortable with it. As a child Claire was often asked if she was friends with the only other Asian looking person in the area, who was fifty. People also continued to make racist jokes about Asians with her, comforting her with claims that she is different. This made Claire try to be white:

I think I was so determined to be white as evidenced by all my Heavy Metal posters and Jimmy Barnes adorations and fuck knows what else. I think I was so determined not to be especially Chinese, because everybody in the country thinks you’re Chinese whatever.

Claire took defence of her whiteness seriously. One night, Claire and a group of twenty friends ransacked the local Chinese restaurant. They started throwing bricks in the windows and when the owner of the shop came out, everyone ran except Claire who just stood there, looking at him looking at her thinking, ‘What are you doing?’

Claire explained that she did not find coming out to her family particularly difficult. Her dad took a little while to accept it but her mum thought that it made sense given Claire’s political networks. Claire’s whole family accepted and loved her wife, with whom she had been in a relationship for ten years. I was tempted not to include Claire’s coming out story because it did not seem very significant. However, as
Plummer (1995) has argued, coming out stories have become crucial to the ways in which gays and lesbians tell their tales. When, during the course of the interview, I revealed that I was a lesbian, she asked me for my coming out story. These stories are an important part of the way in which gays and lesbians enter exchanges, connect and locate one another.

**Work history**

Towards the end of the interview, Claire described herself as curious, interested but easily distracted from what she was doing. Claire believed this helped to explain the different kinds of work she had done and her career changes. However, there seemed also to be a certain passivity about Claire’s job choices. The two most significant lines of work, case work and IT, she described herself as ‘falling into.’ This perceived lack of agency may have contributed to Claire’s sense that she would prefer another career path.

However, Claire also suggested that her desire to freely change jobs and not be bound to a particular vocation was indicative of a general desire not to settle. It was only in the last two years, with her marriage and mortgage, that Claire had committed to IT, investing in a postgraduate qualification and realising that she was surprisingly ‘irritated’ when overlooked for a promotion or when she failed to see promotion opportunities.

Claire only described her history as an employment case worker briefly but also passionately and politically. She was disturbed that the Howard government shut down the Commonwealth Employment Service, where she had her first job. She also described the amazing people and interesting and valuable work that was being done at a number of community organisations where she worked supporting the employment of migrant women and refugees. However, Claire explained that the long hours, taxing work, poor pay and her youth resulted in her burning out, leaving her vulnerable to Graves Disease.

Jane in Case Study IV described burning out twice from the long hours and ‘manic’ work practices in IT management. For both Claire and Jane, long hours meant that
they were unable to care for their health. It seemed they needed a certain number of hours off work for self care, and not having this time they either needed to pay somebody else do it for them or have a relationship with somebody who would do it unpaid, like the traditional wife.

After recuperating in W.A., Claire had a variety of jobs. This was because in the relatively remote mining town where she was living, most public services were ‘understaffed and under resourced.’ It was here that Claire got her first job in IT:

And then I got another job doing websites. I had said to them I don’t know anything about it but I’ll give it a go. So I had three technical jobs and a production job going at the same time. And it was amazing, it was really cool and the more you do the more work they’ll just throw at you because there’s just so under resourced. They’re desperate basically which was fairly obvious. My students knew more than I did.

Claire saw going to the W.A. as an advantage to her career as it gave her the opportunity to spend time working with computers and technology. Because her partner was often away for work, Claire spent a lot of time on the internet teaching herself how to use computers. She saw that computers and computer programs could be used as extremely effective tools in the workplace, but often were not. Claire was enticed by the potential of IT and the scope of it as an intellectual field. She became ‘the kind of geek which I always used to bag’:

I’d just sit on the web and teach myself stuff and my level of knowledge is really low and that happens with everything the more you learn about something the more you realise there’s a whole world out there so I’m studying post grad at the moment and some of it’s really fascinating and some of it’s really boring but some of it’s really quite interesting.

I found this concept of IT as a ‘world out there’ particularly interesting, given the way that trades women described their experiences as revealing a new physical world to them.

On returning to Sydney in 2001, Claire found it difficult to get work. Cities are usually understood as hubs of employment, whereas Claire found the reverse, eventually accepting a low paid administration job outside her field. When Claire did get back into IT work two years ago, it was because she was using technology in her
employment case work, designing a website to make employment services more accessible. The web team saw her work, liked it and employed her. This kind of promotion was described by one of my interviewees as typical of women in IT, where a woman would work in administration and become skilled in IT before being promoted to an IT position. While other studies (Barley and Kunda 2004) supported this claim, Claire was the only one of my interviewees who followed this trajectory.

Claire described her job in IT as remarkably ‘cruisy’ in comparison to her work as a case worker. Claire’s job was called a web co-ordinator. She worked with three areas of the university, helping them manage their web pages and also encouraging and educating them to use the web technologies more effectively. This meant communicating with various organisers of schools, courses and services and working out what they needed and wanted to put up on their website. Claire applied the basic designs herself but mostly fed back the requirements to the web developers:

[The other part of my job is] going back to the web team who are techie heads and don’t really think about things, don’t really think about people’s lives or people with disabilities and what we’re doing on the web and how that effects them. And so the other part of our job is chatting to [the disability services] team and getting all the requirements and issues [for people with disabilities] and getting the web team to take on this stuff and explain why and what it means to people. So it really is a communication role. So yeah, daily, most of my interactions are positive which is a nice change. There’s hardly any pressure. There’s very rarely a deadline and there’s very rarely a problem that actually causes harm to people.

Women I interviewed in IT communication roles and management often described their role as translating the problems of real people into a language which would be understood by the highly technical men who would develop the programmes. This translation required communication and technical skill. It also required a degree of emotional intelligence to shift from one discourse to another, clearly understanding and being understood in both. A number of women, particularly managers, mentioned that there was a need for more people in IT with this skill and that women needed to be more aware that IT involved this kind of work.
For Claire, her fascination with technology emerged from her youth without electricity when she realised that even the simplest technology can liberate people:

I'm not really interested in economic benefits or productivity or whatever but I think if I just think about when we were growing up we were using this washing machine which was this little tin and you go like [spins her wrist] that and you'd go [spins wrist other way] and then you'd go like that and then now what we have it frees people.

This perspective was similar to Jane's explanation of using technology because she was lazy, but unlike Jane and other managers I interviewed, whose implementation of computerised systems made a whole company more efficient and profitable, for Claire there was a stronger ethic of making things work for people who didn't have power.

This perspective on IT as a liberating tool matched Claire's politics. She had been heavily involved in the union while at the university, representing general staff on matters of casualisation. When I ask whether Claire could see a career for herself in IT, she described a desire to work for an organisation which does online counselling for teenagers in rural areas. When describing this organisation, Claire inserted a political discussion (as she often did) of the negative impact a government filter would have on online organisations such as this. Claire's framing of her personal life and work through politics, meant that she viewed technology with a certain ethics. Claire believed that the technology available should be used ('there's all this amazing technology around and we don't really know how to use it and it's a real waste') and used thoughtfully and sustainably. Claire was the only IT interviewee who mentioned the issues of technological sustainability and the global environmental costs of disposing of computer waste.

Gender and sexuality at work

Claire, with no direct prompting from me, acknowledged and was disappointed that her position in the web team was a gendered one:

It's interesting that the hardware side of things is often men's work and the warm fuzzy team motivation stuff is the women's stuff, and it's a bit disappointing. So I guess I never really had girls as friends when I was growing up until high school. And I was always attracted to anything boysie
and I think that’s what brings me here to this team. But it is disappointing, just in that gender assessment point of view, that I’ve ended up being type cast. Bummer. So I’d love to play with the hardware and I’d love to know that but that’s another degree and unfortunately I’m too old to go down that path. That’s certainly what I’m attracted to, I think it’s much more interesting. I don’t know.

There were a number of things that fed Claire’s frustration. She felt that she was too old, not logical enough, and that her current role did not lead to acquiring the IT skills needed to be a programmer or developer.

When I asked Claire if the hierarchies in her team were gendered she did a fascinating analysis of them as gendered, and saw this gendering also implicating race. Claire explained that all of the other web coordinators were women and all of the developers were men. However, while Claire described the IT group as a boys club, just as Jane did, she stressed that they don’t act ‘blokey:’

Not at all. They’re a real diverse bunch of blokes, culturally, class wise. They’re all, most, no they’re all straight though. I’m not sure about a couple of them. It’s not like walking into a rugby team or anything, they’re not that kind of blokey. They don’t whistle at chicks or do anything that emphasises that you’re a girl and we’re a boy. But I also think they don’t think about it and I don’t think they don’t have critical…

This kind of masculinity in IT presented a stark contrast to the physical and active masculinity which had been described by women in trades and women working in IT in male dominated organisations and as such presented different challenges to the gender segregated workplace.

For Claire the biggest issue was the hierarchy amongst the men, where all the junior programmers were international students (mostly Asian) and all the managers and project managers were white men. Claire theorised that the stereotype of the Asian man as ‘gentle, obedient, takes instructions, doesn’t fight back, that kind of passiveness, I think the way our team operates depends on that a bit.’ This seemed like a kind of internal outsourcing. Claire was uncertain how long the team had been getting non-white workers to do their grunt work but had never seen a white junior programmer.
These relatively hidden hierarchies were surprising given that this workplace was publicly acknowledged for being an equal opportunity employer. When I mentioned this to Claire, she was shocked. She recognised that there were a number of women in senior management positions and that in comparison to other workplaces her university was probably good. However, she also stressed that the university was still not good enough. Middle management and faculties were largely managed by men and support services were dominated by women:

Sexism plays itself out as it does in the rest of society. It’s the kind of structure of a workplace that doesn’t say, ‘OK, we have a workplace where 80% of the workers in admin are women, so let’s have a strategy to help them develop their careers.’ Instead it’s a workplace that says, 80% of our administration are women, let’s not have a strategy and let’s be happy with that fact. And let’s actually depend on it. I mean support services, maybe they’re always going to be woman dominated, I don’t know. That’s a structural sexism I guess.

As with Claire’s descriptions of Asian men doing the ‘grunt’ work, women in administration are similarly depended on so that others, usually men, can flourish. This was a classic feminist argument, the administrative staff providing similar enabling support to the man as the traditional wife (Pringle 1989). For Claire equality and equity policies should provide opportunities for everyone in the workplace, not just people aiming for management.

Claire said that the kind of equality promoted by organisations where she had worked in Sydney is ‘a bit fake’ and doesn’t take structural change seriously. She made the comparison with when she worked in Western Australia, where people would clearly express their prejudice and then, ‘They’re kind of over it.’ In Sydney she found that political correctness ‘masked what was really going on’ and so that things would never really change. Jane’s discussion of the same university supported this account of stagnation. For Claire, this structural sexism would not change. This was not only because of patriarchy, but because of the capitalist agenda of the university:

The true agenda of the university which is that right wing, rationalist economic strategy for making money for universities. And we’re run by two accountants and that’s what will happen to universities. So think it’s really
interesting that there's another view out there about us being a good place to work and that there's worker's rights because it's true it is a good place to work but you know it's got 23% unionism. We've got a huge problem with casual employment being so high, contract employment. There's also all those problems that come along with a capitalist approach which makes it uneven in many ways.

Claire attributed her recent interest in pursuing her career in IT to family building. The most significant influence on Claire’s attitude to her career was her partner, who had been frustrated and irritated that Claire did not have a stronger focus on her career. Claire’s partner was a lawyer and, while not working in corporate law, was ambitious and driven. Claire described her partner and all her close friends as working long hours, making the 8 am to 6 pm schedule she had in W.A. seem subdued.

For Claire’s partner, who came from an extremely disadvantaged rural background where she was unsupported and misunderstood, focussing on settling into a successful career, partnership and homeownership seemed to have provided security. Claire, as I have already discussed, had the reverse inclination. However, with her recent commitments to marriage and a mortgage, Claire saw IT as a profitable and stable career choice. She had, with her partner’s encouragement, begun to look for promotion opportunities and make herself more employable through a postgraduate degree.

One of the main reasons Claire went into IT was for its potential as a flexible job for a mother. While this idea was not in itself surprising, Claire didn’t reveal it until very late in the interview when she started to interview me and discovered that I wanted to have children in a lesbian relationship. She then encouraged me to start trying while I was still young, saying that she had been trying unsuccessfully to fall pregnant for some years.

The body

Claire saw the way she used, or didn’t use, her body at work as ‘weird.’ When I asked her what actions her body was engaged in most days she mimicked typing. She saw
this as producing a kind of split with her body. She saw this as bad for both her mind and her health. In comparison Claire described an ex-girlfriend of hers who was in construction and used her body all day. She saw her as healthy and fit but observed that she also experienced a mind/body split as she pretended to be dumb at work and then came home and read hefty building reports.

While Claire had experienced her body as particularly racialised as a child, as an adult Claire had not felt that her race had affected her relations significantly. In fact, Claire mentioned that at university she had been criticised by members of the women’s collective for not deconstructing her whiteness. Claire found that IT was a particularly multi-racial area of work, and she felt that this normalised her body in the field.

Because Claire spent so much of her life at work, like Cassie in Case Study IV she saw her relationships at work as a significant counterpoint to her sedentary work:

I often say this to people I become friends with at work and I do that quite a bit because we’re at work more than we’re at home in that 9-5 work life I spend more times with my workmates that I do with [my partner]. And that’s not the best scenario but it’s the scenario so we’ve got to make the most of it. And being together can be good so I guess what I’ve learnt over the last 15 yrs in the sort of work that I’ve had where most of it has been this [...] I do emphasise the emotional stuff at work because physically I’m only using a tiny bit of me. So that’s what I find most disappointing about admin or computer work that you’re not fully living.

From this description it seems that Claire feels that in order to be ‘fully living’ you have to be engaging both your mind and your body. She attempted to overcome her alienation from her body at work, through her emotional connections with her colleagues and by including physical activity around her work day.

When I asked Claire about how she presented herself at work, she said that she was very conscious of being ‘loud and disruptive’. Interestingly, she linked this to her being a short person and needing to be noticed. In such focused work environments as IT, Claire had been ‘counselling’ about being too loud and aggressive in the workplace. Being loud seemed to fit in to Claire’s distaste for the sedentary and isolating nature of computer work; her voice acting as a literal disruption of the
silence of the workplace, denying that each worker was alone. This can be interpreted as a kind of political action, Claire’s behaviour becoming part of her stand against the regimes of the workplace. Claire has been censured, the control over the volume and context of her speech being found inappropriate. Power worked here through the management of the body, so that Claire became conscious and perhaps even self-conscious about her expression, just as Lisa had been about her body’s sweat.

Like most of the women I interviewed in IT, Claire talked about being conscious of her clothes. Claire was made particularly conscious, not only by her workplace, but by her wife, who was particularly fashionable and saw Claire’s choices as unfashionable. Claire said she had always dressed in an androgynous way. She felt that the managers sometimes gave her looks of disapproval about her dress, because they would prefer her to wear a suit or smart casual. For Claire, the idea that a prospective buyer should see her in something less than a suit and judge their product on that, was shallow and ridiculous. However, Claire’s attempts to take her job more seriously and respect the people she was working with and for have led to a change in her presentation of her body.

Claire used to change her hairstyle regularly, dyeing it bright colours, putting it in dreadlocks and shaving it. Her decision to go more ‘mainstream’ was largely influenced by working with professional migrant women who wanted to get equivalent jobs in Australia. She used more formal dress to show that she was taking them seriously. Similarly, if Claire liked a boss, she would dress more appropriately for them. In this discussion Claire indicated the power of dress to shock, make a political statement and impress. However, Claire was willing to give over rather extreme forms of self-representation, in order to show her solidarity with a group of people or even her boss. There was a sense then, that appropriate dressing, having natural hair colour and wearing suits, made people comfortable and that in making people comfortable Claire might achieve greater success at work.

**Conclusion**

Claire’s political consciousness made for a style of story telling similar to Zadie’s in Case Study I. While for Zadie politics seemed to have facilitated a long and
successful career in trades, for Claire her political understanding seemed to hinder her likelihood of being consumed by the capitalist organisational demands which would facilitate success. However, while her socialist feminist politics offered Cassie a position of resistance in the workplace, the coerciveness of creating a conventional family unit seemed to be bringing her back into line. The pressure of financially supporting a middle class family meant that Claire became less resistant at work and more committed to stable employment with promotional opportunities.

Claire was aware, however, that promotions were restricted by her communications role in IT. Like Jane and Cassie in the two previous case studies, Claire recognised that this communication role was gendered and involved doing social work for men who were left to focus on the technical aspects of IT. Despite this segregation, Claire did still experience the world of IT as opening up new perspectives to her. These perspectives, much like the ones Zadie and Lisa described, allowed Claire to recognise and understand a particularly gendered world, a knowledge she found empowering.
Part III: Analysis

Chapter Nine: Entrances

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore social entrances, moments when my interview participants went through social doors in order to enter new spaces of gender and work. I had some difficulty in deciding whether to focus on these moments of transition as entrances or exits. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) work on deterritorialisation made me consider this further. For them, a deterritorialisation or line of flight was the crossing of a threshold which involved a rupturing of a recognisable code or a unitary understanding. In other words, a movement away from a stable or known territory, such as the gender order, was an exit into an entranced space where there was the potential for metamorphosis, for change. While it is moments such as these – lines of flight away from normative gender regimes – which I attempt to map in this chapter, unlike Kafka’s characters who Deleuze and Guattari (1985) analysed, the interview participants could not simply transform into animals to enter alternative figurations. Instead, they negotiated their lines of flight, their deterritorialisation, within real and given territories. By describing the crossing of social thresholds as entrances, I aim to show how interview participants experienced them as beginnings which at times gave them lines of flight within the gender order and at other times saw them reterritorialised within a normative framework.

Entering masculine cultures

In this section I examine a number of experiences of childhood embodiment which seemed to have contributed to the interview participants’ ability to enter masculine cultures later in life. The three forms of embodiment I discuss in this section all involved active physicality. While this may seem like the logical precursor to feeling confident in a manual trade, many women who ended up in IT also enjoyed these highly physical experiences as children.
Tomboys

About half of the women described themselves as having been tomboys when they were growing up. For most this term became a clear way of explaining their behaviour and embodiment as children. It meant that they dressed like a boy, played rough games and sports usually dominated by boys, and therefore had a lot of male friends. Doing these things gave them access to certain kinds of knowledge that different forms of embodiment might not yield. For a number, the sports and games they played when young extended to building things and, in two cases, when teenagers, hotting up cars. However, while there were similarities in what the interview participants did as tomboys, their understandings of this gender position differed greatly and this meant that their entrances into masculine cultures through this subject position were very different.

Being a tomboy was often about enjoying physical freedoms. Fuschia explained that dressing in shorts and t-shirts simply allowed her unrestricted movement. Similarly, Zadie, Lynne and Claire all equated being a tomboy with being able to run free. But for these women, being a tomboy was not only about enjoying this physical freedom. It also seemed that their embodiment of tomboy was because they were unaware of what was socially expected of girls’ femininity. They described themselves as tomboys in retrospect largely because their embodiment was not recognised as feminine. In a sense, they experienced the conundrum that formed the premise of Halberstam’s (1998) *Female Masculinities*, with masculinity so strongly attached to men and maleness, representations of women exhibiting the same behaviours were extremely limited.

It seemed that these women’s ability to embody an alternative figuration of gender as children was informed by all four of them growing up in culturally middle class families who had chosen to move to small isolated communities where they could pursue, what Lynne described as, small ‘l’ liberal values. The freedom they experienced around their gender was in the context of a broader freedom their parents encouraged around social issues, as seen in Zadie’s mother’s commitment to Steiner education and Claire’s parents’ human rights agendas. This context led all four to attend university and engage in political activity before they entered male-dominated
work. This political perspective gave these women a critical view of their gender embodiment. There was a sense that Fuschia’s political perspective allowed her to extend the freedom she experienced in her embodiment as a tomboy to her present position as a carpenter; as she described the freedom that wearing shorts and t-shirts gave her as a child, she looked down and laughed because she was wearing exactly the same thing in the interview.

For other women, being recognised as a tomboy was more strongly connected with not being recognised as a girl. Emily described not wanting to be a girl at all, wearing a boy’s school uniform and experiencing getting breasts as terrifying. For Emily being a tomboy was a phenomenological issue. Not only did she not recognise herself as a girl or a woman but the female body was alienating to her. Emily’s story was like those of the transsexual men in Rubin’s (2003) study, in which the female body of the girl or woman was unrecognisable as their own. For Emily, being a tomboy felt like the only option. In adulthood, Emily’s embodiment as a butch lesbian tradeswoman who dressed up as a man for fun helped her to recognise herself in her body. However, at the time of the interview, Emily described her past struggles with her gendered embodiment as resurfacing as she considered the idea of bearing a child.

While all of the women who had been tomboys described their experiences with boys in their youth as preparation for their work with men as adults, the women who saw their tomboy identity in opposition to other girls found this experience most useful. It seemed important to them that they already knew about men and that they had already been ‘one of the boys.’ Going to work with men was not entering a new world, it was entering a familiar one. Cassie’s description of this in Case Study V was particularly interesting, as she actively inserted her history with men into the reason she was so capable at working in a male-dominated industry which promoted a particularly aggressive form of masculinity. Cassie was critical of a ‘girly girl’ who didn’t last very long in the steel works. As a ‘girly girl’ Cassie saw this woman accepting an inferior role to men, fulfilling their demands that she make the coffee and clean up after them. Cassie refused to do this; when the men had told her how they took their coffee, she told them how she took hers. Cassie justified this refusal by explaining that she had been brought up in a boys’ boarding school campus with brothers and she
was used to engaging with men as her equals. So while the ‘girly girl’ left the steel works, Cassie’s familiarity with masculine culture seemed to have helped her stay.

In Reay’s (2001) work on types of femininity in a primary school classroom, she told the story of Jodie, a tomboy, who also defined herself against girly girls. For Jodie, being a tomboy meant taking the desirable subject position amongst her peers, that of a boy. Jodie’s tomboyism allowed her to reject traditional notions of femininity, a position which had the potential to deflect the sexualised comments and harassment often experienced by girls and women (Renolds, 2006). Her tomboy training seemed to have allowed Cassie to also do this in the workplace. However, while transgressing boundaries of femininity, Reay argued that tomboyism could embed the gender hierarchy by assuming the superiority of masculinity. Cassie’s position in relation to men, like Jodie’s, combined ‘elements of resistance with recognition’ (Reay, 2001, p.162). She resisted men only by recognising that she had to perform a particularly limited role within their world. Rather than her entrance into a male dominated workforce being an alternative figuration, it seemed that her experiences as a tomboy in persistently male-dominated cultures had taught her to ventriloquise, literally swearing like a man, ‘the dominant culture’s denigration of femininity and female relations [which can] serve to disconnect them [tomboys] from other girls.’ (Brown, 1998, as cited in, Reay, 2001, p.163).

So while being a tomboy in childhood seemed to be useful for women entering male-dominated work, the way it was used depended on how women conceived of it in relation to masculinity and femininity. While being a tomboy had the potential to transform into a political resistance of the norms of gender, sexuality and work in adulthood, it also had the potential to stabilise gender binaries by reinforcing naturalising distinctions between how men and women behaved.

**Living in the country**

Of the 29 women I interviewed, a very high proportion (n=13) grew up in the country. As seen in Lisa and Jane’s case studies, this high proportion could in part be accounted for by ongoing economic stress in rural areas leading women to choose training that was paid and work that was stable and profitable. However, the
similarities in the women's lively accounts of their childhoods in the country also suggested that this high proportion could be attributed to a relationship between childhood embodiment and employment choices.

The interview participants from the country described themselves engaged in physical activities and physical play quite different from that which would be considered traditionally feminine. As already seen in a number of the case studies, interview participants from both occupations often used the word 'freedom' to express their sense of space and possibility as children. Many recalled their parents, usually mothers, telling them to leave at breakfast and come home before dark. This time in open spaces or on farms meant the interview participants described riding horses, climbing trees, riding dirt bikes, chopping wood, sliding down Hessian bags in the mud and generally helping out on the farm.

In addition to these physical activities, women also described the physical space allowing them to have imaginative and creative adventures. Emily created weeklong battles with her male friends, which used armour and weapons they'd made themselves. For a number of other women, being left alone encouraged them to make things for themselves: billy carts, sheds, cubby houses and in one case a mud brick extension to the family home. Coincidentally both Lynne and Emily recalled always being given a box of different nails and one tool for every birthday. They both described these as excellent presents. These women and others were directly taught by their fathers or other men in their lives how to build, being encouraged to join these men in their workshops. Claire, who eventually worked in IT, explained that in part learning to build was about embracing an ethic of resourcefulness, of making toys and fun out of what you already had.

For the five interview participants who had grown up on farms, traditional gendered divisions of labour were ruptured by the necessities and physicality of farm work. As was seen in Lisa, Jesse and Jane's case studies, women who lived on farms or properties often engaged in active physical labour. While Samantha's mother did active physical work, she also saw her father, who had been a lone stockman and therefore had cooking skills, do some of the housework. For these women, the model of women's physicality provided a model of what they were physically capable of.
None of these women questioned the gender appropriateness of their work choice and all of them were shocked when their gender proved an obstacle. It seemed that when the capacity of the labouring physical body was not used to mobilise gender distinctions in interview participants’ childhoods, as adults they were able to approach work with a greater sense of their own possibilities, which in these cases extended beyond gender typing in occupations.

This was not to say that these physical young women were always embraced by rural society or that living rurally neatly produced this form of physicality. While Lisa, Jesse, Claire and Samantha were empowered by their physical activities at home, ironically, it was their physicality which at school made them feel like outsiders. Lisa's experiences playing rough at home meant that when she went to school she played too hard for the other students and was not accepted into games. Living in what they described to be narrow minded small towns, Jesse, Claire and Samantha all experienced discrimination because of their sexuality or race. It seemed that their experiences as outsiders prepared them for their role as gender minorities in the workplace. In childhood, all of these women experienced their bodies as at once empowering and as the cause of ostracism, a combination which many of them would again experience in their work.

For two women in IT, their lack of interest in sport or the physical side of rural life meant that they felt isolated. For Kylie, who grew up in a small town in a rural area, being very smart and uninterested in sport immediately made her an 'outcast' at school. Similarly, while Louise had enjoyed the freedoms of the country as a child, when she reached high school her lack of interest in sport made her feel like a 'misfit.' For both of these women, interestingly from different generations, not being interested in sport and showing an interest in schoolwork, meant that they were made to feel isolated in under-resourced rural schools which had little emphasis on academic achievement or tertiary entrance. Rather than offering them an entry, the physical emphasis in rural life was what they sought to escape.
A high proportion of the women (n=15) also played serious competitive sport. Sport is often regarded as one of the ways in which men make masculinity (Messner, 1992) and therefore is an interesting way in which women may enter and engage in subversive forms of embodiment (Wedgwood, 2001, 2004).

I expected the women who worked in physical trades to play sport. I expected them to have a sense of themselves as physically skilled and competent and a sense of their bodies as somewhat instrumental. This was in many cases true. For example, Susan, a cabinet-maker whose only brother had died as a child, had always been treated as a replacement son by her father. Part of being treated as a boy meant being rigorously trained in sport. Every afternoon after school, Susan’s father would take her to the park to practice softball. Susan became exceptional, playing for the National team when she was still in high school. This precise and skilled body, however, was not one which Susan saw as her own. Instead, she saw it as her father’s creation and discipline, and as such, did not continue with the sport after she left the family home.

It was the women who worked in IT who talked about sport most. For Jane and Natasha it was the competition rather than the embodiment which they enjoyed about sport. They wanted to be the best. Like Susan’s experience of sport as embodying the masculinity of a dead brother, Natasha also positioned her commitment to sport in relation to her brothers. As the youngest sister of four brothers, Natasha saw sport as a way of entering their world. Natasha used sport to prove that she was as capable as they were:

I was very competitive, trying to compete with them, especially when it came to sports or anything physical. I had to prove myself. And I wasn’t able to compete with them at all.

The irony was that despite her efforts Natasha knew she couldn’t succeed against the older, stronger and faster boys. In the interview, Natasha justified this with biology, explaining that girls just couldn’t be as strong as boys, but she emphasised that this didn’t stop her competing with them. In her successful career as an IT programmer, Natasha was no longer restricted by her body’s strength or speed. However, Natasha described having the same competitive approach to this disembodied work. For her it
seemed that engaging in competitive male dominated sport was not about training her body as much as training her in a way of being which allowed her to more easily succeed in competitive male arenas.

For Kylie playing AFL allowed her similar access to forms of masculine embodiment and ways of thinking that she found valuable working in IT. Kylie, while she didn’t enjoy sport as a child, decided to play AFL at university because she liked the idea that women could play it. Kylie loved the opportunity to play a contact sport, she felt that it allowed her to experience a different, what she called, ‘mindset:’

The thing I loved about playing it is that it’s very physical. It’s a physical contact game and there’s not many sports like that for women. And it was really unashamed. Just go for it and embrace that single mindedness. And you can’t be shy and play AFL. You can’t hang back and go, ‘Oh, are you right.’ And the women were just so awesome.

The physicality of the game attracted certain types of women to it. Kylie described a similarity between women who played AFL and those who worked in IT. They were women who were ‘not caring what other people think and making their own path.’ Like Natasha, playing competitive contact sport seemed to be physically enacting what was socially required in male dominated workplaces. Playing AFL not only gave Kylie the opportunity to embody a different kind of physicality, it also exposed her to certain discourses of sport, usually reserved for men, which she has found particularly useful, discourses around supporting your team and leaving a bad game behind. Kylie’s exposure to intense contact sport and the positive coaching discourses around it allowed her a knowledge of her body and ways of working that she found useful but which were usually reserved for men.

While for Natasha and Kylie playing sport exposed and educated them in attitudes and approaches to the world that were usually reserved for men, for Zan being involved in male-dominated sport meant a complex negotiation between being one of the boys and performing a kind of femininity. From the age of 12 to 16, Zan managed a boys’ soccer team in the regional Chinese town where she grew up. Because there was no soccer team for girls this was the only way Zan could be involved in the sport. She described managing the team with great enthusiasm, feeling that she was one of the boys. Clearly, the fact that Zan couldn’t actually play the sport because of her
gender reinforced that she wasn’t a boy, but for Zan managing the team made her feel a part of it. Zan referred to the members of her team as her brothers, but unlike Natasha for whom engagement in sport was motivated by competition with her brothers, Zan was motivated by a desire to support and encourage the boys to do their best. Zan attributed the success of the team to her success as a manager and emphasised that one of her key strengths was to make the boys feel comfortable and focussed. This ability to lead men by making them feel recognised and celebrated was a pattern in Zan’s interview and carried through into her communication role in IT. So for Zan, while her involvement in sport allowed her to feel familiar and at ease with men, to feel like one of them, the resources she drew on in her involvement with them could be seen as particularly gendered emotional work.

**Entering male-dominated work**

There was no single pattern in how the women came to be in male-dominated fields of work. Their reasons ranged from a political commitment to change the gender order, to an economic necessity, to a pure passion. Not surprisingly, their reasons for entering male-dominated work were firmly located within a historical context: feminism inspired women in the late 1970s, just as economic hardship did during recessions.

**Feminism**

The first few interviews I conducted for this project were with tradeswomen who had entered their trades because they were inspired by feminist politics to consciously challenge themselves and the gender order. I was quite astounded by the pattern and for about a month, thought that all tradeswomen must be feminists. Fortunately, my sample expanded and I found this wasn’t the case, but there were still some very interesting patterns that emerged in my research around feminism and how it did and didn’t impact on my interview participants’ entry and experiences of work.

In the end, four of the fifteen tradeswomen I interviewed saw their involvement in feminism in the 70s and 80s as a key reason for them entering a trade. All of these women had gained scholarships to university in the 1970s, a time when universities
were free in Australia and when they were also hives of political activity. While these women’s involvement in politics varied at university, by the time they had finished their degrees they all knew they were lesbians and defined themselves as feminists. Most of them pursued feminist activism after they left the university. Maxine, in particular, who had found the feminism of her university middle class, found the grassroots feminism of London’s squatting collectives much more in keeping with her working class background. It was because of her experiences squatting and her lesbian community’s need for a mechanic, that Maxine started her training in a trade. She explained that she didn’t actually have a burning desire to be a mechanic, just a need for the skills. Feminism more actively pushed Zadie and Hanna to get into their trades. Like all of these feminist tradeswomen, they entered their trades in their late twenties and did so because they wanted to have access to male dominated knowledge. All four women were at some point supported by a feminist training or employment initiative, using their feminist networks to create job opportunities and generate regular clients, just as men might use other networks. Feminism became a resource for these women. Lynne and Hanna were approached to do training and equity projects as women in trades. Lynne explaining that she had been at the ‘right place at the right time.’ Zadie, Hanna and Maxine all described their businesses being based largely on their feminist and lesbian clientele.

In contrast, while a number of the women in IT also studied at university during the 70s and 80s and were exposed to feminism, none of them described feminism as informing their choice of work. Like the feminist tradeswomen, Gail and Louise were both very political at university. Gail continued to pursue her political interests throughout her life. However, both Gail and Louise entered IT after they were 40, when they deliberately moved out of female-dominated caring professions and were looking for more technical roles. Their decision was not driven by politics.

Despite the above tradeswomen and women in IT being significantly affected by feminism when at university in the 70s and early 80s, three of the women in IT who studied at the same time described themselves as not being touched by it. Pauline in particular talked about knowing that feminism was around but that it was something that other people did. Before she got into IT, she worked as a ranger and was asked to promote it as a job for women. While she enjoyed promoting work she loved, she did
not connect with the feminist struggle. Similarly, despite the public nature of feminism at the time, both Jane and Ruby did not describe themselves being affected by it. I can only speculate why these three women, in particular, escaped feminism’s reach. All three of them became exceptional and successful managers. For them, feminism perhaps was not felt as necessary to promote their sense of equality with men. Their equality was assured by their position as bright, ambitious and tenacious young women. All three of these women studied science or business at university, unlike those exposed to feminism who did arts and social sciences. Perhaps most importantly, all three of these women were heterosexual. Unlike the feminist tradeswomen, for whom the politics of university allowed them to learn they were lesbians by deconstructing gender and sexuality, for these heterosexual IT managers, two of whom were also middle class women, a re-imagining of the gender order was perhaps not seen as so necessary or important.

While feminism did not directly promote an entry into trades and IT for women who had entered the industries in the last 10 years, for a number of them it informed their perspective on their work, and the work may have been impossible without this perspective. Tradeswomen Samantha and Nancy and IT workers Kylie and Claire all saw feminism as an important part of their identity, personally and at work. For all of them an academic knowledge of feminism gave them the ability to mark out boundaries for appropriate behaviour at work. Claire did this actively through unionism. Kylie did it through online activism within the open source community. Nancy did it through being a role model for girls and young women at schools and Samantha used her feminism to justify making complaints about inappropriate behaviour. For all of these women, their activism at work was about allowing the entry of other women into male dominated spaces. They saw themselves as providing fairer opportunities for others.

Economic pressures

Despite being structured around precarious models of work, both trades and IT were recognised as being reliable and profitable industries by all of the interview participants. Despite being male dominated, the economic stability provided by both forms of work had, particularly at times of economic stress, encouraged women to
enter these industries. As seen in Lisa and Jane's case studies, growing up in rural NSW in the 1970s meant that their agricultural families were significantly affected by drought and at the time when they left school, in the early 1980s, Australia was in a recession. Both of these young women felt pressure from the economic climate and their financially stressed families to train in work that would be secure and stable and make them independent of the farm. For Lisa, this meant getting an apprenticeship, which provided money and training in a trade. For Jane, it meant doing a degree that would definitely secure a job. For both of these women, their decisions were much more governed by getting work than by what the work was.

For a number of interview participants, their decision to train in IT in the late 1980s and 1990s was driven by IT being positioned as a boom industry. Having been to a private girls school in Sydney and coming from a middle class background, Ruby was made aware that IT was a potential area for growth. Ruby combined Computer Science with Law, a combination which was unusual and cutting-edge at the time. This position of IT as a boom industry was also strongly felt in developing economies, such as China, where Wei and Zan both studied IT because they saw its global financial potential. Wei explained that no one in her family knew what IT was but they'd heard that it was new and was going to be important and so they decided that she should study it. Similarly, Zan, who had always wanted to travel, saw IT as providing her with global opportunities for work.

Four other women got their initial training in trades and IT through programs set up between TAFE and the State Government to encourage unemployed women to gain employment. These TAFE courses targeted women on unemployment benefits and aimed to give them new skills. For Samantha in particular the TAFE position and apprenticeship that she got through unemployment and disability services provided her first entrance into the workforce. Samantha had left school in Year 10, having always found academic work difficult and the school environment socially hostile. She did a number of short TAFE courses which focussed on environmental issues, but had difficulty gaining part or full time employment. Samantha believed that in part, this was because she was because she was a lesbian in a small country town. Samantha was very happy with the opportunity that her horticulture apprenticeship gave her, she found that it matched her skills. Samantha sounded particularly proud
when she explained that at the time of the interview she didn't need support from
disability or other social services to get a job but said that it was that initial job which
gave her the confidence to do what she was doing.

The other women who benefited from the women out of work programmes run
through TAFE also spoke very positively about them. For Kate, who had been a
horticulturalist, the TAFE course in cabinet-making was an important part of her
rehabilitation after having been out of work for over four years due to chronic fatigue.
Like Samantha, the training allowed Kate to gain confidence. For Zadie and Gail,
both of whom where on unemployment benefits after having burnt-out from work in
caring professions, doing TAFE courses seemed more strategic. Indeed, Gail had
been interested in computers since she had used one in the late 1980s to run her
naturopathy clinic. She had developed her skills through a range of courses over a ten
year period before closing her clinic and becoming unemployed. While unemployed,
Gail explained that she had decided to study IT, she had first started a postgraduate
diploma in IT at university and then, realising that the TAFE course pitched at the
unemployed was more practical and up to date, she decided to do that instead. Both
Gail and Zadie represented these TAFE courses as an active choice, as something
which was the best option for them educationally and personally.

By accident

During the last 20 years IT has become firmly embedded within the way most large
organisations run. Partly because of this situation, five of the women I interviewed
found themselves working in IT by accident. In the case of the two technical writers,
both of whom found their jobs well paid but boring, when they applied for their job
they didn’t know what the job was. Louise explained:

I saw this little ad...I don’t think it even said what the job was but it said
something like, ‘Are you good at analytical thinking, instruction,
communication?’ It just had this little set of attributes that was an odd
combination of attributes and I thought, I’ve got all those attributes...I went
along and they said, it’s technical writing and I said, what’s that? And they
said, it’s writing computing manuals. It’s crazy really.
Up until this point Louise had very basic experience with computers. As a high school teacher she'd tried to work out how to use the one computer that the school had. Louise was attracted by the skills she knew she could provide, but had the job been advertised as a technical writer, she explained that she probably would not have applied. While Louise knew what she could do, she wasn't sure that she could be a 'technical writer,' perhaps because the label assumed experience or specialised skill but perhaps also because it included that word, 'technical,' which so often falls on the masculine side of a gender binary (Game & Pringle, 1983). Ashima similarly got her work as a technical writer because an employer valued her writing skills rather than her computer knowledge. Having completed a degree in communications in India, Ashima had been working for an advertising company, a job she enjoyed. Ashima was head-hunted for the technical writing role but went to the job interview reluctantly. Knowing she didn’t want the job, when asked about salary, Ashima said the highest amount she could think of and when they matched it Ashima explained she 'sold out.' For Louise and Ashima, both of whom wrote creatively and had university degrees in English, IT provided an unexpected career change, one which they both recognised as lucrative but creatively unfulfilling.

According to Barley and Kunda's (2004) analysis of careers in IT, Jane, Cassie and Claire’s accidental movement into IT was more typical. All three of these women worked for large organisations in their area of expertise: Cassie as a metallurgist, Jane as an accountant and Claire as a case worker. In their day-to-day work in these areas, all three became particularly skilled at using IT. Senior management or IT management recognised these women's skills and offered them more specialised positions within IT. Most of the interview participants in IT stressed that one of the most important things when working with IT was understanding what it would be used for. For these three women, their use of IT emerged out of a detailed knowledge of the businesses they worked for. However, the idea of being passively promoted into this area suggested that while it was women who might be the experts in creating IT within their areas of expertise, it was only when they are recognised by somebody else and invited into the world of IT that they actually began to call themselves IT workers.
For the passion

Maria, Kylie and Bianca all went into their area of work because they had throughout their childhood and adolescence been fascinated by it. These are the only three interview participants who went directly from school into studying their trade or area of IT. Their direct entry was because of their ongoing passion. As a tomboy, Maria had always socialised with boys, as they grew older they built cars together. In Year 10, her interest in cars lead Maria to do work experience with Ford and out of this she was offered a job as a mechanic. Maria believed that as a woman she needed to have this kind of passion to be in a trade, because it was not the natural trajectory it was for many of the boys with whom she was apprenticed. As someone who was passionate about cars, Maria felt sorry for these young men who were forced into a trade because of family pressure. She recalled with pity how these young men drove Toyota Corollas while she drove a hotted up Chevy. Maria lived for cars. She’d only date ‘car blokes’ and spent her weekends in the pits at the races or racing herself.

Kylie and Bianca were similarly formed by their childhood and adolescent interaction with computers. For Kylie, her passion for computers emerged from her discovery of the internet. A bright young person living in an economically depressed country town, Kylie often felt isolated. When she discovered the internet, particularly fan sites for the *The X-Files*, she also found people like her. She made friends and Kylie described the world beyond her physical location being real and giving her a sense of possibilities. Bianca’s experience also connected her to an alternative world, but she found hers largely through gaming. Bianca began playing on-line games because from her youth she recalled games being a big part of her household, her mother being a passionate gamer. Like Kylie, Bianca also felt isolated, particularly after the death of her mother which caused her to drop out of school. Bianca began to play games over the internet as a way of socially connecting with people. Her passion for gaming and her online network encouraged her to study game design at University.

Entering motherhood

Entering motherhood created significant challenges for women in male-dominated workplaces that had historically only had male employees. Becoming mothers
involved entering new relations with their employers, particularly around flexible work arrangements. Becoming mothers also required women to negotiate the myth of the good mother, a myth which a number of women found difficult to reconcile with being in male-dominated work.

While Saskia’s family of origin had a normative gender regime, her adult life was marked by a resistance against the constrictive gender embodiment she enacted as a child. Saskia became a punk. She described making her body an exhibition piece through piercing, tattoos, hair and dress. Saskia worked as both a chef and then a carpenter, both male dominated jobs and workplaces. She liked being ‘one of the boys’ and described getting on better with men because they ‘get in there and do things.’ Saskia’s active work and her identification with the punk community through her appearance made her feel good about her body. Part of her enjoyment revolved around the fact that her body was not doing what it was expected to. She took pleasure from being looked at and from being different. She was not being a good girl, as she had been growing up, she was being ‘bad’ (in the Michael Jackson sense of the word). Embodying ‘bad’ also meant using heroin. For nearly a decade the enjoyment Saskia took from her resistant body was marred by a sense of shame, embarrassment and disappointment she had around being a drug user. Incredibly, Saskia maintained fulltime employment due to her strong work ethic and the support of her partner. While Saskia loved looking transgressive and her punk identity and drug use put her on the margins, she was adamant that she wouldn’t break certain social codes; she wouldn’t steal to buy drugs nor would she take unemployment benefits. The notion that she could and should work was central to her sense of self and during the interview it was clear from her tone that her pride in having worked during that period eased some of its shame.

More powerful even than the institution of work was that of the good mother. To be a good mother Saskia saw it necessary to completely change her body and her work. Saskia discussed the body of the good mother explicitly in her interview:

I don’t want people to look at me and think she is a bad mother…which some people probably do.

When she found out she was pregnant she immediately came off heroin, quit her carpentry work and changed her appearance. For Saskia being a good mother meant
having a good maternal body. Not only did that body need to be clean (of drugs) on the inside, it needed to be clean on the outside. She began dressing differently, choosing clothes that covered her tattoos. She toned down. New Zealand human geographer Longhurst’s (2008) discussed how this fear of embodying the bad mother during pregnancy was encouraged in women by the readiness of images and voices in society to represent what the good pregnant body should be doing. Longhurst’s pregnant participants described the high levels of surveillance they experience in public places and how openly people voiced their opinions about their pregnant bodies. Her pregnant body also changed Saskia’s situation at work. Being pregnant, she couldn’t be ‘one of the boys,’ she could no longer perform the ‘masculine masquerade’ (McDowell, 1997, p. 197) often performed by women in masculinized professions.

For Saskia being a good mother was clearly linked to being a ‘normal’ heterosexual woman with no resistant past. Despite years of resistance, in mothering Saskia reverted to the conventional embodiment she grew up with. Her family even moved back to her childhood home:

> When I found out I was pregnant with Matt I knew that was a sign. This is our time to, you know, move on and yeah. We just lead a normal life now, two beautiful children and we got married last October after being together for thirteen years.

Saskia said that it was only at the time of the interview with one of her children at school that she was meeting a few other women who also feel a disjuncture with the image of the ‘good mother.’ She said that now she was starting to feel a little more comfortable about showing her tattoos, knowing that these other mothers are also marked with pasts that didn’t fit within the good mother’s outline. Saskia’s experience emphasised how entering motherhood as a heterosexual woman could draw particular focus to how skill and work informed the construction of femininities and masculinities in the family.

In contrast, for Maxine and other tradeswomen who didn’t have conventional heterosexual relationships, trade work and technical skill were incorporated into different ways of entering motherhood. For Maxine becoming a mechanic was directly bound to her feminism and her work as a social mother to a group of children.
Maxine was a member of a feminist housing co-operative in the 1970s in London in which she, like all members of the collective, took responsibility for mothering its child members. Maxine explained that the community needed transport for the children but had no money so she went to learn motor mechanics as a necessary part of her motherwork. Maxine explained that being a mechanic came out of her feminist mothering:

so that was how it really started for me, really through a movement that already existed before I arrived [in London] the housing movement and childcare and grass roots community organisation really.

In the women's collective, Maxine and other feminists created a counter-community, one in which care was shared and in which mechanical and technical skills were actually integrated into a framework of care and motherwork. In order to care for the children they needed to be moved around, to move them they needed a car, to have a car they needed a mechanic, to be a mechanic was therefore to care for children. In Maxine's case it was impossible to separate her work from her feminism from her mothering. This integration of herself as an activist and herself as a carer fitted a number of definitions of feminist mothering in which mothers self consciously interrupt patriarchal narratives through such things as sharing care and being a mother activist who provides role modelling and social education for their children (Green, 2008; O'Reilly, 2008). The kind of integrated feminist mothering Maxine was engaged in in London was facilitated by a strong and supportive feminist community, other studies showing that it was the lack of support that feminist mothers often struggled with (Green, 2008). Indeed on her return to Australia Maxine was disappointed to find that the Australian lesbian feminist movement was not a supportive or nurturing place for mothers, but instead they were excluded from many events.

For women in IT entering motherhood often required similar changes in the types of work women did and the ways they did it. Given the long hours and travel often expected in the IT industry, when becoming mothers women in IT often saw the need to negotiate for flexibility.

This negotiation of their work time around their mothering became a kind of work in itself for a number of women in IT. For two IT managers, in particular, the way these
negotiations were conducted suggested that as exceptional women, much like Jane in case study IV, flexibility around work was negotiable within organisations. It was unclear from my research what happened to women who were less valued and valuable within the organisation.

Ruby, a partner in a law firm where she was the IT expert, got pregnant at the same time as a number of other women in her team. While working for a deeply conservative institution, Ruby argued to the other partners that it made 'business sense' for work to be accessible for these women about to enter motherhood. The firm changed its policies and Ruby became one of the first legal partners to work part-time. Her team also employed an administrative assistant who had nannying experience for when employees' childcare fell through. For Ruby, it seemed that balancing work and family required making significant and public changes to both.

At the time of the interview, Ruby had two children under fourteen. She saw technology as crucial to providing the flexibility she needed to work and mother. Ruby worked from home and used technology to maintain connections with her family, friends and children. When I asked Ruby a number of times throughout the interview about the hours she worked, however, she did not give me a direct answer. She explained instead that the job could take up all of her time and that on two afternoons a week she made sure she was home by 4pm to see the children after school. In part, Ruby's elusiveness around this question could be because her work was variable, at times involving intense periods of work and travel and also including work related social occasions. However, given the scale of Ruby's job and her description that putting boundaries around work meant not answering emails when on holidays, I suspected that Ruby avoided telling me her hours because she worked more than she would have liked. While Ruby might not always work extensive hours in the workplace, flexibility created by workplace negotiation and technology could mean that women worked more and expected more of themselves.

It was only after I had heard Wei's fluent and detailed life history that I asked her about her parents' history and their experiences of the cultural revolution in China. Wei had avoided telling me about this, she said when she got emotional over the telling, because she found it so unfair and sad. Wei described her mother's talent
being wasted first by the Cultural Revolution and then by being a good mother and a supportive wife; Wei recalled her mother always saying, ‘Don’t make a sacrifice for your husband.’ Wei said this significantly informed all of her choices. With her husband, she constantly assessed whether their work choices would affect their children or the equality of their relationship.

Wei got pregnant unexpectedly at twenty-three, having recently migrated to Australia and finished her MBA. While Wei took six months off to look after her first child, she was very eager to get work. It seemed, although Wei didn’t directly say it, that part of the motivation to get work was so she would not sacrifice her career for her family like her mother. Wei did eventually get IT managerial work in Sydney and did not describe the childcare arrangements she used for her first child, though it was clear from the interview that she had worked full-time and travelled extensively. It was seven years later with the birth of her second child that Wei, feeling ‘very maternal,’ felt the need to negotiate a change in her work arrangements. Wei negotiated maternity leave for nearly a year and after this wanted to return to work part-time. Wei described this as a dilemma that a lot of working mothers, particularly managers, faced because flexible work arrangements seemed impossible in large IT organisations, a claim supported by Diamond and Whitehouse’s (2007) study which found that women in IT were less likely to work part time than other professionals (p. 331).

This, however, was where Wei’s particular story got interesting. While Wei had been on maternity leave, her organisation had employed two people to do her job and both of them were only doing 60 percent of it. Wei was irreplaceable. So when she requested to go part-time, her managers negotiated. They agreed that Wei could work four days from home and one day from the office. This meant that Wei had flexibility and could exclude travel time from her daily routine. Obviously, it also involved compromises for Wei. She still had to have her children in full time childcare, but she said in the interview that she was happy with the arrangement. Unlike Ruby’s negotiations, which significantly changed the culture of the workplace for many women, Wei’s negotiation for flexibility was done privately. Only her manager and her team knew about it. Her manager explicitly asking that Wei kept their arrangement from Human Resources, the department who usually supervised
employment relations, as they did not have the framework to deal with it. The primary focus was on the organisation maximising its profitability. I don’t think that in either Ruby or Wei’s case such flexibility would have been granted had the women not established themselves as exceptional employees.

Entering motherhood was a significant turning point in the work lives of all of the mothers I interviewed. While I had initially assumed that challenging the gender order through occupational choice would act as preparation for challenging the politics of the family, this was not necessarily the case. Instead, the myth of the good mother, the good wife and the good heterosexual cast long and coercive shadows (Ruddick, 1989) over the seemingly gender resistant worker. In interacting with this myth women needed to withdraw from male-dominated occupations they found incongruent with their new role or significantly adapt their work to suit their mothering. This negotiation around work time and mothering became a form of work in itself. Middle-class women with political knowledge or women in senior positions found it easier to partake in these negotiations.

Negotiating work with mothering also meant that a number of women selected roles within their occupation which had shorter hours and suited their mothering timetables. This followed patterns in contemporary literature on the family which suggested that women were more likely to ‘adjust their jobs and personal lives to accommodate family commitments’ (Russell & Bowman, 2000, p. 16). However, while this ‘mummy track’ (Williams, 2000, p. 72) was often seen as opting for a ‘second class’ (Wollcott & Glezer, 1995, p. 13) of work, my research found that integrating male dominated work with motherhood had been used as a resource. Women in both trades and IT management made sure that their experience as a mother, as an efficient nurturer, was recognised by employers as important. That said, particularly for women working in the long-hours, full-time culture of IT, there remained a sense that while they worked hard at balancing their work as mothers and workers, negotiating flexible working conditions, the pressures of significant amounts of paid and unpaid work at home remained unshared and unwanted.
Entering a class through work

While trades have been traditionally working class work, IT has often been touted as providing opportunities for social mobility. For the women I interviewed, entering these male dominated occupations often involved entering and adapting to class cultures they were unfamiliar with.

The women who found working with men in trades the easiest were women who came from working class backgrounds and had tradesmen in their families. Maria, for example, described working as a mechanic as the best time of her life. She loved being ‘one of the boys.’ Maria had no problem with the ways the men talked or acted towards and about women, going along to strip clubs with her male colleagues every Friday night. In contrast, for Hanna, a feminist tradie who had gone to an elite private girls’ school, similar behaviour was experienced as ‘horrific.’ For Hanna, this new territory of working class masculinity deeply informed her experience of work and meant that she didn’t complete her apprenticeship.

While these experiences of the working class trades could indicate that trades clearly reproduce familiar working class cultures, the different cultures within trades lead away from this conclusion. Kate, who trained in both horticulture and cabinet-making, described significant cultural differences in both trades. While horticulture emphasised strength and virility, cabinet-making was ‘quite refined.’ Kate recalled her teachers wearing gloves to protect their hands from the wood and the first day that she went to work in a particular workshop she found that the men had thoroughly cleaned the women’s toilet for her. Kate’s experience indicated that different trades fostered different cultures and different gender embodiment. Other interview participants experienced disparities but within the same trade. When moving from one workplace to another, Zadie, Nancy and Susan all stressed that the cultural difference was so significant that it was like changing occupations.

Nancy’s experience similarly complicated experiences of class. Nancy grew up in a middle class family and had a university education in journalism and teaching.
However, finding the caring work she did as both a teacher and in disability services too strenuous, Nancy decided to do physical work, beginning by working in the tip:

I’d found at the tip that all these male-dominated things are male-dominated because they’re kind of men have not being welcoming because they’re in on a good thing. They don’t have to work very hard and [...] it’s really not in their interests for girls to get into it. Instead they should stay in teaching and childcare and disability work. I’ve done disability work too and it’s just the emotional stress. I just wanted to get into a job that’s not emotionally stressful because I can’t handle it, I can’t handle it cos I get home and I keep thinking about it, the clients or the kids...I just took on too much, it’s much better just working on a door. You go, now it closes. Done it. It’s very relaxing.

For Nancy, trade work was more of an exit than an entry. It allowed her to exit from what was expected of a person of her class and gender and find something that was emotionally sustainable. The reason Nancy wanted a job that wasn’t stressful was because she wanted time to write and compose music. She used her working class trade to pay for artistic pursuits which could be viewed as elite.

For some of the women I interviewed their work in a lucrative area directly facilitated their entry into activities recognised as middle class. Women who described themselves as coming from working class families all explained that their parents were happy that they had such well-paid professional jobs. However, while pay and public recognition connected IT work, in particular, with the middle class, not all women experienced the maintenance of this class position as unproblematic. Susan, who had trained as a cabinet-maker, had a full time job using computer software to design cabinets at the time of the interview. Her decision to move away from her own cabinet-making business was prompted by a desire for a higher and more stable income in order that she and her partner could renovate their house. Much like Claire in case study VI, Susan and her partner’s middle class plans to create an architecturally renovated home meant a change in her relationship with her work and her embodiment. Working longer hours and doing more sedentary work, Susan put on weight and had to pay for childcare. While Susan was proud of their plans, she was also upset about the restrictions these new work demands placed on her. As with Claire, it seemed that middle class home ownership locked individuals and families into work arrangements they found unsatisfying.
Entering Australia

Three women who worked in IT told stories of entering Australia from China and India which reflected patterns around IT work in Australia. Zan, Ashima and Wei were all between the ages of 25-35 at the time of the interview and all initially came to Australia to study postgraduate degrees over the last ten years. This was not surprising. Tertiary education has grown to be one of Australia’s biggest exports, degrees from Australia and Northern countries having significant prestige in the global periphery. All three women had already had considerable successes in their careers in IT, their families putting significant amounts of their savings into their further education in Australia. Both Zan and Wei were aware that funds for their education had been taken out of their parent’s retirement savings, while Ashima’s parents in India had to borrow from a relative. Wei, Zan and Ashima had all since settled in Australia because while studying they met their partners. They each had different experiences of moving into the IT industry in Australia.

Wei moved from China to Australia in the early 1990s. At the age of 21, she had already been the marketing manager for a multinational company in China and had burnt-out. She came to Australia to have a break from that kind of intense work and to do her MBA. Wei recalled that she had always imagined that she would go overseas and do her MBA. I think that this was in part because her parents, prior to the cultural revolution, had had these dreams too. In business in China in the early 1990s, ‘MBA’ was the ‘hot buzz word’ but there were no universities running one in Northern China. When deciding to move to study in Australia, Wei chose a regional university because studying in a major city would have been too expensive. During her studies, Wei met her present husband, who she described as an Australian-born Chinese.

When Wei decided to enter the job market in Australia, she found it extremely difficult, which she attributed to racism. Wei applied for over one hundred jobs, from administrative positions to managerial ones. She didn’t get one interview. This was the late 1990s, post Pauline Hanson, when Wei suspected employers were wary of
employing migrant professionals. One of the main reasons that Wei believed she didn’t get an interview was because she refused to change her Chinese name. Even though Wei knew that her name was getting in the way of her employment opportunities, she refused to change it because she wanted to work for an employer who would accept that she was Chinese.

Ten years later both Zan and Ashima had very different stories of gaining employment in Australia. Both of them found IT workplaces actively anti-racist. Ashima emphasised that while she has experienced significant racism since entering Australia, IT workplaces have been her ‘safe havens,’ largely, she believed because they had such global workforces. Similarly, Zan stressed that even though language was a barrier for her, people were patient and supportive and she had recently been promoted into a largely communications role.

For these three women, already successful in their own countries, entering Australia was about extending their opportunities. While the occasion for their journey to Australia was their work, all of them described their personal desire for adventure and exploration. While on a personal level, their entrance to Australia was fulfilling to some degree, each finding life partners and deciding to settle, on a professional level all three women have found that Australia had, in some respects, stymied their progress. Both Wei and Zan found it extremely difficult to get their first job, in Wei’s case because of racism and in Zan’s because of strict immigration laws. For Ashima, while getting a job was much easier than she expected, she found the gender segregation in the Australian IT industry much more limiting than in India. Wei explained that in many ways China offered her more opportunities because as a developing country there was still a sense of entrepreneurialism, an attitude which took a chance on a young talented person.

Conclusions

Literature on women in trades and IT has often focused on the educational and equity initiatives that encouraged women to enter these gender anomalous occupations (Ahuja, 2002; Andrew, 2009; Butler & Ferrier, 2000; Crump et al., 2007; Earley, 1981; Fountain, 2000; Gleeson, 1996; Hollis, 1992; Pocock, 1988; Pringle et al.,
2000; Reid, 2009; von Hellens et al., 2004). This literature emphasised that exposing women to male dominated occupations and encouraging them to study traditionally gendered subjects at school, such as maths and science, would decrease gender segregation in the workforce. My study supported this research in that women were usually given gendered career advice and that all of the women in technical or managerial roles in IT had achieved highly in technical subjects at school.

However, my research also suggested that entering male-dominated occupations correlated with early experiences of gender embodiment. Young (2004) argued that women embody their disempowerment, ‘the general lack of confidence that we [women] frequently have about our cognitive or leadership abilities is traceable in part to an original doubt of our body’s capacity’ (p. 271). In contrast, the women in my study had a confidence in their body’s capacity from a very young age. This sense of their body’s capacity was subversive, allowing them to physically engage with and in worlds usually reserved for boys and men. This not only allowed them the confidence not to doubt their cognitive and leadership abilities, but also prepared them for what it was like to be a gender minority in the workplace. A sense of the body’s capacity, developed from a very young age, allowed women a sense of themselves as not confined by the gendered expectations of their bodies.

While much of the literature on encouraging women’s entrance into male dominated occupations positioned it as advantageous both for the women and the industry (Ahuja, 2002; Crump et al., 2007; Fountain, 2000; Pringle et al., 2000), my study suggested that entering a male-dominated occupation was difficult for women. Women mobilised a range of resources to counteract these difficulties. While some women became ‘one of the boys’ and helped to maintain the gender territory of the occupations’ masculine culture, others used feminism as a resource to help them enter, critique and survive these cultures while attempting to operate differently within them.

The mobilisation of familiar understandings of class was also useful for women in both occupations, who embodied ways of being which they recognised as appropriate and advantageous within the occupation. However, while class was a resource for some, it was not stable or unquestionable within occupations. Women required
vigilance in mobilising specific class resources when they moved organisations. For women in IT, in particular, being an ideal worker seemed to mean that many of the boundaries set up around entering gender specific roles were dismantled. Being the ideal worker became a resource which allowed women from the global south to feel that they were global workers. However, while becoming an ideal worker gave women a sense of opportunities, the realities of their work situations were often disappointing. As the women entering Australia found, despite hopes that Australia would be open-minded and innovative, workplaces within IT had the potential to limit their potential.

For most women the coerciveness of gender and class regimes meant that their entrance into gender anomalous work did not result in a radical reconfiguration of gender roles. Entering motherhood and entering the middle class emerged as two of the strongest pulls back into a normative gender position in relation to work. Motherhood represented the most significant shift in women’s working lives, resulting in a renegotiation of their work life which became a form of mother-work in itself. Similarly, women who had previously used their body and work to represent their politics found that the pressure to enter the middle class in owning and renovating a home meant significant changes in their approaches to work, embodiment and employment situations. Both of these pressures emerged within the context of creating a stable family and were experienced as contradictory by a number of women. On the one hand, they were expected to negotiate for flexible work arrangements to be good mothers and on the other they were expected to maintain stable employment that would service a mortgage. The contradiction around these pressures meant that many working mothers absorbed them into a long working week, which, while flexible in where and when they did paid work, often resulted in women doing extremely long hours to embody both the ideal worker and the good mother.
Chapter Ten: The Occupations

Introduction

In this chapter I describe and analyse the labour processes involved in trades and IT work. One of the things I found striking about reading the literature on trades and IT was that there was little sociological writing about what these workers actually did, about what their bodies and minds were engaged in. In this chapter I use my interviews to describe what these workers saw themselves as doing when they were at work. This moves from a focus on the physical processes involved in their work to a broader discussion of how women managed these processes and how they were managed by others. Finally, I explore how being a gender minority becomes a form of labour for women in male-dominated workplaces and occupations.

What they do

One of the questions I asked in most interviews was for the interview participants to describe what they did during an average day at work. While manual trades people could describe what they did clearly and viscerally, IT workers had more difficulty, often saying something along the lines of, ‘Well, it’s boring,’ or, ‘Too much sitting.’ For tradeswomen what they physically did and created were strong measurements of a day at work, whereas for most IT workers describing what they did at or with their computers involved elucidating hidden processes difficult to make comprehensible to an outsider.

The women in different manual trades described the physical and social processes they needed to engage in at work. The carpenters mentioned reading plans, adhering to building regulations, laying concrete slabs, hanging doors, putting on roofs, digging trenches, measuring, cutting, buying timber, fitting a kitchen, building frames, doing maintenance, working with architects, talking to clients and employing contractors. The cabinet-makers discussed similar tasks but also talked about using computers to design and measure timber, varnishing, judging wood quality, sanding, finishing things with precision, trying to adhere to tradition, being creative and entering homes. Mechanics discussed lifting heavy toolboxes, changing oil, lifting bonnets, getting under cars, getting dirty and washing their hands. The electrician
mentioned climbing into small holes, crawling through roofs, lifting heavy coils of cable and rewiring boxes. The horticulturalists talked about lifting mulch, compost, waste, turf and plants, planning and designing gardens, mowing lawns, walking between trucks and sites, planting, laying turf, mulching, clearing and following direction.

Despite the different labour processes required in different trades, all involved physicality and the need to communicate with either a client or a team. In some respects, the three groups in the IT industry were engaged in more diverse labour processes. The programmers had the most difficulty explaining what they did, most just saying they sat and programmed. This meant they talked to bosses, got projects, understood coding languages, found bugs, wrote code, solved puzzles, sat for long periods, tested programmes and checked emails. The women doing communication roles worked as a bridge between this technical world of IT and the client or customer. Women in communication roles talked to clients or users in clear English, discussed the potentials of IT, understood the basic language of programmers, constantly updated their knowledge and sat for long periods. Managers needed some of these skills too. They also needed to go to meetings, speak clearly and loudly, research how the company worked, find IT solutions to make the company’s systems more efficient, lead a team, communicate goals and values effectively, employ other IT workers, travel, work long hours and be accountable to senior management or a board of directors.

Many of the women, particularly those in IT, also did things to support or extend their work beyond their paid employment. Particularly in the 1980s, some tradeswomen ran trade training for other women, spoke at schools and designed courses to support women in trades. A number of women in IT, particularly managers, were active in mentoring women in IT either inside their organisation or through professional organisations. Women in both trades and IT also formed social communities through pursuing aspects of their work for pleasure. This was the case with young women in IT programming, who played games online and joined online and offline user groups. One young mechanic had also drawn her work into her social life, ‘hotting up’ cars on the weekend so that she could drag race them.
What women did and the roles they took within male-dominated industries were set within hierarchies which often created gender segregation within male-dominated workplaces. As discussed in the previous chapter, entering a particular trade meant entering a certain position within the working class hierarchy. For instance, Kate found that the culture of cabinet-making was more refined and respected than that of horticulture. Kate believed this was because of the fineness of the cabinet-making craft, which, not requiring the same strength and violence as other manual trades meant that it was more highly valued. Less physical areas of trades such as being a telecommunications electrician or a cabinet-maker were seen as more appropriate for women. This supported Game and Pringle’s (1983) argument that divisions of labour were maintained through the creation of dichotomies; women being more easily permitted into lighter, finer, cleaner and less dangerous work manual trades than heavier, dirtier and more dangerous ones. These dichotomies were structured around bodily capacity and engagement, suggesting that it was the interaction between the body and work which most easily positioned it as gendered.

Some have argued that such dichotomies between hard/soft labour also existed in IT (Fountain, 2000), women focussing on the less technical aspects of IT such as ‘hybrid’ communication roles which move between technical and client services (Whitehouse & Diamond, 2006). Statistical analysis of percentages of women in different areas of IT, however, found that there was little evidence for segregation according to these dichotomies (Whitehouse & Diamond, 2006). Instead, Whitehouse and Diamond (2006) found that it was pressures associated with working-time, rather than those of masculinist cultures, that directed women’s career trajectories in IT. This was supported by my study’s findings on negotiating motherhood. As seen in the previous chapter, women selected jobs in IT which were flexible, including the highly technical work of web-design, rather than more workplace-bound roles in communication.

One of the strongest patterns to emerge from my research was around the physicality of labour processes. While all of the tradeswomen discussed loving the physicality of their work, all of the women in IT discussed hating the sedentary nature of theirs. The irony was that much of the work done in IT resulted in work and life becoming more sedentary. For example, three of the women programmed computer games and others
discussed how IT systems they'd helped develop replaced manual workers with sedentary ones. Susan described her manual work as a cabinet-maker becoming sedentary when she'd moved to a company that computerised cabinet-making design. So while my interviews suggested that no one liked sitting all day and that people generally enjoyed moving their bodies, computerised labour processes led to a decrease in the physicality of work.

The pleasures of problem solving

The women from both trades and IT derived great pleasure from solving problems and from getting things to work. On many occasions, their descriptions of the satisfaction of making things work were among the most passionate and moving parts of the interviews.

Despite women in trades and women in IT working with different materials and in different environments, they described the labour processes involved in getting things to work and the satisfaction they felt about these processes similarly. I focus here on two particularly eloquent descriptions of the satisfaction involved in problem solving; the first by Lynne, a woman who had worked as a carpenter for fifteen years before becoming an architect, the second by Kylie, a young programmer.

Lynne was a successful carpenter/builder who, after fifteen years in the industry, retrained as a heritage architect. Lynne still did some building, helping a handy-man friend and designing and building furniture for herself. The following statement emerged when I asked Lynne how she felt when she was building. I have included the whole extract as it emphasised what it was about intellectually and physically solving problems that was so satisfying for Lynne and other trades women.

L: The actual physical stuff is fabulous. There is nothing so satisfying and even just building furniture, just to do a beautiful joint is just a joy [...]. I have to say that architectural design and drawing has a similar thing, it’s not the same because you don’t get the same sense of resolution or satisfaction. It’s hard, I can’t explain, but there’s something so beautiful about cutting the perfect joint [uses hands here to try to help explain – holds right hand vertically and puts the tips of her left fingers to rest gently at the middle of her
right palm] sort of just seeing it sit where it should sit. Or even if it’s not a perfect joint. A couple of months ago I was working with my friend Chris, who’s the handy man, and the job was this sagging roof which was sagging like that, it had been a tin roof, I think, and they put tiles on it and the supports were not strong enough so the struts had split so the whole thing was sagging. And so we had to [...] design how the thing would be resolved [...] We had to get this dirty great beam into span and it had to be that big because it had to span from that point to that point and had to build these struts. And so the challenge was to get that beam in to this skinny little sort of terrace house up two floors. We had to unpick the roof and cut all the joints and it worked. We got it in. The good thing about Chris is that he’s a big bloke and he does all of the grunt stuff and I just have to do the thinking, which is really very satisfying. [...] 

R: Because you get to see the physical product…

I: But you don’t have to do it in the same way. And those struts, they all had to be cut on different angles and we took the measurements and cut them down stairs and then we took the car jack and lifted the roof up to the point and they all just were beautiful.

R: So it’s that fitting together.

I: Yeah and making it work and then knowing that that roof was physically supported. So it’s kind of funny because you know no one is ever going to really see it or going to have any understanding of the process that went into arriving at something that looked really simple but it was a whole, one or two days to get that sorted and then to put the roof back together. And that stuff [said in awe] I dream about that sort of stuff. God those struts were beautiful. I guess it is that instant gratification isn’t it. It’s really nice knowing that that thing is working and that it’s performing that particular function.

Lynne’s description of the arch of a satisfying labour process moved to being given a problem, spending time engaging in detailed planning, thinking and drawing and then
enacting those plans so that the problem was physically solved. The key thing in Lynne’s description was her emphasis on well-made plans creating physical ‘resolution.’ Lynne’s use of the word ‘resolve’ had musical resonance, getting things to work physically brought everything out of chaos and into harmonious order (‘just seeing it sit where it should sit’). Lynne, like Zadie, recognised that this resolution, this perfect joint, while intensely satisfying to her and necessary for the safety of the construction, was not going to be seen by others. The problem of the roof, solved with the beautiful struts of Lynne’s dreams, remained hidden, just as the intense labour of working out their measurements and planning them did. Therefore, while an element of the satisfaction came from working physically, what seemed most satisfying for Lynne was that the world physically worked better because of her intervention.

Kylie, a 26 year old programmer and computational linguist who was passionate about open source, described the satisfaction that she got from programming in a similar way to Lynne:

I love that I get to do problem solving and use analytical skills. So what I was doing in LingTech was like, here’s a problem, figure out precisely what it is then solve it and then write the tests that show that you’ve solved it and I really liked that problem solving process. And that comes back to maths as well, maths and computer science have that in a big way and I love that in computer science it’s actually quite practical, you can write it and you can test it and you can figure out for sure whether you were right. And I also love that it can have an impact on other people, you can deploy it and people can use it and it makes their life easier or whatever and you can have the feedback cycle from that as well and that’s really enjoyable as well if you can be a part of that, which compared to maths, which is very removed from people’s lives. I enjoy being able to construct things, I read this thing about software development that it’s like building things from thought stuff and that’s really cool. I’m not a very manually dextrous person so I wouldn’t be good as a carpenter or whatever, I’m a pretty shitty cook, I have a go, but you can build user interfaces, you can build applications and these software things, which in a way are just virtual, they just appear on the screen, have just as much impact on people’s lives as buildings and bridges and trains and all the physical things and that’s in a way embracing the real engineering.
Kylie mapped out a similar labour process to Lynne’s: getting a problem; thinking logically about the problem; using certain tools to try to solve the problem; testing the solution. Like Lynne, Kylie stressed the importance of getting feedback, of knowing that something was working for the purposes for which it was designed. Kylie made the direct comparison between software development and construction. Through this she indicated that much of the satisfaction in solving problems at work was in making things work for people in their lived environments. While her work didn’t allow her to physically construct the world, her skills meant that she assisted in constructing virtual ones and making them work.

Although they still derived pleasure from problem solving, this sense of making things work in built and virtual environments was not necessarily the motivation of the managers in their problem solving. Unlike Lynne and Kylie who described gaining satisfaction in terms of a particular project, most of the managers described theirs in terms of the whole business. In Jane’s case study, I explained how she described at length the way each organisation worked and the many labour processes involved in each different area of the companies where she managed. These were the problems of her work that she needed to solve: this was her sinking roof. Jane explained that she began computerising labour processes to make her job as an accountant easier. Her efficiency, doing a job in two days that had formerly taken a week, meant that she was promoted to solve other problems in the company, computerising other systems to reduce manual and clerical work. While Jane was still solving problems and experiencing pleasure from making things work more efficiently, doing this with a corporate incentive was very different from the satisfaction that Lynne and Kylie got, which partly rested on making things work for other people. That said, all of the managers did mention significant changes they made to their workplaces, particularly in their employment of women and working mothers, which suggested their capacity to address larger scale social problems in the workplace which could potentially assist others.

Employment situation

What women did at work and around their work lives was greatly influenced by the way they were employed. This was very different between industries. In trades many
women were self-employed, acting as independent contractors or running small businesses. In IT nearly all of the women worked full time for large organisations. In part this was the nature of the industries, but it was also indicative of the ways women negotiated management, control and flexibility. Both trade and IT work was project based and so much of the employment was contractual. This was only seen as a problem by one of the interviewees, Gail, who as an IT manager over fifty-five had spent twelve months looking for work. None of the tradeswomen mentioned the contractual nature of the work, perhaps because many of them no longer worked in trades. The women on contracts in IT accepted it as part of the industry, enjoying their times between jobs as holidays, much like those in Barley and Kunda’s study (2004).

For women in both trades and IT, working out how to be employed - as a contractor, permanent employee, small business owner or on a part or full time basis - was a process of negotiating between labour market demands, organisational structures and personal needs. A number of women in both trades and IT had significant power in this negotiation because their skills were in high demand. The four tradeswomen who had run their own businesses talked about a constant flow of clients. Similarly, IT managers discussed being in demand, ‘head hunted’ for large jobs, even when they weren’t on the labour market. These women had the power to bargain (a little at least) with organisations so that their personal needs might be met. Despite this, there was only one woman who worked part time in IT, and this was because her job was created for her. This was an unusual arrangement in IT, where a low percentage of women worked part time in comparison to women in other industries (Diamond & Whitehouse, 2007). Other women in IT stressed that while they worked full time their workplaces were flexible. As seen in the previous chapter, Ruby and Wei’s employers changed the rules so that they could keep them rather than lose them to extended maternity leave.

**Experiences of management**

Experiences of management significantly informed the ways in which both tradeswomen and women in IT experienced labour processes. The interview participants often referred to managers’ proximity to them and to their labour process as important. Proximity represented the amount of control or autonomy they were
allowed to have over their work. Generally, the women expressed a desire to do their work autonomously and flexibly, but saw a need for management to supervise workplace cultures. Problems in the boundaries around managerial control were most frequently discussed when women told stories of their early career. When they were learning new skills, still proving themselves and first entering sometimes hostile male-dominated work environments the impact of management was particularly significant.

As apprentices, most trades people’s ‘on the tools’ training was immediately managed by a master tradesperson. When describing their apprenticeships, five out of the eighteen women who did apprenticeships mentioned not being given adequate training because their master tradesmen would not let them work freely. A number of these women described being under intense scrutiny while they worked to ensure the work was correctly done. This surveillance did not lead to trust in their skills. In Lisa and Hanna’s cases it eroded their faith in their skill altogether, resulting in both women abandoning their trade and becoming depressed. Most women saw the surveillance they received as gendered. As Maxine, a mechanic, put it when describing how different it was for a woman to be under a car, ‘Whereas even the most hopeless of men tend to be encouraged, even the most enthusiastic of women get messages that tell them it’s inappropriate or you’ll be no good at it or it’s scary.’

Women entering trades in the last five years emphasised that this surveillance existed within the context of a competitive business model. They saw that for their master tradesperson spending time on training and allowing mistakes was a waste of money. Nancy described her learning as being stunted by the fact that the builder she worked for never let her attempt difficult skills or jobs because he wanted all his work to be perfect the first time. This form of surveillance seemed to be a result of a neo-liberal business model rather than a consequence of gender. Fuschia reported that many of the senior builders and carpenters she worked for lamented that no young tradespeople had adequate skills anymore. Samantha and Jesse did eventually find positions that offered good training, however, these apprenticeships were in the public sector. The privatisation of most public services meant that for most tradespeople this previously popular avenue for quality training was removed. Vocational education in
trades therefore relied on training from within a competitive market system, a system arguably focussed on profit not craft (Ewer, 2000).

On the other hand, a lack of intervention from management could result in women feeling unsupported. Many women described management in larger organisations as distant. Larger organisations usually had management hierarchies, meaning that directors passed on the day-to-day running of the business to lower level managers. For many women, this distance between senior management and their daily labour processes meant that the management didn’t adequately understand or address issues for employees such as their company’s work culture. For instance, Lisa’s case study showed that while she was employed as a carpenter by a council in an equal opportunity position, when she was placed into a workshop the tradesmen allocated all of the work according to favouritism and friendship.

A number of other women also discussed management’s failure to understand what actually happened socially and practically in their organisations. The senior manager who employed her, a young kindly-spoken middle class man, promised apprentice carpenter, Fuschia, that his construction sites were professional and that she would receive adequate on-the-tools training. On the site, away from senior management, Fuschia found a classic construction site, full of sexist, homophobic and racist jokes, where she was expected to do site administration and labouring work. For Fuschia, this showed that the manager had no understanding of the worksite or his employees. As seen in the case studies, construction sites and other spaces not directly contained by or associated with a managerial gaze were spaces where gender was made more visible. This was illustrated in similar stories told by both Jesse and Samantha, both of whom worked for companies run by feminist women. Despite all employees being aware of the feminist management, when Jesse and Samantha were sent out on jobs with male employees, they found them to be sexist and homophobic. Samantha reported how she was treated to her bosses and they agreed to move her out of a particularly difficult gang. Jesse, however, felt that the way her workmate treated her would reflect badly on her and so did not report it to management.

For women in IT, most of whom worked in large organisations, the distance between management and their work was embraced. A number of them described their
autonomy as one of the things they valued most about their jobs. Most women across the three areas of IT described being given a task and being able to go about completing it the way they thought best, provided they did it within the time frame. This independence was particularly good for women with caring responsibilities, a number of whom explained that they could be flexible around their childcare needs, working from home and arriving at the office later than 9am. Most of the women working in IT, particularly for IT companies, enjoyed the flexible hours.

As with trades, the main exception to the enjoyment of this autonomy concerned early career experiences in IT. Unlike women in trades who were micro-managed by master tradespeople, women beginning their careers in IT were often given a project and left to work it out on their own. IT did not have the same history of paid training as trades. Some women starting out in the industry had done tertiary training in an IT related field but others had gotten into IT by accident. Programmers Kylie and Kate and technical writers Louise and Ashima described the difficulties of being given no official guidance around their early work. These women found the autonomy overwhelming, particularly because the isolating nature of many IT office environments meant that none of the women felt comfortable asking people around them for guidance or advice. Louise described it as a complete ‘muddle’ at first, as not only was there no modelling or feedback, but she was unaware of how long the task should take.

To achieve the autonomy and flexibility similar to that of most women working in IT, seven of the tradeswomen started up small businesses. Hanna who trained in carpentry in the 1980s had had ‘horrific’ experiences with tradesmen and was no longer prepared to work with them full time. Zadie and Lynne who had trained at a similar time and were both feminists, started up carpentry businesses because they wanted to work with and train other women in trades. While for these three women, running their own businesses was about creating what one called an alternative ‘ethic to the [construction] site,’ for two cabinetmakers who were mothers of young children, starting their own business was about achieving flexibility around caring responsibilities. It was the women who created their own businesses to meet their political and personal needs who stayed in trades the longest.
For highly successful women who worked for big organisations, a usually unnamed management had seen their potential and quickly promoted them. Four women fitted this category. All were young when they were targeted by management to be ‘fast tracked;’ two were under twenty. Promotion meant a management position of significant responsibility. All four found that their promotions led to an increase in hours, travel and stress. In three of the four cases, much of the stress was a result of management’s corporate imperative to make the business do more for less cost and with fewer people.

Maria, a mechanic who was employed by a large American motoring company when she was fifteen, was made a service manager before she had finished her apprenticeship. Maria explained that the company had a policy of overbooking its service schedule so that it was literally impossible to complete. This meant that Maria often had to stay late and finish the services after all the other mechanics had left. Maria hinted that part of the reason the other mechanics wouldn’t stay on to help her was that they resented her having a management position so young.

Like Maria, Wei and Jane effectively did more than one person’s job. For Wei and Jane, both working as IT managers, it was common to work 18 hour days. Ultimately, all four of these women suffered physically and two describe themselves as ‘burning out.’

Listening to these stories made me particularly sad because the beginning of the story was held up by the women as a symbol of their success: working class girls rose to management and the big bucks. But the end of the story showed that their ‘success’ was not in their interest, it was in the interest of the organisation. Maria, despite loving the labour processes involved in being a mechanic on the shop floor, left the company where she had been promoted never to return to being a mechanic. It might be argued that there was a false economy to management’s treatment of these promising young employees. If they were not made to work such long hours and were given more resources they would have been able to stay working for the organisation. This indicated the organisations’ short-term calculations of personal matters.
Supervising management: unions, initiatives and policies to support women in male-dominated work

Trades work and IT emerge within very different cultural economies. Both occupations therefore have different cultural references, different ideas and institutions to frame their understanding of what work is and what a worker does. Trades have a long history of unionism, established to regulate managers on behalf of workers. With their culture of apprenticeship involving some vocational training in a State or Federal educational institution, more recently these educational institutions have also supervised certain reforms external to the workplace. As a new industry IT grew up within a neo-liberal globalised model of labour. The speed with which IT became a large and profitable form of national capital made it the star industry of the 1980s and 1990s. UK, American and Australian governments had difficulty regulating the IT industry while at the same time encouraging it (Xiang, 2007). Microsoft being famously sued for tax fraud in the 1980s, was just one example of how the IT industry used an increasingly casualised labour force to maximise its profit (Xiang, 2007). In Australia, as in the UK and America, special visas for IT workers were granted due to a perceived labour shortage in the 1990s (Xiang, 2007). Most of the women I interviewed in IT worked for large national or international organisations and used globalised technologies, programmes and knowledge. While trade workers had always struggled against the bosses for rights, safety and fair pay within the distinctively working class framework of a union, IT work was often seen as an opportunity, particularly for working class or rural people in India and China, to make a way in the world. It was a career choice of social mobility, a chance to enter the corporate world and move up.

The position of the women I interviewed in relation to unions best illustrated the cultural economies of trades and IT work. The tradeswomen discussed unions in terms of their ability to represent their needs, whereas in IT only managers discussed unions, and only in detailing negotiations with them.

Despite strong unionisation in most trades in NSW and Australia only one tradeswoman had a positive experience with unions. For most of the tradeswomen, unions represented the masculine culture of their trade, a concept supported by
literature on Australian unions in general (Franzway, 2001) and on construction and manufacturing unions in particular (Ewers, 2000). As seen in Lisa’s case study, Lisa realised that her complaint would have needed to have been lodged at the union representative who was one of the people who caused her problems. Maria, describing a time in the 1980s when she was an apprentice mechanic, was furious with the union for insisting that her employer install a female toilet. The union battle was extensive and Maria, who enjoyed being ‘one of the boys,’ found that the union’s intervention interrupted her relationships with her colleagues and management. The women’s toilet her employer installed ended up being so far away from the workshop that Maria refused to use it. For Lisa and Maria unions were a form of bureaucracy that did not represent their interests.

Fuschia, on the other hand, had found her union membership invaluable in dealing with the neo-liberal structures of the contemporary construction industry. Fuschia was employed by a medium-sized construction company who were in turn contracted by a larger construction company to carry out local projects as a part of a federal government stimulus package. It was only because this government funding had apprentice employment as a criterion that Fuschia was employed. The company did not usually employ apprentices because it focussed on project managing, employing subcontractors to do the trade work. The company’s unfamiliarity with apprentices meant that Fuschia had to manage the extensive amount of apprentice paperwork. When Fuschia filled out one of the apprentice rebate forms incorrectly and sent it off to the RTA to receive a $100 off her car registration, she was called into her boss’ office and told that she was fired for fraud. Fuschia rang the union who were appalled and acted on her behalf to get her job back. It turned out that the company, like all contractors working under the stimulus package, was under investigation, and Fuschia’s perceived $100 fraud was her boss’ scapegoat for the pressure he felt at being under such public scrutiny. For Fuschia, the union acted on her behalf, empowering her within a neo-liberal trade market which saw her as the bottom of the hierarchy. The intervention of and threats by the union put Fuschia in a powerful position, allowing her to make demands around her training and the location of her work.
As managers in IT both Jane and Cassie were on the other side of this negotiation, representing the interests of the organisations they worked for. As seen in the case study, Jane insisted on being honest with the union about change brought about by computerising systems. Her insistence seemed to indicate that this was not normal procedure for a large organisation where strong unionism stopped work. Jane inferred that her negotiation with the union had been successful and highly regarded in her company. Unlike Jane, who seemed to respect the union negotiation process, Cassie dismissed unions when explaining that the workers would strike when the price of Coke in the vending machine went up. For both Jane and Cassie negotiations with unions took place because they had positions managing change using IT in traditionally working class male-dominated industries. Other managers and women in IT who worked for large corporations, such as IT companies or banks, did not mention unions at all.

Four women, three in trades and one in IT, got their initial TAFE entrance and apprenticeship through government programs to get women back into the workforce after periods of unemployment. A number of women explained that without this direct encouragement, they probably would not have entered these male-dominated occupations. That said, two of the tradeswomen who went on to work in equal opportunity believed that while these TAFE initiatives may have been supportive they often failed to recognise the reality of trade work for women. Hanna, a carpenter who at the time of the interview worked in equal opportunity, said that creating equality and opportunity within the TAFE system did not change the work cultures where women did their on-the-tools training and where they would eventually work. Maxine was more critical. She said that such initiatives were usually directed by middle class women and failed to acknowledge the changing nature of workplaces and trades. Maxine recalled programs encouraging women into boiler-making when it was a dying trade. A number of women argued that this problem continued. Current TAFE and industry programs encouraged women into trade training where there are skill shortages due to lack of male interest (NRMA, 2007).

The impact of equal opportunity policies on women in trades and IT depended on the culture of the organisation and the women's position within that organisation. In the late 1970s and early 1980s both Zadie and Lynne found that the equal opportunity
policies encouraging their entry into trades coincided with government and non-government feminist initiatives that supported their early employment in trades. Lynne was asked to lead a number of government funded projects for community housing which particularly aimed to support women in trades. Zadie worked on similar projects. Both of them were also involved in a women's building co-operative where women tradespeople worked together on a range of jobs. While both Lynne and Zadie discussed the difficulties involved in working in these co-operative environments with other women (clashes between feminisms, and 'bitchiness'), they also acknowledged that many of these projects were wonderful and gave them a good foundation in their trade.

Women entering trades more recently also saw the benefits of employers focussing on equity. Samantha found the ethic of her workplace, which was run by a feminist, extremely supportive of her as a worker, a lesbian and a woman. She stressed the importance of having management that would 'stand up for you [...] and not just fall in with the boys.' Similarly, Jesse sought an equal opportunity position with a major energy company because she recognised that its approach would support her as a woman. For these four tradeswomen it was clear that the congruence between equal opportunity policies and workplace cultures was important in making their work in trades sustainable.

Lisa, on the other hand, was employed by a council in the 1980s directly after changes had been made to anti-discrimination law. However, Lisa found that rather than ensuring that men behaved well, the rhetoric around her being protected by anti-discrimination law placed the responsibility back onto Lisa to file a complaint. In Lisa's description it seemed as though men continued to act badly towards her as a kind of dare. A false dare, as really the men were much safer than Lisa. Lisa knew that reporting the sexual harassment or abuse she was experiencing would further alienate her at work.

The women in IT who discussed equal opportunity initiatives and policies were managers. All three of them regarded having equal numbers of men and women in the workplace as central to establishing equality. Jessica, who had worked as a senior manager in an international IT firm based in Switzerland and North America, said that
as a manager she was expected to undergo reviews that analysed the gender balance in her teams. Much to Jessica’s delight, in one of these reviews all of her teams globally, from the US to Singapore to China, had a 50/50 male/female split. For Jessica this was completely unintended. She did not call herself a feminist and was always interested in employing the best person for the job. However, when at another point in the interview, I asked Jessica what her ideal employee was like, she very honestly declared that her ideal employee was like her. Much as Kanter’s (1977) study found that men maintained dominance through a homosexual reproduction in which their employment patterns attempted to ‘reproduce themselves in their own image’ (p. 48), Jessica’s desire to employ people like her seemed to extend to a similar employment pattern where gender was reproduced. Simply being a woman in management, Jessica potentially interrupted the ‘closed and gendered circle’ created by male managers desire for ‘shared maleness’ (Witz & Savage, 1992, p. 15). Gail, a senior manager who, unlike Jessica, was a radical feminist, explained that she was definitely conscious of actively employing women and trying to change the gender balance of the office.

Two interviews of women from the same organisation revealed that perceptions and experiences of equal opportunity were greatly affected by the position an individual held within that organisation. At the time of the interview both Jane and Claire worked for the same organisation, an organisation which was nationally recognised for the opportunities it provided for women. Jane, who had worked there for 10 years as a senior manager, supported the popular idea that the organisation was a good employer for women. Jane stressed that she didn’t think that she’d gotten her job because she was a woman, but she did feel that she had been given opportunities because the workplace was focussed on seeing women in management. She found that certain initiatives designed by the organisation to support women, while sometimes resulting in tedious commitments, at other times gave her leadership and networking opportunities. As seen in the case study, Claire held a much less senior position. Her background in social science and as a unionist meant that she recognised the structural sexism within the workplace. She saw that this organisation still exploited women in service roles, providing little opportunity for their promotion. Claire argued that a company should not only be recognised for supporting women in management, it also needed to address the far greater numbers of women doing work to support these
managers. To Claire, the corporate imperative of the organisation meant that while they supported exceptional women into management, a move which ultimately benefited the organisation, they still relied heavily on not enfranchising or providing opportunities for the less skilled administrative workers, 70% of whom were women and without whom the organisation would not run.

Choosing to leave corporate life

There was a pattern of women leaving the corporate world so that they didn’t have to focus on money. These women had been highly successful in the jobs they were leaving and without this success may not have felt so secure in leaving to pursue other things outside the corporate sphere. Two of the three tradeswomen who left the corporate world explained that it was because they did not have the ambition or interest in ‘climbing the ladder.’ Maxine explained that she was not interested in the business side of her trade or in making a lot of money. They both left the world of business to pursue different careers, one retraining at university and the other literally joining the circus.

For the three IT managers who made a shift away from corporate life, there was not such a significant shift in occupations but rather an orientation towards particular kinds of employers. Having successful managerial careers in IT management for between 10 and 30 years, all three managers reached a point where they were sick of the corporate world. For Jane and Wei this resulted in quitting their jobs in the corporate sector. Jane went travelling for two years and Wei decided to spend a year focussing on parenting. Both of them had strong ideas that when they returned to work they wanted something different. Jane wanted to work for an NGO and Wei, ironically given her decision to move away from the corporate world, said that she would only go back to work if she could do so for one of the three companies voted best employer. As soon as they re-entered the job market (actually, before in Wei’s case), both Jane and Wei were head hunted for high profile corporate management jobs. Wei accepted a job with one of the companies that she had on her list. Jessica, who probably had the most high profile international management role of all of the interview participants, made the most significant work change, choosing to work for a federally funded community organisation. Jessica’s jobs had previously been focussed
around maintaining share prices and increasing efficiency, so she felt an enormous sense of relief as well as enjoyment working in an area where the focus was not on money.

For these IT managers the decision to leave corporate life involved them resisting an aggressive force from the market. Jane and Wei's stories of being offered jobs without soliciting them was testament to how much the labour market wanted and needed these women's skills. I've always found the expression 'head-hunted' particularly violent for a task which involved recognising someone's talent. But these women's stories made me understand it. It felt as though if they didn't let them have their heads, they might slice their necks anyway. So Jane, caught by some corporate flanking technique which she explained vaguely and in the third person, found herself ensnared by another corporation when her intention was to use her skills to work for an NGO and continue to find herself rather than lose herself in her work.

**Being a gender minority**

Being a gender minority is obviously a theme that runs through much of the discussion in this thesis. I am including it here because I recognise that doing gender in the workplace can become a form of work in itself. The practicalities of and the relations involved in being a woman in a male-dominated occupation and workplace often affected the labour processes themselves. In part this was because women were not expected to be in these spaces doing this work; they stood out and were recognised as women not as workers. The negotiation of this contradiction became another form of work which was experienced differently by women in trades and IT due to occupational cultures.

Being recognised as a woman but not as a worker was most obvious when it came to women getting employed. As seen through Jesse's case study, being a woman, even a highly skilled one, was reason enough not to be employed. One of the justifications for why Jesse didn't get employed was that management were concerned that she would have to work too hard against sexism and the threat of rape. Fuschia also found getting a full time carpentry apprenticeship difficult because in her regional town apprenticeships were given to 15-year-old boys who were sons, cousins or family
friends of small residential builders. Bianca, a 26-year-old programmer who had been in the work force for a year, also felt that she was not employed for a job because she was a woman. When she arrived at the interview, the interviewer hadn’t looked at her demonstration programme nor did he seem interested in her. Despite her initial difficulty in getting a job, Bianca explained that many people in the IT industry believed women were more likely to get employed because their resumes stood out from the pile dominated by men. When I interviewed Bianca at her workplace, she introduced me to her manager. He was excited about my project and said that Bianca was the first woman developer he’d ever employed and the first to apply.

One of the consequences of not feeling welcomed into a workplace was that women often felt that they needed to prove themselves. Lynne described this happening a number of times in her working life. Firstly in her transition from her first to second year at TAFE, Lynne noticed that while the boys had excluded her and treated her badly in her first year, in the second year they completely changed. Later in her career as a builder, Lynne felt similar pressure. While Lynne ran her own small business, she still needed to work with other tradespeople, architects and building regulators. Lynne explained that on more than one occasion when the local building inspector would inspect one of her buildings, he would measure every beam and joist to see that they were the correct dimensions, a degree of precision he never bothered with any male builders she’d worked with. Cassie and Bianca also described this as happening in IT. While Bianca saw it as a natural part of entering a new workplace, Cassie, who was older and had had a long and successful career in another industry, found having to prove herself tedious and inconvenient.

For many women, a part of proving themselves involved making themselves noticed and respected as both women and workers among men. This was beautifully illustrated in Zadie’s case study. Having been repeatedly unrecognised as a builder on the worksite, Zadie had t-shirts made that said, ‘I’m the builder, Who are you?’ The declaration of identity combined with the interrogative switched the power dynamic. The t-shirt made the woman builder recognisable and everybody else the mystery.

While in trades being recognised was often about physically marking out the self and the space, in more virtual IT spaces the presence of a woman needed to be more
actively made known so that the space remained appropriate and accessible for men and women. Kylie, a 26 year old developer, explained that because open source networks and groups were a particularly male-dominated area of IT they often required her to intervene and remind participants that they were not male only spaces. On a number of occasions technical discussions online had degraded into sexist humour. As one of the only women in the group and as a feminist, Kylie felt a responsibility to comment and 'pull up' the use of a public space for such antics. However, Kylie repeated that she was also disappointed that she was the one who had to write the reprimand, rather than one of the many other participants who later agreed with her. Kylie was also disappointed that the discussion needed to happen at all, knowing that such jokes would never have been made during the network’s offline meetings. Kylie pointed out that the barrier of the computer often allowed people, even when they knew one another, to feel anonymous and unaccountable in a way that they wouldn’t in a face-to-face meeting.

The physical focus of manual trades meant that the masculinity of the work culture was tied to the body. The strength, violence and skill of the male body in trade work was often emphasised by workplace talk which sexualised and degraded the female, homosexual or racialised body. The three case studies revealed the extent to which women entering these spaces were regarded as a threat to masculinity. Most women described being shown pornography and being exposed to sexist, racist and homophobic jokes in the workplace. Three of the women were repeatedly so affected by this that every night they recalled being ‘put back together’ by their supportive households.

Being exposed to masculinist occupational culture was experienced as hard work for many women. Different women used different strategies to deal with this. Most women did not want to, and felt they couldn’t, actively confront sexism every time it occurred in the workplace, a number of women repeating the same phrase, ‘You need to choose your battles.’ In order to protect themselves from daily sexism two of the women described themselves as going into hiding at work. Fuschia tried to avoid working in large groups of tradesmen, keeping herself constantly occupied with menial jobs. While this worked to help Fuschia avoid being exposed to sexist, racist and homophobic talk, it also meant that she was unable to fully participate in the main
jobs of the day, jeopardising her training and potentially reinforcing a gender stereotype of women as peripheral to the action. Similarly, Hanna tried to hide herself and her femininity. She did this by putting on a lot of weight, which she realised in retrospect was an effort to desexualise her body and to create a boundary between her and the world that was buffeting her with abuse.

Some women described the work of being a minority in trades as requiring them to learn a new language. Twice during the interview Samantha elided being a qualified horticulturalist with being qualified at speaking in male conversations. For Samantha conversation topics were divided into male, female and general, and working in horticulture meant that she needed to know the 'basic topics' of male conversation and avoid the more serious female topics around relationships and personal life. Samantha did not find this easy. She stressed that as a serious person, the joking style of men's conversations was difficult for her to emulate. Similarly, while Fuschia mainly tried to avoid what she often found to be offensive male talk on the worksite, when she did choose her battles, they were usually around racism and homophobia. To engage with this, Fuschia invoked what she described as a 'matey' tone, appealing to her workmates' value for being given a 'fair go.' Clearly, both hiding and battling required thought and effort on behalf of the women. Fuschia's process of moving in and out of visibility depending on how emotionally strong she felt and how politically inappropriate she found the situation suggested that these male-dominated workplaces required women to be culturally literate, adapting their work, their talk and their bodies in order to feel emotionally and physically safe.

While learning the language of hegemonic masculinity in manual trades meant learning how to speak in a certain way about things outside of work, in IT women needed to talk in ways that showed their competence and technical ability. As such, the work of being a minority required different skills and strategies which had different gender implications. A number of the female programmers, for instance, explained that they felt quite at home in these male-dominated workplaces because the men with whom they worked were 'geeks' like them and could therefore understand their language, their code. They literally enjoyed the same games they did. However, Kylie emphasised that there were limits to how far this shared understanding could take a relationship. While Kylie connected with these men as
geeks, she found their lack of understanding of social codes, particularly around the reciprocity of conversation and emotional engagement significantly limited the development of relationships. Kylie recognised that while in part this lack of social knowledge was because of the insular worlds in which many of her colleagues lived, she also saw their lack of care for others in conversation as gendered. Fuschia shared Kylie’s observation, but from within the construction industry. She mentioned that men never asked questions about her, but enjoyed answering questions about themselves. In both cases the relational or emotional work of conversations was left to the women, men in these highly disembodied or highly embodied industries not sharing a set of norms with the women around interaction.

Kylie found this particularly significant in her interactions in online open-source communities. These communities were non-hierarchical and revolved around resolving disputes. Kylie found that while she was aware of the underlying emotional impact of the way she used language online, most men did not use or seem to appreciate the use of ‘fluffy language’ to help gently resolve problems. Instead, a common response to questions in these communities was the acronym RTFM (Read the Fucking Manual). As with women in trades, Kylie’s different and arguably gendered expectations of the dynamics of conversation meant that she had to work hard to not have an emotional reaction to such disputes:

It was confronting at times to find that someone disagreed with me and your instinct is to apologise and back off and think you must be wrong but you figure out how not to take it so personally and to respond and to work through it without having such an emotional reaction.

Rather than learning how to talk like a man in these contexts, Kylie had to learn how to be in the presence of this talk. She recognised that while confronting, the contrast of this approach to her own made her focus on and overcome her instinctive reactions, reactions which some would argue were gendered (Tannen, 1994).

While online hegemonic masculinity was enacted in obvious ways through styles of conversation, in organisations of line women in IT described a hegemonic masculinity more subtly infusing the workplace most significantly through the disproportionate number of men in the industry. As seen in Jane’s case study, Jane was unaware of the significance of working with so many men, until she got a job where she was working
with women. The biggest change in this for Jane was that she no longer had to think
about who she was. The idea that being the only woman among men meant that Jane
was more likely to call herself into question meant that part of the labour became
about watching the self. Having other women around shifted this focus. Key to this
was that Jane couldn’t express her feelings about being a minority until she’d stopped
being one. Unlike women in trades, for whom forms of hegemonic masculinity were
made explicit by men’s sexist, homophobic and racist talk and their constant
surveillance of women and their bodies, women in IT often worked in organisations
which hid sexism beneath political correctness, making it more difficult to pin-point
how their labour was affected by being a minority.

Ashima best illustrated this in describing her experiences of gender at work. Ashima
was a technical writer for an IT company, she did this for four years in India before
using her skills to migrate to Australia. Ashima was shocked by the significant gender
division of IT in Australia, given that the company she had worked for in India had
employed 50/50 women and men. Ashima explained that in Australia she was one of
four women working on her whole floor. Of all of the women I interviewed in IT,
Ashima was the most intent on ensuring that she articulated the problem with being a
woman amongst so many men. She explained that while she didn’t feel discriminated
against, she did ‘feel distinctly like a woman.’ When I asked Ashima whether she felt
this because she’d been treated in a sexist way, she explained that while she felt she
had, she didn’t know why:

The thing is some of these things, you feel like you have to substantiate it with
what something somebody said or did but sometimes you can just feel it but
you can’t really...I think it’s because we’ve all learnt the rules of what is the
right thing, so in a way you’re able to perfectly disguise whatever you feel by
saying the right thing and doing the right thing but still as a human being you
can pick up on things that are not said and that are not...So I feel like I have
felt it but I feel like it is wrong of me to say that because I can’t actually
substantiate it...

As with Jane, the impact of being in a male-dominated space was largely affective.
But feeling something was very difficult to actively respond to in a workplace.
Instead, Ashima knew that a part of her labour was about knowing that she had to
work while having these feelings of knowing she was a woman.
Conclusion

Key to women enjoying and sustaining their employment in male-dominated occupations was being enabled to solve problems. While women in trades and IT worked with very different products they shared a sense that satisfying problem solving was what improved the way things worked in the physical, social or virtual world. For women early in their careers, enabling them to approach these problems usually involved providing training and support which guided them towards working autonomously. While equal opportunity initiatives and trade unions assisted women in trades in specific historical moments, such external interventions needed to address the workplace culture and be appropriate to the needs of individual women.

Barriers to women’s employment and enjoyment of their work were presented both by the managerialist market focus of organisations and by their gender regimes. Across the interviews organisations failed to recognise how structural decisions placed personal stress on employees that made their work unsustainable. Women experienced this through the toll their work took on their bodies, their time, their families and their career trajectories. Women in both trades and IT, but in IT in particular, found that the physical costs of working in both occupations meant that caring for their body both inside and outside of the workplace became integral to their work and a form of labour their work demanded. Apart from this general form of body-work, women also had the added burden of being a minority in the workplace. Being a gender minority became a form of labour for most women. Their gender drew attention to them in the workplace, the scrutiny of their gender meaning that they not only scrutinised themselves but that they had to prove themselves as workers and learn new gendered languages. I argue that this awareness required in being a gender minority is an unrecognised form of work.
Chapter Eleven: Embodiment

Introduction

The design of this project rested in part on the assumption that the body was central to trades and peripheral to IT work. I was curious about how the intense use of the physical body in manual trades would lead to different experiences of gender and labour embodiment in comparison to the more disembodied work in IT occupations. Through my interviews, however, I found that IT work was not experienced as 'disembodied.' While manual work saw most women empowered by a new sense of their bodies, women in IT also discussed their bodies as empowering, disappointing and problematic in the workplace. Women in both occupations found their work drew connections between their physical bodies and the physical worlds they inhabited. Their bodies transformed their understanding and experience of social and production relations. These relations also impinged on, inhibited and occasionally liberated their bodies.

Tradeswomen's bodies

As discussed in the previous chapter, all of the tradeswomen loved working physically with their bodies. This relationship with the physicality of work became central to the participants' discussions of it. For a number of women this physicality had become crucial to their sense of worth. This was particularly the case for three women who identified themselves as coming from lower working class backgrounds. For these women, the most highly valued work in their childhood households had been the physical work of their male relatives: miners, fishermen and tradespeople. This left a strong legacy and physical work became central to their identities. As seen in Jesse's case study, doing work that was physical was essential to her finding work a fulfilling achievement. For Kate this sense that she had to make a physical contribution to the world was also keenly felt:

If I am not doing things, I yeah, my spirit does die. You know, I need to be, you know, even if I am not feeling fantastic. I am always like drawing or, you know, looking up a new way of doing a design or something like that. I don't sit...I am a doer. I just do things... No, I can't live without it. Not me, no way
Kate's identity became tied to being physically active, the antithesis to the sitting required of much IT work. In Kate's description not being able to physically engage in the world was akin to dying ("I can't live without it"). Her work in trades was central to her sense of being ("I am a doer"), her spirit, her life and her livelihood. Ironically, both Jesse and Kate were aware that this kind of work was unsustainable. Indeed, Kate had suffered a physically disabling illness which had caused her to dramatically change the way she worked. Like the men in Cockburn's (1983) study, Kate's identity hinged on her relationship with a form of work that was precarious.

Unlike Jesse and Kate who valued the body’s capacity to get things done, for the feminist tradeswomen the importance of physical work became about knowing how to use the body to get things done. Feminism had given these women an intellectual and political framework through which to see their bodies in relation to others and to work. For feminist tradeswomen it was not only the physicality that was important but the fact that the physicality required skills and knowledge that had in the past been reserved for men. The feminist tradeswomen enjoyed learning how to use their bodies in physically competent ways. As Maxine, a mechanic in the 1970s and 80s, explained,

There's a lot of pleasure in that kind of knowledge and that kind of activity. Just in the same way I love surfing. There's a kind of exuberance in knowing how to use your body well.

This pleasure was amplified because these women knew that what they were doing was gender anomalous and therefore political. Maxine continued,

So the pleasure is two fold. There is the initial pleasure of learning how to use your body well and then the resultant pleasure of this being a political action and revelation of the arbitrary and false demarcations of gender division.

Through being a mechanic, Maxine's politics became embodied. With her body physically engaged and skilled in trade work, her body also became a political symbol. Maxine's experiences of embodiment at work were generated by both her body's physicality and by the simultaneous awareness of her body's social and symbolic relations while engaged in this physicality. This was a version of Connell's (2005) body-reflexive practices. The body's enjoyment of the physical experience was interpreted through a political lens on social relations.
For feminist tradeswomen in particular learning a trade transformed their way of seeing the world. On a simple level working in physical trades demystified the work itself. Hanna explained this with some difficulty, because while she was empowered to have trade knowledge and disappointed when other women didn’t, much of her empowerment came from knowing that the work was ‘so easy.’ Fuschia explained that every time she told her father what she’d been doing at work (laying a brick wall, pouring a slab, hanging doors, installing windows), he would say that she didn’t know how to do that. It seemed impossible to him that Fuschia could either know or do these things despite the fact that he had done similar things with no training. Fuschia’s father understood that this work could be easy for a man, but had no comprehension that his daughter could know how to attempt it. Fuschia’s response to her father was always, ‘Well, it’s not rocket science,’ destabilising the complexity of the work and its entrenched relationship with masculinity. Nancy argued that the main reason trades remained segregated was because men like Fuschia’s father wanted to both protect the easy work for themselves, while simultaneously presenting it to the world as difficult and exclusive.

Having demystified the physical and intellectual challenges of trade work, tradeswomen often saw their success in trades as a result of their attitude rather than their strength or skill. When I asked Zadie, for instance, about the physical demands of carpentry, she replied ‘it’s just an attitude.’ Zadie drew the attention away from the physical body and placed it on an approach to physicality and physical problems. Lynne also felt that building changed her sense of physical possibilities:

One Friday night she [her girlfriend] was saying, ‘Oh there’s something wrong with this house, it’s just too stuffy,’ and I said, ‘Why don’t we just take a wall out?’ And she went, ‘Oh, really, can we?’ So that weekend we took a wall out.

It was great.

This attitude of being able to alter and change the physical world was empowering for Zadie and Lynne.

Similarly, for Maxine, her expanded knowledge about the physical world gave her a sense of command in the broader physical world. This manifested itself emotionally in a new confidence around her movement through the world:
You feel less scared of the world and a lot more in control...you have more confidence about being able to deal with things that come up. Maxine didn’t think that it changed who she was a person, ‘but slowly it changes your relationship to the world.’ For these feminist tradeswomen having trade knowledge not only gave them confidence in how to use their bodies to engage with physical problems, this confidence extended into their approach to the physical and social world in general. This meant that the physical body meant less to them than the attitude they brought to their work and that their work brought to them. This suggested that the strength and skill which men have often used to justify the segregation of trades was not crucial to the work. Instead, these women suggested that the ‘secret club’ which men reserved through this segregation limited women’s access to a sense of physical possibility and confidence.

Not all tradeswomen discussed the skills they learnt in trades as gendered. As a heterosexual woman who did not identify with feminism, Maria, while recognising the potential of trades to expand skills and change attitudes, did not see this as distinctively gendered. Maria described how the skills she acquired as a mechanic were useful to problem solving outside her trade:

Being a mechanic you learn to think logically and practically and you learn to fix stuff and it goes further than just fixing things physically. It’s also about fixing things emotionally or mentally or if you’ve got a problem or a financial problem. I’m like, OK this is the strategy, right we’ll do this and we’ll do this and then I’ll take it right through to the end where I think my hubbie has no short term goals...where I will manage things all the way ‘til they’re fixed. Maria believed that her trade skills allowed her to transform the non-physical world into tangible elements that could be worked with and fixed - just as she would have broken down the problem of a car. Her experience in a heterosexual relationship meant that Maria did not see these problem solving skills as gendered, recognising that not having trade training her husband did not have an innate knowledge of how to do what she had been trained to. While the skills and the attitudes, approaches and confidence of trades may have been reserved for men, Maria’s relationship suggested that many men remained unskilled in these areas and, like women, ignorant of the processes they involved.
Women in IT: Presentation of the body

Women working in IT did not engage in such physical work. Indeed, nearly all of them discussed the difficulties involved in the sedentary nature of their work. However, for women who worked in IT their bodies were still made salient, useful and highly visible in different situations at work. This occurred most for women who worked in management and communications roles. Unlike the manual tradeswomen or even the programmers who were ultimately judged on the product they constructed, for women in management and communication roles their bodies often stood in place of the product. Therefore these women talked extensively about embodying professionalism through dress and deportment. Just as women in trades were trained in how to use their bodies most effectively, some women in IT talked about being instructed informally and in workshops about presenting their bodies appropriately. However, more often, women described acquiring their knowledge about how to present their bodies passively. They became highly literate in reading organisations, employees and clients in order that they would embody the appropriate worker. As already seen in Cassie’s case study, this often meant attempting to control the body and the way other people viewed it, particularly through dress.

In a number of interviews with women in IT, interview participants repeated what must have been a mantra at women in leadership conferences in the sector: ‘You can’t be what you can’t see.’ Standing alone this sounded like a rather existential statement but for at least two of the IT professionals the phrase resonated in very practical ways. For them, it meant that they had to find a mentor, somebody, but preferably a woman, who was in a position that they wanted in order that they could see what that looked like. Both women took this quite literally, using it to inform their choice of dress and the way they behaved toward others. What these women seemed to be doing was emulating a recognised version of success in order that they could prepare for and share in it. However, returning to the more existential element of the statement, what it implied was that these women couldn’t ever be the first, they could never pioneer a new vision. Instead, what was crucial was that they made themselves visibly recognisable within an established set of codes. For women entering male-dominated fields this meant repeating a set of codes that have been established by men.
For women in management or more senior roles dress was discussed as a tool with which to express both their power and their solidarity. From a very young age Ruby was taken to her parents’ doctors surgery and expected to do small jobs. Her mother gave Ruby and her sisters uniforms to wear while they were working and Ruby saw this as an early training in how to look professional. She learnt that she needed to dress differently for work in order to symbolise a position and facilitate a relation. This carried through to Ruby’s approach to dress as a manager. In her role, she talked to people in the corporate environment and in rural communities. Ruby saw dressing contextually as showing an awareness of who she was working with and for:

So in a ministerial and corporate environment I want to be authoritative, considered, measured and where I’m with the wonderful women in the women’s constituency, I just want to be one of the sisters coming together trying to solve gender equality issues.

Jessica similarly found knowledge around appropriate forms of dress for different work contexts an important source of her own power and control. She was infuriated when her company told her that she could wear casual clothes on Fridays, declaring she was intelligent enough to know what to wear when. Like Ruby, Jessica recognised that dressing contextually was an important part of managerial embodiment. Dress and dressing appropriately was about being able to read business situations and arguably was a form of hidden labour for these women who saw it as integral to their performance as managers, but a personal rather than institutional responsibility.

Unlike Ruby and Jessica who were both trained as children in middle class families to be professionally appropriate, other senior women described going to more active lengths to take advantage of their embodiment at work. Wei described how she strictly followed rules around wearing appropriately powerful colours at work, rules she had learnt during a number of workshops conducted by companies where she had worked. Zan similarly dressed to assert her authority at work, explaining that she felt most powerful in a meeting when she ‘dressed like a man.’ For these women, dress was more black and white. Their sense of power dressing emerged from rules they were taught or saw clearly reflected in the male-dominated workplace.

For women in less senior roles dressing inappropriately had its costs. Ashima described this particularly vividly when moving jobs in India. Despite the fact that her
new workplace was in a socially progressive city, most of the people working in the
new company had come from rural and regional India to make their futures in IT:

As soon as I realised this office was like that, and it’s so obvious, you can go
and you can feel it immediately. It’s not like somebody has to tell you. You
can look and you can know that you are not going to be able to…and I
remember, my dressing started to tone down immediately.

Like the women above, Ashima read the organisation to determine what she would
wear. Like Ruby, her literacy about what was appropriate emerged from her
childhood. Ashima recognised that in this organisation her body felt similar to the
way it had when she’d been growing up in a strict Brahman family. Ashima knew
how to transform what she felt into what she should wear and how she should behave.

While she had been wearing jeans in her previous workplace, in the new company she
wore salwar kameez, a more traditional dress for Indian women. Ashima also stopped
smoking and drinking because she knew that she had to hide these behaviours if she
wanted to be respected.

For Ashima, her body literacy did not give her the same sense of empowerment it
gave women in management and senior roles. Instead, while the literacy was required
of her to be respected in the workplace, Ashima also described it as a kind of giving
in. Embedded in her description of moderating her dress and behaviour to the new
workplace was Ashima’s justification for why she didn’t rebel. She explained that, ‘It
just wasn’t worth’ being different. Ashima overheard women talk about other women
in derogatory ways if they showed cleavage or weren’t coy about their bodies.
Ashima said:

But it’s so hard, you think, it’s just not worth it, I don’t want to take that on, I
have enough already, I have things to do I don’t want to take on another
pressure of people judging me. And it’s strong, it’s strong when somebody is
judging you… The only way it changes is if they got to like me and realised I
was a nice person. Then they would think it’s not such a bad thing but it’s not
something you can take with you because it’s immediately attaching a label to
yourself and saying, whether or not you want it. And I was just not willing to
carry that.

Ashima’s choice to dress appropriately for the workplace was a way of avoiding the
labour of being a minority among women. As seen in the previous chapter, being a
gender minority became a form of labour in male-dominated workplaces. In dressing appropriately, Ashima tried to avoid the double burden of being a minority among women so that she could do her job.

While Ashima felt inhibitions being placed on her dress as though they were in the air, Lucinda, like Claire in case study VI, had been more directly counselled about dressing appropriately at work. Lucinda was typical of the programmers I interviewed in that she strongly valued the lack of restrictions around what she wore at work. That said, Lucinda, who described herself as dressing eccentrically, had been asked to moderate her clothing on two occasions. On the first, an executive had asked her boss to ask her to ‘tone down’ her dress. Lucinda’s boss ignored the request though reported it to Lucinda in jest. Lucinda did not adjust her dress with this information, but continued to wear bright colours that made her happy and which were not usually associated with the corporate environment. When starting at a new company, Lucinda was warned that certain men in the company viewed women’s bodies sexually, particularly if they wore revealing clothes. This did change her approach:

I don’t mind people noticing [her dress] but I’ve been warned where I am now that some of the people ogle rather than just glance. So I’ve been careful when I go to the head office that I don’t wear something revealing…I haven’t noticed anyone do it. That’s what I’ve been told.

For Lucinda the joy and freedom that she felt through her eccentric dress was not censored by what was appropriate in the workplace generally. However, her freedom was curtailed by an institutional knowledge that had been passed from woman to woman that dress could effect how a woman was sexualised in specific places in the workplace.

Kylie, another programmer, discussed the ways in which casual dress did not necessarily mean that dress was any less complex or less gendered:

K: But yeah I think it’s really true that there’s no unmarked way for women to dress ever and even in IT you’re in an open source thing, you’re doing it to fit in, possibly because I’m a woman, it’s still noticeable that I’m doing that to fit in. You can’t escape it. And you can’t, because there’s no uniform and there’s no unmarked clothes, you just can’t predict how people, different people will interpret what you’re wearing. So when I wear jeans and t-shirt, I really want
to say, you know, we’ve got the same value systems, it’s all about the code, I’m there with you. And I do like this geeky idea of wearing your heart on your t-shirt. It’s like, if someone gets it, it’s like, ahh, we have something in common, I really like that, yeah.

I: But you still feel read as a woman before you’re read as that?

K: I assume that that’s what happens because I don’t know how you could not notice and yeah, I, it’s about the closest to opting out of choosing as you can get really, in terms of choosing how you want to be represented

Kylie thought that her adoption of a kind of geek uniform meant that she would be understood by other geeks as partaking in their humour, knowledge and culture. However, she recognised that this solidarity was interrupted by her gender and by being a gender minority. Kylie’s statement that ‘there’s no unmarked way for women to dress’ suggested that she felt that her body was always read as being female before or at the same time as it was read for what it was wearing. As such, the body literacy required by women in the workplace was different and arguably more complex than that required of men. These women were so aware of what they wore at work and in different work situations because they were never unmarked, their bodies were always being read.

While women were aware of the importance of their dress, only one woman, Jessica, who had been the CIO of a multinational IT company, described using her body, gender and sexuality as a resource in business. When I asked Jessica how she presented her body at work she said that she presented herself much the same as when she was in a non-work environment. Jessica explained that her looks had been important to her ever since she had begun a sexual relationship with her husband. Jessica’s looks being associated with her sexual relationship with a man became a theme in the interview. For Jessica the importance of her looks meant that they needed to be managed and controlled. She weighed herself everyday despite being naturally thin and was committed to an intense exercise programme.

This sense of managing and controlling situations through the presentation of her body was more important to Jessica than her dress,
I don’t wear plunging necklines because that’s not my style. You smile at
people, you look at them. You make, a smile makes you attractive. You don’t
try to hide when you’re at the boardroom. You’re very natural. You dressed
OK. You dressed well. You act comfortably, like you would with a group of
friends but businesslike. And just as any woman knows, if a man is slightly
attracted to you, you can tell by some of his little reactions and you can make
use of it. You can smile at that person a bit more. You don’t have to go and
sleep with them, you don’t have to do anything further than that. If you get the
feeling that someone is appreciative actually. If you think that someone thinks
you’re attractive, I take that as a compliment. And so you know you’ve got
one more potential ally, if there’s going to be a business decision or whatever
it is.

In this extract Jessica shifted quickly from the first to the second person. So despite
saying that she presented herself no differently at home and at work, Jessica’s
grammatical choice distanced her from her choices, making her presentation at work a
generic rather than personal one. Her attempt to generalise her experiences as the
experiences of many women was also seen when she said, ‘as any woman knows.’
The gendered knowledge Jessica was referring to was a distinctively heterosexual one
in which Jessica used the ‘attractive’ female body to facilitate business with men. It
would seem using the body in this way would not be possible if the industry was not
male dominated, though some have argued that male management culture operated
using similar erotic subtexts (Hearn, 1992; Roper 1994, 1996). While Jessica’s
description began with a reference to stereotypically sexually provocative dress
(‘plunging necklines’), she went on to suggest that it was actually deportment that
formed ‘natural,’ comfortable and friendly connections with men and which was the
most useful. Jessica’s sense of power around her embodiment relied both on the fact
that she was a desirable woman and that she knew how to maximise her desirability
by making it seem approachable in a professional environment which demanded
distance.

**Integrating and disintegrating the self**

For women trades and IT work had the potential to make them feel both completely
whole and completely uncertain. When fully engaged in the work itself, in using
highly skilled processes in solving problems, many of the women in both industries described a sense of oneness with the work. It was as though they became the work and it became them. Because of the different physical processes in trades and IT, this manifested itself in different ways, particularly in relation to the body.

When discussing the embodiment of tradeswomen, I described Maxine’s enjoyment of her body at work as being augmented by a sense of its integration with her politics. For a number of other women who didn’t identify as feminists, work in manual trades made them feel integrated within themselves. For Eva working in cabinet-making made her feel ‘absolutely complete.’ Eva described it in terms of an embodied engagement in which every different aspect of herself was connected in the completion of something she produced:

Having engaged the thinking and the feeling then you are a whole person. It is fantastic, it just makes you...you are so satisfied by what you have done because it has there is a completion in your thinking that has somehow been engaged...The use of the body is necessary to feel integrated and complete. But what makes the job satisfying is that it has required a thinking process to determine how to use the body to produce what you want.

Maria stressed a similar thing:

As a mechanic you’re using everything. It’s your brain and your body and your intuition. It’s this achievement.

For these women, the enjoyment they gained from working in their trade emerged from their body and mind both being used to solve a problem. They felt ‘integrated and complete’ because they used ‘everything.’

While IT did not engage the physical body in the way women in trades felt necessary for integration, a number of the women in the highly technical areas of IT also described themselves as being completely absorbed in and with their work. Kylie explained that this state was actually regarded in the industry as a crucial condition for good programming. Focus and absorption over long periods of time were recognised as necessary to solve abstract problems:

As a programmer you put a lot of concentration in and there's this real importance attached to 'the flow.' It's called 'being in the flow.' It's like 'being in the zone' and you don't have all these distractions and you’re
thinking really hard about the problem at hand and that kind of encourages you sometimes to sit there, really in the same shape, really still, longer than you should. I get up, I don’t get up as often as I should but I get up at least for morning tea breaks and lunch and walk around and try to shake it out a bit. And so for the last two years I’ve put on a lot of weight and I’ve been really sedentary.

Unlike manual trades people for whom feeling completely integrated with one’s work involved connecting the body and mind, for people in IT it involved disassociating from the body - leaving the body and its distractions behind and pursuing another zone, a disembodied reality. Indeed, Kylie implied that the body needed to be immobile in order for the mind’s movement to be the most productive. Kylie recognised that while this was considered the ideal programmer, it was not ideal for her body. This sense of integration with work, then, was not as unreservedly euphoric as it was for the tradeswomen. It implied a necessary loss. In many ways it could be compared to the kind of ‘flow’ discussed earlier in Jane’s case study, where her enjoyment in the labour processes meant that her life had been caught in that flow, her personal life lost beneath the rip of the ideal worker.

Women in IT who were most likely to feel integrated in their work were those who strongly identified with the technical aspects of it. For these women their experiences of technology were positive and often allowed them to strengthen their social worlds within and beyond work. Kylie and Bianca, two programmers in their early twenties, were the strongest examples of this. Both of them had gotten into IT because computers had always played an important part in expanding their social worlds. Both had felt isolated growing up and had used the Internet to form strong communities that made them feel connected to like-minded people and reduced their sense of isolation. Kylie and Bianca continued to centre their lives around computer technology, their social worlds being largely focused on computer based activities, forums and games.

For some women in IT who were not a part of this generation of ‘digital natives’ (Prensky, 2001) technology was embraced as allowing them to more easily integrate their work and social worlds. Cassie explained that while she mainly avoided technology as a social tool, she and her husband did use email to communicate about
household matters, largely to free up their face-to-face time together. Similarly, Ruby was passionate about the potentials of technology to maintain a ‘work life balance,’ allowing her to have more flexibility, work from home and integrate work into her family life.

While the work itself made some women feel integrated, the social relations in the workplaces had the potential to make interview participants feel lonely, alienated and unhappy. Many women felt that their sense of connection to their work was interrupted and inhibited by men narrowing in on parts of their bodies, gender and sexuality.

In Hanna’s interview she explained that after working in the ‘hallowed world of men...the bloke’s world’ she needed to be ‘put back together.’ The opposite of being made whole, Hanna’s experience of work made her feel like she had fallen apart. Such experiences drew women’s attention away from their work and onto their gender, their bodies and their sexuality in relation to the men with whom they were working. As seen in Zadie’s case study, the intense intimidation she received from a male tradesmen deeply affected her relationship with her work and her self. She explained that one man’s suggestions that she might get raped made the whole workplace feel unsafe. Rather than centring on her work, Zadie felt she had to ‘be on edge.’

None of the women I interviewed in IT experienced such overt discrimination. However, many of them did feel their gendered bodies as interrupting their focus on their work. Because there were so few women in many of the IT workplaces, women felt their gender difference even when it was not being drawn attention to. As seen in the previous chapter, Ashima felt the significance of her gender in the air but had nothing to attribute it to. Ashima experienced this most acutely on her body. She knew that as one of the only women in a male-dominated workplace she was watched as she walked through the office. The day of the interview she’d torn her skirt and had felt uncomfortable all day at work.

As seen in the discussion of dress above, many women in IT dressed to mediate this male gaze, either drawing attention away from or towards their bodies. Their sense of
dress either being firmly integrated into their labour process or distracting them from it. As seen in the discussion of managerial dress, for some women in IT dressing appropriately became integrated into the way they perceived themselves as professionals. For most women, however, this self-consciousness around the presentation of the body was felt as an unnecessary intrusion on their work. Bianca was particularly aware of how her body looked from behind when she was sitting, wearing layers of clothes to ensure that flesh below her arms was not exposed. As seen in Cassie’s case study, her cognisance of her body’s recalcitrance (its sweating, excreting and breathing) in the workplace required constant maintenance, surveillance and worry.

While technology had the potential to help women integrate their work and social life, Ruby tempered her enthusiasm about the potentials of technology by explaining that it was ‘a double edge sword.’ Ruby explained that bringing technology into the home meant that while she might be physically present with her family, she was not necessarily emotionally present for them. Ruby tried to avoid being emotionally detached by placing restrictions around her use of technology. Technology had the potential to dislocate individuals and displace intimate relations.

This potential was experienced by many IT workers as creating an alienating workplace. Ashima and Cassie felt this as one of the most disheartening aspects of work in IT. Ashima believed that none of the companies she worked for had an understanding of the importance of fostering or caring for their social bodies. She envied the strong sense of community her partner gained from his colleagues in teaching. As seen in Cassie’s case study, this lack of community in the workplace was often created by the labour processes involved in the work, where people come to work, sat at their computers and then left without even saying hello. Two women, however, found that this culture suited their personalities. As self-described loners they explained that they did not want to make friends at work. For them the disengagement allowed by technology was important to their sense of work.
Work damaging the body

Both manual trades and much IT work required the body to repeat certain actions over and over again. While the kinds of tasks being repeated were extremely different - heavy manual work in trades and sedentary precision work in IT - both kinds of repetition created significant stress on the body. Most women found that this stress affected their bodies at and beyond work and needed to be constantly managed. Both in and outside of work, most of the women I interviewed made significant efforts to reduce the physical impact of work on their bodies, their work dramatically changing the way they related to other physical activities in their lives.

Despite all of the manual tradeswomen discussing the pleasures of using their physical bodies, they were all simultaneously aware of the physical dangers and costs of trade work. The physical dangers of trade work were primarily about scale. When constructing or servicing the physical world huge pieces of material (beams, cars, roofs) needed to be lifted, moved and positioned. A person was very small and insignificant in comparison to these large objects, in fact, three of the tradeswomen stressed that they were only five foot two. Lynne described this vulnerability beautifully with the example of when she was trying to put on a roof:

You know you’re in these frightening situations where you might be on the end of a big beam or something that’s got to go in. I had a really scary situation where we’d taken a piece of roof sheeting off a place in Enmore. We were doing a third storey addition, and we’d pulled the tarp over the top and this huge gust of wind just grabbed the tarp and for a minute the two of us were just airborne on this tarp and it’s moments like that when you think you’re really quite vulnerable. [...] I guess if you stop to think, if that slipped...

Given the strength and energy required in manual trades, many of the women described it as physically unsustainable work, stressing that there weren’t many old people ‘on the tools.’ While the inference was that older people didn’t have the
strength to do the work, there was also the theme throughout the interviews that constant exposure to the physical demands of the work ruined the body. A number of women, like Zadie, left trades because of physical injuries to the body. As young tradeswomen both Jesse and Nancy had career plans which meant that they weren’t doing on the tools trade work into their forties, Nancy explicitly choosing maintenance rather than construction so that she could, ‘Do it ‘til I am eighty.’

Two women, one from both industry, found the physical strain of their work needed to be managed by dramatically changing their employment situation and the way they did their work. Kate had trained as a horticulturalist in the late eighties and thoroughly enjoyed working as a gardener. Only four years into this, however, she began to suffer from physical exhaustion and pains in her body, making the physical work of horticulture impossible. Kate spent the next four years on sickness benefits. Diagnosed with chronic fatigue, Kate would spend 18 hours a day in bed, finding the most basic forms of physical activity such as eating and showering exhausting. For Kate, who defined herself by her physicality, not being able to do anything caused a huge shift in the way she managed her physicality:

I used to go to the gym and I’d be working really hard and you know everything is going really well and it is just like bang brick wall.

While in her recovery at the time of the interview Kate still did manual work, she spent considerable time and energy managing what kinds of physical work she did to ensure that she equally distributed the strain on her body. To do this Kate did three different types of work, working part time at a nursery, doing her own cabinet-making and attending to odd jobs for friends:

K: I know that for a couple of days it is going to be lots of pot lifting and blah blah blah or those sorts of things, moving all the plants around the nursery, fitting it up and then emptying it out and that sort of stuff, and then there is other things where I might do some carving, so it will be more intense and I will know, you know, I do know that after I do a lot of that sort of stuff my hands and my wrists and my neck will ache because it is much more intense and it is much more upper body, whereas then if I was gardening it is a lot more lower body, you know lifting with your quads and your stomach and digging and those sorts of things, it is all that sort of stuff. So trying to have a
variety of things rather than just doing one thing makes a big difference to the
physical.

I: It sounds like you are managing your body

K: Yeah, and yeah when I took the like the pain management lessons that is
what they say as well actually, it is managing your condition and, you know,
and not just going, Oh I can't do that, you know because once you start saying
that you end up being worse and for me my spirit would die.

Kate, like many of the other women, talked about this kind of management of the
physical body as being essential for all trade work. Kate noted that when she worked
in either of her trades she knew her body was at risk unless she managed it. Kate said
that when she has not done this had suffered injuries; getting stress fractures and
slipping and hurting her neck and back. To avoid this, Kate tried to 'work smart' with
her body, she learnt how not to depend on strength but instead on thinking:

I am not a big person but I often think I am bigger than I am. But it is finding
new approaches and getting the job done and looking at how you are going to
move a piece of furniture. Like for me by myself, right, getting a piece of
furniture from my car to the shed or from the shed to the car, you know, I
either make it so I can dismantle it and I can assemble it onsite, or I make it so
that I can attach wheels or put it on a trolley and move it that way or get
somebody else to give me a hand. But you are constantly thinking and to me it
is just second nature but a lot of people don't think how you are going to
actually... [...] It is not just an idea it is a physical thing and you do have to
sort that out.

Like other tradeswomen who enjoyed thinking about the physical problems of a task,
Kate recognised that thinking was essential to trade work. But her stress was on
thinking about how to use the body, thinking about how to be physical. As already
seen in the case studies, this notion of smart work and embodiment became a
persistent theme in the interviews with tradeswomen, many of whom saw the quick,
rough and thoughtless approaches of many tradesmen as particularly masculine,
unsafe and needlessly costly to the physical body.
As seen in Cassie's case study, IT also had the potential to physically damage the body. Like Kate, her physical injuries sustained at work meant that she had to manage her work around her body. Women in senior management positions found that it was the stress and exhaustion caused by their labour processes that had the most significant impact on their bodies. Wei's hair went white at twenty, Jane had to stop work and Cassie believes that it caused her to suffer two miscarriages. For these women the significant costs on their bodies resulted in what they termed 'burn out' and meant that they couldn't continue with their work. It was as though their work had consumed their body's fuel.

A number of the tradeswomen criticised the masculinist culture of trade workplaces as encouraging tradesmen to use their bodies unsafely. Nancy explained that in trades 'you're with a lot of guys who want to prove their masculinity.' Proving masculinity in this context often meant lifting heavy weights and doing work quickly. For Nancy not needing to prove her masculinity meant that she was able to do the work more safely and effectively. Nancy continued:

I don't need to prove, I don't need to be a hero, I don't care about that stuff. I pick my battles...I don't want to stuff up my back. I want to be smart about it. Lot's of boys are not smart about it and that's why their bodies are really fucked.

While not all of the tradeswomen were as comfortable as Nancy was to pass on the physical costs associated with heavy trade work to men, many did discuss their gender as a point of difference which allowed them to approach their work more safely. Rather than hurt their bodies Zadie, Eva, Kate, Lisa, Lynne and Jesse described learning how to engage with the physical world thoughtfully. This was particularly the case for the women who ran their own businesses or were self-employed and had the power and flexibility to develop alternative work practices. Eva described developing alternative means to move objects rather than simply using brute force:

I learnt how to use leverage and you know as long as I had someone to help me get it from the car to the work bench but that would be all, then I would put it down on whatever, sawhorses or something and from there on I would be able to work it just through using the weight and leverage, and then of course with power tools, I could not do what I have done without power tools.
As a young horticulturalist, Samantha did not find that working smart or using her gender as a point of difference was an effective strategy. In horticultural work Samantha felt that heavy lifting was often unavoidable and that being able to literally ‘pull your weight’ was often seen as essential to being able to do the work. Samantha described one situation when at the end of a day a large amount of soil had to be carried up two flights of stairs. The two men she was working with carried wheelie bins, a quarter full of soil on their shoulders. Samantha knew that there was ‘no way in hell’ that she could do that. Because she was only able to carry a comparatively small amount, Samantha’s workmates ‘bitched’ and ‘clicked [their] tongue at me.’ Samantha’s inability to lift as much made her a liability to the men’s work speed. As young and new to the occupation, Samantha didn’t feel that she could interject in the men’s work practices by suggesting alternative and safer means of doing the work. Without this power, her body was still put on the line and positioned her as an inferior worker.

For the women working in the more sedentary areas of IT, gender was not articulated as an issue which allowed women to intervene in their unsafe embodiment at work. In part this was because the labour processes which inflict the physical costs of the work in IT were often physically invisible and individual. Unlike manual trades, in which the physical world usually needed to be visibly altered by the active engagement of the tradesperson’s body, in many IT labour processes, progress and change could all take place while the IT worker was sedentary. As discussed in the previous chapter, a number of my interview participants stressed that the ideal IT worker was a person who could sit still for a long time. So while in manual trades the labour processes formed a direct link with the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, the IT labour processes were less directly physically linked to the active, strong and virile male body. While for many tradeswomen their distance from this form of masculinity made their gender a useful resource in creating alternative embodiments at work, for women in IT hegemonic masculinity was not so clearly enacted in the physical performance of the male body in labour processes, meaning that gender was not a useful point of intervention to risky embodiment at work.
All of the IT interview participants discussed managing the strain of labour processes on the body outside of work rather than in the workplace. All of them, and I think the lack of exception here is significant, stressed the importance of regular exercise to their health. As seen in the case studies of women working in IT, all three saw exercise as a way of balancing the sedentary nature of their work. Four women in the larger sample discussed this balance as particularly necessary for their weight, knowing that their sedentary work had at times resulted in significant and uncomfortable weight gain. However, many of the women saw exercise as a way of balancing something more essential to themselves. Like the tradeswomen who felt that the physical aspects of the work were necessary for them to feel whole, women in IT often felt that exercise allowed them the opportunity to feel integrated. Cassie described her daily run as her ‘sanity’. Zan described herself as her ‘best’ when she’d been exercising.

Jessica provided the best example of this. Jessica had been a long distance runner since she was 30. Working in IT around the world she’d found running useful for her professional, social and emotional life. Jessica explained that running had been useful for her work:

It’s great for the mind. I used to say when I was a programmer and I had issues to resolve, I’d go for a run and the solution would come to me while I was running.

Like tradeswomen, Jessica’s sense of integration at work arose from both the physical and the mental. Jessica used a physical exercise to stimulate an intellectual one, an experience which contrasted with Kylie’s description of being motionlessly ‘in the flow.’ Probably the most significant aspect of running for Jessica, however, was that it enabled her to create embodied social bonds, which other women in IT lamented not being able to form in their disembodied workplaces. Moving to a new city, Jessica would not rely on social networks at work but would instead join a running club. Jessica’s description of the bond formed through running was one of the most poetic and emotionally engaged moments in the interview:

And I think that running, especially distance, you become really close to people, because you’re out going for a Sunday morning run of 30km and you talk about a whole heap of stuff but also your body experiences a lot. It goes through a whole heap of experiences over that time and you know that those
people around you, who you’re just chatting with as you’re running, are probably experiencing the same thing. You don’t ever express that to each other, but at the end of that you’ve lived through something that only that group knows and understands. And it’s the same as running a marathon. Until you’ve run a marathon, people used to say to me, you’ll see, it changes things, things are different. And it was. And until you’ve done it you don’t know what the body goes through to push you to do that and where the mind goes to make the body just keep doing something where only your mind is making it go, everything else about your body is saying stop, stop, stop. Stop that next foot fall in front of the other. But you get into another space, it’s weird, very weird. I can’t describe it. So all of those people in the long distance running club will have experienced that, many of them have and you share something else with them. And I would just love to finish work, pack up and run with a group of people after work. It’s a great great feeling.

The shared embodied knowledge of the marathon runner was similar to the empowering embodied knowledges described by a number of tradeswomen who, like Jessica, found that this knowledge connected them to a new world and a new group of people. Unlike most women in IT who had difficulty isolating how their body was gendered at work, Jessica, a senior IT manager in her late 50s was very clear that she had used her gender and sexuality as a resource. So while Jessica’s description of running required her body to be disciplined, just as it was at work, her description did not gender the body or sexualise its connection with others. Instead the relationships between running bodies was stripped back to something unexplainable, a connection only achieved by bodies pushing themselves through pain and motion together.

Because Jessica’s running, and other participants’ exercise, existed outside of work and as determined by the individual, it was not an integrated part of the embodiment of the IT worker. Instead, for women in IT, balancing the costs of sedentary work on their bodies became a crucial personal discipline and responsibility. There was a tacit acceptance that there was no way of doing IT work which wouldn’t be unbalanced and place strain on the body. So rather than attempt to change their embodiment at work, all of the IT workers used time outside of work to counteract the damage work had done to their physical, social and psychological bodies. In all cases this involved a significant investment of time. In many cases it also involved investing money in
buying physical fitness classes. Maintaining the body outside of work so that it could be sedentary for long periods became a kind of subsidiary work in itself. But significantly, one which was unpaid.

A number of women who worked for IT companies explained that there was some awareness of the physical costs of computer work. The companies provided ergonomic chairs and keyboards and breakout spaces where employees could do something different with their bodies like play table tennis or sit on a massage chair. Before interviewing Bianca, her boss enthusiastically encouraged her to show me the roof. It turned out that ‘the roof’ was a 10m by 10m square of astro-turfed concrete. Bianca explained that this was so that employees could enjoy the sun at lunch and maybe kick a soccer ball around. Bianca had never seen anyone use the space for this purpose and it was empty on my lunchtime visit. Three of the women also described the breakout rooms in their companies with some scepticism. None of them had ever used the rooms and explained that most often people were playing computer games they’d created in them rather than playing table tennis.

Fleming (2005) found similar cynicism in some employees in companies which attempted to manufacture fun cultures by blurring work and non-work boundaries through the incorporation of leisure activities and discourses at work. However, unlike in Fleming’s study where his participants were cynical about the inauthentic and pervasive creation of fun, for women in IT it seemed that it was the peripheral position of these fun physical activities which created the cynicism. Within demanding and high-pressure work environments these women felt that such rooms were not in keeping with the overall anti-social and intense culture of the workplaces. Indeed, the companies’ attempts to care for the bodies of their workers often correlated with the level of stress and time pressures they placed on them. Two of the women discussed how lunch and dinner were provided by their companies, a practice which emerged when the workplaces had high pressure deadlines. Providing the evening meal structured the companies’ work practices around the expectation that workers could still be at work at dinnertime.
Mothering: an ergonomic nightmare

For women in trades, the relationship between embodiment at work and in personal life was in some ways the reverse to that of women in IT. Women working in manual trades had extensive experience with the body, their work had trained them how to use it safely and wisely. However, life beyond work presented their physical body with much less predictable challenges, the most significant of which was mothering.

All of the mothers stressed that mothering young children was much more physically difficult than working in trades. Maria’s described how physically draining the practical tasks of parenting were in contrast to the empowerment she felt when doing physical work as a mechanic:

M: Just getting kids in and out of the car everyday...is really physically tough. I just felt physically drained of energy. We’d be in the car and we’d stop and we’d be out the front of the place and I’d think I just can’t get the kids out. We’ll just sit here. And they’d be like mum what are we doing. And I’d just have to psyche myself up for it.

I: Did you ever feel like that when you were a mechanic?

M: No. No way. I always felt like tough and powerful.

Paradoxically, trades historically excluded women on the basis of their physical weakness, when all along women’s work involved in mothering required more physical strength. As seen in Lisa’s case study, mothering was also an ‘ergonomic nightmare’. While in a trade one had safety standards to follow, when mothering it was much more difficult to maintain safe practices when lifting or moving a baby or child around.

This unsafe use of the body was similar to the way Lisa, and many other women, described young tradesmen using their bodies when they begin their trade. Lifting weights that were much too heavy, not thinking about the consequences on their body, and not being smart. All of the women I interviewed were highly critical of this form of macho embodiment in which boys and men would risk their bodies for their machismo. However, in parenting, women found themselves using their bodies in ways that were as unsmart and risky as the boys they had criticised. And despite
spending their work lives taking the trouble to avoid using their bodies in these ways, they felt that their domestic role as a good mother left them no alternative.

**Conclusion**

Experiences of the body at work changed women's perception of the world. Through doing work usually done by the male body and in male dominated workplaces, women had access to particularly gendered skills, knowledge and ways of knowing their bodies. This knowledge altered their perceptions of how physical and virtual worlds were constructed, of their bodies' capabilities to manipulate objects and situations, and of their gender. The fact that women in trades did not believe that trade work necessitated intense strength or unattainable skill suggested that the correlation usually made between trade work and masculine strength was one of the ways men ensured a segregation of labour, and sustained a hegemonic masculinity tied to the body. Similarly, the embodied knowledge women gained from trade work meant that they could reflect on the physicality of mothering, recognising that this particularly gendered form of labour was physically more challenging than the labour in trades. Doing gender-anomalous work often gave women physical experiences which caused them to question or at least feel at odds with gender regimes. The contradictions that women experienced between their embodiment at work and how they were expected to embody gender became a theme in most of the interviews, and form the basis for the next chapter.

Connell (2005) argued that gender always referred back to the body. For this reason, for women in highly embodied labour, such as trades, gender was constantly being made salient. For these women sexism was usually overt and deeply impinged on their day-to-day work life. However, the prominence of gender in the workplace also meant that these women could utilise it as a tool, justifying their rejection of unsafe 'masculine' work practices for slower but safer ones. This meant that the physical work that consumed the bodies of men did not have the same effect on women who, not needing to maintain their masculinity, worked 'smart.'

In the IT industry, in which labour processes were usually recognised as distanced from the body, gender was interrelated more subtly. Women in IT were often aware of
the significance of their gender in the workplace but found it difficult to articulate or describe exact instances where they had been treated differently. The disembodied labour processes meant that women in IT did not use their gender as an excuse to avoid the physical risks of their work. But despite their gender and their bodies being largely unrecognised within the labour processes, women felt that their bodies were constantly recognised and visible in the male dominated workplaces.

While the embodied nature of trade work meant that tradeswomen could be judged on what their bodies physically did, the disembodied nature of much IT work meant that women's bodies became symbolic of their relation to work. Rather than the body doing work, the presentation of the body became about being at work, in particular, being at work as a woman. As such, women in IT described themselves as engaging in a kind of body literacy. They read situations, organisations and other bodies to ascertain how they should present their own bodies. Women in management or more senior roles recognised body literacy as a powerful tool which they transformed into an essential part of their labour process. For other women, the constant reflection on their own bodies through the prism of their workplace relations, while inescapable, were also frustrating and inhibited their full engagement with their work. The need to be body literate was gendered. As a gender minority, women's bodies stood out in the workplace, amplifying a cultural imperative which made women's bodies highly visible.
Chapter Twelve: Gender Contradictions

Introduction

Underpinning this study was an understanding that women who worked in male-dominated trades and IT were, at least in terms of their work, rupturing the gender order. This rupture, however, was not experienced as a simple act of resistance. Instead working in gender-anomalous work often meant negotiating contradictions around gender. While production relations did at times mean that women challenged emotional relations at work and in the family, being a wife and being a mother proved particularly coercive relations in the gender order, often bringing women back into more normative gender relations. In order to sustain work in gender-anomalous occupations and to reconcile the contradictions they experienced at work and at home women developed a range of resources. While in some cases these were political resources which challenged the gender order, in most cases these resources appropriated and incorporated normative versions of heterosexuality and femininity.

One of the boys?

Throughout the interviews, a number of women described either themselves or other women they worked with as being ‘one of the boys.’ As discussed in Chapter 9, Maria, Saskia and Jessica partly chose to work in male dominated fields because they preferred male company. Rather than define their connection with men and male culture through their shared work, these women saw their ability to be one of the boys as arising from their deep understanding of the expectations of heterosexual masculine cultures, particularly around the normative male and female body. These women’s understanding of their embodiment was central to their experience of gender as contradictory. Being one of the boys meant that their bodies could do what men’s bodies did. However, ironically, and this was where the contradiction lay, being one of the boys also meant maintaining that despite what they could do they were ultimately still women. These women moved swiftly and skilfully between working, speaking and socialising in ways which mimicked a type of hegemonic masculinity and drawing on a distinctive heteronormative feminine sexuality. Like Williams’ (1989) study of women in the military, the interview participants did not find the fact that they did masculine work interfered with them being feminine.
Maria, for example, believed that one of the main reasons she was accepted into the group of male mechanics was because she was tough. When I asked Maria what she meant when she described herself as tough, she explained:

You have to be mentally tough to put up with the guys. You have to be. One guy who started was very effeminate and the guys just picked on him so much and he was just useless, like, you know, he couldn’t do anything. You know you have to have your wits about you. You know you’re dealing with stuff that’s hot and it’s quite dangerous. You know, we had fires all the time and crashes. Everyone’s crashing cars because you’re trying to drive around a carpark that’s like an antmaze and it’s really hot as well. You’re wearing overalls and socks and boots and you’re in a workshop with cars running and exhaust fumes. You know, I passed out a few times just from the heat when I started when I was a first year. But, you know, you get used to it after a while. So it was tough in that respect and you were really dirty and you were never allowed to pull your overalls down and wear a t-shirt because it didn’t look good. And people would be in the office saying, ‘Put your overalls on,’ in all the airconditioning and we’d be standing out there saying, ‘It’s 50 degrees out here. Why don’t you come and try it?’ And also it’s heavy, for sure, and I have the bad back to go with it...mainly because I always carried stuff I shouldn’t be carrying. And, you know, my foreman would say, ‘Maria, two people carry that toolbox,’ but as soon as he wasn’t looking I’d just [lift it myself].

Maria began this description of being tough by focussing on the importance of mental toughness. In describing, very briefly, the effeminate man who wasn’t mentally tough enough to withstand harassment, Maria began marking out the clear limitations around the kinds of masculinity that were appropriate for a mechanic. The effeminate man needed to be mentally tough because he wasn’t physically tough enough. It was this form of physical toughness which Maria emphasised in her description. Being physically tough meant being able to subject the body to dangerous and unsafe situations: exposing the body to fumes, heat and weight that was too heavy. During the interview Maria took me outside to show me her toolbox, a metal box about a metre by a metre which I couldn’t budge with two hands. As Maria described, she lifted this alone and against the advice of her supervisors. She inferred that despite her supervisors’ objections, this was the culture of the workplace, a cultural expectation.
which resulted in Maria permanently hurting her back. As in Donaldson (1992) and Paap’s (2006) studies of men in manual work, the expectations of masculine work cultures consumed the body, the performance of the type of masculinity demanded of the work culture being unsustainable, placing both the body and the work in a precarious position. Being one of the boys, then, required Maria to be as tough to her body as men were. Once that was established, Maria described the men thinking it was ‘normal’ to have her in the garage, she said ‘they didn’t even think about it.’

Despite Maria’s descriptions of her tough embodiment and being one of the boys, the story of her labour process clearly marked out the conditions of this position. Towards the end of the interview, I asked Maria about whether her experiences of being tough and physical as a mechanic had had an impact on other areas in her life. Maria replied:

Very much. I’ve always been like that because I’ve always had to look after my sister when my mother was working and she used to drink a lot as well and my sister quite often needed caring. So I always had the ability to think on my feet and manage a situation that might have been out of control. My mum tried to commit suicide a few times and I was the one who had to call an ambulance...I guess from a little girl, I’ve always been put in situations where I had to take control.

Even though Maria initially adamantly agreed that her work had changed her approach to the world, the rest of her response suggested that she had always needed to be tough. In this description, Maria connected taking control of extremely difficult personal situations with the kind of control and resourcefulness she needed when working as a mechanic. For Maria the premature demands to care for others resulted in her being tough and in control, an attitude and approach Maria found suited masculine environments. Arguably, the toughness of the masculine workplace was a relief from Maria’s home life - unlike people, cars could be controlled.

Throughout the interview, Maria repeated that one of the reasons she preferred the company of men was because she didn’t like talking about her nails. Towards the end of the interview, however, Maria recalled that she used to do her nails with sandpaper in her TAFE classes, an activity which prompted laughter from her male classmates. While Maria actively disliked what she considered a feminine preoccupation with
nails, she seemed to parody this recognisable trope to mark out to the boys in her class her separateness from it. However, in alluding to it, Maria not only pointed out the masquerade involved in being a girl, she also highlighted that she was one. This was knowledge she had even if she chose not to use it. After the interview, Maria said without prompting that her femininity did benefit her in the workplace. She said that she ‘got special treatment from the start,’ she wasn’t subjected to the ‘mean tricks’ often involved in an apprentice’s rites of passage, nor did she have to do the ‘shitty jobs.’ Maria was aware that many women were not spared these ‘mean tricks.’ She described one woman who she met at TAFE who was ‘unfeminine’ and who got treated very badly. Maria believed this was because while the men thought that ‘she’s [Maria’s] OK, she’s just a girl doing a man’s kind of job... they thought she was a girl trying to be a man.’

What Maria presented here was a fine line. She had to be tough but not butch, feminine but not effeminate. This contradiction was perhaps best illustrated by Maria’s maintenance of her hair. While nails were worth parodying, hair, apparently, was a serious matter. Maria explained that she had really girly hairstyles. I didn’t even tie my hair back. I did it with hairspray every morning. But I wasn’t into make up or anything like that but the hair always looked good. I never just did it in a pony tail. I don’t know why. I don’t understand that part of me, maybe that was a feminine part of me going out. I remember one day I had this car and I had to take this clip, you know for the window winder, before car windows had to take the handle off and I couldn’t find the clip. The customer was waiting and where the fuck could it be…and so I walked up to the office and said to the girl, ‘This customer’s going to have to take this car without the window winder because the clip’s missing’… and the girl in the office looked and said, ‘Is that it?’ and it had got caught in my hair.

Obviously, this is a funny story, again, Maria’s feminine embodiment in the workplace became a way of her making fun of herself and, potentially, of other women. Maria’s obsession with her hair was confusing to her too (‘I don’t understand that part of me, maybe that was a feminine part of me going on’), showing up the ways in which gender regimes necessarily interpellate without comprehension or
permission. At another point in the interview, she described it as ‘the female part of me,’ the compartmentalising of her gender making it easier for her to understand.

While in the story above, Maria’s hair was a humorous impediment to her work, given her previous descriptions of the tough conditions she worked under, presumably it could also potentially add to the danger of the work too. Hegemonic masculinity might coerce Maria’s body into tough situations, but her commitment to certain feminine embodiment could cause her to get literally stuck in them. The fact that Maria chose to feminise her hair while ridiculing feminine hands was significant. Metcalfe (1995) argued that male hands symbolically became tools that created and transformed him through work:

> When the tool-using hand splits wood or stone, however, ‘man prises open the nature of things and discovers the laws that the structure dictates and reveals.’
> (Bronowski, 1976, as cited in Metcalfe, 1995, p. 106)

But while the *homo faber* story celebrated the masculine hand at work, Metcalfe pointed out that the feminine hand was ignored, thereby denying the importance of ‘nurturing, touching and grooming and of hands-touching-hands in the continuous daily production of the self and body’ (Metcalfe, 1995, p. 124). In a similar way, Maria’s distance from female hands located her within the masculine world of work; her hands like the men’s she worked with were tools for labour. Her feminine hair allowed her to maintain and groom her femininity while her hands worked against it.

While Maria loved the camaraderie of being one of the boys and described working in the garage as the best time in her life, she believed it was the ‘female part of me that made them [management] think I could go into the office.’ Whereas Maria loved being a mechanic and described herself as more passionate and more skilled than most of the men in the garage, her gender meant that she was promoted out of what she loved and into a more gender normative role. While in the view of the large company for which Maria worked, this was seen as career progression, for her it meant leaving what she loved and ultimately leaving the occupation altogether.

Like Maria, Saskia described herself as ‘just one of the boys.’ However, while when doing her work she may have felt like she belonged to a group of men, working with her husband Saskia’s gender and embodiment were related to through her
heterosexuality. Unlike Maria, Saskia never felt that she was treated differently because she was a woman, which she believed showed that she was accepted as an equal by the men with whom she worked. This position could in part be because Saskia worked in the same company as her husband, another carpenter. While she didn’t directly discuss her relationship with her husband at work, he had encouraged her to leave her job as a chef and get her a job working for the same construction company as him. Her husband’s support for Saskia’s gender anomalous work choices were bound up in their emotional connection with one another. Saskia said that her husband had always been attracted to the fact that she wasn’t a ‘girly girl,’ although he didn’t like her to look butch or have visible tattoos. It seemed from this description, that for Saskia’s husband his partner’s desirability as a woman was not interrupted by what she did. Indeed not doing things that would confine her to being a ‘girly girl’ or presumably hyper-feminine made her more attractive. What her male partner was concerned with was what Saskia’s body represented. Being butch and tattooed seemed to more significantly call into question her gender and, given the choice of the word ‘butch’, her sexuality, than what she did for work. Saskia’s partner marked out a blurry line around what kind of femininity was attractive; Saskia couldn’t be too feminine or too unfeminine.

For Saskia three things made her feel like she was one of the boys. Her father had been a carpenter so she’d grown up using tools. She explained that because of this exposure she already had knowledge about the industry. Saskia also said that she had always enjoyed physical work and was very strong, having been a chef for a number of years. Finally, Saskia explained that she had always preferred the company of men to women and because of this she was used to them. Saskia talked about this being a particular advantage in the social aspects of the work. She explained,

Men can talk about anything in front of me, I don’t go, ‘Oh,’ you know, like this. I am not one of those shy girls in that way, so yeah, no they didn’t change anything in the way they worked and yeah, so no it was good.

Being one of the boys, then, seemed to mean that Saskia’s presence didn’t interrupt the masculine culture. Saskia didn’t see the need to interrupt what she called ‘boys talk...swearing and, you know the stories.’ Saskia’s use of an indexical response here, indicating that I should know the stories, suggested that the stories were familiar and typical of talk amongst men in this particular environment. Other interviews
specified that they revolved around sport, sex and women. As seen in the discussion of gendered talk in chapter ten, such talk usually reflected a distinct power relation where men were positioning themselves as more powerful than women and other groups of men. Saskia’s tone in this part of the interview suggested a certain pride in being able to be present during this kind of conversation, opposing herself to ‘shy girls’ who would not be able to handle it. This seemed to be Saskia proving herself and her strength, another indicator that she was one of the boys.

Despite Saskia’s sense of herself as one of the boys, it seemed from her interview that her workmates didn’t forget that she was a heterosexual woman. This came into sharp focus when every Friday night Saskia attended a strip club with her workmates. As with the sexist talk, Saskia went along with the social aspects of her work being directed at a particular kind of heterosexual male pleasure which objectified women’s bodies. But while on the worksite the men might not have treated Saskia any differently, in the strip club Saskia was positioned as a woman. She said, ‘all the other blokes used to say to me, ‘I wish my girlfriend would be as cool about it as you’,’ suggesting that Saskia was clearly positioned as wife, girlfriend or heterosexual woman, rather than as one of the boys. As a woman outside of the work context and in a strip club she was instantly seen in terms of sexual relations. Beyond the construction site where Saskia felt recognised as a worker and a part of a team, she found herself in an unusual position. She found the events ‘a good laugh,’ presumably a laugh she was having with the male audience at the female performers. But she also recognised some solidarity with the performers as women (‘I think they were quite happy to see a female in the audience’). While Saskia saw this as a good thing, it indicated the doubleness required when working as a woman complicit in a masculinized workplace. What Saskia did appeared to rupture gendered divisions of labour; yet Saskia’s pride in being a part of a sexist male culture could be recognised as making it more difficult for other women to resist. For instance, Saskia’s compliance in the masculinized culture could undermine other women who did not like their partners partaking in it.

Like Maria and Saskia, Jessica said that she ‘liked to be recognised as one of the boys’ in this very physically demanding job. Like many women I interviewed, for Jessica her move into IT in her early thirties was a move from another male-
dominated occupation as a park ranger. While Jessica wanted to be one of the boys, the men she worked with still saw Jessica as physically and presumably sexually vulnerable as a woman working alone in the bush, recommending that she take up martial arts. Typical of many stories in Jessica’s life history, she took this task very seriously, becoming a black belt and training her body so hard that she became a marathon runner. It was not clear from the interview whether Jessica’s acquired skills in defence changed her relationships with the men or whether they recognised her differently. What was clear was that despite her capacity to do the physical work of ranging, her body was recognised by the boys as distinctively gendered, as that of the vulnerable woman. While it was tempting to read Jessica’s commitment to martial arts as a rebellion against this position, the physical and mental discipline of martial arts matched Jessica’s approach to her life more generally. Indeed, Jessica explained that throughout her career she ‘didn’t think much about it [gender].’

When Jessica moved into IT she said that she had ‘no recollection of being treated any differently [from men].’ As seen in Jane’s case study, gender was not a system through which Jessica understood the world. A number of times when I asked her about gendered dimensions of her work, Jessica took care to stress that it was not something that was important to her: ‘But it [working with men] was insignificant to me. That’s why it’s not clear in my mind.’ As Jessica had already stressed that she enjoyed being one of the boys, what she found insignificant was that she was different from them, was her position as a woman among them.

Despite the line of Jessica’s life history which minimized the significance of gender, there were two other lines which contradicted this: her experiences of discrimination and her experiences of sexualising her own body. Because of her belief in the insignificance of gender in the workplace, Jessica found it difficult to recall moments when she’d experienced sexism in the workplace. When I asked her whether she’d recognised any sexism in her workplaces Jessica paused for a long time. But slowly, as with Jane’s interview, stories of sexism unwound. Jessica focussed most of her attention on the significant sexism she experienced in her first IT workplace in Australia, having lived and worked in Europe for a number of decades. When recalling the events she was shocked that she’d suppressed such ‘terrible’ and ‘horrific’ memories, and was disturbed that they had not come to mind immediately.
The main instances of discrimination that Jessica described were being excluded from 'blokey things,' social but work-related events which were usually homosocial activities, such as viewing or playing sport. Jessica was annoyed that she wasn't considered or invited to these events but she was more shocked and offended by the ways in which her male colleagues declared their attendance at them as a form of status. Jessica felt that this inflated sense of self-worth translated into the way these men talked more generally, particularly in meetings, where Jessica found herself being talked over and ignored:

That was the one thing that really did piss me off. I never had that happen anywhere else in the world. But I'm an easy going person. I won't stand up and fight, I just don't think it's worth it. If I was going for my career, if I was still trying to get up through the ladder maybe I would do all that but I'm beyond that, I don't have to do all that.

This was the strongest emotional response Jessica had in the interview and the only time she swore. While the response seemed appropriate, it was quickly deflated. A comment like 'that really did piss me off' was immediately followed by 'I won't stand up and fight.' Jessica's anger was defused by her understanding of her personality as 'easy going,' her lack of combativeness meaning that she had forgotten the story altogether, her anger and experience of gender inequality evaporating into a more easy going understanding of gender as insignificant. Amnesia seemed a useful way of reconciling gender contradictions in Jessica's life.

In contrast to the slow response she gave to questions around sexism, when asked about the usefulness of the female body in the workplace, Jessica was quick to respond: 'Absolutely. I've played the game.' For Jessica, this question was about the sexuality of the female body and using this to advantage at work. This response was very different from all of the other women in IT, who interpreted this question as being about equity strategies and token women. She claimed that any woman who didn't see this 'was kidding themselves.' I found Jessica's comfort in using her sexual body as a business tool intriguing given her discussion of gender as invisible and insignificant. How can she be 'one of the boys' and so clearly not one of them at the same time?
The game Jessica referred to playing was a heterosexual one, in which the female body was positioned as a kind of alluring bait to the heterosexual man who was initially drawn in by her looks and then entertained by her intellect:

If you know you look good, men might be more inclined to come and talk to you. And they might think at the start that you’re a floosy, my husband used to talk about floosies, he used that term, always jokingly, I never knew exactly what a floosie was but I love the term. And so yeah, someone that doesn’t really think much but looks OK. But once you get talking to someone, if you’ve got a brain, well, then they will know very quickly that they can listen to you and maybe understand and maybe get something from you that they are looking for intellectually. And so, I think that women have it made. If they can be attractive and can use their brains, you’ve got two things going for you.

This story was framed from a man’s perspective: he sees a floosy, talks to a brain and realises that he can ‘maybe get something from you that they are looking for intellectually.’ The man was positioned as the active agent who was benefiting from this exchange, despite Jessica’s implication that in positioning herself in this way the woman would ultimately be advantaged. The female body became a glamorous package, which when unwrapped was even more enticing and useful than the frivolous branding would suggest. This matched Jessica’s extensive experience in the corporate world where the good product, in this case the woman, was attractive and indispensable.

I asked Jessica whether she thought that men could play the same game with their appearance as women. Her response provided another set of contradictions:

Maybe. Realistically that should make sense but I don’t think men are as competitive. Women are competitive. Women mostly dress for other women. Most men actually don’t notice. But, if you’re looking OK, they might notice. Women will always notice what another woman is wearing, men won’t always notice. But if you’re looking attractive. Whatever attractive may mean then I think it’s been shown pretty clearly that attractive people get interviews, attractive people get jobs before other people, so if you have attractive and add brains to it, which is the important bit, then you’ve got to have a plus and because of the whole thing, particularly in Australia with women and the glass ceiling and whatever, you may as well make use of this other feature which
you’ve got which you can dress and look OK than just look in the opposite way with it.

This discussion of women dressing for women, a popular discourse, came in the middle of two lengthy discussions about the power of the female sexuality and body to attract men in business. The idea that ‘most men actually don’t notice’ seemed at odds with the rest of her discussion. Jessica moved swiftly between seeing the presentation of gender at work as insignificant and the presentation of the body at work as highly significant for men and for women. The inconsistency in her responses seemed to be because while gender was not a framework through which Jessica was used to seeing her world, sexuality was. For Jessica, the implications of sexuality on her experiences of the workplace were not seen as necessarily related to her gender.

While Maria, Saskia and Jessica engaged in work that was gender anomalous, showing the porousness of divisions of labour, it seemed that being one of the boys did not rupture the culture of the workplace. Despite what these women did with their bodies and minds at work, despite being able to socialise and partake in a boys club, these women still found that they must at various points relate to these men through heterosexual relations in which their bodies were sexualised and made to feel other. Social relations became much more coercive than production relations for these women.

These women’s privileging of the male gaze on the female body needed to be contextualised within their life histories. All three were heterosexual and married. Both Saskia and Jessica discussed how they had changed their embodiment to suit the sexual desires of their husbands. All three of these women also recognised that at different times their work threatened their relationships, making significant changes in order to enact more conventional versions of wife and mother. So the fact that these women were doing resistant work did not actually indicate that they were resisting the gender order at work or in their lives. None of these women had been exposed to or identified with feminism. None of them saw gender as an issue when entering their occupations, rather they were motivated by interest and practicality. The conventional gender order in these women’s intimate relationships was echoed in their gender relations at work. As Maria said, they were women doing men’s work, they weren’t trying to be men, they were just trying to be one of the boys.
Emotional relations

Women who worked in fields dominated by men did have the potential to disrupt emotional relations in their most intimate relationships. Divisions of labour have been made along gender lines within a family unit. For a woman to engage in the 'work of a man' meant that she not only laboured differently at work, but potentially created a certain crisis around divisions of labour in the home. As discussed above for many heterosexual women in trades and IT, being in a male-dominated occupation and being a wife and mother presented a central contradiction in their experience of gender. While many of the women told their stories in ways which reconciled this contradiction, others spoke starkly of the costs of their work on their relationships, particularly in their work as wives. The lesbians I interviewed did not experience this contradiction in the same way. For these women, who had already broken with compulsory heterosexuality, the emotional relations in their intimate relationships had different expectations, their skills often being seen as a resource in women-only relationships and spaces.

Manual trades and IT presented different challenges to heteronormative relations within the interview participants' intimate lives. The strong connection between the strength and skills involved in manual trades and masculinity meant that for some men, women skilled in trades could be seen as a threat to their role as the man in the house. In IT, it was not so much the skills themselves as the work culture of long hours and travel which challenged a traditional heterosexual relationship of a woman as domestically and emotionally available to her husband and family.

Maria, the mechanic discussed in the previous section, provided a striking example of how her skills had created a rupture in her relationships with men. Maria saw her domestic capability as a challenge to her heterosexual relationships. Maria could do everything: she is the super-mum. She fixed the car and the spa. When I arrived for the interview she had danishes in the oven and had just come back from a run which she'd done after dropping the kids off to school and after taking a conference call from Sweden. Her first husband and father of her two children found her capability
and energy too much and Maria claims that this was one of the reasons they divorced. Her current husband feels similarly inferior and feels that Maria is 'taking over.'

The skills Maria gained as a mechanic clearly challenged the division of labour not just at work but at home. Maria was highly capable at manual, technical and technological tasks usually associated with masculinity and therefore of traditional fatherwork. While she was partnered to a man who was not particularly manually or technically skilled, her partner had not compensated for this by being skilled at another area in the domestic arena. She found this frustrating and was continually shocked by her male partner’s lack of skill. There was a sense during the interview that that this is a very old discussion between the couple. Not only did Maria do domestic labour usually done by many women, she also does domestic labour stereotypically done by men (fixing the car) and also does a full time job. This was a triple shift and while this is the plight of many single mothers, Maria had the added pressure of not only being a good mother but also a good wife. Maria worried about undermining her husband’s masculinity. She was concerned that he would be threatened when she earned more than him and feels somehow responsible for maintaining his role as man in the house when she can do the work usually associated with masculinity.

The major challenge that IT work seemed to present to heterosexual relations was that it took so much time. This proved to have particularly stark consequences for women in the middle of their careers, women in their late forties and older who had felt the impact of their long-hours and travel on their relationships over a long period of time. Like Maria, Jessica described her inability to perform her wifely duties due to her work schedule as one of the reasons for her divorce. Because she worked for a multinational company, Jessica split her time evenly between Europe and America. Because of the global nature of her company, she was always on call, often scheduling telephone conferences for midnight. Jessica thought at the time that it was not a problem in her relationship because her husband also travelled extensively. In retrospect, however, she speculated that it was.

Looking at Jessica’s life-line, her husband and his work were the impetus behind many major life changes for them both. They moved cities and countries for his work.
Jessica also changed careers in order that she had more flexible and employable work to suit their itinerancy. This arrangement enacted an element of heteronormative relations, in that despite Jessica’s eventual success in her career, it was her husband’s that took priority. Jessica explained that just before her husband asked for a divorce, she’d begun working from home more so that she could make him dinner. Jessica found it difficult to talk about the divorce. Her husband initiated it and she still didn’t seem to understand why. However, her pre-emptive enactment of the good wife, cooking dinner and staying at home during the day to care for her husband, indicated that she knew, somehow, that it was this that was wrong.

For a number of the women in IT, the impact of the time they spent at work on their emotional relations was visible more through an absence of emotional relations. For instance, Jane talked about being a commitment-phobe despite being so intensely committed to her work. Similarly, during the course of the interview Natasha, a forty-year-old programmer, did not mention any intimate relationship. I interviewed Natasha in her apartment where she lived alone. One wall of her minimalist living space was dominated by a number of large computers which she confessed to working on late into the night. Miller’s (2008) study of the relationships between people and the material objects in homes emphasised how objects created subjects and defined identities. Natasha’s positioning of computers in the centre of her living space reflected their dominant position in her life and how her work on them was a strong determinant of her identity.

For some of the earlier career women working in IT, their longer hours became one way they negotiated with their partners to engage in a more egalitarian share of the housework. Lucinda, a forty-year-old programmer, didn’t want to work long hours and had quit one job when the hours increased beyond what she saw as reasonable. Lucinda and two other IT workers of a similar age and stage in their career and relationships placed restrictions around their hours in consultation with their partners who believed they needed to have a balanced life. This did not, in Lucinda’s case, or the cases of the other women, translate into more time to do domestic wifely duties. Lucinda and Ashima in particular described using their spare time to pursue their creative interests. They both described dividing the housework evenly with their partners. Lucinda and her boyfriend made a structured arrangement, working out right
down to who cooked on which night. They arranged this around who was working the longest hours on particular days. All of these women had more job security and earning capacity than their male partners, their jobs and incomes supporting their partners through unemployment, insecurity and study.

In some sense, this shift was generational. Neither these men nor these women grew up in 1950s households of wifely servitude like Jessica and her husband. Unlike Maria's partners, these men seemed confident in the domestic sphere, one partner making a three course meal for me and the interview participant while I was taking her life history, serving us wine as he went. All three of these women recalled times when their male partners had intervened to care for them when they were working extremely long hours. From the women's descriptions, their partners seemed to value the women's relationship with their work, while maintaining a scepticism about it needing to consume all their time. These women saw their partner's scepticism as useful, placing their jobs in perspective and helping them make time to pursue other interests. For these women their intimate emotional relations with their male partners helped them care for themselves. They used their work to help define and mark out the domestic division of labour, their partners sharing the care for the relationship and one another.

In some senses these are hopeful stories of rupture. They illustrated how production relations could rupture heteronormative relations at home. However, like lesbians, these women already saw themselves as outsiders before they entered unconventional production or emotional relations. Two of them migrated to Australia from developing countries and remained in Australia after meeting their partners. Their inter-racial relationships could be seen as one reason for their renegotiation of hetero-relational norms; with so many cultural assumptions needing to be re-evaluated, gender became one of many systems to be re-worked and re-evaluated between two sets of understanding. Indeed, throughout the interview Zan and Ashima both constantly translated their experiences of the world by explaining where they came from, indicating an understanding of culture as porous. These women didn't articulate their position as outsiders as affecting either choice of work or their emotional relations, but given their ability to rupture it seemed significant. It would be interesting to see whether the emotional relations in these relationships changed when
these women had children. As I will go on to discuss, mothering was a condition that often brought the rupturing back into line.

Of the women I interviewed in trades, a disproportionate number across age groups were lesbians (n=12). Two women I interviewed in IT were also lesbians. The high number of lesbians could in part be due to my use of snowballing, in which lesbian community networks may have been used by participants to help me recruit. However, as I've already discussed in chapter nine, these networks did in many cases work in a similar way to recruit feminist lesbians into trades in the first place.

That said, there did seem to be something about lesbian embodiment, its necessary movement away from compulsory heterosexuality, which enabled lesbians to more easily embark on and sustain alternative production relations. Their trade skills for many women became a part of their sexuality, just as their sexuality often became a useful part of their work. All of the lesbian tradeswomen talked about how their job gave them status within the lesbian community. Many referred to other women finding their work in trades attractive. Maxine was typical of these women in describing this:

Well, you know, it was the women's movement. It was a pretty hot thing to be doing...probably got me a few more girlfriends than being an academic might have.

However, two women explained that as tradeswomen their bodies and skill were read inappropriately by other lesbians. For instance, Samantha found that as a strong, muscly woman who wore overalls and got dirty at work, her body was often read as butch by other lesbians. For Samantha, who was attracted to butch women, she found the type of women she was attracting through her tradeswoman's body were the wrong ones.

There seemed to be two different gender politics going on here. For Maxine and other lesbians working in trades in the 70s and 80s, trade work was integrated with feminism. It was 'pretty hot' in this context because it was seen as an enactment of rebellion. Indeed, many of these women mentioned that they were not butch or physically comparable to men, emphasising this by referencing their shortness and their slight weight. Samantha, a contemporary horticulturalist, felt that within the
lesbian community her trade positioned her not so much as a feminist, but on a butch/femme spectrum. Her body and her work meaning that she got inappropriately positioned. Without an overt feminist context, trade work identified Samantha with masculinity and men, rather than against them. This she felt as a cost to her emotional relations.

Men on worksites also saw lesbianism as a way of identifying with rather than against the women with whom they worked. Both Jesse and Nancy had particularly striking experiences of this. Nancy explained that being a lesbian meant that many of her male workmates strongly identified with her over their shared object of desire: the ‘chick:’

Because I was out as a lesbian he thought that was great because he could check out chicks with me but Jesus, it was unbelievable, ‘Aw look at her, look at her, she’s got great breasts’ or ‘Look at her tits.’ It was just too much. My friend, Amy, thinks that I’m like that, but I’m not because when I’m out with Stan I don’t feel like I’m saying anything at all because he’s constantly saying it. He’s a bad influence.

The male colleagues made the assumption that lesbian sexuality enacted itself in the same way as this particularly voyeuristic version of heterosexual male sexuality. Both Nancy and Jesse did identify themselves as partaking in this form of sexualising other women. However, for Nancy the insight into the constancy of men’s performance of this was ‘unbelievable.’ Jesse felt that being a woman gave her a different kind of access to acting in a sexist way towards women: she discussed it as though her female body annulled her responsibility for the sexism. Both of these women recognised themselves in the ways in which men sexualised other women. However, they also distinguished themselves from the men’s performance, in Jesse’s case, just by having a ‘ginie.’ Like Saskia’s visits to the topless bars, Nancy and Jesse’s complicity in sexism towards women served their connection with men and their social ease at work. It did, however, also present an uncomfortable contradiction around their own gender, in which they were objectifying a body as other which was in fact their own.
Reconciling self with gender in crisis

Sustaining and reconciling a sense of self to gender anomalous work involved a challenging negotiation of emotional relations in and beyond work. Women managed this in different ways. Many of the women drew on a sense of difference in their broader lives in order to help them and others understand their gender difference at work. For instance, lesbians and feminists often drew on their politics to help understand their position within a male dominated workplace. Women who described themselves as social outsiders in other ways, such as migrant women or ‘loners,’ also seemed to have used this understanding to reconcile themselves with their position within the workforce. While these women used narratives of difference to help to understand themselves as outsiders in male dominated work, other women used their gender difference as a distinctive way of approaching their work. Feminising their skills allowed these women to more easily reconcile their position within a male dominated work environment.

Narratives of difference

Lesbianism potentially offered the women I interviewed a framework to critique hegemonic masculinity in a way that was useful in maintaining their position in male dominated workplaces. This was most often the case when these women, like Zadie, had been exposed to feminism and a politicising of their gender as well as their sexuality. This critical perspective meant that these women saw doing their gender differently, at home and at work, as an important part of their identity. While most of the feminist lesbians had studied at university in the late 70s and early 80s, there were also four younger feminist lesbians in both trades and IT who talked about their gender politics at work in similar ways, as seen in Clare’s case study. For these women lesbianism and feminism dovetailed into one another. Both their lesbianism and their feminism informed their choice of work in a male dominated field, a choice most recognised as a part of their resistance. For instance, Maxine became a mechanic not because she particularly wanted to but because it was what her feminist community needed. Within her feminist women-only community, doing male dominated work did not present itself as a contradiction so much as a logical necessity.
As I began to discuss in a previous section, migrant women's sense of their own difference seemed to offer them the potential to re-organise their emotional relations in more egalitarian ways. Eva, who migrated to Australia from Denmark when she met her Australian partner, clearly used her migrant status to help her and others understand that she was different. When describing her emotional relations with her husband she said that they were effected by 'Denmarkation.' Eva used her foreignness, and distinctively her Scandinavianness, to explain how and why her relationship functioned so differently to most in Australia. Eva described her husband contributing equally to the housework, suggesting that he did more of the internal domestic labour. While Eva's husband was a fine artist, she made furniture and built kitchens. 'Denmarkation' was a play on the word 'demarcation;' Eva's migrant status allowed her and her husband a way of explaining an unconventional division of labour.

Of the five women programmers I interviewed, three described themselves as having been social outsiders when growing up. Already identifying as outsiders, being a gender minority at work seemed to be a familiar social position for them. Growing up, Lucinda described herself as a 'loner' who wasn't close to anyone in her family or at school. She was picked on at school and retreated to the library where she became passionate about reading, particularly historical novels and science fiction. At university, studying engineering, Lucinda got involved with the medieval society which re-enacted medieval times. The alternative worlds Lucinda found through literature and the medieval club were echoed in the computer games she enjoyed, leading her to pursue a career in game design. The pattern of being alone in Lucinda's life history seemed to have fed her ability to work in a male dominated workplace, where she wanted to explore other worlds not make social connections.

Kylie and Bianca, two programmers who had only recently entered the workforce, had also found the social world where they grew up to be hostile, lonely and alienating. Kylie, a gifted student in a rural town, found that she was ostracised at school, and like Lucinda ended up retreating to the library. Bianca found school so intimidating that she developed a school phobia, unable to complete her schooling in a conventional setting. For Kylie and Bianca online forums, social networks and games
became a way of becoming an insider in a world where they otherwise felt alone. For Lucy online spaces were much safer than offline ones because within these male dominated communities her knowledge and skills were understood and embraced. For these women who had felt different for most of their lives, IT worlds gave them comfort. Their gender in an IT community was a less salient point of difference because they already felt so different in the rest of their lives. In contrast to other women who used narratives of difference in their broader lives to help them approach their work, the IT community provided these programmers the opportunity to feel connected with others like they did nowhere else. IT gave these women their first points of identification with others: geekdom, technology and a passion for IT.

**Feminisation of work**

To describe work as feminised can mean a number of things. Historically, feminised work was work that was dominated by women, work that therefore often came to be seen as feminine work. The boundary is not stable, male-dominated work becoming feminised when it becomes less skilled or lower paid (Reskin & Roos, 1987). More recent literature on labour markets has used the term ‘feminised’ to describe a labour market which has become casualised and precarious. I find this use of feminisation problematic. Firstly, to describe casual, flexible and precarious work as feminised embeds within academic discourse an understanding that feminine work is the opposite to full-time, stable and on-going. Secondly, in describing a labour market as feminised there is an implication that this neoliberal labour market would suit women better than men. However, and here is the third and most significant problem with this conceptualisation, describing a labour market as feminised fails to acknowledge that women’s casual and flexible engagement in the paid labour market is because of their on-going commitment to unpaid caring responsibilities in the home. Therefore, unless men’s relation to caring responsibilities changed along with the new casualised labour market, their relation to this new form of work would be very different to many women’s. The processes and relations by which women selected casual work in my study, emphasises how describing a labour market as feminised fails to take into consideration the realities of women’s work inside and outside the home.
Working in male dominated jobs a number of the women feminised their skills in, seeing their ability as deriving from a natural understanding they had as a woman. While this was at times done by the women themselves, there were also instances when the women described their work being feminised by others. Many of the women also discussed actively seeking casual and flexible work within their industry, usually to ensure that they would be able to look after their family. In both of these examples, the women seemed to be making the male dominated workplace less contradictory to their experiences as women. The women who most frequently ‘feminised’ their work were mothers, indicating that mothering was a crisis point for women working in male dominated fields. It was a point at which women needed to find ways to adapt the work to suit a new set of emotional and production relations in the home.

Women in both trades and IT feminised their skill most distinctly by describing the ways in which their natural ability to nurture improved their work in their field. Both Eva and Saskia believed they were better builders because as woman they were more maternal and nurturing and therefore took more care with their work. Saskia felt that women took ‘more pride in their work’ because

> It is in our genes [...] It is that nurturing motherly type thing that comes out that most of us are born with. And, yeah, just take a bit more care. Whereas men will go in and rip things out and bang bang it is done, sort of thing, whereas women will look at the bigger picture.

While as mothers, both Eva and Saskia seemed more determined to attribute this way of working to their maternal instincts, a biological imperative, other women recognised their capacity to take a different, bigger picture approach to men as emerging out of pressures to perform masculinity and femininity in particular ways.

As seen in the previous chapter, women developed ‘smart’ work practices in order to save their bodies from unnecessary strain labour. An important pattern in the interviews was that the speed with which most tradesmen wanted to approach work often meant that they make mistakes. Saskia explained this in a sweeping generalisation:

> Whereas men will go in and rip things out and bang bang it is done, women will look at the bigger picture.
This bigger picture approach made many of the women describe the embodied processes of tradework as gendered. As Lynne elucidates:

It [renovating] takes a lot of planning and a lot of patience and I guess that's where Greg and I went in different directions because he just wanted to get it all done and get it done quickly and wanted to see it whereas I was more concerned to have the planning in place so that the whole thing would work and you weren't going around afterwards fixing up little mistakes.

For Lynne, her approach of working smart meant that what she ended up doing with her body was very different from what men did. Lynne and others suggested that with this approach the work did not need to be nearly as physically demanding as men often seemed to insist.

Like Eva and Saskia, women in IT, particularly in IT management, discussed a woman’s ability to care, communicate and nurture as an advantage in IT. All of the women who feminised skill were biological mothers in heterosexual relationships. With mothering as central to their emotional relations outside of work, it seemed that they recognised what their mothering skills offered to the workplace. Feminising skill through a particularly maternal lens seemed to be a way of validating and reconciling both experiences.

Wei’s description of mothering and managing was a good example of this. On the one hand Wei’s experiences of mothering deeply altered her relationship with work. As seen in chapter nine, Wei changed the practicalities of where and how she worked when she had children. She also changed the way she managed. She explained that in job interviews she would always say that she was a ‘mother first’ and that this meant that she was more efficient, better at managing time but also required flexibility. This worked to Wei’s advantage in a recent interview where the CEO was looking for someone who would ‘care for’ the team. Ironically, Wei’s personal expectation of flexibility meant that she also expected the members of her team to take care of themselves. She explained to her team that she didn’t want to know about where they were or where they’d been and that she trusted them to manage their own personal lives as they needed to, provided they got their work done.
Wei’s experiences of management also fed into her approach to mothering. She took the management of her children’s lives very seriously. The year of the interview, Wei had taken nearly a year off paid work, in part so that she could focus on parenting. One of the main foci of this period was to support her eldest child to prepare for selective high school exams. Wei thought that cooking nourishing food and providing a supportive home for her daughter might help with her school choice. Issues of school choice have become a central part to middle class mothering (Aitchison, 2010; Campbell, Proctor & Sherington, 2009), but it was interesting that in Wei’s case supporting her child involved doing tasks associated with traditional versions of the good mother even though she had mostly been determined to maintain her career. Like a project at work, however, this form of mothering was goal and project oriented. Once her daughter had completed the exam Wei went back to work. While Wei’s work was feminised through an understanding of herself as a mother, mothering was also transformed by a managerial approach which combined traditional perceptions of nurturing with the achievement of goals.

When women were positioned as nurturers by others in the workforce, it was usually met with a mixed response. Cabinet-makers Eva and Susan both found that the ways in which others feminised their work was an advantage. Eva who designed domestic kitchens for private clients who were mostly women found that her clients thought that Eva’s gender was a benefit. They thought that she could make better kitchens than a man because as a woman she would have spent more time in one. It seemed that Eva’s clients saw her work as an extension of her domestic role as a woman and mother in the kitchen. Eva didn’t mention to her clients that her husband did the cooking. Similarly, Susan built imaginative children’s beds which maximised space. Like Eva, she believed that she was given more freedom to be creative because she was a woman.

While for Eva and Susan the feminising of their skill was felt as beneficial, many women expressed resentment about the expectation that they would care for men in the workplace. This was particularly the case with women who worked in communication roles in IT. Because they were doing work of a low to medium status in the company which was often seen as peripheral support work to the ‘real’ technical work of IT, a number of these women told stories of men assuming that the
women would do small jobs for them without complaint. Louise said that this attitude usually came from a particular type of man, a permanent employee in middle management. For Louise, these relationships deeply affected her attitude towards work in general.

The women who had children talked at length about how they adapted their work time to combine it with mothering. Whitehouse and Diamond’s (2007) interviews with men and women in IT professions suggested that men were much less likely to discuss these caring responsibilities than women. In attempting to reconcile an IT work life with mothering, Rosemary and Claire moved into web services and development before they had children. They both recognised that the job security, flexibility, pay and ability to work free-lance and from home were particularly suitable for mothering. Rosemary and Claire predicted what other mothers found one of the central challenges of combining IT and mother work, which Wei described beautifully by saying ‘business time is not baby time.’

Four of the six tradeswomen mothers, all of whom were self-employed in their trade, found the flexibility of trade work was very suitable to mothering. Eva and Susan only become cabinet-makers with the birth of their first children. Eva’s training in interior design in Denmark had included a one-year full time apprenticeship in a cabinet making workshop. When she moved to Australia she was employed full-time as an interior designer before she had her first child. With the birth of her first daughter she found cabinet-making particularly suitable to mothering. This was both because she was self-employed and therefore more flexible and because she worked building kitchens in her local area for other women – usually mothers. The women who employed her found Eva’s availability to work outside peak motherwork periods (before and after childcare/school) matched their needs to have a renovation free home when their children arrived home from school.

Feminising the skills of male dominated work and making the hours more flexible became crucial ways of making gender-anomalous work sustainable. This was particularly the case for mothers, whose re-formulation of their skill and re-organisation of their time at work made work in male-dominated workplaces and
organisations emotionally and practically reconcilable with their caring responsibilities.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that while certain conditions made living with the contradictions around gender and work possible, other situations made gender contradictions particularly challenging to maintain. The women discussed at the beginning of this chapter did not see their gender as a point of rupture at work, even though they did use a conventional embodiment of heterosexuality as a resource in their workplaces. This contradiction between treating gender as insignificant but heterosexuality as powerful allowed them to have successful careers in male dominated industries, but ultimately made their work irreconcilable with conventional heterosexual emotional relations outside of work.

For these women being a good mother and a good wife became difficult to sustain alongside gender-anomalous work. Being a mother and a wife emerged as a particularly coercive emotional relation in the gender order. These women, and others, found it difficult to reconcile the gender order at work with remaining responsible women at home. Some resolved this tension by quitting their gender-anomalous work altogether; others changed the way they worked or the way they positioned that work. For instance, feminising their skills and practices meant that some women conceived of their work as an integral part of their mothering and their mothering as integral to their work.

Most women relied on a narrative of themselves as outsiders to help sustain the contradictions they experienced around their gender and work. Unlike narratives which feminised the work, these alternative narratives allowed women to displace conceptions of themselves as needing to be normal. Political narratives provided by feminism and lesbianism helped some women to sustain their involvement in gender anomalous work. These narratives gave women the ability to recognise the contradictions around what was demanded of them as women at work and at home. Other narratives of difference such as being a migrant or being a geek also seemed to help women sustain their involvement in work, and often relationships, that ruptured
the gender order. Narratives of being an outsider seemed to allow these women a position from which to see culture – the culture of the workplace or of a country – as porous negotiable.
Conclusion

Reflections on the study

This thesis set out to understand how women in the male dominated occupations of trades and IT experienced the gender order as having a tendency towards crisis (Connell, 1987, 2005, 2009). By studying women in male dominated work which implicated the body in different ways, I aimed to see how crisis tendencies in the gender order were particularly focussed through occupations and embodiment.

In Part I I explored how changes in the gender order had been previously studied. I found that the stubborn coerciveness of the gender order, particularly in its relation to patriarchy and capitalism, needed to be understood alongside a more changeable view of gender as practiced. Embodiment became a useful framework for reconciling these perspectives as it allowed for an understanding of the body as situated and relational; at times coerced into a normative gender position and at other times actively resisting one. Because of my focus on the situated experiences of the gender order, I also argued that a life history framework for interviewing was the most appropriate for my study.

In Part II the six case studies introduced the central themes of the study and showed how these themes emerged out of the life histories of women in trades and IT. From these six case studies, and the twenty-three not included in full, a number of significant topics emerged: the significance of childhood embodiment to later resistance; the attitudes with which women approached gender anomalous work; the embodiment of gender, sexuality and labour; and the contradictions involved and resources needed to sustain employment in male dominated occupations. These patterns formed the basis of the chapters in Part III.

In chapter nine I argued that entering certain forms of embodiment or certain situations could either facilitate or hinder women’s participation in male dominated work. In particular chapter nine focussed on how the sense of physical possibility and capability women experienced in childhood through playing sport, being tomboys, farming and having physical female role models informed the women’s sense of their
own capability as adults. This supported Young's (2005) argument that confident and capable embodiment lead to a sense of confidence and capability in other areas. This has implications for future research and policy on gender segregation in occupations. Currently, most of the research on encouraging women to enter trades and IT focuses on high school subject choices (Reid, 2009) and exposure to role models in the industries (von Hellens et al., 2004). My research suggested the importance of a correlation between childhood embodiment and a sense of capability and confidence in adulthood. The social implications of physicality in childhood could potentially inform educational policy, making children's physicality in primary school a key area for action.

In chapter ten I argued that this sense of possibility acquired in childhood was extended through women's work in male dominated occupations. In both industries the women's sense of what they could do allowed them to perceive physical, social and virtual worlds which would have otherwise been closed to them. This supported Merleau-Ponty's (1962) argument that perception was altered by the situation the body was in. In this case, the forms of embodiment that allowed access to this perception were traditionally gendered. Indeed, knowing about the gendered nature of the worlds they entered - that they were joining a 'secret club' - made the perception more enjoyable for many women. Their understanding of male dominated work, skill, knowledge and worlds often gave women a different sense of themselves in the world at large. For example, they felt less scared and felt they could engage with men differently. Working in a male dominated area was not just about what women learnt to do, it also changed the way they saw and felt in the world.

The masculine cultures produced by male dominated workplaces became a central theme which ran throughout the case studies and ultimately underpinned the study as a whole. The impact of masculine cultures on women in trades and IT was a clear focus in the previous literature on both industries (Ahuja, 2002; Butler and Ferrier, 2000; Cockburn, 1983; Earley, 1981; Erickson-Zetterquist, 2007; Gleeson, 1996; Hollis, 1992; Hunter, 2006; Pocock, 1988; Truath et al., 2003; von Hellens et al., 2004; Wright, 1996). However, my comparative study revealed that the kinds of masculine cultures produced in trades and IT operated differently, constructing different versions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). This difference was
largely due to the ways in which the occupations referred to the body. In trades masculinity was tightly yoked to the body. The male body's capacity for strength, skill and violence were constructed as integral to both the work of the trade and the work of being a man. Therefore, women engaging in this work were often felt by men as a threat to their sense of worth as a man and to their employment security, as explored in chapters eleven and twelve. The tradeswomen's experiences of masculinity in trades supported other studies of working class men (Donaldson, 1992; Messner, 1992; Paap, 2006) which argued that this kind of masculinity which relied on the heavy work of the body was extremely vulnerable, men only being able to sustain it for as long as their bodies could.

In contrast to the dependence on the body in trades, the labour processes and workplaces of IT often called for the body to disappear. The ideal IT worker was often described as someone who could ignore their body. This was for some workers a practical requirement, sitting for long periods and 'being in the flow' necessitating a disembodiment. However, many women also felt that it was difficult to acknowledge the significance of their gendered bodies due to the political correctness of their organisations. As in Franzway et al.'s (2009) study of ignorance around sexual politics in engineering, assumptions around gender-neutrality in IT workplaces often made it difficult for women to articulate their experiences of gender and the body, even though as a gender minority many talked about feeling highly visible. Here hegemonic masculinity seemed to function by reinforcing the invisibility of male power (Franzway et al., 2009), a power which was brought into sharpest focus when it needed to negotiate with the women as women – for example, as mothers – rather than simply as workers.

As I argued in chapter eleven, working as a minority within these masculine cultures became itself a form of labour, unrecognised in the literature on women in trades and IT. While most of the literature focused on the ways in which discrimination and sexism affected women in workplaces, it did not address how the day-to-day experiences of being a gender minority were absorbed into the way women worked in male dominated occupations. Many women found that a significant part of their work involved directly or indirectly negotiating their gender in the workplace. In trades the overt displays and constant reference to the masculine body meant that women often
had to confront sexism directly, developing strategies to ignore, engage with or protect against it. In contrast, the usually more oblique or hidden masculine power in IT workplaces meant that women often questioned whether their experiences were gendered. The work of being a minority in IT required that women deal with the contradiction that the organisations rarely acknowledged their difference, while this difference simultaneously made their bodies feel visible and brought into question.

The significance of the masculine body to trades meant that women often used their gender as a resource to avoid dangerous work practices. Unlike the working class men in the literature (Donaldson, 1992; Messner, 1992; Paap, 2006), most women did not often feel the need to prove their masculinity by putting their bodies at risk. Instead, more than one woman described developing ‘smart’ work practices. While most of the women described the men in the industry as valuing strength and speed, they themselves consistently valued planning and quality. I argued in chapter eleven that this became an approach to the occupation which was particularly gendered. A feminist reworking of Bourdieu (Huppatz, 2007, 2009; Reay, 2004; Skeggs, 1997) might argue that gender, being used here as a point of interruption in a damaging masculinist culture, could be seen as a form of feminine capital; their gender embodiment allowing them to legitimate their investment in alternative ways of being at work. However, like Moi (1991), I recognise that because this use of gender did not usually transform into other forms of capital it was not a form of capital in the Bourdieuan sense. That said, unlike most of the literature which focused on the burdens of being a woman in trades, I argue that in some cases gender was used by women as an important resource in their approach to labour processes.

For women in IT, where the body at work was often made to seem insignificant, gender could not be used to interrupt the embodiment of labour processes in the same way. Like trade work, IT had significant costs on the body. As argued in chapter twelve, while women in trades loved the physicality of trade work, women in IT found the sedentary nature of their work a constant challenge. Because these physical costs were tied to corporate life rather than the masculine body, women found it more difficult to see them as unnatural and changeable. Unlike women in trades who changed their labour processes to help safely manage their bodies, women in IT allowed their labour processes to put their bodies at risk and absorbed the
management of their bodies into their leisure time. As I argued in chapters eleven and
twelve, the costs of sedentary work required women to maintain their bodies outside
of it in order to continue working. Like Donaldson’s (1992) study of working class
men’s bodies being consumed by their work, the bodies of women, and presumably
men, working in IT were also consumed. But while the men in Donaldson’s study
risked their bodies in the service of working class masculinity, IT workers did so in
the service of the neoliberal corporation.

While for the most part women were made to feel that their bodies were insignificant
in IT, one way in which the body was felt as highly visible and gendered was through
the requirement that women working in IT had body literacy. I argued that this
contradiction between being invisible and visible was central to women’s experience
of their embodiment in IT. As I argued in chapter twelve, most women talked about
the importance of the presentation of their bodies at work. Women read situations,
organisations and other people to determine how they should dress and how they
should hold their bodies at work. This monitoring of their own bodies through
reflecting on others required constant adjustments and anticipation depending on the
roles, situations or relationships the women found themselves in. This body literacy
was gendered because as a gender minority these women were more visible. While
women in powerful positions considered their body literacy as a resource in their
work, others found the demands of this scrutiny of others and themselves as
oppressive.

As well as exploring the immediate issue of women’s participation and embodiment
in male dominated occupations, my study was motivated by a broader interest in a
contradiction I argued was central when theorising gender. Literature on the gender
order recognised that it was stubborn and hierarchical, existing in relation to coercive
and oppressive structures such as patriarchy and capitalism (Delphy, 1977; Millet,
1970; Mitchell, 1971; Walby, 1980, 1990, 1997). At the same time, there was a
recognition that because gender was practiced through social relations it had the
potential to change (Connell, 1987, 2005, 2009) or at least be porous (Butler, 2006).
For Butler (2006) the norms of gender were only made to seem fixed by the ways in
which they were materialised on the body. In actual fact, she argued, these norms had
‘no ontological status apart from various acts that constitute its reality’ (p. 185). Like
other sociologists (Namaste, 2000, 2009; Rubin, 2003), I found that this sense that the
gender order was a fiction did not help explain the way women in my study
experienced their bodies or their gender. Nor did I find that women materialised
norms through their bodies in ways which stabilised gender practices. I argued that
women could use their bodies to both materialise and resist norms. As I argued in
chapter twelve, being ‘one of the boys’ was not a simple adoption of masculinity. It
involved negotiating contradictions: for example, finding gender insignificant at work
but particular types of female sexuality useful.

As such, the body was not docile in its engagement with ‘various acts which
constitute its reality’ (Butler, 2006, p. 185). The acts of the body were always
experienced within a situation or context, its reality informing how it acted. This was
clearly seen through women’s sense of their body literacy. While women were
materialising norms with the presentation of their body, they did so through self-
conscious assessments of situations. Their bodies became a medium through which
they reflected on the world and through which they reflected it back. This argument
supports Connell’s (2005) discussion of gender as relational, in particular the way in
which the body is engaged in reflexive practices, constantly altering its practice in
response to the situation.

This focus on gender as relational helped explain the contradictions women felt
around their gender and the gender order throughout their life histories. The same
woman would often experience gender as significant and insignificant, enabling and
disabling, as a resource and as a hindrance at different points of her life history. I
argued that being completely engaged in the labour processes involved in trades and
IT often allowed women to not feel gendered at all. The complete engagement of the
body and mind in trades work and the complete disembodiment of the body and mind
in IT programming and management allowed women spaces where they didn’t feel
gendered at work. However, other sets of relations brought gender into focus very
sharply.

Women explained and sustained the contradictions they experienced around feeling at
once ungendered, highly gendered and resistant of the gender order by using very
different resources. Feminism and lesbianism were two resources which allowed
women to critique the masculine cultures of the industries in which they worked. The abstract understandings of the gender order that feminism gave women meant that gender was brought into focus as unnatural and an illegitimate reason for division. Feminism became a resource in that it allowed women to question the gendered nature of their work and workplaces, often empowering women to establish their own businesses. In contrast, normative heterosexual relations were also used as a resource by some women. For these women, relating to men in the workplace as heterosexual women was a way of maintaining the gender order. As in Williams' (1989) study, what women were doing at work did not stop them from being feminine and relating to men as heterosexual women. For women in IT, in particular, a commitment to the profitability and pace of the neoliberal organisation also proved a resource in sustaining gender contradictions. Because of the long hours and intense commitment expected of women in large organisations, alongside these organisations' political correctness policies, these women often ignored, forgot or did not know how to articulate how they were gendered at work.

These resources in reconciling the contradictions of gender and work were particularly challenged by certain relations outside of work: being a good mother and a good wife. The coerciveness of these structures to shape women's lives, which underpinned early Women's Liberation (Comer, 1974), continued to have a significant impact on women's working lives, even women who may have resisted going into female-dominated occupations. While feminists found it easier to sustain gender anomalous work while mothering, women who had used other resources to reconcile the contradictions between their work and gender found it difficult to sustain gender anomalous work in a normative heterosexual family arrangement. This gave a way of understanding the literature on women in IT which emphasised that there was a disproportionate number of women in IT without children and that when women in IT did have children they often changed career trajectories due to time commitments (Perrons, 2003). I argued that the pressure women felt to resolve the contradictions between their work and role as mothers and wives meant that they not only feminized their work by working part-time (Diamond & Whitehouse, 2007; Fountain, 2000), they also feminized their skills. Women in both trades and IT integrated their sense of themselves as mothers into their work, seeing their role as nurturers as informing their
approach to labour processes. In this way women transformed their male dominated occupations into areas of feminised speciality.

**Methodological reconsiderations**

Conducting this study I have had the opportunity to evaluate and reconsider my method. While overall I have found the life history framework rewarding as both a research process and in terms of the social histories it has generated, I have had doubts about aspects of my use of the method. The experience has also led me to expand my understanding of the importance of researcher embodiment in the interviewing process.

I have two doubts about my sample. Firstly, while many of my participants from trades no longer worked in the industry, all but one of the women who worked in IT were still engaged in IT work. This created an unevenness between the two groups. Women who no longer worked in trades occasionally found it difficult to recollect exact examples except those which they recalled with nostalgia or as a disaster. In contrast, the immediacy of IT work for the participants meant that they often spoke in detail about the present and glossed over the past. While through the trade life histories I established an interesting history of the occupation, the IT life histories were much more focussed on the present, making it difficult to draw conclusions about the historical ebbs and flows of women in the occupation.

My second doubt was whether I should have interviewed some men in both occupations. I did consider this early on in my project and decided that interviewing individual men would not necessarily give me an impression of the organisational or occupational gender relations. That said, throughout the research I did wonder how individual men’s life histories and experiences of gender regimes would have differed from those of the women I interviewed.

Another concern about methodology involved the difficulty of balancing the integrity of my participants’ life histories with a theoretical and reflexive approach. While on the one hand, the purpose of life histories is to allow participants to create their own histories, the patterns, themes and flows of which are ideally preserved in the
research, a sociological process must at some point dislodge these stories from themselves and transform them into sociological knowledge (Plummer, 2001). At times I have doubted whether the process of analysing life histories with theoretical grids and in comparison to one another adequately communicated the complexity of an individual’s life and its internal contradictions.

My final doubt around my methodology is whether an oral method such as life history is the most effective way of studying embodiment and the experiences of the body. While many of my participants were extremely articulate when describing their bodies and their experiences of their bodies at work and in their personal lives, an ethnographic approach could have provided a more embodied perspective to the research. However, Paap’s (2006) ethnography of the construction industry in which she worked as a carpenter described the intense difficulty of adequately observing, recording and analysing data when engaged in such physically exhausting work. I sense that a certain degree of distance and abstraction may be useful for discussing the body in practice.

As an apprentice life history researcher, something I hadn’t considered was the significance of my own embodiment in the interview. While research into method had directed me towards taking a reflexive approach to interviewing and analysing my own position in relation to the research, little research discussed the relations of the researcher’s physical body to the body of the research participant.

I found myself engaging in a similar body literacy to that described by the interview participants, altering my dress and presentation depending on where the interview was going to be held and according to what I gleaned about the interview participant in our communications prior to the interview. Through adjusting my presentation, I was attempting to be recognised by the interview participant as someone similar enough to them that they could be open about their lives. At times I felt that I was unable to be literate in a particular form of embodiment. This was particularly the case when I interviewed in a corporate setting. I remember the discomfort of trying to dress in my equivalent of corporate attire and feeling rather grubby when I met the very well groomed and expertly corporate Ruby. This was one of the shortest interviews I conducted. Like her dress, Ruby’s life story and answers seemed well prepared, well
groomed and, for me at least, a little unapproachable. I found myself wondering how differently the interview would have run if I had been accustomed to this form of embodiment and been able to replicate it more effectively. Despite my efforts to present my body in particular ways for the interviews, the trajectories of the interviews also made me aware that I had very little control over what or how my body communicated meaning. As I mentioned in a number of the case studies, how I was feeling and what I revealed about myself seemed to have a significant effect on the interview whether I intended it too or not. Interviewing Cassie, for instance, I was emotionally exhausted and physically uncomfortable and in retrospect can't help but wonder whether this had an impact on Cassie's focus in the interview on her own emotional exhaustion and physical discomfort. On a more superficial level, Gail assumed from the beginning of the interview that I was a lesbian feminist. While I am unclear as to whether it was my body or my topic that caused her to make this assumption, it was an assumption that seemed to create an intimacy in the interview which encouraged Gail to focus on her own feminism and lesbianism. Similarly, when, during the course of the interview, Claire discovered that I was a lesbian who wanted to have a baby, the interview changed direction. Claire confided that she had been trying to get pregnant, the difficulties she had experienced and how family planning had affected her work choices.

My embodiment and my sexuality, in these cases, seem to have been recognised as a point of connection in these interviews. They became a resource for me to acquire a certain kind of story, just as not being able to 'dress corporate' had perhaps been to the detriment of the interview with Ruby. While some have argued that the creation of such rapport was a kind of exploitation (Leatherby, 2000; Stacey, 1996), I argue that rapport in interviews is not always in the researcher's control and requires reflection rather than regulation.

Clearly, my embodied relations with the interview participants were not only a result of my presentation, they also operated within other sets of relations. Because I used a snow-balling technique to recruit participants the relations through which participants viewed me were often important. Who had recruited the participant on my behalf often became a significant indicator as to the tenor of the interview. Most of the
interviews that I conducted in people’s homes were with people who were friends or relations of friends. In contrast, people recruited through broader networks were often interviewed at work. As discussed in the Method and Methodology section, the location of the interview had a significant effect on the interview’s tone. Indeed, further content analysis of the transcripts revealed that interviews conducted at home spent longer discussing personal rather than labour histories. The setting and the relations used in setting up the interview informed how and what the interview participants discussed in their life histories.

My argument about the importance of embodiment and embodied relations during the life history interview contradicts criticisms that the life history framework does not consider contemporary situations (Denzin, 1995; Ditz, 1996). In future research, I would carefully document how participants were recruited and begin recording my relationships with them from this point, rather than just prior to the interview. I would also bring greater awareness to my own embodiment and to the setting of the interview. I would develop questions that directed the participants’ attention to where they were and how they were feeling at the time of the interview rather than just in the past. By doing this I would recognise the importance of the embodied researcher and research participant in life history interviews. For researchers to truly understand the ways in which their interview participants are telling their past, they need to have a strong awareness and understanding of how they are feeling in their present.

Implications of the study

The study has a number of implications for approaches to studying women in male-dominated occupations. The life history framework gave a broader scope to the study and showed a connection between childhood physicality and adult perceptions of capability. Other resources from early experiences, such as childhood and adolescent relationships with men, also informed women’s confidence in male dominated workplaces. This perspective should encourage future research to examine historical factors which contribute to participation in male dominated fields, rather than focussing on direct influences such as subject choice and mentors.
Despite being in male dominated industries, many women described moments at work when they did not feel gendered. These moments arose from the women being completely absorbed in their labour processes: they were embodying labour not embodying gender. All of the women who described these moments described them as some of the most rewarding times in their work. The possibility for such moments has implications on the way gender at work is studied. Future research needs to provide opportunities for participants to explore these moments in order that a better understanding of their conditions be developed.

In my study such ‘ungendered’ moments were not sustainable. For women in trades, their use of the physical body, while one source of their enjoyment at work, was also the reason that they could not sustain long periods of embodying labour. Similarly, women in IT found that embodying labour meant ignoring their body by making it immobile. Being disembodied these women could only embody labour for so long without needing to move. In both cases the body’s involvement in the labour process becomes the very thing which stopped labour being embodied. This has implications for the importance of the body to the study of all labour processes and how they are sustained.

While some women experienced ‘ungendered’ moments in their work, most women described being a gender minority at work as a form of labour. The burden of being one of few women, of standing out and being visible, was experienced by most women as a significant part of their work. I argue that future studies need to take into account the labour processes involved in being a gender minority at work. Rather than being a minority simply being a statement of fact, a docile position or something that needs to be balanced, further research needs to be done on what work is involved in sustaining this position.

Every participant in the study discussed the significance of the involvement of their body in their work. Unanimously, women in trades loved using their bodies and women in IT found their sedentary work very difficult. With the increasingly sedentary nature of work, this has implications for the embodied enjoyment of work in the future.
The visibility of embodiment at work had unexpected implications. While in trades the highly visible body meant that women were easily targeted for discrimination, it also provided them with a point of intervention in the workplace. They changed labour processes and actively addressed sexism. The visibility gave women something to speak and act against. In contrast, the apparent invisibility of the body in the IT workplaces meant that women often felt uncertain as to how their bodies and their gender were being interpellated. This contradicts the simple binary in which women’s bodies are visible and men’s are invisible. Instead, it emphasises the power of organisational cultures to make a woman’s body seem invisible even when she knows how much she’s being looked at. Within these cultures, where labour was disembodied, it was much more difficult for women to find something to speak and act against. This suggests that the visibility of the body can be a useful resource for women as it makes the way that power operates more visible.

Women in IT did experience the significance of their bodies in terms of what I have called body literacy. This concept seems to name a particularly gendered form of workplace knowledge. It would be interesting to see how this knowledge operates in different industries.

Central to understanding the tendency of gender towards crisis is understanding it as contradictory. Women used a range of resources to help them live these contradictions. The kinds of resources women used influenced whether or not they could sustain work in gender-anomalous occupations, particularly when challenged by the coercive positions of being a good wife and a good mother. The usefulness of feminism and other discourses of being an outsider suggest that women need to develop a sense of their position as resistant or unusual in order for them to overcome normative pressures of the gender order.

Given the importance of feminist and outsider discourses, the future of women feeling able to engage in gender-anomalous occupations is not assured. Experiences of my participants across a thirty-year period have shown a decrease of feminist influence on public policy and work place programmes in Australia. Despite the usefulness of feminist ways of thinking to women’s engagement with work in their occupations and homes, this epistemological importance could be ignored given the silencing of
feminism in a neoliberal context. Outsider discourses, while useful for some women in negotiating the difficulties involved in feeling different, relied on women identifying as outsiders. Indeed these women seemed to select these occupations in part because they fitted with their sense of themselves as abnormal. This outsider discourse requires that the occupations remain gender-anomalous, and does not, therefore, represent a large scale threat to the gendered divisions of labour.

The reliance of feminist and outsider discourses does, however, highlight that women need the tools to critique and negotiate workplace and domestic cultures if they are to engage in gender-anomalous work. Feminist ways of thinking should not be underestimated as having continued relevance in thinking about work, and the interrelations between paid work and the family.
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Appendices
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place where grew up</th>
<th>Class (origin - present)</th>
<th>Trade</th>
<th>Age began Trade</th>
<th>Years worked in trade</th>
<th>Reasons for entering trade</th>
<th>Place where did trade</th>
<th>Reasons for leaving</th>
<th>Current occupation</th>
<th>Current location</th>
<th>Formal Education Beyond Trade</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesse</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Rural Canada</td>
<td>Working - Middle</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3 f/t</td>
<td>Need occupation Girlfriend</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Middle - Middle</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4 f/t</td>
<td>Need employment Apprenticeship security</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Male dominated Dreadful apprenticeship</td>
<td>Laboratory Manager, University</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science (after)</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>City, Denmark</td>
<td>Middle - middle</td>
<td>Cabinetmaker</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15 p/t self employed</td>
<td>Physical work combined with design Flexible work</td>
<td>Inner Sydney</td>
<td>Body Retired</td>
<td>Retired Smaller artistic pieces</td>
<td>Rural Tasmania</td>
<td>Bachelor of Interior Design (before)</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Working - Middle</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5 f/t</td>
<td>Passion for cars Leave school</td>
<td>West Sydney</td>
<td>Bored Opportunity</td>
<td>IT sales manager</td>
<td>East Sydney</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskia</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Working - Working</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3 f/t</td>
<td>Physical work With men Sick of other occupation</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Mothering</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynne</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Middle-Middle</td>
<td>Carpenter - Builder</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20 f/t and p/t, p/t self employed</td>
<td>Physical work</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Pressures of finding good contractors to work with Interest in Architecture</td>
<td>Heritage Architect</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts Bachelor of Architecture (after)</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Working - Working</td>
<td>Horticulturist and cabinet maker</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12 f/t and p/t, p/t self employed</td>
<td>Non academic occupation</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Part time work in Hardware shop</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuschia</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Middle-Middle</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2 f/t</td>
<td>Physical work and creativity</td>
<td>Sydney and Wollongong</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Carpentry Apprentice</td>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts before</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Place where grew up</td>
<td>Class (origin - present)</td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>Age began Trade</td>
<td>Years worked in trade</td>
<td>Reasons for entering trade</td>
<td>Place where did trade</td>
<td>Reasons for leaving</td>
<td>Current occupation</td>
<td>Education Beyond Trade</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6 ft</td>
<td>Job opportunity Disability scheme</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Horticulturalist</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>TAFE courses in environment (before)</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Indonesia - Regional Australia</td>
<td>Working - Middle</td>
<td>Mechanic</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8 ft self employed</td>
<td>Feminist Squatting needs</td>
<td>London and Sydney</td>
<td>Not business woman</td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>Bachelor of Social work (before), MA, PhD (after)</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zadie</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Working econ/middle cultural - Middle</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10 ft self employed</td>
<td>Feminism Physical work</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Body</td>
<td>Production manager at university</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>BA (before)</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Middle - Middle</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4 ft</td>
<td>Physical work Not care work Job you can leave at work</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Carpenter - maintenance</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Bachelor of Professional Writing, DipEd (before)</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Middle - Middle</td>
<td>Handy woman</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10 ft</td>
<td>Physical work with creatively Problem solving Girlfriend</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Carpenter - prop designer and builder</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Bachelor of Industrial Design (before)</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanna</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Upper-middle rural - Middle</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5 pt self employed</td>
<td>Feminist Desire for physical work</td>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>Business sense Male Dominated Equity interests</td>
<td>Equality and Diversity officer at a University</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Bachelor of Economics, DipEd (before)</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>City, New Zealand</td>
<td>Working - Middle</td>
<td>Cabinetmaker</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6 pt self employed</td>
<td>Physical work combined with creativity Need occupation</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Cabinet Maker - IT software company</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Bachelor of Design - unfinished (before)</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix II - Women in IT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Place where grew up</th>
<th>Class (origin-present)</th>
<th>IT Role</th>
<th>Age began in IT</th>
<th>Year's work in IT</th>
<th>Reasons for entering IT</th>
<th>Place where trained in IT</th>
<th>Current location</th>
<th>Formal education</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassie</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Middle Class - Middle Class</td>
<td>Programmer, educational software</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6 p/t</td>
<td>Change and challenge</td>
<td>Regional city, Australia</td>
<td>Regional city, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Engineering Masters of IT</td>
<td>Heterosexual (partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucinda</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Working class - working class</td>
<td>Programmer and web developer - games</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12 f/t</td>
<td>Wanted to get a 'real job'</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Engineering</td>
<td>Heterosexual (partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Regional city, Australia</td>
<td>Working class - working class</td>
<td>Programmer - games</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1 f/t</td>
<td>Passion for computer games</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of IT</td>
<td>Heterosexual (partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Middle class - middle class</td>
<td>Programmer and web developer</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12 f/t</td>
<td>Wanted a job that combined art and design and maths</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor in Graphic Design</td>
<td>Heterosexual (not partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zan</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Large regional city, China</td>
<td>Middle class - middle class</td>
<td>Communication role: Business analyst</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3 f/t</td>
<td>Opportunity for travel, new area, career in logic and maths</td>
<td>Regional city, China</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Engineering, Masters in IT, Masters in Business</td>
<td>Heterosexual (partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Working class - middle class</td>
<td>Programmer - computational linguistics</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3 f/t</td>
<td>Combines maths/logic and linguistics</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Combined Bachelor of Arts/Science</td>
<td>Heterosexual (not partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Working class - middle class</td>
<td>Communication role - technical writer</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23 f/t</td>
<td>Combining maths/logic and creativity</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts, Masters of Arts</td>
<td>Heterosexual (partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashima</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Regional India</td>
<td>Middle class - middle class</td>
<td>Communication role - technical writer</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7 f/t</td>
<td>Money</td>
<td>City, India</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Journalism, Masters of creative writing</td>
<td>Heterosexual (partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Rural then city, Australia</td>
<td>Middle class - middle class</td>
<td>Communication role - web co-ordinator</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2 p/t</td>
<td>Money, opportunity for flexible and stable employment</td>
<td>Regional city, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts, Masters of IT</td>
<td>Heterosexual (partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Rural Australia</td>
<td>Working class - middle class</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20 f/t</td>
<td>Making systems work better</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of business (accounting)</td>
<td>Heterosexual (not partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Reason for Flight</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Other City</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Middle class - middle class</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28 f/t</td>
<td>Global industry to move with husband’s work</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science (honours), Diploma of IT</td>
<td>Heterosexual (not partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Middle class - middle class</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24 f/t</td>
<td>New area of opportunity, science and creativity</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Information Science, Bachelor of Law</td>
<td>Heterosexual (partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Rural America</td>
<td>Working class - middle class</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15 f/t</td>
<td>Change from caring industry, money, security</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts, Diplomas in Natural therapies, Diploma in IT</td>
<td>Homosexual (not partnered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wei</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Rural China</td>
<td>Working class - middle class</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15 f/t</td>
<td>Opportunity for travel, new professional area</td>
<td>City, China</td>
<td>City, Australia</td>
<td>Bachelor of IT, Masters of Counselling</td>
<td>Heterosexual partnered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix III: Ethics Approval I

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20 December 2007

Professor Raewyn Connell
Faculty of Education and Social Work
Room 544, Education Building – A35
The University of Sydney

Dear Professor Connell

The Executive Committee of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) considered Ms Louisa Smith’s correspondence dated 4 December 2007. After considering the additional information, the Executive Committee at its meeting on 19 December 2007 approved your protocol entitled “Trading Gender: the impact of educational institutions on the gender and embodiment of women in physical trades”.

Details of the approval are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref No.:</th>
<th>12-2007/10440</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval Period:</td>
<td>December 2007 to December 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorised Personnel:</td>
<td>Professor Raewyn Connell</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ms Louisa Smith
Dr Sue Goodwin

The HREC is a fully constituted Ethics Committee in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans-March 2007 under Section 5.1.29

The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. We draw to your attention the requirement that a report on this research must be submitted every 12 months from the date of the approval or on completion of the project, whichever occurs first. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of consent for the project to proceed.
**Condition of Approval Applicable to this Project:**
Section 9.1 – Please provide the missing words at the bottom of the page.

**Chief Investigator / Supervisor's responsibilities to ensure that:**

(1) All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

(2) All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

(3) The HREC must be notified as soon as possible of any changes to the protocol. All changes must be approved by the HREC before continuation of the research project. These include:-

- If any of the investigators change or leave the University.
- Any changes to the Participant Information Statement and/or Consent Form.

(4) All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Statement and Consent Form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee. The Participant Information Statement and Consent Form are to be on University of Sydney letterhead and include the full title of the research project and telephone contacts for the researchers, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee and the following statement must appear on the bottom of the Participant Information Statement. *Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Senior Ethics Officer, University of Sydney, on (02) 9351 4811 (Telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (Facsimile) or abriody@usyd.edu.au (Email).*

(5) Copies of all signed Consent Forms must be retained and made available to the HREC on request.

(6) It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.

(7) The HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the Approval Period stated in this letter. Investigators are requested to submit a progress report annually.

(8) A report and a copy of any published material should be provided at the completion of the Project.

Yours sincerely
Associate Professor J D Watson
Chairman
Human Research Ethics Committee

cc: Ms Louisa Smith, Faculty of Education and Social Work, Room 548, Education Building – A35, The University of Sydney
Dr Sue Goodwin, Faculty of Education and Social Work, Room 730, Education Building – A35, The University of Sydney
Dear Prof. Connell,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 24 June 2009 addressing comments made to you by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). After considering the additional information, the Executive Committee at its meeting on 7 July 2009 approved your protocol entitled "Trading Gender PART II: The embodiment of women in the traditionally male dominated occupation of Information Communication Technology ICT".

Details of the approval are as follows:

Ref No.: 11557
Approval Period: July 2009 to July 2010
Authorised Personnel: Prof. Raewyn Connell
Ms. Louisa Smith
Dr. Sue Goodwin

The HREC is a fully constituted Ethics Committee in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans-March 2007 under Section 5.1.29
The approval of this project is **conditional** upon your continuing compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*. We draw to your attention the requirement that a report on this research must be submitted every 12 months from the date of the approval or on completion of the project, whichever occurs first. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of consent for the project to proceed.

**Chief Investigator / Supervisor's responsibilities to ensure that:**

1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

2. All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

3. The HREC must be notified as soon as possible of any changes to the protocol. All changes must be approved by the HREC before continuation of the research project. These include:
   - If any of the investigators change or leave the University.
   - Any changes to the Participant Information Statement and/or Consent Form.

4. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Statement and Consent Form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee. The Participant Information Statement and Consent Form are to be on University of Sydney letterhead and include the full title of the research project and telephone contacts for the researchers, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee and the following statement must appear on the bottom of the Participant Information Statement. *Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney, on (02) 8627 8175 (Telephone); (02) 8627 8180 (Facsimile) or gbriody@usyd.edu.au (Email).*

5. Copies of all signed Consent Forms must be retained and made available to the HREC on request.

6. It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.

7. The HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the Approval Period stated in this letter. Investigators are requested to submit a progress report annually.

8. A report and a copy of any published material should be provided at the completion of the Project.

Yours sincerely
Associate Professor Philip Beale
Chairman, Human Research Ethics Committee
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT
Trading Gender

Dear participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in “Trading Gender”. In this project I am concerned with how women in trades have come to choose to work in traditionally male dominated areas. I am particularly interested in how your experiences growing up, in your family and in educational institutions have impacted on your choice of work.

Because of the focus on how your work fits in to other aspects of your life story, I will conduct life-history interviews. These interviews are open ended discussions around general topics and will last between 40 minutes and an hour and a half. The interviews will be audio-taped for transcription.

“Trading Gender” is a pilot study for my PhD in Education which I am undertaking at the University of Sydney under the supervision of Professor Raewyn Connell. The information gathered in this research project will be used in my PhD and for academic publications.

This research is approved by the University of Sydney Ethics committee and thus every effort has been made to ensure that your information will be kept confidential and anonymous.

When you have read this information I will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you have any questions related to this research at any stage, please feel free to contact Ms. Louisa Smith on +61 2 9351 5281 or Professor Raewyn Connell on +61 2 9351 6247.

Your participation is greatly appreciated and will be taken as indication that you:
1) Have understood that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.
2) Have understood that your information will be kept confidential and in a secure location and that no personally identifying information will ever be published or reported
3) Have understood that your responses will remain anonymous
4) Are between the ages of 20 and 65
Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on +61 2 9351 4811 (Telephone); +61 2 9351 6706 (Facsimile) or gbriody@mail.usyd.edu.au (Email).

Yours sincerely,

Louisa Smith
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Trading Gender

I, .........................................................., give consent to my participation in the research project “Trading Gender”.

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I understand that the interview will be audio-taped.

3. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher(s).

4. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) now or in the future.

5. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

Signed: ............................................................................................................................

Name: ............................................................................................................................

Date: .............................................................................................................................
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT
Research Project

Title: Women in IT

You are invited to participate in this project about women’s experiences of working in the traditionally male dominated area of Information Technology (IT). While we are interested in your experiences working in IT, we are also interested in how your experiences growing up, in your family and in educational institutions have impacted on your choice of work.

"Women in IT" is a component of Louisa Smith’s PhD in Education. This PhD is being undertaken at the University of Sydney under the supervision of Professor Raewyn Connell. The information gathered in this research project will be used in Louisa Smith’s PhD and for academic publications.

Because this project focuses on how your work fits in to other aspects of your life story, the researchers will conduct life-history interviews. These interviews involve you telling the story of your life and its relationship to your work. These interviews will last between 40 minutes and an hour and a half. The interviews will be audio-taped for transcription.

Being in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to consent and if you do consent you may withdraw at anytime without affecting your relationship with the University of Sydney. You may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

Any aspects of the study, including results, will be strictly confidential and only the researchers will have access to information on participants. While the researchers will be confidential with information on participants, you can feel free to tell others about the study. Being involved in this study does not have any direct benefits for the participants.

When you have read this information Louisa Smith will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage,
please feel free to contact Ms. Louisa Smith on +61 2 9351 3767 or Professor Raewyn Connell on +61 2 9351 6247.

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on + 61 2 8627 8175 (Telephone); +61 2 8627 8180 (Facsimile) or gbriody@mail.usyd.edu.au (Email).

This information sheet is for you to keep
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, .................................................................[PRINT NAME], give consent to my participation in the research project

TITLE: Women in IT

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

3. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting my relationship with the researcher(s) or the University of Sydney now or in the future.

4. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

5. I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary – I am not under any obligation to consent.

6. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time if I do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.
7. I consent to:
i) Audio-taping         YES ☐ NO ☐

Signed: ............................................................................................................
Name: ...................................................................................................................
Date: .....................................................................................................................